

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **ST ALBANS GIRLS' SCHOOL**

St Albans

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117524

Headteacher: Mrs V A Booth

Lead inspector: David Roberts

Dates of inspection: 19<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2004

Inspection number: 259320

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

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## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 – 18
Gender of pupils:	Female
Number on roll:	1145
School address:	Sandridgebury Lane St Albans Hertfordshire
Postcode:	AL3 6DB
Telephone number:	(01727) 853 134
Fax number:	(01727) 831 157
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr H Wilkinson
Date of previous inspection:	January 1998

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

The school is situated in a pleasant residential area on the northern fringe of the city; it draws pupils mainly from the local area but also some who travel from farther afield. The social and economic circumstances of the pupils, and the standards they have achieved before they come to the school, are well above the national average profile. There is a very small number of pupils for whom English is not the first language. Minority ethnic pupils, from a wide range of heritage, make up about a fifth of the population. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs (SEN), including those with statements, is well below the national average. The school gained an Achievement Award in both 2002 and 2003; in September 2003 it gained specialist status as a Business and Enterprise college.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
7582	David Roberts	Lead inspector	
9974	Daljit Singh	Lay inspector	
9542	Brian Jones	Lay inspector	
20845	Sue Walker	Team inspector	Mathematics (11-16) Citizenship
12857	Rob Bailey	Team inspector	English Drama Media studies (sixth form)
2106	Richard Swan	Team inspector	Science
15163	Eric Deeson	Team inspector	Information & communication technology Business studies (sixth form)
21954	Terry Chipp	Team inspector	Art and design
21825	Eileen Kelly	Team inspector	Design and technology
19530	Jennifer Bray	Team inspector	Geography
7247	Clive Moss	Team inspector	History
13155	John Dixon	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
31701	Graeme Rudland	Team inspector	Music
31983	Debra Makin	Team inspector	Physical education
12003	Andrew Marfleet	Team inspector	Religious education (11-16)
28002	Sue Taylor	Team inspector	Special educational needs English as an additional language
7541	Helen Hutchins	Team inspector	Mathematics (sixth form)
18447	Ron Cohen	Team inspector	Religious education (sixth form)

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## REPORT CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>4 - 8</b>
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS</b>	
<b>STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS</b>	<b>9 - 14</b>
Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
<b>QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL</b>	<b>14 - 22</b>
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
<b>LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>22 - 25</b>
<b>PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES</b>	
<b>SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4</b>	<b>26 - 41</b>
<b>SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM</b>	<b>41 -</b>
54	
<b>PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS</b>	<b>55</b>



## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE INSPECTION REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the school is **good** and it provides **good value for money**. The school is well established and rightly popular with parents and its pupils and students. A new phase of development has started enthusiastically now that the school has the status of a Business and Enterprise College.

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

- Results in national tests and examinations compare very well with the national average; there was some underachievement at GCSE level in science in 2003.
- Staff in all roles relate well to the pupils and students in their care, helping to secure good attitudes and very high attendance; there are some safety issues to resolve quickly.
- Teaching is good overall, and best in the sixth form; teachers insist on high standards of behaviour in nearly all lessons; work is not always well enough matched to pupils' capabilities.
- The headteacher provides very good leadership and is well supported by other key staff.
- Clear line-management ensures the school reviews its practice effectively, although current arrangements are not fully cost effective.
- There are good examples of the assessment of pupils' work, but practice is too variable across the school and some pupils are not adequately informed about their progress.
- Weaknesses in the availability of resources and in the quality of accommodation affect learning in a number of subjects, although teachers and pupils generally overcome these drawbacks, except in relation to access to computers.
- The co-ordination of pupils' experience of information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum is unsatisfactory.
- The statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship and, in the sixth form, for religious education, are not met.

The school's improvement since the previous inspection in 1998 has been **good**. The proportion of teaching which is at least good has increased significantly. The key issues for improvement identified in the last report have been addressed well, with a few exceptions.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2001	2002	2003	2003
	A*	A	A	D
Performance in GCE AS and A-level examinations in Years 12 and 13	E*	A	A	

Key: A\* - very high; A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average; E\* - very low. Similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.

**Standards achieved by pupils overall are very good.** The substantial majority of pupils make good progress during their time at the school and build well on the above average standards they have reached before entering the school. The few pupils with special educational needs or for whom English is an additional language achieve as well as other pupils. There is no discernable difference between the achievement of pupils from different ethnic heritages. The most capable pupils also achieve well. Results in the sixth form show sustained performance at high levels over the last few years. Standards of work seen during the inspection were particularly good in English, mathematics, drama and physical education. The quality of pupils' language and literacy skills make a very good contribution to their achievement. Their numeracy and ICT skills are good.

**Pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good.** Pupils' generally positive attitudes and behaviour and good relationships, support a healthy and productive learning environment. Attendance is very high. Pupils are helped to develop well as responsible members of the community. Opportunities to understand and value other cultures represented in the school are sometimes overlooked.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

The **quality of education** which the school provides is **good**. Overall, the quality of **teaching and learning are good** through all years in the school, particularly in the sixth form. About three quarters of lessons are at least good. In some lessons, activities are not well enough matched to pupils' capabilities. A very few are unsatisfactory due to weak behaviour management. The feedback given to pupils on the progress they are making is too inconsistent, although there is good practice in many subjects.

**The curriculum is satisfactory taken overall.** Strengths include the special provision made for those with relatively weak language and literacy skills in Years 7 to 9 and the flexible approach to the subject choices of individual pupils in Years 10/11. Pupils' experience of ICT is not well co-ordinated across the curriculum. Weaknesses in resources and accommodation affect learning in some subjects. There is a good range of curriculum enrichment opportunities.

**Care, guidance, mentoring and counselling are effective. Links with parents are generally good.** There are **very productive links with other schools** in the area.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are good overall**, with very good leadership provided by the headteacher. She is well supported by other staff with a leadership and management role. However, some management arrangements are costly and there is a lack of clarity about ultimate responsibility in some areas. Forward planning is thorough and based on the right priorities. **Governance is satisfactory**; governors provide good support and advice and know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well but do not ensure all statutory requirements are carried out. The school has a good approach to reviewing its own practices.

