

INSPECTION REPORT

SIR HENRY FLOYD GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Aylesbury

LEA area: Buckinghamshire

Unique reference number: 110496

Headteacher: Mrs S M Powell

Lead inspector: Mrs J Greenfield

Dates of inspection: 26th - 29th January 2004

Inspection number: 259312

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 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	901
School address:	Oxford Road Aylesbury Buckinghamshire
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Miss G Glover
Date of previous inspection:	3 November 1997

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Sir Henry Floyd Grammar School is a Specialist Arts College and is the only mixed grammar school out of the three grammar schools in Aylesbury. It has strong links with the local community. With 901 pupils on roll, of whom 241 are in the sixth form, the school is about the same size as other secondary schools. Most pupils who reach the entry level for admittance to a grammar school enter the school in Year 7 but about a quarter enter in Year 8. Few pupils leave before the end of Year 11. Pupils' attainment on entry is well above average. Pupils come from a wide geographical area and from a wide cross-section of social and economic backgrounds, which are mostly favourable. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The majority of pupils are of white-British origin. About ten per cent are from a range of minority ethnic heritages, mainly Chinese, Indian, black-Caribbean, Asian and Black-African. No pupils are in the early stage of learning English as an additional language. There are no pupils in care, from traveller families or with refugee status. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is well below average, as is the proportion with a statement. The range of special needs includes emotional and behavioural difficulties, physical disabilities and other medical conditions. The school gained a School Achievement Award in 2000.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
7070	Mrs J Greenfield	Lead inspector	Citizenship, English as an additional language
11104	Dr M Fleming	Lay inspector	
33160	Dr N Power	Team inspector	English
19454	Mrs J Whitburn	Team inspector	Mathematics
19135	Mr D Ebbage	Team inspector	Mathematics (sixth form)
5714	Ms Frances Thornton	Team inspector	Science, Biology (sixth form)
4607	Mr D Ward	Team inspector	Physics (sixth form)
31688	Mr B McGonagle	Team inspector	Art and design
	Mr P Reynolds	Team inspector	Design and technology
20247	Mr R Parry	Team inspector	Geography
5733	Mr T Dillon	Team inspector	History
4426	Mr T Fitchett	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages, French (sixth form)
31652	Mr K Homard-Roy	Team inspector	Music
4647	Mrs J Evans	Team inspector	Physical education, Dance (sixth form)
2448	Mr A Mathews	Team inspector	Religious education, Personal, social and health education
2740	Ms B Barratt	Team inspector	Special educational needs, Sociology (sixth form)
10060	Mr D Gutmann	Team inspector	Information and communication technology, Business studies
32150	Mr K Redman	Team inspector	Economics (sixth form)

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Sir Henry Floyd Grammar School enables its pupils to attain very high standards. Their achievement is satisfactory. The school has some strengths but also has several weaknesses. The teaching is good and most pupils learn well. Pupils' attitudes are positive and relationships are very good. The headteacher leads the school well but there is a need for a more strategic approach to school development and more rigorous systems of self-evaluation at all levels. **The school's effectiveness**, although good in the sixth form, **is satisfactory overall**. It provides satisfactory value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- the school's results in national tests and public examinations are very high, placing the school in the top five per cent of schools nationally;
- pupils are achieving well in design and technology, geography, history, French, German, religious education and business studies and particularly well in art and design, Spanish and music;
- pupils' attitudes to work are good and relationships between pupils themselves and with staff are very good;
- teaching and learning are good overall, but not all teachers involve pupils enough in contributing to lessons or challenge the higher attaining pupils sufficiently;
- provision for information and communication technology (ICT) and citizenship is unsatisfactory and does not meet statutory requirements;
- the headteacher leads the school well, with a clear focus on school improvement, but there are weaknesses in strategic management and in the use of self-evaluation to determine the school's development needs accurately;
- the provision for pupils' moral, social and cultural development is good;
- some of the accommodation is of good quality, but its general condition, environment and the provision for physical education are unsatisfactory; and
- links with the community are good, but there are insufficient opportunities for work experience.

The school has made satisfactory progress since its last inspection in 1997. Standards have improved and the quality of teaching has remained constant. Good progress has been made in improving the provision for design and technology and in the accommodation for music, drama and the library. Progress in improving the provision for ICT remains unsatisfactory. Accommodation for religious education has improved.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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.*

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is well above average. By the end of Year 9, standards overall are well above average and pupils are achieving as expected. The test results in 2003 were very high when compared with the national average and were in line with those for similar schools. Current standards are well above average in English, mathematics and science and also in design and technology, geography, history, French, German and Spanish. They are below average in ICT. By Year 11, standards are well above average and

improving. Most pupils' achievement is satisfactory, but their achievement is very good in art and design and music and good in design and technology, geography, history, French, and business studies. The GCSE results in 2003 were very high but well below those found in similar schools. Gifted and talented pupils, pupils from minority ethnic heritages and with special educational needs are achieving satisfactorily overall. **Pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good.** Attitudes and behaviour are good and attendance is very high.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching is good and enables most pupils to learn well, although the higher attaining pupils are not always stretched. The best lessons are lively and stimulating but not all teachers ensure that all pupils are involved and contribute to the lesson. There are weaknesses in the use of ICT to support learning. The assessment of pupils' work is satisfactory but its quality and impact on learning and its use to inform subject teaching are inconsistent. The curriculum is satisfactory, with strengths in some subjects, but weaknesses in ICT and citizenship and statutory religious education in the sixth form. Links with other schools and with the community are good. Standards of care, welfare, health and safety are satisfactory. Pupils receive good support from their teachers and their involvement in the school's work and development are satisfactory. Links with parents, other schools and the community are good.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher's good leadership provides clear vision and motivation for staff and pupils. The school has good systems of monitoring teaching and learning and analysing examination results. The senior leadership team have concentrated on raising standards of achievement but have not always acted with sufficient rigour in evaluating and implementing the school's policies and procedures or in providing the overall strategic management that their role requires. Most heads of department provide good leadership and create effective teams, but practice in departments is often inconsistent. Governors provide satisfactory leadership but they do not ensure that all statutory requirements are met.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents have a high regard for the school and have few significant concerns. Almost all pupils consider it a good school and that they are expected to work hard and do their best. Although a significant minority in the questionnaire returns believe that there is some bullying and that not all staff treat pupils fairly, these were not considered major issues in discussions with pupils during the inspection.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- sharpen strategic leadership and management and the use of self-evaluation at all levels;
- increase the provision for ICT and strengthen the curriculum for citizenship, to ensure that both subjects fully meet National Curriculum requirements;
- provide greater challenges to the highest attaining pupils and involve all pupils more actively in lessons;
- increase the opportunities for work-related learning, including work experience;
- enhance the accommodation for physical education and the sixth form and improve the general condition and environment of the school;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- provide religious education in the sixth form and a daily act of collective worship for all pupils;
- and

- ensure that the prospectus and the governors' annual report to parents fully meet requirements.

THE SIXTH FORM

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is an effective sixth form that is cost-effective. Standards are above average overall and are well above average in several subjects. Teaching is good and most students are achieving well.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- the A-level examination results in 2002 and 2003 were very high, placing the school in the top five per cent of schools nationally;
- students are achieving well overall and particularly well in art and design, history, music and religious studies;
- teachers use their very good subject knowledge well to challenge students and help them learn;
- students' work is assessed thoroughly and their progress is carefully monitored;
- students' attitudes to their work are very good, as are the relationships they forge between themselves and with their teachers; and
- provision for ICT in the sixth form is inadequate.

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	<p>Good in English. Standards are well above average and students' achievement is good. Teaching and learning are good.</p> <p>Good in French. The good teaching enables students to achieve well and standards are above average.</p> <p>The small amount of teaching seen in German was good.</p>
Mathematics	<p>Satisfactory in mathematics. Standards are above average and students' achievements are satisfactory. Teachers' very strong subject knowledge and the good relationships between students and teachers lead to good attitudes to study.</p>
Science	<p>Good in biology. Students attain well above average standards and their achievement is good. Teaching and learning are good.</p> <p>Satisfactory in physics. Standards are average. The good teaching enables students to learn well. Their achievement is satisfactory.</p> <p>The small amount of teaching seen in chemistry was very good.</p>
Humanities	<p>Good in geography. The good teaching enables students to achieve well. Standards are well above average.</p> <p>Good in history. Standards are well above average. The good teaching results in very good achievement.</p> <p>Very good in religious studies. Standards are well above average and students' achievement is very good. Teaching is very effective and enables students to learn very well.</p> <p>Good in sociology. Students achieve well and standards are above average. The teaching is good but does not always sustain challenge and momentum in learning.</p> <p>The small amount of teaching seen in psychology was satisfactory.</p>

Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Satisfactory in design and technology. Standards are improving and are average. The quality of teaching and learning is good and students' achievement is satisfactory.
Visual and performing arts and media	Very good in art and design. The teacher has very high expectations and sets challenging tasks for students. Students respond very positively to these demands. Standards are well above average and achievement is very good. Good in dance. Teaching is good, planning is effective and good resources support learning and research. Standards are above average and achievement is good. The teaching in music, music technology and theatre studies is very good.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	The small amount of teaching seen in the A-level physical education course is good and students are achieving well.
Business	Good in business studies. Standards are well above average and students' achieve well as a result of good teaching and effective planning. Good in economics. Students achieve well and standards are above average. Teaching and learning are good and students' attitudes are positive.
General education	The teaching in the small number of lessons seen in general studies is good and students achieve well.

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

Relationships with staff are good and students feel well supported by them. The arrangements for induction into the sixth form are good. The provision of careers guidance is satisfactory, although limited in scope. The involvement of students in contributing to the work and life of the school is satisfactory.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The quality of leadership and management of the sixth form is satisfactory. There are good systems for tracking students' progress and for setting targets. Subject leadership and management are generally good.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Almost all students enjoy being in the sixth form. They find the teaching challenging and teachers accessible and helpful. They appreciate the teachers' subject expertise and the way that their work is carefully marked and assessed. They find the courses available to them appropriate for their needs and abilities. A considerable majority express concerns about the quality of the careers advice they receive and consider that the school does not seek and respond to their views sufficiently.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall, although it varies across subjects and is better in the sixth form than in Years 7 - 11. Standards are well above average by Years 9 and 11 and are above average by Year 13. Pupils with special educational needs and those identified as the most able pupils achieve as well as their peers - satisfactorily in the main school and well in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Although the GCSE examination results are well above the national average overall, pupils do not achieve as well as they might in some subjects.
- Pupils are achieving very well in art and design and attaining very high standards in the GCSE examinations.
- Standards are below average in ICT as pupils do not have sufficient opportunity to develop and apply their skills.
- The higher attaining pupils are not always sufficiently challenged by being given more demanding work.

Commentary

1. The National Curriculum test results taken at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were very high overall, placing the school in the top five per cent of schools nationally. The results in all three core subjects of English, mathematics and science were very high and have been consistently so in English and science in recent years, but have varied between well above average and very high in mathematics. There is little difference in the overall performance of boys and girls when compared with their respective national figures, although fewer boys than girls gain the highest levels in English. Pupils' attainment on entry, based on their performance in the national tests at the end of Year 6, is very high. When compared with the results in schools whose pupils had performed similarly at the end of Year 6, the school's results in 2003 were average overall, being above average in English, average in science and below average in mathematics. The overall results were below the average for other grammar schools. The progress made by the pupils, based on their attainment in the tests at the end of Year 6, was satisfactory. Since 1999, however, the school's results in the tests at the end of Year 9 have improved at a faster rate than the national trend. The school met its targets at Level 6 or above in 2003 but did not meet its target at Level 5 or above because of the long-term illness of a few pupils.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	41.7 (40.6)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	45.0 (45.2)	35.4 (34.7)
science	42.1 (43.9)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 142 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

2. Over the past few years, the GCSE examination results overall have been well above average. In 2002 and 2003, the school's performance for the 'capped' points score (based on the pupils' best eight subjects) has been very high, placing the school in the top five per cent of schools nationally. At five or more grades A*-C and for the average points score, the results in 2003 were well above the national average, but were well below average in relation to the figures for other grammar schools and for schools with a similar level of performance in the Year 9 tests. For the last two years, the

figures show that pupils have not done as well as might be expected in their GCSE examinations when account is taken of their performance in the tests at the end of Year 9. One of the reasons for this lower performance is that in a number of subjects a smaller proportion of pupils than found nationally did not attain the highest grade of A* and in some subjects, pupils did not do as well as their earlier attainment would suggest. For example, in 2003, the results in design and technology at grades A*-C were below the national average in resistant materials and in line with the average in systems and control; these are lower standards than might be expected for these very able pupils. At the highest grades of A* and A, the results in double science, resistant materials and physical education were lower than the national averages and in many other subjects were lower than the figures for grammar schools nationally. However, in art and design, biology, chemistry, food studies, graphics, textiles, music, physics and religious studies the results were better than the grammar school averages at grades A*/A. The school's performance over the past five years has been below the national trend. In 2003, the school did not meet its targets at five or more grades A*-C or for the average points score but exceeded them at five or more grades A*-G and one or more grades A*-G.

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 (98)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	98 (99)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (99)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	49.0 (48.9)	34.7 (34.7)

There were 155 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. Standards of pupils' work by Year 9 are well above average overall and their achievement is satisfactory, although there are some variations across the subjects, partly related to their prior experience in the subject before they enter the school and partly related to the quality of the teaching. Although most pupils enter the school in Year 7, around a quarter of the year group enter in Year 8. This means that not all pupils have the benefit of being taught in this school for three consecutive years. By the end of Year 9, standards are well above average in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, geography, history, French, German and Spanish and are above average in art and design, music and religious education. Standards are satisfactory in physical education and personal, social and health education but are below average in information and communication technology (ICT) because the time allocated to this subject in Years 7 - 9 is insufficient to cover the National Curriculum programmes of study. Pupils' achievement varies across the subjects. Their achievement is satisfactory in English, mathematics and science, physical education, religious education and personal, social and health education; it is good in history, geography, French, German and music; and it is very good in art and design, design and technology and Spanish. Pupils' achievements in ICT are unsatisfactory as pupils have insufficient opportunity to develop their skills either in discrete lessons or through other subjects. There is insufficient evidence to make a clear judgement about standards or pupils' achievement in citizenship.

4. By Year 11, standards overall are well above average and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Pupils attain well above average standards in English, mathematics and science and their achievement in all three subjects is satisfactory. Standards are also well above average in art and design, design and technology, geography, French, music and business studies. Pupils' achievement in these subjects is good. In the case of art and design and music, achievement is very good. Achievement is also good in history and is satisfactory in German, Spanish and religious education; pupils attain above average standards in all these subjects. Pupils achieve as expected in physical education and standards are average. They are below average in ICT, as little provision is made for this subject in Years 10 and 11. There is insufficient evidence to make a clear judgement about standards and pupils' achievement in citizenship by Year 11.

5. There is little difference in the achievement of pupils across the year groups. Pupils who are identified as gifted and talented and who are often the highest attaining pupils are achieving satisfactorily overall. In general, although there are exceptions in some subjects, for example in some AS level work undertaken by a small number of Year 11 pupils in business studies, the highest attaining pupils do not receive more challenging and demanding work than their fellow pupils. There are no pupils learning English as an additional language in the school and pupils from a range of different minority ethnic heritages are achieving as well as their classmates. These pupils are generally fluent in English and do not require additional support. The achievement of the small number of pupils with special educational needs, including those with a physical disability, is satisfactory and good in mathematics, modern foreign languages and art and design. They make good progress in reaching their individual targets and most do well in external examinations.

6. The inspection evidence indicates that standards and pupils' achievement are improving in the school and that some of the underachievement shown by the GCSE examination results in 2003 is being addressed. A key reason for this is the way the school has taken on board the recommendations of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy, particularly in the modification of previous teaching and learning approaches and the implementation of a wider range of strategies. The use of the three-part lesson structure and the more active involvement of pupils in the lesson is leading to improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' learning, although these approaches are not always securely embedded in all cases. Not all teachers, through their questioning, class discussion and the organisation of tasks and activities, ensure that all pupils contribute to the lesson and are sufficiently challenged. Some teachers direct and lead too much of the pupils' learning, with the result that pupils sometimes disengage from the lesson. In many cases, the quality of written and other work undertaken by pupils outside of lessons is of a higher standard than that seen in class.

7. Pupils' literacy skills are above average and most pupils are confident and articulate in contributing to class and group discussions. Their writing skills are good, enabling them to make good progress in all the subjects they study. They use their good mathematical skills to support their learning in subjects other than mathematics, using them well in several subjects. Pupils' use their ICT skills appropriately to support their learning across the curriculum but they do not have enough opportunity to develop and apply them either in discrete ICT lessons or in their other subjects.

Sixth form

8. The school's overall A-level results in 2002 and 2003 were very high, placing its performance in the top five per cent of schools nationally. In every subject, other than mathematics, physical education and physics, all students gained at least a pass grade. The proportion of students gaining the highest grades of A or B was above and sometimes well above the national averages in many subjects. In art and design, all students gained the highest grade of A, a position that has been maintained for the last six years. Students did particularly well at the highest grades in biology, business studies, theatre studies, English, geography, history, mathematics, music, religious education and sociology. The results were also above average in economics, French and German. The results were closer to the average at the highest grades in chemistry, physics and general studies. Students did not perform as well in design and technology, government and politics, physical education and psychology and standards at the highest grades were below average in these subjects.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	95.9 (93.2)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	50.6 (45.3)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per pupil	377.3 (377.9)	253.1 (254.5)

There were 105 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

9. The standard of the work seen during the inspection, which is above average overall, reflects the results in A-level examinations in 2003 in most subjects and shows some improvement in those subjects where performance was weaker. For example, standards are now broadly average in design and technology, brought about by improvements in the quality of teaching and other changes designed to raise standards further. In physical education, standards are above average. The recruitment of new staff has contributed to this improvement. In the subjects that were inspected, standards are well above average in English, biology, art and design, geography, history, religious education and business studies; above average in mathematics, French, economics, sociology and dance; and average in design and technology and physics. There is insufficient evidence to make clear judgements about standards in chemistry, German, music, theatre studies, physical education, psychology and government and politics, although in the small number of lessons seen, standards exceeded course requirements in most cases and were sometimes better than this.