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

There is a good general level of satisfaction among parents; they are happy with the progress their children make and the high expectations the school has of their achievement although there are some concerns about the quality of reports. Pupils have a generally very positive view of the teaching and the high expectations but many have concerns about the behaviour of a minority; many feel that the school does not take sufficient account of their views.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

The most important things the school needs to do:

- Improve teaching where there is evidence of pupils' underachievement.
- Review management arrangements to ensure that staff time is used most effectively and that ultimate responsibilities are always clear.
- Secure a consistently effective approach to the assessment of pupils' work, including improved use of pupil performance data; improve the quality of progress reports to parents.
- Improve the quantity of resources, particularly computers, and the quality of the accommodation.
- Improve the curriculum provision for less academic pupils in Years 10/11 and ensure they receive appropriate guidance in relation to post 16 education.



- Secure effective co-ordination of the experience of ICT across the curriculum, including in the sixth form.

To meet statutory requirements:

- Make effective arrangements for a daily act of collective worship.
- In the sixth form, provide for all students a course in religious education.

## THE SIXTH FORM AT ST ALBANS GIRLS' SCHOOL

The sixth form is larger than average for sixth forms in 11-18 schools. It offers a predominantly academic A-level curriculum, but has effective consortium arrangements with other schools to provide a range of other courses.

### OVERALL EVALUATION

The sixth form is **very effective** and provides **good value for money**. Performance in A-level examinations over a number of years has been well above the national average, and the work seen during the inspection was of a high standard in most subjects of the curriculum.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Standards at AS and A-levels are consistently well above average.
- Students have very positive attitudes to learning and achieve well in most subjects.
- Teaching is good, and very good in a number of subjects, with high expectations.
- The sixth form is well led and managed.
- Students' progress is well monitored and supported.
- Students have very positive attitudes to learning.
- Students participate well in the life of the school and wider community.
- The sixth form curriculum is insufficiently well defined to ensure that less-academic students are aware of what opportunities it presents.
- There is insufficient use of ICT to support learning and research.
- Resources and accommodation are unsatisfactory in some subjects.
- The statutory requirement for all students to follow a course in religious education is not met.

### 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, modern foreign languages and communication	Provision in English is <b>very good</b> . Teaching is lively and challenging, and examination results are well above average.  Provision is <b>good</b> in French. Teachers have high expectations of students and make good use of media. Examination results are well above average. Two lessons were seen in Spanish, which were both well taught.
Mathematics	Provision in mathematics is <b>very good</b> . Teachers have high expectations of students and examination results are consistently well above average.
Science	Physics provision is <b>good</b> , benefiting from very good teaching. Students achieve very well and examination results are well above average. Provision in chemistry and biology was sampled; here too provision is <b>good</b> and results are well above average.
Information and communication technology	Provision for ICT is <b>good</b> . Good teaching ensures that A-level students reach a good standard of knowledge and understanding. However, across all subjects,

	the standards in ICT are only <b>satisfactory</b> .
Humanities	<p>Provision for geography is <b>good</b>. Teaching is good and students achieve well. Examination results are above average.</p> <p>History provision is <b>good</b>. The teaching is well focused and standards reached by students are above average.</p> <p>Provision for the Philosophy and Ethics course is <b>good</b>. Most teaching is good and students make good progress through the course. However, provision for non-examination religious education is <b>unsatisfactory</b>.</p> <p>Sociology was sampled; provision is <b>good</b>. Teaching gives the students confidence to contribute ideas and develop their understanding.</p>
Engineering, manufacturing and technology	The course in textiles was sampled. Provision in this new course is <b>good</b> ; students are progressing well as a result of good teaching.
Visual and performing arts and media	<p>Provision in art and design is <b>good</b>. Teaching is good and standards are well above average despite the lack of suitable accommodation.</p> <p>Provision in drama is <b>very good</b>. Students respond well to challenging teaching and standards are well above average.</p> <p>Provision in media studies was sampled; good, lively teaching secures above average standards and ensures provision is <b>good</b>.</p> <p>Music provision is <b>good</b>. Students make good progress and achieve above average standards as a result of the good teaching and a wide range of extra-curricular musical opportunities.</p>
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Provision in physical education is <b>satisfactory</b> . Teaching is satisfactory and standards are average.
Business	Provision in the Economics and Business course is <b>good</b> . Students respond well to high quality teaching, and results are above the national average.

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

## ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Provision for students' welfare is **good**. Students receive good advice and support in choosing their sixth form programme, although students consider there to be some shortcomings. The school makes every effort to accommodate the subject combinations required and to provide as wide a range of courses as possible, including through access to the consortium of schools, particularly for less academic students. There are very good procedures for setting targets and for tracking students' progress towards them. The school takes note of students' views through questionnaires and through student self-evaluation.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership is **good**. There are clear aims and values and a good focus on what needs to be done. Development is well-planned with a focus on raising standards and ensuring that the school's high academic traditions are sustained. Relationships with consortium schools are good and well managed, and the supplementary curriculum provision available works well to the benefit of students in the school. The sixth form is **well managed** on a day-to-day basis with good structures in place so that student progress and welfare can be ensured. Teaching and learning are well monitored.

## STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

The overwhelming majority of students enjoy being in the sixth form. They know that they are taught by well-qualified staff whose lessons are challenging and demanding, and who are accessible and helpful when difficulties occur. They appreciate the wide range of enrichment activities which the school provides. However, a substantial proportion state that the school did not provide a suitable range of courses to suit their capability and career plans, and that they did not receive sufficient helpful advice on what to study before they entered the sixth form. Most disagreed that the school seeks and responds to their views. Inspectors found that whereas the school itself does not provide a wide enough range of courses for the full range of potential students, there are opportunities for all through the co-operative curriculum arrangements in the city, but these need to be made more clear to students.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

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

Achievement is good in Years 7 to 9; it is also good, taken overall, in Years 10/11 although more variable than in the lower years. Standards of work seen during the inspection were generally above average in all Years 7 to 11.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The achievement of pupils with special educational needs (SEN), those for whom English is an additional language and those identified as gifted or talented is good, as it is for all other pupils.
- Results in national tests in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9 in recent years have been consistently well above the national average, and also compare very well with similar schools. High proportions of pupils gain the highest levels in the tests.
- The school adds excellent value to pupils' achievement throughout Years 7 to 9.
- Results in GCSE examinations have also been consistently well above the national average, although underachievement in science in 2003 meant that results did not compare well with similar schools.
- Standards of work seen in Key Stages 3 and 4 were generally above average; they were well above average in drama and physical education and, in Years 7 to 9, in English.
- The quality of pupils' English language and literacy skills give very good support to their achievement.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results	
		All pupils	Girls
English	38.0 (40.0)	33.4 (33.3)	34.6 (34.8)
mathematics	42.2 (43.2)	35.4 (34.7)	35.5 (34.7)
science	40.5 (40.1)	33.6 (33.3)	33.6 (33.3)

*There were 177 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	82 (89)	52 (50)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	97 (100)	91 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (100)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	46.9 (48.7)	34.7 (34.7)

*There were 176 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

### Commentary

1. Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with generally above average standards in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, although in others (for instance, geography and music) standards on entry are average. They achieve well through Years 7 to 9 in response to the generally good teaching and their very positive attitudes to learning. This leads to the good or

very good standards of work seen and has led to national test results over the last three years which are very high for all three subjects in comparison with the national median for girls.