10. Students achieve very well in art and design, history and religious education. Their achievement is good in English, biology, geography, French, business studies, economics, sociology and dance. In mathematics, physics and design and technology, their achievement is satisfactory. In the small number of lessons sampled in other subjects, students' achievements were at least satisfactory, often good and occasionally very good. Students use their literacy and numeracy skills well in their chosen subjects. Their opportunities to develop and apply their ICT skills are limited and standards are below average.

11. The achievement of students with special educational needs is good, as is that of students identified as gifted and talented. Students from minority ethnic heritages achieve as well as their peers.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning are typically good and often better than this. They are very good in the sixth form. Pupils' moral, social and cultural development is good and their spiritual development is satisfactory, making these aspects of their personal development good overall. Attendance is very high.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Relationships among pupils and between pupils and staff are very good.
- Sixth form students play a valuable role in school activities and the support of younger pupils.
- The attendance of most pupils is very high.
- Pupils collaborate well when working together.
- Sixth form students do not consider that the school takes sufficient account of their views.
- In some lessons, a few pupils disrupt the learning of other pupils.

Commentary

12. Most pupils are pleased to be at the school. The atmosphere within the school, both in lessons and around the site, is generally calm and relaxed. From their first year, pupils find it to be a

friendly place. They praise the way the transition for incoming pupils is smoothed by means, for example, of the induction day visit, which gives them a taste of the type of lessons they will experience. Those who start later than Year 7 are helped to feel welcome and are soon able to make friends.

13. Pupils know they are expected to work. Most pupils value high attainment and understand what is necessary to reach high standards. They appreciate the quality and value of the teaching they receive and feel that teachers give them the help they need. Most pupils forge friendly and supportive relationships with teachers, as well as with each other. Pupils confidently question teachers and ask for further information, advice or personal support and this helps learning to be productive. Pupils are capable of working effectively either independently or in groups, as required. They are enthusiastic participants in extra-curricular activities, most of which occur during lunchtime. During lessons, pupils are attentive and often interested. They respond well to good questioning and usually work conscientiously and as instructed. In some lessons, where the pace is slow or the teacher does not express high expectations of behaviour, pupils are chatty and this can disturb others.

14. Standards of behaviour generally reflect pupils' very good relationships and their good attitudes to work. Although movement through stairways, doorways and passages is often somewhat disorderly, it is not chaotic or tumultuous. Some jostling results from crowding, but pupils are generally considerate of others. Bullying is not widespread; pupils and parents are confident that incidents are handled well by the school when they occur. Pupils usually follow the school's rules and expectations of behaviour. The sanction of temporary exclusion is not used commonly or casually; it is used appropriately as part of a programme of behaviour management, following which pupils rarely re-offend. No pupils were excluded permanently last year.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No. of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	586	10	0
White – Irish	4	0	0
White – any other White background	24	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	3	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	4	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	11	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	16	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	7	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	5	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	6	0	0
Black or Black British – African	5	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	2	0	0
Chinese	21	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	196	2	0

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

15. Most aspects of pupils' personal development are developed well. Pupils become familiar with notions of rules and fair play during physical education. Their moral knowledge and understanding are promoted effectively, especially in religious education where ethical dilemmas are discussed philosophically. Pupils often consider the effects of issues on other people, for instance in discussions about war or poverty in history lessons and the impact on the environment when judging the relative merits of different types of power generation in science. An example of pupils' social responsibility is the 'buddy' system whereby some Year 10 pupils act as mentors to Year 7 pupils, which the younger pupils find helpful and supportive.

16. Pupils' spiritual development, as noted in the last inspection report, is weaker than their moral, social and cultural development. This is due to the school's reliance on its strong ethos and the embedding of personal development opportunities within subjects. These do occur and can be good or even excellent on occasion, but often opportunities are missed to develop pupils' appreciation of the intangible and to elicit personal responses to the issues before them. Nevertheless, pupils are attentive and respectful in assemblies and their spiritual development is satisfactory overall. Pupils' cultural development is better than their spiritual development, as their familiarity with and understanding of, their own and other cultures is promoted well in several subjects, particularly art and design and religious education. During a design and technology lesson, pupils preparing food for religious festivals were aware of the meaning of the festivals for those who espoused the various religions.

17. The rate of attendance in the main school is consistently very high in comparison with that in other schools and the rate of unauthorised absence is well below the national figure. As a result, most pupils are able to benefit from the whole of the taught courses, although some fail to ensure they make up for all work missed due to absence. There are clear procedures for recording and monitoring absence and lateness and parents support the importance the school attaches to attendance, as expressed in induction documents. Unpunctuality is uncommon because pupils and students are keen to learn and so they ensure they are ready to start lessons on time.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	3.9	School data	0.1
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

Sixth form

18. There is a good sense of community among sixth form students. They enjoy being at the school and find the work challenging. Their attendance is good. They are interested and engaged by their lessons and they respect and get on very well with, their teachers, although a significant minority say they do not feel well known by an adult. Most students consider they are able to pursue courses relevant to their ambitions, but there is a widespread demand for more comprehensive advice about courses and careers. Sixth form students are more sceptical about the effectiveness of the school council than their younger peers and only a minority consider that their views are fully taken into account by the school. Students value the opportunities the performing arts development has brought but consider that not all of them benefit, especially those who are more interested in sport. They share younger pupils' dissatisfaction with those parts of the school accommodation that are in need of refurbishment or replacement.

19. Students are active as prefects, providing support in lower school tutor groups, running extra-curricular activities and organising a charity week. As in the lower school, there is no conflict between boys and girls, or groups of students or pupils from different ethnic or social backgrounds. Overall, the social development of students in the sixth form is clearly good. Similarly, they demonstrate advanced sensitivity in other areas, ranging from reflection on issues such as crime

and deviance in sociology, to a high-level discussion of the uses of propaganda and imagery when contemplating Picasso's *Guernica* in art.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is good, although there are areas of weakness in aspects of the curriculum, especially ICT and citizenship and religious education in the sixth form, as well as in the provision of a daily act of collective worship. Teaching is good overall and enables most pupils to learn well, but there is some unsatisfactory teaching, especially in Year 8. The school's links with parents, other schools and the community are good. The provision for enrichment, including out of school activities and for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety are satisfactory. Resources to support learning are broadly satisfactory, although there are insufficient numbers of computers. Some aspects of the accommodation are good, but overall it is unsatisfactory.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. It is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 - 9. There is a higher proportion of good or better teaching in the sixth form than in the main school. The assessment of pupils' work is satisfactory in Years 7 - 11 and good in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers use their good subject knowledge effectively to provide a range of well-planned activities to interest and motivate the pupils.
- Teaching in art and design is very good.
- The higher attaining pupils are not always challenged sufficiently through being provided with more demanding tasks.
- Some of the teaching does not involve pupils enough in contributing to the lesson.

Commentary

20. The table below indicates the quality of teaching across the school. The teaching is good or better in just over three out of five lessons in the main school and in three-quarters of lessons in the sixth form. However, there is a higher proportion of unsatisfactory teaching and a lower proportion of good or very good teaching in Year 8. Both parents and pupils are positive about the teaching in the school. There has been little change in the proportions of satisfactory, good and very good teaching since the last inspection.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 203 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
3 (2%)	44 (22%)	89 (44%)	61 (30%)	5 (2%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)

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

21. In its attempt to raise standards and improve the quality of learning and hence pupils' achievement, the school has embraced, with some success, the recommendations of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy. The three-part lesson, which includes a starter activity, focused individual pair or group activities to meet the specific learning intentions of the lesson and a concluding whole-class plenary activity to check what learning has taken place, has been implemented by most teachers. There are good examples of well-planned starter activities in several subjects, particularly in mathematics. Teachers usually make it clear to pupils what they are to learn and these learning objectives are pitched at a satisfactory level, although they are not always challenging enough for the range of ability in the class. Nearly all teachers reinforce the school's expectations of high standards

of behaviour and concentration in lessons, which is supported by the keen desire of most pupils to learn and make progress. As a result, learning takes place in a positive atmosphere, in which most pupils are fully engaged and concentrate well. At times, particularly in some lessons in Year 8, teachers' expectations of pupils' behaviour, especially that of the boys, are not high enough and consequently, the pace of learning diminishes considerably.

22. Teaching has several common strengths that underpin the good quality of pupils' learning. For example, teachers have good and often very good subject knowledge, which they use well to provide pupils with a varied and interesting range of tasks and activities to enable them to learn effectively. Lessons are generally planned well to meet course and examination requirements. Teachers identify clear learning intentions for lessons and, in most cases, they review them at the end of the lesson to check what learning has taken place. Sometimes, the final plenary session is a bit rushed or too brief and not enough time is left for this review. Relationships between pupils and staff are usually positive and ensure that learning takes place in a supportive and well-ordered climate. As a result, most pupils concentrate on their work and show good application and interest.

23. As a result of their recent training as part of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy, teachers are developing a wider range of teaching approaches and seeking to involve pupils more actively in pair, group and class discussions and activities. In many instances, teachers apply these strategies successfully, resulting in greater enthusiasm and contributions from pupils and improved levels of learning and achievement. Despite these improvements, however, much of the teaching remains too directed and led by the teacher and fails to involve all pupils sufficiently in contributing to the lesson or to ensure they are adequately challenged. For example, questions by the teacher are not targeted sufficiently so that many pupils can get by without contributing to the lesson. This can lead to lapses in concentration and disengagement by some pupils. In other lessons, there is too little oral work, with questions designed to make these very able pupils think, reflect and consider issues more deeply. In a few lessons, boys dominate the oral work too much and as a result, girls become passive learners. The impact of these weaknesses is that pupils become too reliant on the input of their teachers and do not develop their skills of self-reliance and learning for themselves. Pupils continue to make satisfactory progress in these lessons but the pace of learning is much slower. In the most effective lessons, teachers have very high expectations of what pupils can achieve, provide a range of suitably challenging tasks to meet the needs of all pupils in the class and through their own enthusiastic and dynamic presentation enable all pupils to make very good progress. In such lessons, pupils work very productively, make very good progress and achieve very well.

24. Resources are used appropriately in most lessons, but the use of ICT and other modern technologies is not regularly planned for in most subjects to support learning. Homework is set regularly and in most subjects is appropriate in extending work undertaken in class. Occasionally, though, it is not challenging enough, for example in business studies.

25. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory in most subjects and good in art and design and physical education. Individual learning needs are well known and pupils are fully integrated in lessons. There are instances of good individual support, as in Art and design and physical education, where visual resources are used effectively to sustain pupils' interest. In most subjects, however, planning does not take sufficient account of pupils' learning requirements. Teaching assistants support pupils with physical difficulties very well. The objectives set in each statement of special educational needs are fulfilled and annual reviews are carried out effectively. The achievement of targets in Individual Education Plans is reviewed regularly.

26. Pupils' progress is assessed regularly in all subjects. In addition to moderated half-termly formal assessments, their work is marked regularly and there is continuous assessment in many lessons through observation and questioning. The quality of assessment is good in most subjects and very good in art. Procedures, however, are unsatisfactory in mathematics and ICT. Assessment procedures are kept under review; for example, they have been recently reviewed and revised in physical education and the science, business studies, mathematics, history and ICT departments are currently trialling new approaches to be used throughout the school.

27. Assessment data are used well to track pupils' progress in science, design and technology, modern foreign languages, art and design and physical education, but tracking and target setting are underdeveloped in English, ICT, history, geography, religious education and business studies. The school has rightly identified the need to ensure consistency in the use of performance data through training to increase teachers' confidence in its use.

28. The use of assessment in planning to meet students' needs is variable. It is very good in art and design and good in science, design and technology, history, religious education, modern foreign languages and physical education. Examples of particularly good practice include the systematic use of test results to guide planning in science and the very thoughtful interpretation of results in art and design to meet individual needs.

29. Pupils generally know how well they are doing and this is discussed with them individually following half-termly assessments. In terms of specific subject detail on how to improve their work, this varies across subjects. In some, particularly science, design and technology and modern foreign languages, marking gives students good feedback on how to improve their work and clear guidance for target setting. For instance, pupils are very clear about their targets in modern foreign languages. In some other subjects, including mathematics, the feedback is not good enough. Feedback in English is sometimes negative in tone and does not give enough encouragement and guidance to pupils on how to improve.

Sixth form

30. Teaching in the sixth form has a number of similar features to those in the main school, but there is a higher proportion of good and very good teaching. None of the teaching was less than satisfactory and it is good overall.

31. Lessons are carefully planned and teachers' very good subject expertise is used effectively in presenting work that motivates and challenges students. Most teachers have high expectations of their students, who show good commitment and a keen desire to do well. Relationships are very positive between teachers and students, which ensure that contributions can confidently be made in a purposeful and supportive environment. In most subjects, good group work and whole-class discussions enable pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding effectively. As with the main school, the main weaknesses in the teaching relate to too much talk and direction by the teacher and insufficient oral contributions from students as questions are not targeted well enough. At times, there is insufficient opportunity for extended class discussion, as for example in some mathematics lessons, which limits the opportunities for students to learn from one another. There is insufficient access to ICT to support students' learning in several subjects. However, individual whiteboards are used to good effect in some lessons, for example in physics.

32. Assessment is good in the sixth form. Students' progress is regularly and usually rigorously assessed in most subjects, both in lessons and coursework assignments and through regular testing and answering questions from previous examination papers. Marking is thorough and in the best cases provides students with clear and constructive guidance on what they need to do to improve. Students appreciate this level of support and most have a clear understanding of how well they are doing. In mathematics, however, the marking is variable, with infrequent comments provided that are helpful to students and much of the work is unmarked. Assessment data are analysed and used well in most subjects to track progress and set targets for students but they are not always used in sufficient depth in a few. For example, they are not used systematically enough in sociology and are not used enough to inform planning in mathematics.

The curriculum

The breadth of curriculum opportunities, including opportunities for enrichment and extra-curricular activities, is satisfactory, with several areas of strength and other areas where the provision is unsatisfactory. Although there are areas of good quality, the quality of accommodation is unsatisfactory overall. Resources to support the curriculum are broadly satisfactory but they are not

extensive in some areas and there are insufficient computers to enable the school to meet statutory requirements in the provision for ICT.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision for citizenship and ICT is unsatisfactory and does not meet statutory requirements.
- Provision for personal, social and health education is good.
- Limited opportunities exist for work-related learning, especially work experience.
- Equality of access and opportunity are good, although the arrangements for reviewing the provision for pupils with special educational needs are not systematic enough.
- Participation in the arts and support for learning outside the school day are good.
- The match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum is good.

Commentary

33. All pupils have good access to the subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education in Years 7 - 9. They learn French and have the choice of German or Spanish as an additional modern foreign language. Design and technology now fully meets statutory requirements, an issue identified in the last inspection. New performing arts facilities contribute well to broadening pupils' experience through dance, drama and music. The personal, social and health education programme in Years 7 – 11, taught as part of a weekly period of 'Enrichment Time', is good. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have a satisfactory choice of subjects in addition to the core subjects. They can opt for another modern foreign language, dance, drama or business studies, all as GCSE courses. Some pupils comment unfavourably on the narrow range of subject choices in Years 10 and 11. Inspectors judge that the choice is reasonable but not extensive.

34. Provision for ICT does not meet requirements by the end of Year 9, a weakness identified during the last two inspections. The teaching of ICT is shared with 'skills' lessons in Year 7 and these courses alternate every three weeks. This arrangement disrupts pupils' continuity of learning in ICT so that much of their work is unfinished. Pupils receive a weekly lesson of ICT in Year 8, but no ICT lesson in Year 9. The school does not provide ICT in Years 10 and 11 apart from its use in some subjects, such as business studies and science. Pupils do not have the opportunity to study ICT as a GCSE subject. Citizenship is included within the packed programme of enrichment time but, although some progress has been made, the provision does not fully meet the requirements of the programmes of study. Careers education is satisfactory, but not extensive and is provided mainly in Years 9 to 11, although related aspects are covered briefly in Years 7 and 8. Opportunities for work experience are very limited and the provision is unsatisfactory. Work experience for pupils stopped some years ago when the school could not find suitable placements. Many pupils express concern about the lack of such opportunities.

35. The school, as a whole, is not fully meeting the requirement that all pupils should attend a daily act of collective worship. Assemblies are held for different groups of pupils during the week and those seen met the requirement of a collective act of worship. On days when they are not attending an assembly, pupils are intended to experience a 'moment of reflection' in their form groups, conducted by their tutor. Some tutors encourage pupils do this for themselves. The material in assemblies and for tutors is broadly Christian in character, as required and some tutors operated the policy on 'moments of reflection' but this was not consistently undertaken.

36. Pupils with special educational needs have full access to the whole curriculum. Subject teachers are well informed about their learning needs and pupils' access to learning is enhanced in some lessons by the good support of teaching assistants. Learning needs identified in an individual statement of special educational needs are included in pupils' Individual Education Plans (IEPs). However, provision, both in subjects and overall, is not sufficiently well planned to meet pupils' specific needs and the arrangements to ensure that each pupil's programme is kept under regular review are insufficiently systematic.