2. The five-year trend of improvement in the national tests was above the national trend until last year but has now slowed to below the national trend due to the high levels already reached. Although there was a decline in the proportion of pupils reaching Level 7 in the tests in 2003 compared with 2002, the proportion remains high and reflects the good achievement of the most capable pupils.
3. Pupils achieve well too in most of their other subjects at this stage, and very well in science, drama and physical education. They achieve satisfactorily in history, where teaching is less good, and in art, where facilities are inadequate.
4. Achievement in Years 10/11 is good, taken overall, although there is more variability than in the younger age group. Achievement is very good in English, drama and physical education; it is satisfactory rather than good in information and communication technology (ICT), history, religious education (except for pupils who take the GCSE course, where achievement is very good) and music.
5. Standards of work seen were generally above average in Years 10/11 and well above average in English, mathematics, design and technology, drama and physical education. They were average in the non-examination religious education course. The lower standards seen here are a reflection partly of their lower status in the eyes of pupils due to there being no GCSE examination at the end of the course, and partly to weaker teaching in some lessons.
6. Results in the GCSE examinations in 2003 were well above the national median for all pupils and for girls. This follows the pattern established over recent years. The proportion of pupils reaching the nationally expected level of five or more higher grades (A\* to C) in 2003 was lower than in previous years and a little below the target which governors set. Whilst it compared very well with the national average, it compared poorly with similar schools. This was largely due to a significant number of pupils achieving higher grades in a number of their other subjects, but failing to do so in science. The comparison with similar schools is a difficult one to make reliably, due to the relatively small number of other non-selective schools where the average attainment level on entry is so high. However, it remains the case that GCSE results in 2003 would have exceeded the target set and compared better with similar schools, had performance in science matched that in other subjects.
7. The school added satisfactory value to the achievement of pupils who took their GCSE examinations in 2003 compared to their starting point at the beginning of Year 10, and good value compared to their starting point at the beginning of Year 7. Only in geography were 2003 results not significantly above the national average. Results in religious education, Spanish and physical education compared well to the overall picture, whilst those in art, business education and English literature were less good comparatively.
8. Pupils' achievement in reading and writing is very good and these skills help to ensure that pupils make the good progress that they do across the curriculum. Speaking and listening skills are also well developed, although in modern foreign languages, the development of pupils' speaking skills receives too little attention. Good standards of numeracy are also seen to support pupils' work, particularly in science. Pupils reach high standards in their ICT skills and capability by the end of Year 9, although they have relatively few opportunities to use these across the curriculum as yet. Their achievement in ICT is no better than satisfactory in Years 10/11, where they lose some of their motivation and concentration, and where the time allocated to the short GCSE course is inadequate.
9. The strategies which teachers use for assessing pupils' work make a very good contribution to pupils' progress in history and ICT, whereas there are too many inconsistencies in other areas, particularly in science and physical education.

10. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well because of the quality of the teaching in small group and individual sessions. This is focused on the development of the skills with which they have particular difficulty.
11. There is no evidence of pupils from any minority ethnic background achieving any better or worse than any other or than the overall rate of achievement in the school. The handful of pupils with English as an additional language achieve well throughout the school.

## **SIXTH FORM**

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school maintains examination standards which are well above average.
- Students achieve well relative to the standards they achieved in GCSE.
- Students have very positive attitudes which contribute well to their learning.
- Skills in ICT could be higher.
- Standards and quality are affected where accommodation and resources are unsatisfactory.

### **Commentary**

12. The standards reported in the last inspection report were judged to be very good, and placed the school in the top 25 per cent of schools nationally. In 2003, the school has sustained its high levels of performance. The average points score per candidate was well above the average for all post-16 providers across the country. Although the overall level of grades obtained was slightly lower than in 2002, there was a markedly higher proportion of higher grades (A and B). A marked characteristic of the results obtained by students in the school is the high proportion of higher grades achieved. Over the past five years, performance in the A-level examinations in the school has been consistently well above the national average. However, the trend is slightly downward and this may be due to the school's easing of its high entry level requirements for sixth form courses.
13. Whilst performance in some subjects at A-level may vary a little year on year, consistently high standards have been sustained in mathematics, English literature, science (especially biology), French, geography and history. AS results in 2003 showed a similar level of high performance, with the proportion of higher grades again above recent national averages. Students show that they have made good progress in the sixth form, and most achieve the targets set for them at each stage based on their attainment at age 16.
14. In the work seen during the inspection, students responded with enthusiasm and commitment to the challenging teaching they received, and in most subjects the progress which they were able to make was rapid and secure. Attitudes to learning are extremely positive. Most students achieve well relative to their attainment at age 16, and become more mature learners by acquiring good analytical skills and developing thorough subject knowledge and understanding. They work hard and engage well in discussion and oral work.
15. In some areas of the curriculum, students' progress is affected by the lack of opportunities to use computers and other technology in support of their learning. ICT skills are not as high as they might be, and the use of computers for research and independent study is not as well developed as in many similar schools. In art and design and in science, the lack of up-to-date accommodation and resources has an impact on the range and quality of students' work.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	98.0 (97.0)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	54.4 (51.2)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per student	289.0 (304.0)	253.1 (254.5)

*There were 124 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

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

Pupils' **very good attendance** ensures they enjoy learning and behave in a constructive and effective manner, as well as serving the school and wider community in a responsible way. Pupils' moral and social experiences significantly support learning and their effective relationship with others. However, there are very few opportunities for the school community to learn about other cultures represented in the school community.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Effective attitudes, behaviour and relationships support a friendly and welcoming environment.
- Occasional anti-social behaviour affects the learning of others and exclusions have risen.
- High attendance and low unauthorised absences support learning and progress.
- Moral and social experiences at the school have a positive impact on pupils' attitudes and behaviour, enabling them to learn effectively.

### **Commentary**

16. Most pupils are willing and motivated learners, which is due to their regular attendance, and desire to learn. Pupils show respect and consideration for others. Their positive attitudes help them to become self-disciplined, confident and motivated learners and help them to pursue extra curricular activities. During the inspection, pupils from Years 7 and 11 were observed practising dance and gymnastics, as well as indoor hockey at lunchtime. After school pupils stayed to make effective use of computers to access information and complete homework tasks. These experiences enabled them to develop physically and emotionally, and improve their information and communication technology skills.
17. The attendance rate in 2002/03 was well above the national median, and in the best ten per cent of schools nationally; the rate of unauthorised absence was below the national median. However, there are a small number of less motivated pupils who are late for lessons, are noisy, immature and boisterous. These attitudes, and occasional racist comments, affect other learners and the normally welcoming and friendly environment. Much of this unwelcoming and anti-social behaviour is effectively challenged, and explains the recent rise in exclusions. However, some racist behaviour goes undetected, because pupils lack confidence to report incidents. The failure to report affects pupils' self-esteem, attitudes to learning and their relationship with others, and subsequently progress and achievement. A most effective record of behavioural incidents is maintained using a computer database and this helps ensure that patterns of unsatisfactory behaviour are identified and appropriate solutions found.
18. Most teachers value their pupils and reward them by providing opportunities for them to serve the school and wider community as fundraisers, volunteers and as house captains. These opportunities are taken seriously and pupils value the trust placed in them, which gives them confidence to learn, increases their self-esteem and ensures they become responsible and trusted citizens of the school and the wider community.
19. Further support for pupils' personal development is provided through English, art and design, music, religious education and personal and social education lessons and through extra-

curricular clubs, sports coaching and school visits to France, Belgium, Germany, Spain and museums locally. This wide range of experiences enables pupils to value their own and European cultures, to develop socially and value and appreciate others and learn new languages. Teaching in religious education, art and music, as well as elements of both house and year assemblies, ensure pupils spiritual and moral experiences are enhanced. However, the opportunities for understanding and valuing cultures represented in the school are not taken systematically and this affects relationships between pupils and their attitudes to diversity. However, in general, pupils from the range of cultures represented in the school get on well with each other.

20. The attitudes and behaviour of pupils with special educational needs, when taught by special needs staff in small groups and individual sessions, are outstanding. They remain very positive and co-operative despite concentrating on areas of the curriculum they find difficult. Pupils with special educational needs are closely involved with the setting of targets for their individual education plans and are aware of their progress towards them.

#### **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	724	18	0
White – Irish	5	0	0
White – any other White background	27	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	12	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	14	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	11	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	22	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	14	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	30	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	18	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	8	0	0
Black or Black British – African	8	0	0
Chinese	13	0	0
Any other ethnic group	12	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	204	0	0

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

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	5.4	School data	0.2
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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



## SIXTH FORM

Students in the sixth form use their constructive and very conscientious attitudes and maturity to pursue their studies, and develop their personal and social skills by serving the school in a responsible and caring way.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most students achieve very good attendance and approach learning in a very effective manner.
- Most students serve the school in a responsible and conscientious manner, which promotes effective relationships between the main school and the sixth form.

### Commentary

21. Students enjoy coming to the sixth form and work diligently to ensure high attendance, appropriate time keeping and positive attitudes which enable them to pursue their learning in a very organised and disciplined way.
22. These very motivated students give much of their spare time to pupils in the main school, including support with learning in mathematics and English, and acting as counsellors to younger pupils. Through the various networks, including through the new house system, students were observed leading assemblies, which supported constructive relationships between school and sixth form, setting high standards of behaviour and providing secure and caring supervision.
23. Younger pupils and teachers spoke well of prefects and the assistance they provide supporting the welfare and wellbeing of younger pupils and helping teachers to organise pupils in their care. The arrangements ensure a very clear sense of unity between all learners.

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is **good** overall. Teaching is largely good. The curriculum is satisfactory, although it has not yet been developed adequately to meet the needs of all pupils, particularly those for whom a less academic pathway from age 14 would be an attractive option. Plans to remedy this are currently being put into place. Co-ordination of the application of ICT across the curriculum is weak. There is a good range of extra-curricular opportunities. The school does not comply with the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship. Care for pupils and support for their personal development are strong, although there are some health and safety concerns. There are very good links with other schools and good links with the parents and the community.

### Teaching and learning

**Teaching is good** overall but with less very good and excellent teaching than would be expected from the national data. Teaching is very good in a number of subjects in the sixth form. Pupils' learning is also good as a result of this good teaching and also of the very positive attitudes towards learning which they bring to school. The quality of teachers' assessment of pupils' progress is satisfactory overall, although it is better than this in some subjects in Years 10/11 and is generally good in the sixth form.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good or better in three quarters of lessons and unsatisfactory in only two per cent. Quality varies between subjects, although in none is it unsatisfactory; teaching is generally best in the sixth form.
- Teachers' skills and subject knowledge are well matched to the areas they teach.

- Assessment practice is good in a number of subjects (particularly in English, history and design and technology) but good and consistent practice is yet to be embedded across the school.
- Pupil performance data is readily available, although their analysis and use, by staff, in target-setting and raising achievement is not yet adequately developed across the school.
- In a minority of lessons, mainly in science, the teaching is not well enough matched to the capability of pupils in the set, and this particularly impacts on the higher attaining pupils.
- Teachers' expectations of appropriate behaviour in lessons are high and all but a very few have good behaviour management skills.