37. The school provides a satisfactory range of activities to enrich the curriculum for pupils of all ages, although a considerable number of pupils believe that the range of extra-curricular activities,

especially in sport, is limited. Visits and field trips are arranged on a regular basis to support the curriculum and pupils' wider development, such as the World Challenge expeditions and Team Challenge events. Pupils also visit the theatre and other performances. However, pupils do not have the opportunity of experiencing exchange visits abroad. Pupils also participate in numerous competitions, many based on the house system, including Maths Challenge, public speaking and debating. Extra-curricular activities take place mostly at lunchtime through a number of subject departments and include art and design, dance, drama, music, sport, chess, computing, archery and homework clubs. The high number of pupils travelling to and from school by the school buses limits the range of after-school activities.

38. The range of performing arts activities is good and has improved with the introduction of dance in the lower school. Levels of involvement in the arts are good and, as a result, the school is applying for an Artsmark award. Pupils benefit from a variety of instrumental and choral clubs and a high number of pupils participate in extra music tuition. Concerts, festivals and performances give pupils the opportunity to share their achievements in the arts with parents and the wider community. Arts visits, partnerships and artists in residence further extend pupils' experience with professional artists.

39. The physical education department provides games activities at lunchtime, inter-house matches and opportunities to represent the school in competitive sport in the major games. Pupils also participate in local leagues and competitions, including athletics and swimming. The range and choice of sporting activities are limited by the specialist facilities available. Participation and provision are satisfactory.

40. Teaching and support staff are well qualified and experienced and are appropriately deployed in their specialist subjects. Staffing provision is good. Resources in most subjects are satisfactory, although not extensive, but they are unsatisfactory in ICT. Many pupils comment unfavourably about the lack of computers. The number of computers available for pupils' use is approximately half the national average.

41. The accommodation is unsatisfactory. It is of varying quality, but is very good in art and design, music and drama. It is unsatisfactory in physical education. The lack of an outdoor hard play area is limiting the range of activities available, although the school has plans to replace the hard play area during the summer term. The boys' changing and shower facilities are unsatisfactory and have seen no real improvement since the last inspection, although they were renovated following a fire. There are no changing facilities in the dance studio and students are required to use changing rooms in the performing arts centre, although these have no shower facilities. In all other subjects, accommodation is generally satisfactory, although the temporary classrooms are in a very poor state of repair and do not provide accommodation conducive to effective teaching and learning. Library provision is very good and has improved considerably since the last inspection, when it was identified as a weakness.

Sixth form

42. The school offers a broad range of academic subjects for AS and A-level study, including several not offered in Years 10 and 11, such as economics, sociology and government and politics, as well as GCSE Italian. As a performing arts college, the school provides dance, theatre studies, music and music technology. Two courses lead to vocational qualifications - the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) course in business studies and the Community Sports Leaders Award. Through links with the adjacent college of further education, the curriculum includes a further choice of subjects, such as communications, media studies, psychology and law. Students also have the opportunity to take a general studies course and a critical thinking course.

43. The curriculum has some weaknesses. The school does not provide specific lessons in ICT because there is a lack of suitable staff. A number of students say their use of ICT is limited, although they use it occasionally for research. Many students consider that careers advice from external advisers and school staff is insufficient for their needs. They also regret the absence of

work experience. The school arranges a little amount of work shadowing for students who apply for veterinary science and medical courses. Provision for religious education in Years 12 and 13 does not meet statutory requirements, as the school does not provide a general course for all students.

44. Teachers are appropriately qualified and teach in their specialist subject areas. The quantity and quality of learning resources are satisfactory in most subjects, other than in mathematics, where they are unsatisfactory and in economics, where they are poor due to the lack of suitable textbooks. Many of the weaknesses in accommodation identified in the main school also apply to the sixth form. There is a lack of private study facilities in the sixth form block as some of the accommodation previously available to students has been modified into a dance studio. However, students are able to use the library and other vacant rooms as required.

Care, guidance and support

Standards of care, welfare, health and safety are satisfactory and the school provides pupils with sound advice, support and guidance. Pupils receive well-informed support and good advice and guidance from some teachers, but there is inconsistency between departments. Procedures for involving pupils in the work of the school are satisfactory. In the sixth form, students receive satisfactory support, advice and guidance, but many do not feel that they are given enough opportunity to contribute to the development of the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- An effective tutorial system enables tutors to build good relationships with pupils and parents.
- Visits by the head of Year 7, along with other staff, to primary schools to gather information about prospective pupils ensure a smooth transfer into the school.
- The half-termly assessment of pupils' progress and achievements is effective.
- Most pupils feel that the school council is not effective and consequently do not feel that their views are acknowledged or acted upon.
- Many sixth form students consider that the careers advice they are given in Year 11 before joining the sixth form is inadequate.

Commentary

45. Child protection procedures meet requirements, are well known and followed. There is an appropriate Internet policy in place, which has been signed by parents and pupils. Individual departments are responsible for identifying and addressing any issues relating to health and safety. Satisfactory systems for recording accidents have been established and the school's matron is always informed. There is good health and safety awareness and good practice in physical education, design and technology and the performing arts. Around the school, in general, systems to ensure high standards are not so evident. Litter is a particular problem as is the standard of cleanliness of the buildings, especially the floors, which results in an unsatisfactory environment in some areas. The site manager is responsible for carrying out risk assessment of the site and one of the deputy headteachers for trips outside school. These systems are sound in the main and good use is made of outside bodies such as the Fire Service. Individual departments are responsible for undertaking their own risk assessments, but although carried out, records of these are not included in all departmental documentation and are not always signed. Records of risk assessments are not maintained centrally and therefore it is not possible to monitor with any degree of certainty what departments have done.

46. The tutorial system enables pupils to establish good, trusting relationships with one or more adults in the school. The senior leadership team meets regularly with the heads of year to raise and discuss issues. There is a well-structured pastoral support programme which involves one of the senior managers from the local Pupil Referral Unit, who comes in to the school on a weekly basis to work with pupils and heads of year. Good use is made of the 'Traffic Light' system to inform staff and parents about pupils' progress. A consultant has been helping heads of year and heads of

department to evaluate critically the quality of their tracking and recording of instances of pupils' misbehaviour. Consequently, improved systems are being developed. Current practice is satisfactory in most subjects.

47. Induction procedures for pupils in Year 7 are very good. The head of Year 7, along with other staff, visits contributory primary schools in the summer term. There is also an induction day when prospective pupils come to the school, meet their tutors and experience a programme of lessons. In Year 9, staff from the Connexions service discuss career opportunities with pupils in relation to their option choices before entry to Years 10 and 11. However, the provision of careers advice across departments is varied and inconsistent. In religious education and history, pupils feel that they have been given good advice in Year 9, whereas in mathematics, design and technology and geography, they feel that the advice provided is just satisfactory. Many pupils feel that the advice they have been given on various career pathways is very limited, with little discussion of alternatives to proceeding to higher education.

48. Support for pupils with special educational education needs is satisfactory. Their learning and personal development needs are clearly identified. The special educational needs coordinator, in liaison with subject teachers and form tutors, monitors their progress. Individual plans and statements are in place, but there are some weaknesses in terms of assessing and monitoring their progress. Statements of special educational need and targets on individual education plans are reviewed regularly. However, other than the initial involvement of the Educational Psychologist, there is no regular specialist assessment of pupils' specific learning needs or central tracking and recording of their progress.

49. Support for gifted and talented pupils is satisfactory and is being developed. One of the deputy headteachers, along with the head of modern foreign languages, has received training. Heads of department, who have responsibility for identifying pupils that are gifted or talented in their subject areas, are currently being trained.

50. The use of assessment information to provide accurate targets for individual pupils is satisfactory. There is a whole-school programme of assessment, which ensures that pupils are given feedback on their progress in the form of half-termly grades. Each pupil knows, therefore, how well he or she is doing and so informed targets for the future can be set. However, practice across departments is inconsistent. For example, assessment is very good in art and music, where pupils receive good oral and written feedback at the end of unit tests. However, practice is unsatisfactory in mathematics, ICT and citizenship.

51. The involvement of pupils in the school's work and development is broadly satisfactory. There is a school council, although many pupils do not feel that it is an effective body or that their views are listened to, acknowledged or acted upon. A significant minority of pupils, almost one in three, have expressed the view that staff do not treat all pupils fairly. Roughly the same number feel that there is not an adult in the school to whom they can talk if they are experiencing problems. Inspectors found no evidence to support pupils' views that some pupils are treated unfairly or that they do not have an adult in the school to whom they can talk. In the light of the number of pupils who express real concern about the above issues, the school should consider further whether changes in its current practices could help to alleviate the pupils' concerns.

Sixth form

52. Induction into the sixth form is good. The head of sixth form and the deputy head of sixth form interview all students in Year 11, who are provided with a sixth form booklet. Subject teachers are asked to complete a grid that shows the suitability of individual students for courses of study in the sixth form. After the GCSE examinations in Year 11, a day is set aside for induction when students are expected to spend some time in discussion with their tutors. A significant number of sixth form students, almost two out of three, expressed some concerns about the quality of the advice given to them about their courses of study before joining the sixth form.

53. Relationships between teachers and students are good. Most students feel secure in the school and free from external pressures. They feel well supported by teachers in art and design, history and chemistry but not so well supported in psychology and biology. Most feel that they have been given some responsibility in the sixth form, but they do not feel totally involved in contributing to the school's development or in the decision-making process. They regard the school council as largely irrelevant and maintain that nothing gets done.

54. The provision of careers advice in the sixth form is broadly satisfactory, although limited in scope. Students receive a planned programme of advice and guidance in preparation for entry into higher education but little beyond this. Many students feel that the range of options available to them is too narrow, with little discussion of any alternative pathways to higher education and little opportunity for them to gain any experience of work-related activity. Some students, who were interviewed by staff from Connexions, found this an encouraging experience, but not very useful. Students of dance expressed disappointment at the lack of careers advice that they received, as there was no prospectus or information about the next stage in dance education or training. Although the school encourages work-shadowing for the most able students, others feel at a distinct disadvantage because they have not had any experience of the world of work.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's partnership with parents is good. There are good links with other schools and community organisations, which benefit pupils and enhance the school's reputation.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents have considerable confidence in most aspects of the school's work.
- The school's support is valued and valuable within the community.
- Parents receive good information about the school's activities and their child's progress.
- Good links with primary schools promote pupils' personal development.
- There are some very beneficial links with businesses, although their range is limited.
- Subject departments do not do enough to involve parents in their work.

Commentary

55. Both in their questionnaire returns and at the pre-inspection meeting, parents report satisfaction with the principal activities of the school and the way it is led and managed. Nearly all agree that the school expects their children to work hard and there are few concerns about bullying or harassment. Inspection evidence supports many of the parents' views of the school. For example, rare instances of bullying are well handled, some of the accommodation is uninspiring and teaching is good overall.

56. The school is open to parents' views and most parents feel comfortable approaching it. Steps are taken, for example in the well-presented prospectus and the bi-termly newsletter *Floyd Footnotes*, to encourage parents to participate in the life of the school. There is a very good induction pack, which includes a form for parents to record their agreement with the school's Internet access policy. The Parents' Society organises frequent well-attended events that raise useful funds to supplement the school's resources. Parents have been involved in both the formulation of the Performing arts bid and the subsequent management of the centre. Parents were consulted about changes to the school day and the uniform. They receive mostly good information about the school and about their children's progress; they are invited to comment on reports. Reports are of good quality, although specific guidance on what should be done to improve, which informs parents how they can help their child, is not provided in some subjects. However, there is no clear evidence that subject departments routinely plan to involve parents in their children's education.

57. The development of the school as a Performing Arts College has successfully raised its profile in the community and supports collaborative work with a good number of schools and other organisations such as Bucks Dance and Sound Studios. Pupils and staff from the school often work

in other schools; for example, some Year 7 pupils took their work on Indian music into primary schools. Such activities make a worthwhile contribution to the participants' personal development. They are very much appreciated by the schools involved, who also value the sharing of staff expertise and of resources such as keyboards, which they lack. Relationships with the contributory schools are good.

58. The extent of contact with businesses and the wider community is inconsistent across departments, although many have developed a range of activities that involve links with and contributions from businesses and the local community. The opportunity for work experience described in the last report, involving contacts with businesses, is no longer in place and is missed by those pupils who would benefit from it. There have been some very beneficial links through visitors, for example from a composer in residence, but there is no longer an established exchange system to support those learning foreign languages. Many departments do not routinely sponsor contacts with the wider community as a way of raising achievement.

Sixth form

59. In the sixth form, some students enjoy highly developed links with businesses through their very successful participation in the Young Enterprise scheme and those taking business studies have appropriate contacts with local companies. There are also benefits from the resources shared with the neighbouring college; for example, students studying psychology are able to use the college's library, with appropriate guidance. University applicants are able to visit and make appropriate contacts. Students have been involved with pupils from other schools, especially during the opening of the Performing Arts Centre. Their writing, directing and performing activities with these pupils brings important benefits to the pupils concerned as well as enhancing the students' own personal development.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of the headteacher's leadership is good. She has a clear vision for the school, which is shared by governors and staff. The leadership provided by other key staff is satisfactory, as is that provided by the governors. Management is satisfactory. The school is endeavouring to update its systems and procedures. It has been effective in some areas, such as teaching and learning in Key Stage 3, but in others a good deal of inconsistency in the implementation of change remains.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher's clear vision and leadership are good.
- Systems for monitoring staff performance are good.
- The detailed analysis of examination results is used well in setting targets.
- The good leadership in most departments develops effective teams.
- The school's provision and performance are not evaluated with sufficient rigour and policies are not being applied consistently across the school.
- Governors have not ensured that all statutory requirements are met in full.

Commentary

60. The headteacher provides good leadership. She has a clear vision for the school, which centres on improving academic performance through improving provision. The development of the school as a Performing Arts Centre is typical of this in that it has raised the profile of the school, made available additional resources and increased opportunities for pupils. She has carried the senior leadership team and governors with her in her drive to raise standards of achievement. She provides a good role model through her commitment and the obvious care she has for staff and pupils and sets the tone for the positive ethos of the school. The deputies carry out their duties satisfactorily but have yet to provide the model of rigour required if the school is to achieve its targets. Teachers are committed to the headteacher's aspirations and in recent years have undertaken

training to improve the overall quality of teaching and learning as a means of raising standards and achievement throughout the school.

61. The school has implemented good systems to ensure that the vision is fulfilled but these are not applied consistently. There is a clear leadership structure consisting of the senior leadership team, heads of department and managers of each key stage. There are appropriate meetings at all levels. The school benefits from the motivation of the headteacher and her team leaders. For instance, most heads of department provide good leadership, supporting their staff well and creating effective teams. The headteacher and deputies have concentrated their efforts on raising standards by sharing responsibility for the oversight of departments as well as undertaking a wide range of other responsibilities. This gives them a feel for how well particular areas of the school are progressing and the opportunity to influence performance. However, their wide range of tasks and the levels at which they are working limit the time they give to the strategic leadership role they have.

62. The school has a detailed school improvement plan, which is structured satisfactorily and has four key priorities. They are concerned with matching the curriculum more closely to pupils' needs, creating a caring and safe environment for all pupils, using the performing arts to raise standards and developing effective teamwork among staff and pupils. In several instances, for example in improving examination performance in the sixth form and in the implementation of the Key Stage 3 Strategy, the plan has had success. However, the school has been less successful in other areas. This is illustrated by the lack of rigour in the annual evaluations of the plan and of effective strategies for achieving the objectives. This explains to some extent the limitations in the curriculum, the no more than satisfactory provision for the guidance and support given to pupils and the unsatisfactory quality of the school's overall environment.

63. The quality of management is satisfactory. The school runs smoothly and most departments are well organised. Performance management is well established and works effectively in most subjects. The school has satisfactory monitoring systems in place. The headteacher and senior managers observe lessons and, in several departments, teachers observe one another as well as being observed by their immediate superior. The school and departments have detailed analyses of examination performance. Consequently, staff know where there are major issues, as in the performance of boys compared with girls and the results at the end of Key Stage 4. The senior leadership team uses the outcomes to guide governors and departments when setting overall targets for public examinations. An important area of weakness is the failure of managers at all levels to ensure that school and departmental policies are implemented consistently.

64. The arrangements for the day-to-day management of the provision for pupils with special educational needs are satisfactory. However, leadership does not provide a sufficiently clear direction for meeting pupils' specific learning difficulties and as such, it is unsatisfactory. Much has been done to improve access for pupils with physical difficulties, but there is no strategic planning to meet the increasingly complex learning needs of pupils. The importance of fully recognising these in the context of a selective school is not clearly established. The special educational needs coordinator co-ordinates provision and maintains effective liaison with teachers, parents and external agencies. The statutory requirements for the annual review of statements for pupils with special educational needs are met. However, provision is not monitored, reviewed or planned systematically. There are no centrally held details and records of pupils' progress.

65. Provision for the continuous professional development of staff is adequate. The systems for inducting newly qualified teachers are appropriate. The school has supported its own graduate trainees in the recent past satisfactorily and there is an induction programme for new staff. There has been a relatively high turnover of staff in the last two years, but despite difficulties in recruitment, the school has a well-qualified staff with an appropriate range of experience. They are suitably deployed. Support staff provide effective support in departments such as ICT and science. The administrative staff are well organised and provide for a smoothly administered school.

66. Governors provide satisfactory leadership and management. The governing body has appropriate structures and terms of reference. The chair of governors supports the headteacher

well, meeting with her regularly. She has a good understanding of the major strengths and weaknesses of the school. The headteacher and staff keep the governing body well informed on significant matters concerning the school. Governors have been trained in interpreting the analyses of examination results. They were closely involved in the school's successful bid to become a Performing Arts College and act as 'critical friends' when the school improvement plan is being formulated. However, aspects of governance are unsatisfactory in that a number of statutory requirements are not being met fully. These include provision of religious education in the sixth form, meeting the National Curriculum requirements in ICT and citizenship, provision of a daily act of collective worship for all students and the incomplete publication of the schools' test and examination results in the prospectus.