## Commentary

### **Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 161 lessons**

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
0 (0%)	31 (19%)	89 (55%)	38 (24%)	3 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

24. Three quarters of teaching was good or better overall, with this overall figure made up of approximately seven in ten lessons in Years 7 to 11 and nine in ten sixth form lessons being good or better. Only three lessons observed were unsatisfactory and these were all in Year 10.
25. All teaching seen in art and design, drama and business education was good or better. Only in science, geography and ICT was less than two-thirds of the teaching good or better.
26. The good teaching observed was typically characterised by:
  - the planned use of a variety of teaching and learning activities;
  - high expectations of pupils' productivity, attainment and behaviour;
  - a challenging pace to lessons with effective questioning of pupils;
  - lessons where the activities, resources and expectations are well matched to the capabilities of the pupils;
  - effective homework tasks which support learning; and
  - helpful diagnostic marking.
27. Lessons, or elements of lessons, which were less satisfactory were those where:
  - lesson content was less stimulating and offered too little challenge, pace and variety;
  - opportunities were missed (for instance in modern foreign languages in developing pupils' active use of the language being studied);
  - the match of activities and resources to the needs of different groups of pupils, from the higher attainers to the lower attainers, was not adequate (for instance in science where the work set for the higher sets was not adequately challenging); and
  - marking did not adequately help pupils understand how to improve and /or was not used by teachers adequately to plan the next stage of work.
28. In particular, there were a number of lessons observed, for instance in science, design and technology and art, where the highest attainers were insufficiently challenged. In science, this has been leading to some underachievement at the highest levels.
29. In general, teachers have good or very good knowledge of their subject and they successfully insist on high standards of behaviour. In two of the three lessons where teaching and learning were judged to be unsatisfactory, this was due to a rare inability to manage behaviour, although restless behaviour was a feature of parts of some other lessons where pace dropped or activities became insufficiently challenging to motivate pupils.

30. Pupils acquire skills, knowledge and understanding in relation to each subject well, and very well in drama and physical education where there is a very good focus on the teaching of technique.
31. Pupils apply themselves well to their learning in all subjects and particularly in English, drama and physical education. In ICT, music and religious education, their application is stronger in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10/11.
32. Where given the opportunities, pupils are able and willing to work both collaboratively and independently. A particular emphasis on providing such opportunities is seen in geography, music and English lessons. Homework is used well in all subjects, except in ICT and citizenship, to reinforce and extend what is learned in lessons.
33. Literacy skills are well taught in some lessons but there is unevenness across the school. Following staff training, the overall provision for mathematical competence is good in science, design and technology, geography and ICT, the subjects where it is most important. Teachers draw on computers too little in most subjects, sometimes even when they are available. Often, access is the problem, but in some subjects computer use depends on the approach of the individual teacher, leading to inequality of access by pupils.
34. Teaching in small groups and individual sessions for pupils with special educational needs focuses on improving specific skills. This aids the pupils' success in lessons so that they achieve well. Learning support staff have respectful relationships with pupils focused on maximising independent learning. However, in lessons generally, resources and strategies are not sufficiently adapted for those pupils of differing capabilities, including those identified as gifted and talented and those with special educational needs. Teaching is often not specific enough to boost learning, although provision made in lessons varies across subjects. The information provided in the good quality individual education plans is not generally linked to objectives in lessons, so that effective learning is not promoted adequately. There is insufficient use of ICT for pupils with special educational needs so that their independent learning skills are not developed as well as they might be.
35. The school has an adequate policy on assessment for learning which is reviewed annually. There is no overall school co-ordinator for assessment. Data is recorded centrally and widely diffused but inconsistently used. The school is aware of the need to introduce a more stringent monitoring procedure to ensure that the good assessment processes become embedded in the practices of all teachers and departments. In most subjects in Years 7 to 11 and in subjects across the sixth form, there are well-established assessment routines which are employed effectively. The outcomes from assessment are not well enough used to inform lesson planning in some subject areas such as physical education, music and science. In some areas (science, design and technology and physical education), pupils are not always adequately informed about the standards they have reached, targets for examinations and how to improve.

## **SIXTH FORM**

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is of a high quality throughout. Strategies are well planned and promote good learning.
- Lessons are challenging and demand high standards.
- There is insufficient use of ICT to support learning.

## Commentary

36. A major contributory factor to the high standards achieved by students in the majority of subjects is the very high quality of the teaching. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and are enthusiastic about what they teach, and the mature and positive relationships which they have with their students also contribute well to the creation of an atmosphere where very good learning can take place. Lessons are challenging and teachers' well-planned strategies encourage students to become mature learners and to develop their own high-level learning skills. Assessment of students' work is good overall, and well used to help them make progress. Only in a very small minority of cases was teaching less effective in giving students the opportunity to take part in discussion and develop their own thinking.
37. In English, drama, history and religious education, the quality of discussion and debate contributes very positively to the way students learn, and in music and French, students are encouraged to develop their practical skills. Students are encouraged to work and think independently in mathematics, religious education and media studies. In science and geography, effective use is made of ICT to support learning, but in most other subjects in the sixth form there is insufficient use of computers to back up teaching and learning or for independent work and research. There is effective use of media to support learning in modern foreign languages.
38. Sixth form students make an effective contribution to the learning of younger pupils in the school through their contribution to booster classes in mathematics in Years 7 and 9, their production of a school magazine and their work as media prefects.

## The curriculum

The breadth of the curricular opportunities is **satisfactory**. Staffing is satisfactory but there are significant weaknesses in the provision of accommodation and resources overall.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a good range of curriculum enrichment opportunities.
- The additional support for pupils who have lower levels of language and literacy skills has a very positive impact on their attainment.
- The school has responded well to the opportunities for increased flexibility at Key Stage 4, but opportunities for vocational studies remain very limited.
- Arrangements for some less academic pupils to have private study lessons in Years 10/11 are unstructured and not linked effectively to other aspects of pupils' programmes.
- The co-ordination of cross-curricular ICT is unsatisfactory and access to, and sufficiency of, computers remains inadequate.
- Accommodation is inadequate in a number of subjects.

## Commentary

39. The quality and range of curriculum opportunities are satisfactory at both Key Stages 3 and 4. All subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education are taught at Key Stage 3. The provision made for personal, social, health and citizenship education, including careers education, is satisfactory. The information provided to pupils at Key Stage 4 about how to access post-16 provision available through the consortium of schools is, however, inadequate. The school does not comply with the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship.
40. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. Approaches to differentiation within subjects are, however, variable. The additional support provided at Key Stage 3 to pupils who do not study a second modern foreign language is good and enables them to make very good progress in their literacy skills. Arrangements are made for pupils who, for a variety of reasons, give up their opportunity to complete certain studies at Key Stage

4, to undertake private study. The support which these pupils receive during these times is too variable and, in the least satisfactory cases, results in these pupils attempting to complete coursework or other work at the back of classrooms during other lessons.