67. On a day-to-day basis, the school's finances are managed well. Senior staff and members of the governors' finance committee regularly receive clear, up-to-date information for budget monitoring and decision taking. The school last received an auditors' report from the local education authority in September 2003 and the issues identified in the report have been addressed.

68. The governors have made a number of financial commitments to improve the school's accommodation and facilities to support learning, for example, in the building of a new library and associated facilities and the construction of the new performing arts building. These have involved both revenue and capital expenditure of a substantial nature, supported by loans from the local education authority to be repaid from the revenue account over several years. Alongside the loan repayments, the governors are planning for a revenue budget deficit in 2004/05 and this has been agreed with the local education authority. The governors anticipate that growth in pupil numbers will generate enough income to remove this deficit over a three-year period. In making the financial commitments to the new buildings, the governors have restricted the funds available for the maintenance and improvement of the existing buildings and grounds and the provision of resources across the curriculum. If the revenue budget deficit is not removed as planned, the governors will be faced with difficult decisions in the future.

69. The principles of best value are applied appropriately and the school has sufficient resources at present. There are major issues about the school's current budget deficit and financial commitments. These are known to the local education authority and understood by the governors. The school's ability to meet its financial commitments in the future depends greatly on the number of pupils who enter the school year by year. Currently, it gives satisfactory value for money.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	2,582,259
Total expenditure	2,656,200
Expenditure per pupil	2,981

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	12,231
Balance carried forward to the next	-61,710

Sixth form

70. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. Sound systems of induction ensure that students who transfer from within the school and those who are recruited externally adapt to the sixth form well. The provision of a day's team building away from school at the end of their first month contributes well to this. The range of courses is satisfactory, although the lack of provision of vocational courses results in a strongly academic curriculum. Teaching groups vary in size, some being relatively large, as in history in Year 12, but few are uneconomic.

71. Overall, the quality of subject leadership and management is good. Courses are well organised and taught and good assessment systems enable teachers to track students' progress. Students have good access to information and support regarding entry to higher education, particularly entry to 'Oxbridge', but guidance for those seeking alternative careers is limited.

72. Students have good opportunities to take responsibility through being prefects and providing support to younger pupils through peer mentoring. The recently introduced home study periods extend their opportunities to develop as mature students. This has compensated to a small extent for the loss of their private study room to the new, but temporary, dance studio.

COMMUNITY PROVISION

The school makes an effective contribution to the local community.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school's partners in community activities are very satisfied.
- Participating pupils benefit from enhanced personal development.
- The school's profile and standing in the community are enhanced.

Commentary

73. The school has developed a broad range of activities that involve collaboration with schools and other organisations. Their partners offer effusive praise for the effectiveness of these arrangements, the good will with which they are organised and the benefits to all participants. Within the school, the impact of the school's community connections is principally felt in the broadening and deepening of pupils' experience of working with other members of society, with beneficial consequences for their own social and cultural development. There are also enhanced opportunities for pupils and students to put on performances for others. Some arrangements involve people from outside the education system. For example, a drama project for Asian women is planned and the Stagecoach theatrical group uses the school's facilities; both of these activities will also benefit members of the school community.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in national tests and public examinations are very high.
- Higher attaining pupils are not challenged sufficiently and the needs of pupils with differing abilities are not fully catered for.
- Pupils' written work is carefully corrected.
- In the most effective lessons, pupils are encouraged to take a full part in class discussions.

Commentary

74. Pupils' attainment in English on entry to the school is very high. By careful teaching, teachers ensure that pupils continue to gain results that are well above the national average. In the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2003, the results were very high in relation to the national figures and pupils did better than expected when account is taken of their earlier attainment on entry to the school. Boys and girls perform equally well overall, but more girls than boys attain the highest levels. Pupils' results in English were in line with the school's results in mathematics and science at Level 6 or above, but fewer pupils, especially the boys, gained the higher grades of Level 7 or above. Current standards by the end of Year 9 are well above average and most pupils, including those with special educational needs, are achieving as expected.

75. In the GCSE examinations in English language and English literature, the results in 2003 were very high when compared with maintained schools nationally. However, fewer pupils gained the highest grade of A* in English language than their counterparts nationally. In the two English examinations in 2002 and 2003, a smaller proportion of pupils gained the highest grades of A* and A than in other grammar schools. Pupils' current work shows that standards are well above average by Year 11 and that pupils' achievement is good.

76. Pupils are keen to learn and they make good progress, especially where teachers actively engage pupils' interest and provide opportunities for them to contribute to the lesson. All pupils discuss topics well in groups, but teachers do not always make the best use of their findings. In the most effective lessons, pupils report their findings to the whole class and, because of skilful questioning from the teacher, are able to make good progress in their understanding. In some lessons, quiet pupils are not fully involved in the questioning and make insufficient contributions to lessons. In others, pupils do not make progress because tasks are not clearly explained, or because teachers do not set tasks that help pupils to acquire analytical skills or to develop their understanding of literature.

77. Teaching ranges from unsatisfactory to good and is satisfactory overall. The teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 than in the first three years mainly because lessons follow the examination syllabus. Pupils' work is marked thoroughly. In the best cases, targets are provided to help pupils understand how to improve. Higher-attaining pupils are not helped to aim for the highest standards, because they are not provided with sufficiently challenging tasks. The work covered in lessons in the first three years is not consistent across the English department, as teachers follow individual schemes of work instead of sharing ambitious programmes designed to bring out the best in each pupil. Although pupils' work at Key Stage 3 is thoroughly marked, comments tend to be descriptive, rather than offering clear targets. The use of ICT is not fully incorporated into English teaching as a

whole, although some teachers use ICT imaginatively to extend the activities offered to pupils. Boys are encouraged to attain higher grades than their counterparts nationally, because teachers choose texts to appeal equally to boys and girls and also because they ensure that boys and girls sit and discuss together.

78. The head of department leads a team of committed and hard-working teachers who co-operate and share similar values. The management of the department, which is satisfactory, enables pupils to make progress and to undertake a range of visits and trips to enhance their appreciation of literature. Although leadership is satisfactory overall, stronger leadership is needed to develop programmes of study to ensure that pupils of all abilities fulfil their potential and to put in place strategies that will enable more pupils to attain the highest grades. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

79. Provision is good. Standards of literacy across the school are very good compared with the national average, because pupils arrive at the school with literacy skills that are well above average. Strategies for implementing a whole-school policy on improving spoken and written English in all subjects are satisfactory. Pupils are taught important words in most subjects and are encouraged to write and speak clearly and correctly. The school has a strong tradition of debating and public speaking.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teaching is good and has some very good and excellent features.
- Pupils in Years 7 - 9 achieve well in all languages.
- The GCSE examination results in German and Spanish are much lower than those in similar schools.
- Standards in listening and reading comprehension are high.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to their learning.
- In Years 10 and 11, pupils do not have enough confidence to speak without prompting.

Commentary

80. By the end of Year 9, standards in French, German and Spanish are well above average. Pupils have a very good grasp of tenses, their skills in comprehension are very strong in that they have little difficulty in extracting meaning from written or spoken texts and they respond with ease to instructions in the foreign language. Written work is accurate and higher attaining pupils are producing extended language, which is grammatically very correct. Pupils pronounce well and many are beginning to use the foreign language to initiate communication. Pupils' achievement in Years 7 - 9 is good because they apply themselves very well, strive for accuracy and make very good progress in expanding their range of language and in the application of correct grammar.

81. Recent GCSE examination results in French at grades A*-C have been well above the national average but slightly below those of similar schools, although the proportion of pupils achieving the highest grades of A* and A is in line with that in similar schools. The GCSE results in German and Spanish were also above the national averages but well below those for similar schools. A low proportion of pupils gained the highest grades of A* and A in Spanish. Standards of work by Year 11 are above average in German and Spanish and well above average in French. This reflects good achievement in French where pupils write accurately and use extended language, are able to speak confidently and have a solid grasp of grammar, combined with a wide vocabulary. In German and Spanish, achievement is only satisfactory because pupils are not sufficiently confident to use a

breadth of language and their knowledge of more complex grammar is not yet firm enough. In all languages, boys continue to achieve less well than girls, and pupils are usually unwilling to speak without some reliance on prompts, but their pronunciation is good and comprehension skills are very well developed.

82. Teaching at both key stages is good overall, with features that are very good and occasionally excellent. Teachers use the foreign language consistently for all classroom communication and the mutual respect established between teachers and pupils fosters in pupils a very positive attitude to their learning. Lessons are planned well and in the best lessons, the range of activities, combined with a dynamic presentation by the teacher, leads to some outstanding learning. Where teaching is only satisfactory, teachers do not challenge pupils enough to work things out for themselves and progress is inhibited, as pupils are too reliant on the textbook or the teacher's help. Teachers mark pupils' work conscientiously, provide very helpful written commentary and give frequent and encouraging feedback in lessons. In Years 7 - 9, lessons are particularly well structured. Although ICT is being used effectively, there is still not sufficiently regular and planned use of ICT or of TV and video to enhance pupils' learning.

83. The modern languages department is managed well. The head of department has created a strong team of teachers who are consistent in their methodology and assessment of their pupils. The recent Key Stage 3 National Strategy training has had a perceptible impact upon raising pupils' standards in Years 7 - 9. Teachers are encouraged to observe one another and this ensures greater consistency. The identification of techniques to improve boys' motivation is a positive step to improving boys' results in all year groups. The head of department is a strong role model who instils confidence and provides good leadership for his colleagues.

84. Since the last inspection, improvement has been satisfactory. The quality of teaching has improved and the more coherent structuring of lessons in Key Stage 3 has raised standards in Years 7 - 9. Results in the GCSE examinations have also improved in French but have not yet done so in German and Spanish.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have good subject knowledge but they do not involve pupils sufficiently in lessons.
- New leadership of the department is addressing areas of weakness.
- The assessment and monitoring of pupils' attainment lack rigour.
- Pupils' learning is restricted by their limited access to ICT and some of the higher attaining pupils are insufficiently challenged.

Commentary

85. Pupils' attainment in mathematics on entry to the school is very high. In the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003, the school's results were also very high. In the GCSE examinations in 2003, the results were well above the national average overall although the proportion gaining the highest grade of A* was lower than the national figures. The results at the highest grades of A* and A were much lower than the average found in similar schools. There was little difference in the performance of boys and girls.

86. Standards in mathematics are well above average by the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory at all stages. The highest attaining pupils in Year 11 are able to sketch exponential functions and others in Year 11 are able to apply logical reasoning to deduce the sizes of angles. Pupils in Year 7 are able to demonstrate a good understanding of the theoretical probabilities of combined events. In a Year 8 lesson, the teacher interacted effectively to enable the pupils to

describe accurately two-stage transformations. By Year 9, pupils are able to discover the relationships between equations to straight lines, their gradients and the y-intercepts.

87. Teaching is satisfactory overall and ranges from satisfactory to very good. Lessons are planned well and teachers demonstrate detailed subject knowledge, which enables them to anticipate pupils' difficulties. The most effective lessons have a brisk start, use a range of questioning skills, including targeted questions requiring extended explanation and use a range of activities to retain pupils' attention. In a few lessons, however, teachers do not provide sufficient challenge for high attaining pupils to stimulate their mathematical thinking and enable the sharing of ideas.

88. Overall, pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and good relationships exist between all teachers and their pupils. Although most pupils are engaged to their full capacity, a minority, usually boys, can become distracted. The Key Stage 3 Strategy has only recently begun to influence teaching. In general, teaching fails to involve pupils sufficiently in contributing to the lesson and as a consequence, some pupils lose concentration and do not make the progress they are capable of. In one Year 8 class, pupils were noisy and inattentive because they were not able to participate actively. In those lessons where teachers enthuse their pupils, the pupils' keenness to participate increases and, as a result, they are able to make better progress in understanding mathematical ideas and applying procedures. At the beginning of lessons, 'starter' activities are planned well but include insufficient oral work to engage the pupils and there is too much recourse to written work; as a result, pupils are not sufficiently challenged. Plenary sessions at the ends of lessons are often too brief to check on pupils' understanding or to provide further challenge. Pupils with special educational needs are effectively integrated and play a full part in lessons, thus achieving well. There is no difference in the standards attained by boys and girls, although in a few lessons boys dominate the oral questions and girls are then reluctant to volunteer answers.

89. The assessment of pupils' work is unsatisfactory. At both key stages, teachers monitor and support pupils in class, but the marking of written work lacks consistency, with too great a variation in both the frequency of the marking and the quality of the comments made. Pupils are not clear about what they need to do to improve or how they are progressing towards their targets. The monitoring and analysis of data is not rigorous enough to inform planning and teaching adequately.

90. Pupils have inadequate access to computers. Other resources within the department are unsatisfactory and limit the opportunities for pupils to be able to use ICT to enhance their learning. Teachers sometimes use data projectors successfully to illustrate particular topics, especially those with geometrical applications. The department lacks interactive whiteboards and associated software.

91. Leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. The head of department, appointed in September 2002, has taken action to address the most urgent priorities, namely raising attainment at GCSE, especially among the highest and lowest attaining pupils and increasing the number of pupils continuing with mathematics in the sixth form. Changes have been made to the way pupils are grouped according to their attainment and a greater proportion of pupils are being entered for the higher tier of GCSE examination papers. However, teachers do not, at present, collaborate sufficiently in planning, share good practice or resources, or have a cohesive approach to teaching a range of different topics. A more strategic approach to departmental management is needed to secure longer-term improvement. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory; the positive aspects mentioned in the last report have been maintained and action has been taken to introduce more vigorous management and to extend opportunities for staff development.

Mathematics across the curriculum

92. A school policy and related guidance have been produced by the recently appointed numeracy co-ordinator. Standards of mathematics across the curriculum are above average and pupils show a good understanding and procedural competence in a number of subjects. There is good practice

in science and history where pupils are able to correct errors in graphs and to interpret and comment on figures in tables. In geography, pupils use climate and scatter graphs appropriately in their learning.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The science results were very high in 2003 but the achievement of a few pupils in the GCSE examinations was unsatisfactory.
- In a minority of lessons, teachers do not have high enough expectations of pupils' behaviour and the completion of work, which reduces a few pupils' learning and achievement.
- The good assessment procedures help pupils to improve their work.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge, which they use well to extend pupils' understanding of science.

Commentary

93. Standards in the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were very high. Pupils achieved as expected given their very high standards in science when they joined the school. The overall GCSE examination results in 2003 at grades A*-C were very high in relation to the national averages, although well below those in similar schools and when account is taken of the pupils' earlier performance in the national tests at the end of Year 9. In double award science, the results in 2003 were significantly above the national averages at grades A*-C, but a lower proportion of pupils than nationally gained grade A*. The results in 2003 were lower than those in 2002. Some pupils, particularly boys, did not achieve as well as expected. In the separate sciences, a higher proportion of pupils gained the highest grades of A* and A than pupils nationally and the results were as expected. The science department has taken the dip in the double award results very seriously and has put in place a number of changes to improve curriculum organisation, teaching and assessment to make sure that results improve.

94. Current standards are well above national expectations in all aspects of science. Almost all pupils are achieving as expected, including pupils with special educational needs. This is because teaching is satisfactory and assessment is good. For example, by Year 9, they have a good understanding of the differences between inherited and environmental factors. By Year 11, pupils have good knowledge and understanding of total internal reflection. The achievement of a few pupils is unsatisfactory because they do not always complete their work.

95. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall but range from satisfactory to very good. Teachers plan effectively for lessons and set and mark homework regularly, which helps pupils to build on the work completed in class. All teachers have good specialist knowledge of the subject they teach, which they use well to extend pupils' knowledge and understanding. In the more effective lessons, teachers translate this knowledge into a lively discussion and targeted questions. These lessons include a variety of strategies, which interest pupils and make science interesting. As a result, pupils listen carefully and have to think and learn well. In a very good Year 11 lesson, the teacher effectively used the pupils' own interests in mobile phones to explain digital signals when explaining fibre optics. Pupils worked hard and their learning was very good. In a minority of lessons, teachers do not insist on high standards of behaviour. As a result, pupils do not achieve as well as they should considering their high starting point. A few pupils do not complete their work and their achievement is reduced.

96. The science department has used the staff training related to the National Key Stage 3 Strategy to improve teaching. Some teachers explain to pupils what they are going to learn and return at the end of the lesson to check if pupils have learnt these aims. Special revision classes have been introduced and provide effective support to pupils' learning. Many teachers are using a

range of strategies to check previous learning before moving onto the new learning, enabling them to focus the learning on identified weaknesses. The challenge is for all teaching to include the same range of activities in the main part of the lesson so that pupils' interest is maintained. Where teachers use ICT, it enthuses pupils. Teaching supports literacy and mathematical development effectively. Assessment is good. Regular tests and thorough marking of pupils' work provide good information to allow teachers to track and guide pupils' progress so that pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

97. Leadership is satisfactory. The head of science is committed to raising standards. He has taken action to tackle weaknesses in the organisation of the curriculum and teaching. He has ensured that staff have taken the opportunities for training provided by the national strategy. This training has resulted in changes in teaching, but the changes are not yet fully consistent. Priorities are clearly laid out but do not explain how they will bring about improvement to examination results. Management of the department is good. The heads of subject work well together and have managed the absence of a member of staff effectively. The head of science evaluates science results by teaching group and takes action when weaknesses are identified. Teachers monitor the progress of individual pupils effectively, but the head of department is not sufficiently rigorous in identifying pupils who are falling behind so that appropriate remedial action can be taken across the year group. Technicians work efficiently and effectively and provide very good support to teachers.

98. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Until the dip in 2003, standards have improved and assessment is used more frequently to inform lesson planning. ICT has recently been introduced in a more systematic way to support learning, although pupils in the upper part of the school have not had sufficient opportunities to use ICT in science.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Statutory requirements for ICT are not met and standards are below average by the time pupils leave school.
- Pupils use a variety of software programs competently but do not achieve as well as they might.
- Some teaching in Years 7 and 8 is good.
- Computer equipment has improved but the number of computers is still below the national average.
- Pupils' progress in ICT is not yet assessed systematically in all years.
- There is increasingly good use of ICT in design and technology, dance and music.

Commentary

99. Only pupils in Years 7 and 8 have timetabled lessons in ICT and there are no GCSE or A-level courses. Teachers' assessments made of pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 in 2003 accurately showed standards to be well below average overall, with less than a third of pupils gaining the expected Level 5 or above. These assessments do not reflect pupils' high levels of attainment overall on entry to the school. This is mainly because lesson time is insufficient in Years 7 and 9 to consolidate their skills and knowledge fully. Standards are beginning to rise with better schemes of work, teaching and additional computers. Nevertheless, standards remain below national expectations and the current achievement of pupils in Years 7 - 9 is unsatisfactory because the National Curriculum programmes of study are not met either in the limited discrete lesson time or in other subjects.

100. Standards by the end of Year 11 are below average and pupils' achievements are unsatisfactory as there are no timetabled lessons in Years 10 and 11 and ICT is not used

consistently to support teaching and learning in other subjects. The governing body has approved a plan for discrete lessons in Years 9, 10 and 11, subject to finance being available. Several subjects, notably design and technology and music, provide well-planned activities to help pupils meet National Curriculum requirements. Although standards are below average, the purchase of a set of new laptop computers has led to some recent improvement.

101. In timetabled ICT lessons and their work in other subjects, most pupils in Years 7 - 9 consolidate their skills of handling and communicating data, using word processing software and desktop publishing. Standards are below expectations overall because pupils have too little opportunity to develop and apply their skills. Pupils use spreadsheets well to explore formulae to calculate mobile phone tariffs, but modelling work is not extended into mathematics lessons. No database work was seen and much work is unfinished. Most pupils plan and design publicity brochures well, showing a good sense of audience. Pupils in Year 7 show above average animation skills in using PowerPoint and Year 8 pupils display very good potential to develop web design skills.

102. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 and 8 is satisfactory overall. Good features of teaching include targeted individual support for pupils, including those with special educational needs, from learning support staff. The good subject knowledge of specialist ICT staff keeps most pupils interested. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons are mostly positive. In one large Year 8 class, teaching was adversely affected by the lack of sufficient table space to write on. Some pupils, mainly boys, lost concentration in their groups and as a result did not achieve as well as they might. Assessment procedures are unsatisfactory overall, as there is no systematic monitoring of pupils' progress across all subjects. However, there are examples of good practice in the discrete lessons, where marking is closely linked to the national level descriptions and pupils are usually given targets for improvement.

103. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. There have been some recent improvements in teaching, equipment and in the management of ICT, particularly in the discrete lessons. The recently appointed specialist subject leader has made determined efforts to make up for past deficiencies and in implementing the school's good vision. This is beginning to have an impact. Further improvements in staffing and equipment are planned. The number of computers available for pupils, although improved, is still below the national average and the school has few interactive whiteboards. Staff confidence has improved, although further training is needed. Improvement since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory and much remains to be done to ensure that the school's provision meets statutory requirements.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

104. In other subjects, the use of ICT does not fully meet National Curriculum requirements, but there are signs of improvement in several subjects as staff gain expertise, particularly in using the new laptops. In Years 7 - 11, there is very good practice in design and technology, music and particularly in history in Year 7. Pupils consolidate their ICT skills in several other subjects, such as mathematics, modern foreign languages, geography and history. National Curriculum requirements are generally met in science, although progress in using ICT has been slow. There are missed opportunities to develop editing and publishing skills in English and spreadsheet modelling skills and statistical analysis in mathematics. Learning support staff make good use of ICT to help pupils with special educational needs learn effectively. Staff are beginning to gain skills in using electronic data to monitor pupils' progress. The development of ICT in other subjects is a key part of the school improvement plan. There are still too few planned ICT lessons in Years 10 and 11 to support teaching and learning in subjects.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' good lesson planning and subject knowledge engage pupils' interest.
- Pupils participate well because they are keen to learn so their achievement is good.
- Marking does not consistently show pupils how they can improve.
- Teachers under use assessment data to guide improvement to the curriculum, teaching and learning.

Commentary

105. Standards of work when pupils start in Year 7 are above average. Teachers' assessments placed pupils well above average by the end of Year 9 in 2003, which represents good achievement. Pupils' current work by Year 9 is well above average and pupils achieve well. Pupils use their very keen analytical skills for interpreting data. Higher attaining pupils explain patterns and trends clearly in extended writing, for example, on the relationship between birth and death rates in determining population size. Standards have fluctuated in recent years. In 2003, performance in the GCSE examination was significantly better than the national average at grades A*-C although they were below those of other grammar schools. Girls performed very well and much better than the boys. At grade A*, the results were below the national average. Standards of pupils' current work by Year 11 are well above average and pupils achieve well. Pupils continue to show much ability with number and their writing is fluent. A few pupils have incomplete records of work because of absence.

106. The majority of teaching and learning is good, but in about a third of lessons, it is satisfactory. Effective planning of lessons and good subject command engage pupils' interest, so that they acquire and retain new knowledge and understanding. Pupils with special educational needs and those with talent do not always receive appropriately matched work, so they do not progress as well as they should. The quality of marking varies; detailed assessment of some work provides pupils with national levels or grades and guidance on how to improve. However, teachers do not mark work in exercise books consistently or give written advice on what they must do to improve. They do not check consistently that work missed through absence is subsequently written-up by pupils. Pupils respond well when teachers ask rapid, open-ended questions and set them challenging tasks. In a Year 11 lesson on how employment structure is changing, pupils quickly used a new graphical method to show changes in less economically developed countries. Pupils' keen attitudes, ability to concentrate and to work independently and collaboratively, contribute considerably to the standards they achieve. Pupils have satisfactory standards of ICT, but they would benefit from more specific teaching of ICT skills when they use computers to support subject work.

107. The head of department gives a clear lead to raising standards in line with the school's aim. Teachers share this goal and work harmoniously. A good programme of fieldwork supports pupils' learning both locally and in Snowdonia. The monitoring of teaching is satisfactory. Recently implemented procedures have improved the assessment of pupils' work against national standards. However, not enough use is made of assessment as a tool for raising achievement by the end of Year 11 to at least the level of similar schools. Storage space is unsatisfactory. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils attain very good standards by the end of Year 9.
- The quality of teaching is good and sometimes excellent.
- The department is well led and managed.
- The GCSE examination results in history are below those in many other subjects.
- The assessment policy is not implemented consistently.

Commentary

108. In 2002 and 2003, teachers' assessments of standards at the end of Year 9 were well above average. Girls performed better than boys. In the GCSE examinations in 2003, a higher proportion than average attained grades at A* and A when compared with all maintained schools nationally. The proportion of boys achieving grades A*-C was better than the national average and the proportion of girls was significantly better. This has been the trend in recent years. When compared with the results in similar schools, the results in 2002 were well below average at grades A* and A and below average at grades A*-C. In 2003, there was a modest improvement in the proportion of pupils attaining the highest grades but the results remained below the average for other grammar schools.

109. Current standards by the end of Year 9 are well above average and pupils achieve well. Pupils identified as having special educational needs make good progress. Pupils write good quality essays, using appropriate historical vocabulary. They comment upon the validity of primary and secondary sources well. By the end of Year 11, standards are above average and pupils' achievement is good. Pupils have a good understanding of relevant British history and can comment maturely on the impact of World War II on various social groups in the United States. They make good progress in understanding change over time and the effects this has on people's lives, as in work on Stalin. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 use their numeracy skills well to interpret statistics. In general, pupils have positive attitudes to study; they enjoy history. They work effectively together and on their own.

110. The overall quality of teaching throughout Years 7 - 11 is good; in two lessons it was very good and in two excellent. As a result, learning is good. A major strength of the teaching is planning. Teachers have clear objectives, which are shared with the pupils and they use a range of very good teaching strategies. A very well structured lesson in which pupils used computers to investigate medieval life and a very exciting lesson in which 'Black Adder' featured were extremely successful in developing pupils' historical thinking and skills. Teachers use informal assessment effectively. Marking is satisfactory overall, although an agreed departmental mark sheet is not completed consistently and opportunities are missed to deal with individual weaknesses. Teachers do not always use oral work effectively.

111. The department is well led and managed and the head of department supports staff well. The quality of teaching and learning is monitored effectively. Detailed analyses are done on examination results and points for action identified such as improving boys' results at GCSE. The departmental policy and scheme of work are well structured. The improvement plan has appropriate priorities, although the time scale for carrying them out is not specific enough. History teachers make a conscious effort to improve pupils' literacy. The subject makes a good contribution to the moral, social and cultural development of pupils.

112. Progress since the last inspection has been good. Leadership and management have improved, although standards in Years 10 and 11 have slipped. The quality of teaching has many similarities with that at the time of the last report.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in the GCSE examination, taken by all pupils in Year 11, are well above average.
- Standards of pupils' work are above average and often well above average.
- The teaching of the subject is good.
- Leadership and management are good.
- Pupils have good attitudes towards their work and generally work hard.

Commentary

113. In recent years, results in the GCSE examination in religious studies have been well above average. In 2003, the results at grades A*-C were well above the average for maintained schools and slightly above average for similar schools, especially at the higher grades of A* and A.

114. Standards of work are above average overall by Year 9 and Year 11 and often well above average. By the end of Key Stage 3, nearly all pupils research and explain well the important features of different religions and relate religious ideas to their own lives and use them effectively in discussing questions of morality and value. For example, pupils are able to derive different causes of suffering from their own examples of events and to discuss and rank possible solutions to them, from the perspective of believers and non-believers. By the end of Year 11, they understand the different proofs put forward for the existence of God, supporting their arguments by reference to major thinkers such as Paley and Aquinas. Achievement is satisfactory overall and in lessons in Years 7 - 9, it is often good. In some lessons, not all pupils are being stretched or are working to their full capacity and some, often boys, easily disengage for periods of the lesson and do not put their full effort into the task in hand.

115. The quality of teaching is good overall. It is sometimes very good, but in one lesson, it was unsatisfactory. A number of features characterise the good teaching. Frequently, the teacher has a good command of the subject and advanced planning is carried through well in practice. Activities are provided which generally interest pupils and motivate them to learn, such as in a lesson in Year 7, where pupils devised a drama presentation in groups which aimed to tell in a modern idiom the meaning of one of Jesus' parables. There are high expectations, both of work and behaviour, in virtually all lessons and pupils are frequently challenged to engage with and debate issues at an appropriate level for their age. On occasions, pupils are not challenged sufficiently, although the worksheets in use in some lessons, which are designed for pupils of different levels of attainment, enable more to achieve nearer their potential. Whole-class questions and answers are well developed and enable pupils to concentrate on difficult ideas and then to articulate them clearly. On occasions, questioning is insufficiently focused. A good range of methods are used, especially pair and group work leading to presentations of the feedback, as, for example, in the Year 8 lesson where pupils were challenged to come up with as many similarities and differences as they could between Jewish and Christian marriage ceremonies and then to feed them back to the whole class. Good use of textbooks for research helps pupils develop skills of independent learning. In some lessons, insufficient use is made of resources such as videos or artefacts that would provide greater stimulus for the topic under consideration. Homework is set regularly and is well linked to graded assessments. Assessment in Years 7 - 9 is generally satisfactory and developments are also underway to improve it further by matching assessment to the levels outlined in the Agreed Syllabus. Assessment in Years 10 and 11 is good.

116. The leadership of the department is good and the head of department articulates a clear vision and sense of purpose for the subject. There are high aspirations for pupils' achievement, reflected, for example, in the decision to enter the whole Year 11 cohort into a short course examination in religious education. The department has largely realised the school's aspiration to make religious

education into a subject that is equally respected alongside others and thought worthwhile to study. Management is also good. Data on pupils' performance are analysed but there is insufficient use of pupils' earlier attainment in order to set targets or to check whether they are making sufficient progress. Performance management contributes to the monitoring of teaching and learning in the subject and targets improvement in standards, alongside occasional reviews, but there is not yet a systematic approach to the regular observation of lessons. Resources for the department have increased significantly since the last inspection, particularly through the purchase of new sets of textbooks and the annual capitation allowance is now adequate. Insufficient time for professional development is made available for staff, for example, to support the development of assessment in Years 7 - 9.

117. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Standards have been maintained, as has the quality of teaching. Spending on the subject is now adequate. The accommodation for religious education has been improved by the addition of a new specialist room, but many classes are taught in rooms that have restricted access to resources and are unsuitable in other ways.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards by Year 9 and Year 11 are well above average.
- Teaching and learning are good and promote good achievement.
- Assessment is used well to support learning and improve standards.
- ICT is used effectively to help pupils achieve quality in their designing and making activities.
- Standards in resistant materials are not high enough.

Commentary

118. By the end of Year 9, standards are well above average and pupils achieve very well. Pupils develop very good designing and making skills using a wide range of materials. They are able to plan and record their work in detailed design folders. Their practical work shows accuracy and attention to detail. This picture reflects the teachers' own assessments of pupils' performance at the end of Year 9 in 2003. The GCSE examination results in 2003 were well above the national average overall, although there was some variation in the results in the different GCSE courses. In contrast to those in graphics, food technology and textiles, the results were average in systems and control and were below average in resistant materials. Standards of work in Year 11 are well above average. Pupils' GCSE work shows that they develop their skills and knowledge in their chosen options well, showing creative design solutions and mastering more advanced making skills, including computer-aided design and manufacture. Pupils' achievement in the GCSE courses is good. When pupils have special educational needs, teachers take care to support them appropriately. The achievement of these pupils is good.

119. The quality of teaching and learning is good in both key stages and has many strong features. In the most effective lessons, teachers prepare well, have very good command of their subject, very high expectations and ensure that learning is firmly rooted in challenging, safe, practical activities. A small amount of teaching in systems and control is unsatisfactory as the teacher fails to plan in sufficient detail, does not make the lesson's objectives clear or does not enable pupils to learn actively. Technicians make an effective contribution to the pupils' achievements, helping them with processes that are more complex. There are many opportunities for pupils to make good use of ICT to improve both designing and making. In a Year 10 class, pupils programmed a computer-controlled milling machine to produce complex templates, which they subsequently used to manufacture highly unusual jewellery boxes. Teachers assess pupils' work well, supplementing

marking with detailed feedback to ensure that pupils know what they must do to improve. The quality of assessment contributes to the high standards achieved.

120. The quality of leadership and management is good. Within a short time, the department has been coordinated well by the new head of department, with a clear focus on raising expectations and standards. Systems to unify the different options have been introduced and very good moderation meetings used to build staff awareness of standards in Years 7 - 9. Improvement plans are based on a strategy of rigorous self-evaluation and good use of assessment and other data. Health and safety systems are in place to ensure that pupils and staff work in a safe environment.

121. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. As a result, the curriculum in Years 7 - 9 now gives broad and comprehensive coverage of the National Curriculum. It is well taught, makes a good contribution to developing pupils' competence in ICT and enables pupils to attain high standards.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The head of department has created a very challenging and exciting environment for pupils to learn.
- Achievement is very good from the start of Year 7 to the end of Year 11.
- Pupils learn very well due to very good teaching.
- Pupils have very limited access to ICT facilities within the art studios.
- Some class sizes are too large for the accommodation.

Commentary

122. Pupils' attainment in art and design on entry to Year 7 is below national expectations. Basic drawing and painting skills are underdeveloped and craft skills are weak. However, progress is good in Year 7 and towards the end of Year 8, their attainment is in line with national expectations. This rate of progress is maintained throughout Year 9, by the end of which most pupils are working above, with a significant minority working well above, the national average. Achievement from entry to the end of Year 9 is therefore very good.

123. In the GCSE examination in 2003, the results at grades A*-C were significantly above the national average, with nearly every pupil attaining the highest grades of A* and A. This performance is very much higher than the national figures and better than the figures for grammar schools. Since 2001, all pupils entered for the GCSE examination have attained grades A*-C, which has been well above the national figures. The standard of pupils' current work is well above average and their achievement throughout Year 10 and Year 11 is very good.

124. Teaching is very good overall and has some excellent features. Teachers possess very good subject knowledge and display great enthusiasm for the subject, which they succeed in communicating to their pupils. They have created a very exciting context for learning, which challenges pupils to produce work of a very high standard. Teachers have very high expectations and pupils are encouraged to develop deeper understanding of the art process in their visual diaries. They have also improved their capacity for critical evaluation of their own work and that of other artists and craftspeople.

125. Most pupils work with a real sense of purpose to explore their own concepts and ideas through the creative manipulation of a range of media and materials. However, they operate within a very

traditional model of the curriculum which places undue emphasis on drawing, painting and the acquisition of craft skills. There is very little evidence of any use of modern technology, such as photography or ICT, in the production of images or artefacts.

126. Leadership and management are very good and have some excellent features. The head of department is an excellent role model for other staff and pupils. Her obvious enthusiasm for the subject is infectious. Management is very good. The schemes of work are very well designed and appropriate to the needs of pupils at all levels. The head of department is responsible for producing the departmental development plan, which is reviewed annually.

127. Accommodation and resources are good, but the large size of some teaching groups results in pupils having to work in very cramped conditions, which has an adverse impact on their achievement. The furniture, tables, stools and plan chests are very good, but there are some issues surrounding the storage of a small number of large three-dimensional clay figures. At present, there are few opportunities for pupils to produce images through the use of photography or ICT in the art studios. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good and the GCSE examination results show consistent improvement over the past three years.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' subject knowledge is very good and lessons are effectively planned.
- The provision of ICT within the department is very good.
- Teachers do not involve pupils sufficiently in some lessons and the work does not challenge some higher attaining pupils enough.
- Extra-curricular music is a strength.