41. The school has kept its curriculum under review and has made extensive use of disappication at Key Stage 4, in order to allow pupils to concentrate on particular areas of study. The school has good plans, under its status as a Business and Enterprise College, to extend further the range of opportunities available, particularly vocational programmes. These remain, however, currently very limited, as they were at the time of the last inspection. Recent investment in ICT as part of the development as a Business and Enterprise College means that the school has a much improved range of modern equipment, located in high quality accommodation. However, ICT resources are still inadequate and provision is below the national average level per pupil. Weaknesses in the co-ordination of cross-curricular ICT mean, however, that this is currently not well used across the school.
42. There are good opportunities available for curriculum enrichment through a wide variety of after-school and lunchtime activities, covering sports, the creative arts and educational visits. They are particularly strong in sports, in which the school enjoys considerable success at local, regional and national levels. The introduction of inter-house sports has done much to increase participation. Many activities are well supported by the pupils, but it is unclear that the needs of all groups are met adequately. The school uses its own resources to ensure that enrichment activities can be undertaken by all pupils, where these form an essential part of their studies. Lunchtime clubs, linked to subjects of the curriculum, provide good support for pupils' learning and progress. There is a well established and very successful Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme.
43. Pupils with special educational needs generally have the same access to the curriculum as their peers. The provision for these pupils throughout the school is satisfactory overall. In small groups and individual sessions, however, the provision is good and enables the pupils to achieve well. The reading club, run by sixth form students, is effective in raising pupils' reading ages rapidly. The lack of a designated base for those with special educational needs reduces the access of these pupils to special resources, including computers and specific help.
44. Some ten per cent of pupils are identified as gifted and talented and subject teachers know who these pupils are. However, most teachers do not provide extension activities for them in lessons, leading to a lack of sufficiently challenging content. There are very few additional experiences specifically arranged for these pupils, such as visits, competitions and master classes.
45. The numbers, qualifications and experience of the teaching and non-teaching staff are appropriately matched to the curriculum in most areas. There is insufficient technician support in design and technology.
46. The educational resources for learning are adequate in many subjects and meet the needs of the curriculum. They are good in design and technology and modern foreign languages. However, they are inadequate in ICT despite recent improvements; in art and design, music and science there is insufficient access to ICT resources. In science, equipment is becoming outdated. Accommodation is inadequate in many areas, especially in science, drama, art and design, food technology, special educational needs and physical education. Either rooms are in need of refurbishment, or fixtures and fittings are old and in poor repair, or rooms are too small or lack storage space. The limited new facilities for design and technology are good and have had a positive impact on learning.

## SIXTH FORM

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a good range of AS and A-Levels, which can be supplemented through a consortium of schools.
- There is a good range of curriculum enrichment opportunities.
- There is no provision for key skills.
- The statutory requirement to provide religious education for all sixth formers is not met.

### Commentary

47. The quality and range of opportunities available in the sixth form is good, although the school fails to meet the statutory requirement to provide for the study of RE. The range of AS and A-Levels is wide, with the opportunity to study further subjects such as German and music technology through the local consortium of schools. The consortium offers significant opportunities for all students, irrespective of their attainment level, to extend the range of their studies. In reality, few choose to do so and there is insufficient information in the sixth form prospectus on how students can access these opportunities.
48. Appropriate arrangements are made for less academic students but these can only be accessed through the consortium arrangements. No courses for these students are provided at the school and information about appropriate provision is not included in the sixth form prospectus. These arrangements are not sufficiently inclusive.
49. The absence of arrangements for key skills means that students' progress, including in ICT, is limited to the level attained at the end of Key Stage 4. In general, students have good literacy skills which are shown in the quality of much of their written work, and students in physics who are not also studying mathematics are given extra support so that they can sustain the mathematical demands of the course.
50. There are good opportunities for curriculum enrichment in the sixth form, including the Duke of Edinburgh Award and Young Enterprise schemes. The school also provides good opportunities for students to undertake activities to provide support to younger pupils at the school, both in their learning and through mentoring schemes. There are very good opportunities for students to participate in sports, with strong links to local community provision. Students are encouraged also to join local clubs.
51. In addition to the inadequacy of the provision of computers, resources and accommodation in a number of subjects – science, art and design, music and physical education – are unsatisfactory, and have a negative impact on the progress of students and the standards they achieve.

### Care, guidance and support

Care for pupils is **satisfactory** overall. The school provides **sound** advice and guidance. It prepares pupils **well** for their careers and studies after school. It actively seeks pupils' opinions and responds to them **well**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staff in all roles relate well to pupils and provide good care.
- There are health and safety concerns that need addressing.
- Support for pupils' personal development is strong.
- The main school and the sixth form have good arrangements to help pupils settle in.
- The school makes good use of questionnaires to get pupils' views.

## Commentary

52. The school is a caring school. Staff at all levels listen to pupils and get to know them well. An assistant headteacher has designated responsibility for child protection. She consistently updates her training and effectively communicates the requirements to staff. The school has a good medical room and facilities for first aid. The matron has appropriate qualifications and experience and looks after pupils sympathetically.
53. Health and safety procedures and practice are good overall but there are concerns. Broken flagstones externally are a trip hazard and large puddles form in rain due to blocked drains. In the gymnasium, stacked equipment could injure pupils who collide with it, and dusty window areas are a particular risk to pupils with asthma. The school has achieved worthwhile recent improvements, including extensive refurbishment of the toilets.
54. The school provides strong monitoring and support for pupils' personal development. Heads of year move with their pupils from Year 7 to Year 11. Last September, the school launched the house system, with the intention of significantly extending pupils' opportunities to practise problem solving, team building and leadership skills. A trained counsellor sympathetically helps pupils affected by bereavement and other difficulties. The Year 11 'review days' provide extra academic support. Year 10 will have these days this year. A pastoral weakness is that there are no secure procedures for monitoring racist name-calling.
55. Parents interviewed say arrangements to help their daughters settle into school are good. A team of staff visits all 57 primary schools whose pupils join the school. They get full information about their new pupils as individuals. However, several parents pointed out that their daughters had not joined their nominated friends in the tutor groups. Induction into the sixth form works well.
56. The school gives pupils good opportunities to express their opinions through questionnaires. It responds well to their ideas. Pupils regret that the 'forum', which provides a key opportunity for the expression of pupils' views and for them to contribute ideas relating to the school's development, has not met since before the summer vacation.
57. The achievement of some groups of pupils, such as those from different minority ethnic groups and those with special educational needs, is carefully monitored and support and mentoring provided where it is needed. Individual education plans are issued only when indicated by the special educational needs Code of Practice. There is good liaison with feeder primary schools which enables pupils with special educational needs to be identified prior to entry.
58. Pupils with statements of special educational need and those with individual education plans are invited to attend their review meetings so that they can participate in the monitoring of their own progress. They are involved in the setting of new targets and are encouraged to identify action they can take to further their own learning. There are good links with outside agencies, which provide advice and strategies to support pupils who may be having difficulties.

## SIXTH FORM

Mentoring within the very effective pastoral and academic enhancement programme helps sixth formers mature responsibly. Year 12 and 13 students give much support to the younger pupils. They themselves serve as mentors and as prefects attached to each form, They gain by learning to listen to people. The school's Young Enterprise scheme equips students for life in the business world.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Induction processes are thorough; access to the sixth form is well supported.
- Procedures for tracking students' progress are very effective.
- Availability of courses outside the home school is not always made clear.

## **Commentary**

59. There is a thorough induction process for students intending to enter the sixth form. Good account is taken of the subjects which each student would ideally like to study, and where the school cannot guarantee provision in a subject it can often be taught through the effective consortium arrangements which the school has with other sixth form institutions in the area. However, these opportunities are not always brought to students' attention as clearly as they might be. There is a basic minimum requirement for entry to the sixth form, but the process is treated flexibly where potential sixth form students do not achieve their expected grades at GCSE. The assistant head with responsibility for the sixth form and the heads of Year 12 and 13 make every attempt to ensure that students are placed on courses where they can achieve success.
60. The school has very good procedures for tracking students' progress through the sixth form. Targets are set from the outset and regularly reviewed by academic mentors, who compare the results of assessments in subject areas with the expected levels of attainment at each stage. Student self-evaluation is built into the process. This aspect of the school's monitoring process makes a very good contribution to the standards which students achieve.
61. Sixth formers act effectively as mentors for younger pupils. Year 13 students train 30 Year 12 volunteers to take over the mentoring role as they approach their examinations.

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

**Very good** partnerships with other schools and **good** links with parents and the community significantly enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school has very good links with other schools, enabling pupils to participate more fully in community learning.
- Good links with parents enable them to support their children's progress well.
- Good community links extend pupils' self-esteem and understanding of social responsibilities.
- The prospectus and governors' annual report to parents omit some statutory information.

## **Commentary**

62. The school's new role as a Business and Enterprise College is beginning to generate very good links with local schools. Local primary and special schools get three hours' support each week from the school's ICT technician. ICT teachers team-teach with primary school teachers. Year 12 pupils work by Internet with deaf pupils at a local school. They help them to email and improve their literacy skills. Media students produced a video for them. The school provides five hours' ICT training for disadvantaged people in the community. These activities give pupils extra practice in developing their own skills and they strengthen the pupils' awareness of people less fortunate than themselves.
63. Good links with parents enable them to take a full part in pupils' learning. Parents value the progress their daughters make, and say they are happy at school. High quality teaching and improved standards are having a positive effect. Parents actively support the homework policy. The school obtains parents' opinions by questionnaires. It recently responded by improving



facilities at school. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, some parents were not satisfied with the information about their daughters' progress. The school arranges formal meetings with class and subject teachers once a year. It stresses at the induction meeting 'if you are worried at any time, please get in touch with us'. Annual reports contain much good, individual writing about what the child has done in the year, in and out of school. However, not all subject sections contain targets, or guidance on how the girl can improve. In this respect, parents' concerns are justified. The school has extended its information booklets and has set up a website, although this is acknowledged to be at an early stage of development. Parents play a major role in the Friends of the School. This organisation successfully raises funds to widen learning and leisure.

64. The school has a high reputation in the local community. Its activities enhance community life. Each term, it presents a major concert. Musical and drama groups perform frequently. Local people particularly appreciate the choir and orchestra at the carol service. Teams and individuals take part in conventional and unusual sports. For example, one pupil is a member of England's synchronised swimming squad. The very wide range of activities extends pupils' self-esteem, teamwork and maturity. Arrangements for the induction of pupils into the school are found to be good by pupils and by their parents.
65. The school prospectus and the governors' annual report to parents are well presented. However, both documents omit some statutory requirements. The school has undertaken to rectify these omissions in future. They have not adversely affected pupils' learning.
66. The school has increased its efforts to involve parents of pupils with special educational needs. They are regularly invited to review their child's progress on individual education plan review days.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**The leadership and management of the school are good** overall. The quality of leadership provided by the headteacher is **very good**, and this is well supported by the leadership group and other key staff. The effectiveness of management is also generally **good**. The governors provide **good** support, advice and guidance and work closely with the school and the sixth form. Because a number of statutory requirements are not fulfilled, their overall contribution is judged as only **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The headteacher provides very good leadership and clear vision for the future development of the school; she has high expectations of the contribution of staff.
- Governors have good knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for development; they operate efficiently and confidently; they have not secured all the statutory requirements.
- There is good quality internal communication and teamwork; leaders provide good role models for other staff.
- Development planning is well linked to agreed priorities, although with too little emphasis on targets for improved performance by pupils.
- There is a good approach to self-evaluation which is well co-ordinated; this can be further developed to ensure the effective dissemination of best practice.
- Pupil performance data are beginning to be well managed and are already well used in some areas, particularly the sixth form.
- Although clearly effective, some elements of management arrangements are costly and reduce the time available for staff contact with pupils.
- Some statutory information is missing from the prospectus and annual governors' report.