Commentary

128. Standards are above average by the end of Year 9. Pupils are making mostly good progress and their achievement is good. Girls achieve better than boys at the higher levels. Current standards are not quite as high as the teachers' assessments undertaken at the end of Year 9 in 2003 would indicate due to a number of recent staff changes. Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with varied musical backgrounds. By the end of Year 9, pupils perform confidently using good keyboard techniques and they use key musical terms very well to describe the music they hear in the lesson.

129. The GCSE examination results in 2003 were significantly above the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining the highest grades of A* and A was better than the figures for grammar schools and shows a considerable improvement over the results in 2002. By the end of Year 11, standards are well above the national average and pupils' achievement is very good. In the more effective lessons, teachers draw on pupils' own musical experiences to exemplify musical ideas and pupils discuss their responses to music using appropriate musical language. Standards continue to rise.

130. Teachers have a very good command of their subject. Lessons are planned well with clear objectives set for each lesson. Teachers are generally very successful in engaging pupils' interest, although where the teaching style lacks variety, pupils are quick to lose concentration. Some higher attaining pupils are not given enough challenging work. Very good use is made of the performing arts technician in lessons, which allows for more time in teaching ICT in music lessons. Appropriate homework is set which supports the learning undertaken in the classroom. Teaching is good and pupils are learning well. As a result of the teaching, pupils acquire new skills and knowledge very well, on which they are able to build from one lesson to the next. For example, Year 9 pupils know how to construct chords and are able to play them as full-fingered chords in a 12-bar blues performance.

131. In Years 10 and 11, teachers give good verbal comments on pupils' progress during lessons. Because of this, pupils know how their learning fits into the overall picture. Composition and performance work is thoroughly assessed, showing ways in which coursework may be improved, enabling pupils to progress further. As part of this assessment, pupils have the opportunity to reflect on and evaluate their work at regular intervals and they do this very well. Pupils work independently and also help each other through providing mutual support and advice in composition work. Their work shows good development of initial ideas and a secure understanding of form and structure.

132. The department is well led and managed. Schemes of work are comprehensive and linked to the programmes of study in the National Curriculum and examination requirements. The head of department has a clear vision for music and works closely in an informal way to monitor the work of other members of department. Internal moderation of work is undertaken in departmental meetings. The peripatetic teachers are managed efficiently and are fully involved in the life of the department. Extra-curricular activities are managed well; the provision is extensive and standards of playing are very good. The music department runs a senior wind band, training band, woodwind group, steel pans group, vocal choir, flute choir, string group and brass group. Over 150 pupils participate on a regular basis. Instrumental lessons are available on the oboe, clarinet, violin, saxophone, percussion, brass, electric and classical guitar, piano, voice, cello, keyboards and steel pans.

133. Progress since the last inspection has been very good. An increase in the length of lessons has ensured that teachers are now able to assess pupils' work within the lesson. Accommodation has improved considerably with the new building that houses the Performing arts. The increased use of ICT in music has enabled weaker pupils to compose with a greater awareness of style.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good as a result of newly-appointed staff committed to raising standards.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good and they respond well to the teachers' high expectations.
- Pupils' achievement varies in different areas of activity.
- An emphasis on games limits the amount of time spent on other areas of activity.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

134. Standards by the end of Year 9 are average. These standards do not match the assessments undertaken by the teachers at the end of Year 9 in 2003, which judged that standards were above average. Since September, the department has reviewed its assessment procedures and, as a result, will be able to monitor and assess pupils' attainment and achievements more accurately. By the end of Year 11, standards in the core programme are average. Results in the GCSE examination are above average; however, the proportion of pupils achieving the higher grades of A* and A is below average. Pupils' performance in this subject was significantly lower than their performance in other subjects.

135. Pupils' achievement in relation to their attainment on entry is satisfactory overall, but varies within different activities as they move through the school. Pupils with special educational needs are fully included in the physical education curriculum and make satisfactory progress. By the end of Year 9, pupils perform a variety of games skills with increasing control. They demonstrate a sound understanding of games play and recognise the importance of rules. However in hockey, girls achieve well and demonstrate a good knowledge and understanding of positional play, formations and the role of the sweeper. They are able to improve their skills through evaluating their own

performance. Standards in gymnastics are below what is expected by the end of Year 9. Pupils have a limited movement vocabulary to enable them to perform sequences that are more complex with fluency and control.

136. By the end of Year 11, standards are average and the achievement of pupils is satisfactory. In the core programme, pupils perform skills with increased consistency and control in competitive games. Their ability to develop more advanced tactics and skills is constrained by inappropriate teaching spaces and the time allocated to each area of activity. Pupils in the GCSE examination groups achieve well and make good progress. In a Year 11 theory lesson, pupils analysed performance with increasing accuracy, identifying each other's strengths and areas to improve.

137. The quality of teaching and learning is good throughout. Teachers are knowledgeable specialists and are able to teach a range of activities. Demonstrations of high quality motivate and improve pupils' performance and good questioning consolidates and extends pupils' learning. Teachers are implementing the Key Stage 3 Strategy well. Lessons are planned well but in a small number of lessons, although teaching is satisfactory overall, teachers direct activities too much and do not plan tasks to meet the needs of all pupils.

138. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good. They respond well to the high expectations demanded of them and as a result, behaviour and participation are very good. In all lessons, pupils demonstrate good social and cooperative skills.

139. Leadership is satisfactory overall and management is good. The newly-appointed head of department is establishing a shared vision and beginning to provide strong leadership. This is an improving and developing department, committed to raising standards. The curriculum meets statutory requirements, but games dominate the curriculum. Most units of work are six weeks in length, which limits the opportunities to develop more advanced skills, tactics and strategies. Extra-curricular provision is satisfactory and participation varies between activities. There are school teams in all the major sports and pupils compete regularly in fixtures and events.

140. Accommodation for the teaching of physical education is unsatisfactory and has an adverse impact on the curriculum, the provision of extra-curricular activities and pupils' achievement. The indoor facilities limit the range of skills and activities; the floors are dirty and the markings are in poor condition. The outdoor hard play area is inadequate for the teaching of netball and tennis. The changing rooms are in a poor state of décor and repair and although they were renovated following a fire, they have not improved since the last inspection. The physical education office is too small to accommodate the various needs of the department.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average.
- Good teaching helps pupils to achieve well.
- Pupils have good attitudes and behave well.
- ICT is not available for regular use in lessons.
- Links with local business and industry are underdeveloped.

Commentary

141. The GCSE business studies course in Years 10 and 11 is popular, with about a half of the year group opting for the course. Standards are well above average overall. In 2003, the GCSE

examination results were significantly above the national average, with a higher proportion than average gaining the highest grades of A* and A. The results in 2003 improved over those in 2002, particularly in the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C. Pupils' achievement is good when the well above average examination results are compared with pupils' attainments at the end of Year 9. In 2002, pupils gained higher grades in business than in their other subjects.

142. Pupils' current work is above the nationally expected levels. Pupils make good progress and achieve well. Higher attaining pupils produce written work that is well above average in quality, but they do not use ICT enough as there are no computers in classrooms. Pupils in Year 11 draw accurate graphs linking demand and price and showing break-even analysis, although these do not show how changes in prices affect profitability. Pupils work very well in small groups to critically discuss business ideas and are well motivated by practical tasks, although some boys lose concentration and achieve less than they should during parts of lessons.

143. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Teachers keep most pupils involved and interested in tasks. Teachers' relationships with pupils are good and in the best lessons, teachers' topical examples, based on very good subject expertise, challenge pupils to analyse case studies with numerical data. The three pupils identified as particularly able are given AS-level assignments to work on, but this sometimes means that they are precluded from main class activities. Teachers' marking is constructive and in the best practice, teachers give pupils individual targets for improvement. Because teaching rooms lack computers, the quality of teaching and learning is sometimes weakened. In addition, teachers' expectations of boys' achievement are not high enough, for example, when boys take too long to complete some tasks. Homework is set fairly regularly, but it is not always sufficiently challenging. There is scope for giving pupils more advanced tasks. Not enough use is made of assessment data to track pupils' progress and for the setting of targets.

144. Leadership and management are good, resulting in improvements in standards in the short time the new, but experienced, coordinator has been in post. Links with local businesses are not sufficiently well established although there are plans to develop them further. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The programme is not sufficiently well planned to meet statutory requirements as there is insufficient linking between the three strands.
- The recently-appointed coordinator is keen to develop and improve the programme.
- The lack of an adequate assessment and recording system makes it difficult to monitor pupils' progress.
- Monitoring the work across the school is not rigorous or systematic enough.

Commentary

145. Citizenship is included as part of the enrichment programme which is taught by form tutors. Elements of the citizenship programme of study are covered for short blocks of time at various times during the year for all pupils in Years 7 - 11. In addition, last term, pupils in Year 9 participated in a citizenship day, in conjunction with a local charity, based on the topic of asylum seekers and refugees. The programme of citizenship education is still at an early stage of development. In its current state, it does not meet statutory requirements as the curriculum is not sufficiently well planned to ensure adequate depth of coverage, there is insufficient linking between the three strands of the programme of study and the assessment arrangements for tracking pupils' progress are not

firmly established. An audit has taken place to map the contribution that subjects can make to the teaching of aspects of citizenship, especially for Years 7 to 9, and departments have been asked to identify such opportunities in their schemes of work. However, these are not always clearly identified or planned for. The provision for citizenship is not monitored in a rigorous and systematic way.

146. It is not possible to make a judgement about standards by the end of Year 9 and Year 11 or pupils' achievement overall as only a small number of lessons in Year 8 and Year 10 were seen. There is very little written work undertaken by pupils or any clear record of the work they have undertaken included in, for example, portfolios or logbooks. In Year 8, pupils' knowledge and understanding of issues relating to the disadvantaged in society, especially concerning disability, are broadly average. Some contribute their ideas in a thoughtful way but a few show stereotypical responses that are not always challenged by their teachers. In one effective lesson, the skills of enquiry and communication were promoted well to support the topic under discussion and, as a result, pupils' achievement was good. In other lessons, pupils' learning was hampered by a lack of focus for the lesson, the teacher's unclear expectations and some pupils' silly behaviour. In the Year 10 lessons, standards are above average and some pupils are working at a higher level than this. The topic of capital punishment enabled pupils to work effectively in pairs to gather evidence from a range of sources and to marshal their arguments for and against capital punishment. They then put their arguments to the rest of the class, so developing their skills of communication well. In general, the recording of pupils' work and experiences is unsatisfactory.

147. The teaching is satisfactory overall and ranges from unsatisfactory to good. Teachers are given outline lesson plans and support materials prepared by a previous coordinator. Not all of the plans develop pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills adequately and some teachers do not adapt them sufficiently to meet the needs of their class. Where form tutors are confident in the material and have a clear understanding of the requirements of the programme of study, then pupils attain higher standards and their achievement is good. Although staff have had some training and the programme is discussed in tutor meetings, additional training is needed to improve some teachers' knowledge and understanding of the programme's requirements and to develop their skills in teaching the subject.

148. Leadership and management at present are unsatisfactory. A new coordinator has recently been appointed and has identified the need to provide more support to staff and develop additional support materials, but it is too early to see the impact of these initiatives on improving provision. The assessment and recording of pupils' progress and achievements are underdeveloped and currently unsatisfactory. The school has good links with the community and organises a number of activities in school, such as the school council, involvement in fund raising for charities, the 'buddy' system and the prefect system, that could make a powerful contribution to developing citizenship. As yet, these aspects have not been drawn together in a coherent way and therefore they do not contribute in a consistent way to developing all pupils' skills of participation and responsible action as well as they might.

Personal, social and health education

Provision in personal, social and health education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers are generally confident in dealing with personal and social issues.
- The annual programme and individual lessons are planned well.
- Pupils achieve well in most lessons.
- Teaching methods are generally effective.

Commentary

149. During the inspection, planning documentation was scrutinised and four lessons were observed in personal, social and health education as part of the enrichment time programme, taught by form tutors. It was not possible to evaluate school policies for sex and relationships education and drug and alcohol misuse, nor to speak to any teacher with management responsibility for the subject.

150. The school provides an effective programme of personal, social and health education, which incorporates contributions towards sex and relationships education and pays attention to alcohol and drug misuse. Sex and relationships education and health education are integrated across the curriculum but occur regularly in the weekly programme taught to all year groups by their tutors, called enrichment time. This type of organisation works well in this school and learning is effective as a result. Pupils achieve well in most enrichment lessons, although some in Year 10 believe that they could learn many of these topics better themselves out of school time through newspapers and other media.

151. Staff are generally confident in dealing with personal and social issues and as a result teaching is frequently good and lessons are often successful. This was particularly noticeable in the sensitive but frank way in which teachers dealt with the topic of changes at puberty with a Year 7 class. Teaching methods are generally successful and include debates and speakers from outside school to good effect. Not enough use is made of ICT to enhance learning in some topics and some teachers lack confidence in using methods such as role-play to full effect.

152. The annual programme is planned well and teachers' confidence is further supported by the individual lessons being planned in detail and supported with appropriate resources. This extends to the flexibility to vary lessons according to circumstances; some teachers made very wise changes to their plans as a result of the low attendance due to exceptional weather in the sessions during the inspection week. Many staff are committed both to their tutor role and to teaching personal and social topics, including careers education.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 14 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

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

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	10	90.0	65.2	40.0	11.1	36.0	20.6
Business studies	14	100.0	76.4	71.4	16.3	46.4	26.2
Chemistry	6	83.3	72.7	16.7	13.9	36.7	24.1
Design and technology	5	80.0	74.9	40.0	15.1	32.0	25.3
Drama/Theatre studies	1	100.0	86.5	100.0	19.6	50.0	30.6
Economics	7	85.7	73.6	28.6	20.1	35.7	26.4
English literature	7	100.0	85.9	71.4	19.1	48.6	30.2
French	4	100.0	78.2	25.0	18.9	35.0	27.6
General studies	8	100.0	73.9	17.8	17.8	33.8	25.7
Geography	2	100.0	74.3	50.0	19.8	40.0	26.5
German	4	75.0	81.5	0.0	19.3	27.5	28.9
History	11	100.0	80.7	45.5	19.5	45.5	28.6
Mathematics	19	73.7	61.9	15.8	17.1	23.2	22.1
Other social studies	9	77.8	69.7	11.1	16.7	23.3	24.1
Physics	11	100.0	68.6	54.5	14.4	39.1	22.7
Religious studies	2	100.0	80.2	100.0	22.6	50.0	29.8
Sociology	5	100.0	71.8	40.0	18.4	40.0	25.4
Sports/PE studies	4	100.0	73.2	25.0	11.4	30.0	23.1

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	8	100.0	98.6	100.0	50.2	120.0	87.5
Biology	35	100.0	96.4	77.1	39.2	100.0	78.6
Business studies	21	100.0	98.7	76.2	36.8	100.0	80.1
Chemistry	23	100.0	97.6	43.5	49.0	86.1	84.9
Design and technology	8	100.0	97.8	0.0	35.0	60.0	77.9
Drama/Theatre studies	6	100.0	99.5	66.7	40.1	100.0	83.6
Economics	11	100.0	98.9	63.6	52.0	98.3	88.3
English literature	32	100.0	99.5	78.1	46.5	98.7	86.5
French	12	100.0	98.8	58.3	51.5	90.0	87.6
General studies	92	83.7	94.7	27.2	31.0	67.2	73.1
Geography	15	100.0	98.7	73.3	44.5	96.0	84.0
German	5	100.0	98.4	60.0	47.9	96.0	84.8
History	23	100.0	99.0	60.9	44.6	93.9	84.6
Mathematics	13	92.3	96.7	76.9	55.6	100.0	88.8
Music	5	100.0	98.8	60.0	38.9	96.0	81.1
Other languages	2	100.0	96.9	100.0	64.5	100.0	93.8
Other social studies	18	100.0	97.4	33.3	42.7	83.3	81.8
Physics	22	95.7	96.7	40.9	44.6	84.5	81.7
Religious education	12	100.0	98.8	83.3	46.7	105.0	85.6
Sociology	29	100.0	98.2	51.7	44.3	91.7	83.6
Sports/PE Studies	12	100.0	98.0	16.7	30.9	78.3	75.2

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus was on A-level and AS courses in English literature and French. Two lessons in German were also sampled, one in Year 12 and one in Year 13. The A-level results in 2003 were well above average, showing a marked improvement over those in 2002. Standards are well above average. Students achieve well because of the good teaching they receive, their improved comprehension of complex language and their increasingly accurate writing.

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results have improved rapidly over the past three years.
- More students gain the highest grades of A and B than in most other subjects in the school.

- Boys do less well than girls.
- Students are not always encouraged to take a full part in lessons.

Commentary

153. Students enter the sixth form with well above average results in their GCSE examinations. The A-level examination results in 2003 were well above average. Results in English have improved rapidly over the past three years, particularly in the proportion of boys gaining the highest levels of A and B. More students gained the top two grades in the A-level examination than in most other subjects in the school. The boys' results were not quite as high as those of the girls, a picture that is found nationally, but the school has strategies in place lower down the school that raise boys' standards and are helping to improve their performance. The AS examination results in 2003 were also well above average. Standards of students' current work are well above average, reflecting the A-level results in 2003 and their achievement is good.

154. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are good. Students learn well because they are committed and want to do well and because teachers are knowledgeable about the subject and keen to impart their knowledge to the students. Teachers enable students to understand the texts studied by supplying handouts and recommending students to use ICT for research. Teachers plan lessons well to ensure that the syllabus is fully covered. Marking is thorough and, in the best cases, offers students clear guidelines on what they need to do to improve the quality of their work. Although students pay close attention in class and write notes, some remain silent throughout the lesson because some teachers pay attention only to those who respond to questions. Opportunities are missed to challenge students further in developing their ideas about the texts they study. The last inspection report indicated that students in the sixth form were not encouraged to learn independently. This is still the case in some lessons where students are passive and not stimulated by discussion which would help to extend the curriculum and develop their ideas.

155. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Staff are effective in enabling students to make rapid progress and to aim for high grades. Students undertake a satisfactory range of visits and trips to enhance their appreciation of literature. Improvement since the last inspection has been good, especially in the proportion of students gaining the highest grades.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

156. The provision for developing students' communication skills is good. Students are encouraged to discuss at a high level both in lessons and in enrichment time, to widen their knowledge through books and ICT and to use sophisticated language to express their ideas in writing. Students are articulate, speak well and most are willing to participate in pair and group activities and to contribute to class discussions when given the opportunity. Their skills are well developed to meet the demands of the subjects they study.

French

Provision in French is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge.
- Students are not always confident enough to initiate ideas in the language.
- Lessons are well planned to encourage students' active participation.
- Students have a strong commitment to their learning.
- Students' comprehension of French is very secure and their writing is accurate.
- Teachers do not make enough use of the full range of available resources.

Commentary

157. The A-level examination results in French in 2002, when compared with national data, were well below average, but the results at AS level were better and close to national averages. The A-level results in 2003 showed a considerably improved picture, particularly for both boys and girls at the highest grades of A and B and were above average. Standards of work seen reflect these substantial improvements and are now above average because students' written language is of high quality, with a strong emphasis upon accuracy. Their listening skills and reading comprehension of extended texts are also confident because students have a solid base of vocabulary. Spoken language is, however, occasionally constrained by students' hesitation to express themselves using complex structures or to initiate ideas. Achievement in Years 12 and 13 is also good overall because of the students' strong commitment to learning and an increased focus on grammatical accuracy, good pronunciation and a confident breadth of vocabulary and idiom.

158. Teaching is good and has many very good features. Without exception, teachers have excellent subject knowledge and they plan their lessons to include a balance of activities that challenge students' active and receptive language. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and teachers use a range of techniques to encourage as much contribution by students as possible to improve the accuracy and breadth of their language. Whereas students are always attentive and committed to their learning, they are occasionally too passive and this reduces the amount of unprompted oral contributions they make. Relationships between students and teachers are extremely positive and benefit the productivity of the lessons and the confidence of students. Whilst students have access to printed documents of good quality, there is insufficient use of the full range of resources, including TV, video and ICT, to broaden students' exposure to authentic language.

159. The head of department manages his department well and the sixth form modern languages curriculum is broad and offers, in addition to AS and A-level courses in the three core languages, a GCSE course in Italian which produces outstandingly high results. Schemes of work are comprehensive and support a consistency of approach by those teachers sharing the sixth form teaching. Students' progress is tracked through regular analysis of their attainment from Year 11 onwards so that the department can identify and address areas of weakness. There are, however, few extra-curricular opportunities, including visits or exchanges, to expand students' linguistic and cultural experience.

160. Since the last inspection, the quality of teaching has shown some improvement whilst examination results have indicated considerable fluctuation but with a marked improvement in French at both AS and A-level in 2003. Improvement overall is, therefore, satisfactory.

MATHEMATICS

The inspection covered A-level and AS courses in mathematics.

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in the A-level examinations have improved over the last two years.
- Teachers' subject knowledge and the management of students are very good; their confident presentation of mathematical ideas results in positive learning opportunities for students.
- The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are insufficiently developed.
- The analysis of examination results is not used sufficiently to inform planning.
- Marking is variable and departmental policies are not applied rigorously enough.
- Relationships with students are good, which helps students to develop positive attitudes to studying.

Commentary

161. Results in the A-level examinations in the four years to 2001 were below national levels. In 2002, the results improved considerably and were above average. There was a further improvement in 2003 and the students' performance was well above average. The proportion of students gaining the highest grades of A and B was well above the national average. The AS examinations results were below average in 2002 and 2003. The mathematics department has identified weaker candidates and provided them with different textbooks so that further practice in mathematical techniques can take place. There is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls.

162. Standards of students' current work are above average in Year 13 and close to the average in Year 12. In particular, students demonstrate good levels of algebraic manipulation and numeracy, which was commented upon in the last report. The achievement of students is satisfactory. Progression in mathematical topics is good, with new modules building on work previously covered. Students are keen to apply themselves thoughtfully in lessons and their concentration throughout is good.

163. The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the mathematics and the requirements of the various courses are very good. Teachers present their lessons extremely fluently; they show a very high command of the subject and deal very confidently with students' questions. They also demonstrate good levels of control in the classroom with the result that students follow teachers' instructions immediately. Students apply themselves well, concentrate for long periods and work well together. Teachers' planning varies, with the better plans showing time allocations for various parts of the lesson. There is a variable expectation of the capabilities of students, but all students are expected to work hard. Teaching methods are mainly traditional, but in one lesson, students used the new technologies well and showed good confidence in using computers and the Internet. When students are brought together, both during the lesson and in plenary sessions, to discuss the progress that they have made, discussion tends to be limited and there are not enough opportunities for extended class debate. These oral class sessions are too short and give insufficient time for the confirmation of the knowledge gained. The marking of students' work is variable among teachers and teachers do not regularly mark the students' weekly work. The addition of more helpful comments would assist students in understanding what they must do to improve.

164. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The head of department has been in post for just over a year and has needed to spend a great deal of time sorting out the turmoil caused by many staff changes and shortages. The match of teachers to the curriculum is good, the organisation of the courses is clear to students and experienced teachers have a good knowledge of the demands of the examination boards. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning take place only rarely and there is room for improvement in this area. The analysis of examination results is not completed in enough detail or used sufficiently to inform planning. Further analysis will enable teachers to plan more carefully for the demands of different groups of students.

165. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory, but the comment in the last report about the need to establish more rigorous and systematic management in monitoring and evaluation is still true. A strong team ethos is developing and teachers work cooperatively.

Mathematics across the curriculum

166. Mathematics is used well across most subjects. In science subjects, students use graphs and formulae successfully. The use of enlargement skills in moving from small sketches to larger drawings and in three-dimensional work is completed well in art and design. There is very able data handling by students in geography, where work on analysing population statistics for different countries of the world uses pyramid graphs. In history, good numeracy levels allow students to use tables and interpret graphs correctly during their studies of the economic conditions of different countries. In sports studies, fitness testing leads to sensible comparisons between heart rates before and after exercise. Students use coefficients of elasticity well in economics. In sociology, the

analysis of data is very well handled, with very competent analysis on relationships between crime and punishment.

SCIENCE

The focus of the inspection was on A-level and AS courses in biology and physics. One lesson was sampled in chemistry. In this lesson, the quality of teaching was very good. Standards are above average and students are achieving as expected.

Biology

Provision in biology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in the A-level examinations are very high and students' achievement is good.
- Standards have improved because of good leadership and management.
- Students learn and achieve well because the teaching interests them.
- Assessment and marking are good and students know how to improve.

Commentary

167. Standards in biology examinations are very high. In 2002 and 2003, the A-level examination results were very high, with almost all students doing at least as well as expected and many doing better. Standards are rising. In 2003, boys and girls performed equally well at the higher grades of A and B. Based on students' prior attainment, the results in the AS examinations in 2003 were higher than expected. Students currently studying biology in Year 12 and Year 13 are on course to achieve above the expected grades. Almost all students, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds, achieve well. In Year 12, students have a good knowledge and understanding of immunity. In Year 13, students relate function to structure in the stomach and the eye.

168. Teaching and learning are good. All teachers have good knowledge of biology, which they use to explain ideas and provide a good range of interesting activities, including practical work and opportunities to use ICT, which make students think more deeply. Students are attentive and respond well to the variety of learning styles that they experience and in lessons, they ask good questions. They report that lessons are interesting and not repetitive. Teachers are skilful in drawing together students' ideas and moving them onto new work. This leads to effective learning.

169. Teachers relate well to students and students enjoy the relaxed working atmosphere. Teachers expect students to work hard and students find the clear deadlines helpful. A strength of the department is an emphasis on correct examination technique. Students find the practice papers help them to know what they have to learn and how to improve. Assessment is good, with regular and thorough marking of students' work. This provides good information to allow teachers to track and guide students' progress so that students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. All teachers check students' progress as an integral part of the lesson. For example, students write questions to which key words are the answer. This allows teachers to check misconceptions before moving on to new work. As a result, students learn effectively. Homework complements work completed in class. Students' work indicates they have systematically made notes and succinctly summarised in their own words difficult topics such as natural selection.

170. Leadership is good. There is a clear focus on raising students' achievement and extensive support is provided for them. New teaching and learning strategies are incorporated into the curriculum. The head of biology leads a strong team who work very well together and contribute to improvements. Management is good. There is rigorous monitoring of students' progress and rigorous analysis of examination results. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Overall results have improved and more students achieve the higher grades. Technicians work effectively to provide teachers with very good support.

Physics

Provision in physics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Experienced teachers consider students as individuals and extend their aspirations well.
- The department successfully strives to raise attainment and achievement through well-planned lessons, a variety of teaching approaches and tracking students' progress.
- Opportunities to use ICT are limited.
- Students can choose physics in a wider set of subject combinations than is usual.

Commentary

171. In 2003, the A-level examination results were above the national average. When comparing the sixth form results of individual pupils with their GCSE grades, the achievement of most students is at least satisfactory and for many it is good and often very good. The AS examination results in 2003 were slightly above average but were not as high as in 2002 when they were well above average. A small number of students, often with underdeveloped mathematical skills, did not achieve as well as expected. In the last few years, some 30 students have opted for physics in Year 12, with approximately three-quarters continuing with their studies into Year 13. This is in line with other subjects in the school. Retention rates are generally around 90 per cent. Students' overall attainment is in line with the national averages and their achievement is satisfactory. Some students take physics as their sole science subject and physics is more popular with the boys. The attainment and the achievement of the small number of girls that study physics are generally higher than those of the boys.

172. Teaching ranges from satisfactory to very good and overall it is good. Lessons are carefully planned and thought through in a logical sequence, conveying new knowledge and checking out students' understanding. Occasionally, parts of lessons contain too much talk by the teacher, where facts and explanations are given, rather than encouraging students to offer their own views and interpretations. Lessons come alive when individual whiteboards are used to good effect to check that all students make progress during lessons. Experienced teachers, with a love of their subject, create a purposeful climate for learning in their lessons.

173. Theory work in class is well supported with practical work and demonstrations. Ample questions from past examination papers are used to assist students to check out their understanding and to prepare them for external examinations. These are very well marked and annotated with recommendations for improvements - a conscientious practice appreciated by students. In one Year 12 lesson, laptops were used to good effect by every student. This involved the accurate collection of data on the change of gas pressure with temperature. The results were analysed and best-fit graphs from spreadsheets constructed accurately. There are no computing facilities available on a daily basis for students in the science department, but students say that they are generally satisfied with the accessibility of ICT facilities in the school.

174. Students work well together and whilst they recognise the skills of abler colleagues, many are prepared to seek clarification of detail during the lesson; this needs more encouragement. Calculations are performed well in class. This was evident in a Year 13 lesson focusing on magnetism, when students confidently demonstrated to their colleagues how to measure the force on a wire carrying an electric current in a magnetic field. Students' application to learning is good.

175. At each level, two members of staff teach the subject. The sharing of teaching materials and students' progress is evident. Leadership of the subject and its management are satisfactory. Students' work and examination module results over the two years are carefully monitored and students retake modules that they and the department feel can be improved. Assessment processes are good. There are some extra-curricular opportunities for students to extend their

horizons, such as the university taster courses in Year 12. Since the last inspection, improvement has been satisfactory. However, a large proportion of the equipment is worn, broken or outdated and requires replacement so that more individual student investigations are again possible.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The school does not provide any AS, A-level or vocational courses in ICT. There is limited provision for ICT in the sixth form, although in the past some students have followed a CLAIT course. Year 12 students do not have key skills classes to support them due to shortages of teaching staff.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

176. In several, although not all, subjects, students are making good progress in developing their competence in using a range of applications to extend work done in lessons, for example, by researching on the Internet and presenting coursework. Students have developed their skills though using their own computers rather than through the school's teaching of ICT, which has been limited in Years 10 and 11. Good examples of graphs occur in several subjects such as mathematics and science, but these tend to be produced for homework rather than in lessons. The availability of computers for lessons has improved with the purchase of a set of laptops but they are not yet being used extensively, except in design and technology and dance, where some innovative practice occurs. Students in science and art and design have too few opportunities to use ICT to support their learning. When given the opportunity, students on the AVCE business studies course use ICT very well.

HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was on A-level and AS courses in geography, history, religious studies and sociology. One lesson in psychology was sampled. In this lesson, taken by a member of staff from the nearby college of further education, the teaching and students' achievement were satisfactory.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- By the end of Year 13, standards are above average.
- Teachers use methods that challenge students to tackle issues independently as well as collaboratively.
- Teachers plan lessons well and use their assured knowledge effectively.
- Students show much interest and contribute positively to lessons.
- Weaker students do not receive sufficient support to develop their study skills.

Commentary

177. Almost all students begin the AS-level course in Year 12 with above average GCSE examination grades. In the A-level examination in 2002, the performance of the small numbers entered was broadly similar to the national average, although boys did better than the girls in relation to their respective national figures. In 2003, the A-level results improved and were well above average, with a higher proportion gaining the highest grades of A and B than in 2002. Students achieve well over two years of A-level study and there is a rising trend in standards. With the exception of a few students, those who start the course in Year 12 invariably remain to the end of Year 13.

178. Standards by Year 13 are well above average and the students' achievement is good. Students handle information very skilfully and use a wide range of statistical methods and graphical techniques. They read quickly and synthesise detailed text quickly. Higher attaining students listen carefully to points in class discussions and make detailed but succinct notes. In essay writing, they draw widely upon case-study examples to support their arguments. Weaker students miss out essential points from their notes and they do not use supportive evidence as frequently. These students do not receive sufficient help in developing their study skills. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as other students, receiving good support from teachers.

179. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers plan lessons well so that students have relevant resources to use in exploring ideas and issues. They have good subject knowledge that they use effectively in asking open-ended questions to draw information from students. For example, in a Year 13 lesson students knew from prior learning the effects of human activity on deciduous woodlands. The teacher's questions gave rounded coverage to the topic. Students used a colour-shading technique (choropleth mapping) to show the extent of damage by acid rain to forests in European countries. Teachers support students also by providing a sheet of geographical terms when a new topic starts. They expect students to become independent as learners. In a Year 12 lesson, students discovered how the distribution of the world's mega cities had changed between 1960 and 2000. The teacher demonstrated how to construct dispersion graphs and then provided the population figures for students to use independently. Fieldwork gives students a strong evidence base for their studies and they refer to it in lessons.

180. The head of department gives a clear lead and shares the teaching of the syllabus with a colleague. Good assessment procedures identify for students their strengths and weaknesses so that they know where to focus their efforts. The quality and standards of the subject show good improvement since the last inspection.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average and achievement is very good.
- The quality of teaching is good.
- Students have very positive attitudes to history and learn effectively.
- Teachers do not use a wide enough range of questioning techniques in lessons.
- Oral work is not well developed.

Commentary

181. At A-level, students have achieved well above average examination results. In 2002, the pass rate at grades A - E was much better than that for schools nationally and the proportion of pupils gaining the higher grades of A or B was better than average. In 2003, the results were also well above average. The proportion of students gaining the highest grades of A and B was better than in 2002, with girls doing much better than the boys. Most students have performed well in history when their results are compared with the results for other subjects. The results in history have improved over the past three years.

182. Standards are well above average overall and students' achievement is very good. Students have a good historical vocabulary and use different types of sources to reach well-supported judgements. The quality of writing, particularly of some girls, is very high, demonstrating the very good progress they make from the end of Year 11. Standards of literacy contribute well to learning in history, although oral work is not well developed. Pupils use numeracy skills well to interpret historical statistics, as in a lesson where they discussed the economic condition of Germany in the 1930s.

183. The overall quality of teaching is good; occasionally, it is very good. This encourages students to have positive attitudes and develop a mature approach to study. They develop good social skills as a result of working effectively in different groupings. A major strength of the teaching is the planning and range of approaches used by teachers, although teachers' use of questioning and their expectations regarding students' responses do not ensure that oral skills are being fully developed. Informal assessment is used well to identify areas in which students need support, as in a Year 13 lesson where, at the start of new work on Germany, the teacher took time to give the students a short test to see what they could recall from their previous learning. Marking is satisfactory and detailed comments are provided on some essays. The departmental mark sheet is not used consistently, however.

184. The department is well led and managed. The head of department supports staff well. The quality of teaching and learning is effectively monitored. Detailed analyses are done on examination results and points for action identified, although the progress of individual pupils is not checked through specific areas for development. The subject makes a good contribution to the moral, social and cultural development of pupils.

185. Since the last inspection, standards have improved and students continue to have positive attitudes to study. The overall quality of teaching is slightly below that reported previously but there remain examples of very good teaching.

Religious studies

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in the AS and A-level examinations are well above average.
- Standards as seen in class are well above average by the end of Year 13.
- The quality of teaching overall is very good.
- Leadership of the subject is good.

Commentary

186. The results in the AS and A-level examinations in recent years have been well above the national averages. The numbers entered for the AS and A-level examinations are rising from a low base and include more boys. In 2002, all students gained pass grades in the A-level examination and two-thirds gained the highest grades of A or B. The performance of the girls was better than that of the boys, with nearly twice as many gaining grades A or B as girls nationally. The A-level results in 2003 were well above average and a greater proportion of students gained the highest grades than in 2002.

187. Standards by the end of Year 13 are well above average. Most students have highly developed speaking and listening skills and their writing is highly sophisticated. In class, students show a mature understanding of the topic under consideration and outline well ideas and arguments from key philosophers. They argue very well about, for example, the concept of conscience and its nature and understand clearly its relationship to belief in God in philosophical thought. They apply their accumulated knowledge to different problems proficiently and skilfully use the thinking of philosophers and theologians in evaluating contemporary accounts of religious experience. Achievement is very good overall, with no significant differences in achievement between different groups of students. The generally very high level of students' literacy skills significantly supports their overall achievement in the subject.

188. The quality of teaching is very good overall. Teachers have secure knowledge of the subject and structure lessons into well-paced activities that enable students to learn independently and cooperatively. Teachers use a range of methods, such as video extracts, to stimulate thought, for example on ethical dilemmas in medicine surrounding premature birth. Debates are arranged to

enable students to practise arguing the case for and against the design and ontological arguments for the existence of God. Such methods greatly increase the effectiveness of learning. Research work from textbooks, together with group discussions, helps students to learn well in class and to increase their learning by trying out their ideas in discussion with others. Written work is set regularly, usually in the form of essays and some useful formative comments for improvement are added during marking.

189. Leadership of the subject is good. A-level work has been developed since the last inspection in the belief that religious education has much to contribute as an intellectual discipline that also assists the personal development of students. The head of subject has developed an effective teaching team, which works together closely to plan and develop the subject at this level. Management of the subject is also good. Data are now being used to analyse the performance of past students and the outcomes are then applied to present students to help them avoid some pitfalls and to achieve better. There was no A-level provision in the school at the time of the last inspection and therefore improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Sociology

Provision in sociology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average.
- Students achieve well.
- Teaching is good overall but does not always sustain sufficient challenge and momentum in the learning.
- Provision is well planned and managed, but procedures for monitoring, reviewing and development planning are not sufficiently systematic and rigorous.

Commentary

190. In 2002, the A-level examination results were well above average. Fewer students gained grade A in 2003, but the overall results were similar to those in 2002. The AS examination results were average in 2002 but dropped sharply in 2003. This fall reflected both the ability of the students and their poor motivation in completing coursework. Current standards in both Years 12 and 13 are above average. All students are achieving well in comparison with their GCSE results. Boys and girls achieve equally well.

191. Students' knowledge and understanding is good. Higher attaining students, especially, have a good grasp of issues, which they enjoy discussing knowledgeably. They make confident and secure contributions to class discussion, engaging in challenging dialogue with the teacher. Students in Year 12, for instance, sustained a stimulating dialogue about post-war changes in education, with some posing very perceptive questions about the influence of the changes on equality of opportunity.

192. The written work of higher attaining students shows a good understanding of sociological approaches and perspectives. Notes are clear and useful for revision and essays are well structured and, at best, evaluative and well argued. Coursework is well researched, coherent and clearly focused. The work of other students varies in quality with some having weaknesses in detail, explanation, the use of evidence and depth of understanding. Some is careless.

193. Students appreciate the teacher's very good subject knowledge and clear presentations. Well-planned teaching provides high expectations for them to work at a demanding level. Group work provides good opportunities for collaborative learning. Well-timed interventions by the teacher remind students to link their investigations to sociological perspectives. Individual and group guidance is very effective in increasing understanding. Classroom relationships are very good, fostering confident contributions and lively discussion, such as that by Year 13 students on crime and deviance. Not all students, however, contribute fully and this, in part, is a result of questioning

not being sufficiently well targeted. At times, challenge and momentum in learning are slowed by too long being spent in discussing a single issue. Marking is thorough, providing detailed guidance for improvement, but performance data are not used systematically enough to track students' progress and set targets against their prior attainment. There is too much reliance on whole-school procedures for target setting. More stringent requirements and guidance are needed for the completion of coursework.

194. The good standards reflect the good quality of both the leadership and management by the head of department who is the only teacher of sociology. He has a clear vision for provision in sociology and ensures that the curriculum is meticulously planned and reviewed in terms of its effectiveness. Line management arrangements, however, are not strong enough in supporting these processes, especially in ensuring strategic approaches to monitoring, reviewing and development planning. The subject was not inspected during the last inspection.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

The focus was on A-level and AS courses in design and technology.

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' subject expertise is good.
- The development of links with local businesses contributes well to students' achievements.
- Students have positive attitudes to their studies.
- The course does not enable students to build sufficiently on their strengths at GCSE.

Commentary

195. In 2002, the A-level examination results were below the national average. In 2003, the results were not as good and were well below average. Although all students gained a pass grade, no students gained the higher grades of A and B. Standards have declined over the past three years. However, the small numbers of students entered for A-level examinations makes comparisons with the national figures difficult. Analysis of the results of individual students shows that in most cases their achievement was satisfactory. Standards of work of students on the current AS and A-level courses are average, which indicates that standards are rising. Students respond well to the challenge of design projects, showing creativity and a willingness to try new ideas. They develop and present their work in design folios, which are of high quality. Practical work combines both traditional and more innovative techniques, such as laminating and forming and the use of computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM). In a typical project, a student used CAD/CAM to produce components for a chair she had designed that could not have been produced accurately in any other way.

196. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers provide a programme that covers the examination syllabus well. They structure the courses using a range of learning activities and place strong emphasis on designing and making to a high standard. They provide opportunities for students to study industrial processes and the work of other designers through visiting museums and local companies. A visit to a local furniture manufacturer was made very effective by the way the teacher used a range of ICT skills to record the visit, produced an excellent multi-media presentation on the lessons learned and then made the whole learning package available to students on CDROM for the purposes of further study or revision. Because of its good relationship with the school, the company has provided resources that would not otherwise be available. Teachers know the interests, strengths and weaknesses of individual students very well and give very good one-to-

one support. They assess students' work accurately and give them detailed constructive feedback on ways to improve.

197. Students' attitudes to their work are very good. They strive for the higher grades and are prepared to work hard to achieve them. Many see design and technology as an important subject in relation to what they plan to do when they leave the school, are highly motivated and are prepared to extend study beyond normal lessons. Most take the opportunity to gain additional time in the workshops. The use of ICT for CAD/CAM and for recording and presenting their work helps to maintain standards and contributes to the development of their competence in ICT. The combination of good teaching and students' very good attitudes to work supports their achievement in the sixth form, which is satisfactory.

198. The quality of leadership and management is good. In a relatively short period of time in post, the subject leader has introduced appropriate measures to address the immediate issue of raising standards and proposed other longer-term strategies to ensure that the curriculum provided builds more closely on the students' achievements in GCSE courses. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on A-level and AS courses in art and design and dance. In addition, a small number of lessons were sampled in music, music technology and theatre studies. Three lessons were sampled in music and music technology. In these lessons, standards are well above average. The teaching is mostly very good and students achieve very well. Three lessons were also sampled in theatre studies. Standards are well above average. Students' achievement is very good because they are very well taught.

Art

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The head of department has successfully created a challenging environment for learning.
- The teacher is very well informed and able to provide very good advice and support.
- Students work with great application to acquire new knowledge and develop new skills.
- Students' achievement is very good.
- The lack of ICT provision within the art department restricts some design activities.

Commentary

199. The A-level examination results in 2002 were very high, with all students attaining the highest grade of A, which is far higher than the national figure of 40 per cent. These very high standards were maintained in 2003. Since 1998, all students have attained a grade A in the A-level examination. Students' achievement from the start of Year 12 to the end of Year 13 is very good.

200. The standard of students' current work by Year 13 is well above average and their achievement is very good. Students in Year 12 make very good progress and are successful in building upon those skills that they have acquired in Year 11. They apply themselves enthusiastically to the task of acquiring new knowledge and developing much deeper understanding of art as a means of communicating ideas and expressing feelings. Their visual diaries show clearly how research is conducted and ideas developed. In Year 13, students continue to make very good progress and demonstrate improved technical skill and capacity for resolving problems of increasing complexity. They are highly productive and demonstrate much greater confidence in their own experiences and belief systems as starting points for their artwork. They have also developed the

capacity for much deeper analysis and critical awareness of their own work and that of other professional artists and craftspeople.

201. The teaching is very good overall and has some excellent features. The teacher is very well informed and familiar with the A-level examination specifications, which ensures that students receive very good advice and support. Relationships with students, who are expected to work to the best of their ability to achieve their full potential through art and craft activities, are very good. Students are actively encouraged to carry out thorough and detailed research into a variety of different subject matter and record this information in their visual diaries. Their written essays display a depth of analytical and critical skills, which are of a very high order. Work is assessed regularly, with written feedback provided for students. This information is stored in the students' portfolios.

202. Students follow a highly traditional curriculum that places emphasis on the acquisition of drawing, painting and craft skills. Within these constraints, however, they are very successful and produce work of a very high standard. They produce large acrylic or oil paintings which reveal a high level of skill and craftsmanship. There are also examples of large, ambitious clay sculptures on display in the art studios and throughout the school.

203. Leadership and management are very good and include some excellent features. The head of department has a very thorough and detailed understanding of the A-level examination specifications and, in particular, the individual unit assessment objectives. Her enthusiasm for the subject is infectious and has a very positive impact on both staff and students.

204. Accommodation and resources are good, but due to the lack of resources in the art studios, there are few opportunities for the production of design work employing ICT. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. The high standards have been maintained, in particular, the achievement of the highest grade A by all students since 1998.

Dance

Provision in dance is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average and students achieve well because of good teaching and effective planning.
- Dance enriches the sixth form arts provision and is taught by a knowledgeable specialist.
- Good resources support learning, independent study and research.

Commentary

205. Standards are above average and achievement is good. Dance has been introduced into the sixth form as a result of the school becoming a Performing Arts Specialist College in September 2002. A dance specialist was appointed in September 2003 and students will sit the A-level examination for the first time in 2004. Students' attainment in the AS examination in 2003 was well above the national average with all students gaining a pass grade and almost three-quarters gaining the highest grades of A and B. Six out of the seven students are continuing with dance in Year 13, including one male student. Eleven students are currently studying dance in Year 12. Students studying the AS course have a range of different experiences in dance, some with limited curriculum experience, whilst others have had extensive experience in independent external classes. The courses take this into consideration and the quality of the work observed in lessons is above average.

206. The quality of teaching and learning is good. The dance modules have been effectively planned, enabling students to develop their knowledge and skills in a range of different cultural styles and forms. Students are highly motivated by the commitment and enthusiasm of the teacher. The

range of teaching methods and the provision of good resources allow students to make good progress and achieve well in composing, performing and appreciating dance. In Year 12, students take increasing responsibility for their own learning in selecting and working on their own individual solo and choreography performances in preparation for their final assessment. Their ideas are creative and imaginative and students demonstrate a good understanding of choreographic skills. Students in Year 13 respond well to the challenge, acquiring ballet performance skills and the technical language required as preparation to analyse the dance in Macmillan's *Winter Dreams*. Students receive good guidance from their teacher and their progress is carefully monitored. Assessment procedures are clear and helpful.

207. The teacher in charge of dance has a clear vision and commitment to improving standards. The subject is well managed and organised and schemes of work are being developed. Students benefit from a designated studio for dance with a sprung floor. However, the space is inadequate to develop the skills of lifting and working with larger groups. Students have to change in the adjacent Performing Arts Centre and there are no showering facilities. The quality of resources is good and the library provides a range of resource material for research. In general, though, careers advice in this area is unsatisfactory. Forging links with professional dancers and networking with Bucks Dance is developing and students benefit from theatre visits to view live performances. Currently, the provision for extra-curricular dance is limited and students do not get sufficient opportunities to perform in public.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

No courses in this area were subject to an in-depth inspection but the A-level and AS courses in physical education were sampled. Two lessons were seen. Standards in these lessons are above average and students' achievement is good. In both lessons, the teaching was good. The A-level results in 2003 were not as good as in previous years and only a small proportion of students gained the higher grades. Recruitment of staff in the department contributed to the decline in standards. Students in the sixth form are able to take the Community Sports Leaders Award, developing their leadership, management and organisational skills through sport. However, timetabled activities in the afternoon are optional and poorly attended.

BUSINESS

The focus of the inspection was on AS/A-level and AVCE courses in business studies and AS and A-level courses in economics.

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average.
- Good teaching helps students to achieve well.
- Students develop very good attitudes to their work.
- Links with local business are underdeveloped.
- ICT is not available in lessons for students to use.

Commentary

208. The A-level examination results in 2002 were well above the national average, with two-thirds of the students gaining the highest grades of A and B and all attaining a pass grade. A higher proportion of girls gained the two highest grades. In 2003, the results were very high; all students gained grades A - E and a much higher proportion gained grades A and B than in 2002. The AS-level results were well above average in 2002 but were not quite as good as in 2003. In 2003, two-thirds

of students following the AVCE course gained the highest grades. Students achieved as expected in Year 12, as grades were in line with predictions and achieved well in Year 13, where students tended to make better progress. The achievement of students on the AVCE course is bolstered because they gain good key skills of communication and ICT through assignments linked to local businesses. Students on the AS course have less opportunity to develop these skills except when they join the two very successful Young Enterprise companies that make and sell products in school.

209. Students' current work is well above nationally expected levels. They make good progress in lessons and achieve well. AVCE students' understanding of how the marketing strategy of local firms is affected by economic factors is above average. However, some boys do not produce the standard of work of which they are capable because ICT is not used enough to model financial data or present work. Students are unable to use the Internet for research in lessons as there are no computers in the business studies classrooms. Students on all courses are predicted to attain similarly high grades to those of last year.

210. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Teachers' very good relationships with students keep them fully engaged, helping to sustain very good attitudes. Where teachers note problems in students' understanding of marketing and financial concepts, they reinforce essential terms clearly. Teachers assess students' work thoroughly, using examining board criteria and give them frequent class tests and practice examination papers. AVCE students make presentations to improve their key communication skills, but are not able to make enough use of ICT to support their learning. Higher attaining students are challenged to achieve more in Year 13 than in Year 12 as they have more external tests.

211. Leadership and management are good, with clear vision for improvement. Experienced subject specialist staff work well together as a close-knit team. In the short time she has been in post, the co-ordinator has helped to improve standards and monitors students' achievement regularly. There are plans for more rigorous analyses to help in the setting of individual targets for students, together with improved business links and the use of ICT. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

Economics

Provision in economics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership and management result in well-planned and diverse learning.
- Teachers use assessment well to show students how to improve their work.
- Students' attitudes are good and make a positive contribution to their success.
- Systematic and structured teaching enables students to learn well.
- The working environment is poor and the lack of a television and video facility restricts teaching and learning approaches.

Commentary

212. The A-level examination results in 2003 were well above the national average and showed a considerable improvement over those in 2002, which were average. In both 2002 and 2003, all students gained a pass grade but in 2003, a higher proportion gained the highest grades of A and B than in the previous year. There was little difference in the results of boys and girls. In the AS examinations in 2002, all students gained a pass grade and their results were above the national average. Girls' results were better than those of boys. The proportion of students gaining the highest grades of A and B was above the national average in 2002 but declined in 2003. Girls' results were better than those of boys. The 2003 results represent good achievement for most students at AS and A-level.

213. Standards are currently above average by Year 13 and achievement is good. In a Year 12 lesson, students built on their prior understanding of the meaning of 'efficiency' in economics and, as a result of systematic and structured teaching, extended their learning into the concept of market failure and the significance of positive and negative externalities. They showed good ability to use supply and demand graphs to illustrate their work and they responded positively to opportunities for discussion. In a Year 13 lesson, students showed good knowledge and understanding of economic growth and the limitations of using gross domestic product as an indicator of living standards. They demonstrated their independent research skills by using computers to access information on alternative measures of standards.

214. The above average standards in economics are linked closely to good teaching and learning and the positive attitudes of the students. The teacher uses her very good subject expertise to plan and structure the work to ensure clarity of delivery and to relate it to current national and international events. Her style is both challenging and supportive. She organises lunchtime tutorials for students who require extra help. Due emphasis is given to subject-related vocabulary and the interpretation of examination questions. Whilst there is an emphasis on systematic teacher-led work in lessons, students are given opportunities to develop their oral skills through discussion in pairs or small groups. They are encouraged to learn independently through research tasks, for example, on global warming. Students are encouraged to use ICT and are given opportunities in class time to do so. Discussions with students reveal that they find the work in economics interesting, challenging and very relevant to real life. Their learning is enriched and extended through their participation in the Proshare and the Bank of England Target 2.5 competitions. Students in both years keep well-organised files that contain a variety of information in written and graphical form. This will form a very good basis for examination revision.

215. The leadership and management of economics are very good. The head of department has a clear vision and sense of purpose. She has high aspirations for those studying economics. This is well set out in the departmental handbook. The departmental improvement plan focuses on pupils' achievement and teaching and learning. It reflects the increasing use of statistical data for target setting and monitoring students' progress and the broadening of students' experience through their involvement in the Proshare and Bank of England Target 2.5 competitions. The head of department rigorously evaluates her work and the standards in economics. She uses fully the statistical data available to analyse examination results and to inform the development of schemes of work, learning activities and the provision of resources. Essays and tests are set on a regular basis and are thoroughly marked. Students appreciate the help they are given to further improve their work.

216. Since the last inspection, there has been an improvement in the proportion of students gaining the highest grades and this is often above average. The teaching and learning environment for economics, however, remains poor, although good displays of relevant materials have been developed. There is no television and video facility and this restricts teaching and learning opportunities.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

General studies

217. Only a small number of lessons were sampled in general studies and it is not possible to make a judgement about overall provision. In these lessons, standards were above average and students' achievement good. Students learn well because of the good teaching.

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

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