## Commentary

67. There is a strong sense of purpose about the school which stems from the clear leadership and determination of the headteacher. As a result, all staff know what is expected of them and they have a good understanding of the school's priorities, playing their part in achieving them.
68. Targets for improvement in test and examination results at whole-school level are incorporated into the annual development plan, although with some inconsistencies and with too little prominence. Few of the subject area plans make reference to the intended improvements in outcomes.
69. The strategic development plan is carefully constructed through purposeful discussion involving all staff, such that there is a good level of commitment to the plan and its priorities. Governors play their part in this process, with the curriculum committee paying appropriately close attention to its key features. Detailed plans to help secure these priorities are presented by each element of the school, but some of these are too complex and will require resourcing at levels which are unlikely to be available.
70. Strategic planning is now beginning to incorporate the emphases which arise from the school having achieved Business and Enterprise specialist status in September 2003. In particular, there is now an improved consciousness of and focus on the achievement of less academic pupils. A number of plans to secure improvements for them are currently being enacted and these will see important changes, particularly in the 14-19 curriculum, from September next.
71. Much has been invested in securing very effective communications between the leadership group and staff as a whole. This has resulted in a staff which understands the school's priorities and the legitimate expectations of their own performance and contribution. In particular, key staff (such as heads of subject, year and house) feel involved, valued and motivated to contribute. Senior staff and other key staff generally provide good role models both for other staff and for pupils and students.
72. Most teams are well led; English, drama and geography are very well led. The quality of this subject leadership is reflected in the consistently good provision in these subjects resulting from good, energetic teamwork around development priorities which focus on the quality of teaching and the curriculum.
73. Leadership has largely secured an environment in which all pupils are valued, regardless of their background, capability and particular needs. However, there is evidence that the curriculum after Year 9 for pupils who are less academic has received too little attention up until now.
74. The school's procedures for self-evaluation are well developed. Opportunities for scheduled lesson observation are built into the programme and, in the best departments, these are supplemented by additional observation, including peer observation. Feedback arrangements are adequate and procedures are in place for disseminating the good practice identified via a report from the headteacher and the new 'teaching and learning group' of staff. An annual thorough 'workscan' by the leadership group yields further evidence of quality and this process contributes into the priorities in the development plan. However, there remains scope to improve the sharing of good practice within and between teams. The headteacher carefully reviews the progress the school has made on priorities identified in the previous development plan and publishes this review as the preface to the current annual plan, thus maintaining for all involved a focus on the agreed priorities. The weekly meetings between team leaders and an identified member of the leadership group are also effective in this regard.
75. The school has improved its collection, monitoring and analysis of pupil performance data and has recently appointed a data manager to support the deputy head, who has lead responsibility here. As yet, the quality of use of these data and their analysis varies between departments. At

best, data are well used to set targets for individual pupils' improvement and these are carefully explained to pupils. Analysis of test and examination results at whole-school level has room for improvement, so that the school can confidently identify any signs of underachievement which need remedial action.

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

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,785,018	Balance from previous year	142,072
Total expenditure	3,724,227	Balance carried forward to the next	161,502
Expenditure per student	3,290		

76. There is a good consciousness of the need to relate the school's financial planning to its development planning and senior staff all play their part in securing sound budget construction and financial management. The school's leadership group ensures effective monitoring of department budgets. There is a good understanding of the need to secure value for money in the award of contracts for services and supplies, although the wider implications of best value principles are not fully appreciated. Too little use is made of benchmarking data.
77. The leadership group works effectively as a team and each member has an appropriate awareness of developments in each area. Much time is devoted within the school day to meetings of the group, and to meetings between individual group members and the range of key staff for whom each provides line-management. These arrangements have been effective in securing good quality communications, both to and from the staff of the school, and a real sense of community and shared commitment. However, there is sometimes a lack of clarity about final responsibility, for instance, with regard to assessment policy, to the analysis of data and to behaviour management. This, coupled with the resulting reduced contact time between staff and pupils, leads to a need to re-evaluate the detail of the current arrangements, which overall are serving the school well, based as they are on the headteacher's careful reflection on what makes an effective school.
78. The leadership and management provided by the special educational needs co-ordinators are good. They have implemented the special educational needs Code of Practice carefully, and this is an improvement since the last inspection. Statements are now reviewed regularly and provision is in place. They are beginning to influence the work of subject teachers by giving training on aspects of special educational needs and provision for gifted and talented pupils. Additionally, they provide very good quality information on a wide range of difficulties and strategies to support learning. A small number of teaching assistants has been appointed, including one who is bilingual. They provide good support to pupils. However, they are relatively inexperienced and would benefit from further training in the special needs of those pupils they are supporting.
79. Governors are committed and hard working and have a good understanding of the school and sixth form priorities. They use their professional skills to ensure the school works efficiently and provides a good education for all pupils. Their objective and proactive measures ensure that the school and sixth form are financially secure and there are contingencies for emergencies.
80. Performance management, particularly in terms of the monitoring of teaching and learning, is well established, although there remains considerable scope to extend this work within the pastoral programme. Teachers receive good oral and written feedback on their teaching, targets are identified in regular management meetings and any additional training needs are provided through the professional development programme. Training needs identified through self-evaluation and within the development plan are similarly met. However, there is a tendency

for individual teachers to focus on curriculum and examination training rather than that which would provide more variety to their teaching.

81. There are currently no advanced skills teachers. Numerous new arrivals to the staff, including part-time, temporary and newly qualified teachers, receive helpful and constructive guidance from a senior member of staff and there are good support links with local universities to provide for those on the initial teacher training scheme. Non-teaching staff have good initial guidance and ongoing support from the facilities manager, enabling the smooth day-to-day running of the school. An appraisal system is currently being put into place for these staff.

## **SIXTH FORM**

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good leadership and clear vision ensures that the school continues to maintain the high standards.
- Relationships with the consortium of schools are good and used for the benefit of students.
- Management is good; arrangements for the tracking of students' progress are very good.
- Faculties are well led, and contribute to the high standards achieved.

### **Commentary**

82. The leadership of the sixth form is good. There are clear aims and values, and good procedures to review and evaluate the work. Development is appropriately planned with the raising of standards and the welfare of the students at the centre. The assistant head with responsibility for the sixth form has a clear grasp of what needs to be done to continue and sustain the school's high academic traditions whilst ensuring that all students achieve their full potential. She represents the Post-16 phase as a member of the school's leadership group and looks after the school's interests in curriculum planning matters with the other schools in the consortium. To this end, the school's curriculum provision and students' access to it, and the links to extend the range and quality of sixth form provision, are kept under constant review. Governors are kept well informed about developments and plans at sixth form level.
83. Management of sixth form matters is good. There is a good management structure with two heads of year to ensure that the day-to-day running of Years 12 and 13 is efficient and works in the best interests of the students. Arrangements for the monitoring of students' progress and taking action where there are concerns are very good. The two heads of year know their students well and operate well as a team, meeting with the assistant headteacher weekly to discuss matters which arise.
84. At subject level, leadership is good. There are in the majority of subjects clear plans for development which concentrate on raising standards and improving provision. Faculty leaders have been successful in promoting good teamwork; teachers understand aims of their subject area and work well together to achieve them. Management is good. The school has good procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, and some subjects have developed procedures of their own to improve provision for students.

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

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

### ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

#### English

Provision in English is **very good**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Well above average
Achievement	Good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Very good	
Management	Very good	
Progress since previous inspection	Good	

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in GCSE exams and standard attainment tests are well above average.
- The attitudes and behaviour of all pupils in lessons are very good.
- Leadership is very good and provides a clear vision.
- Teaching is good so that pupils make good progress.

#### Commentary

85. By the end of Year 9, the standards achieved in the national tests are well above the national average and have been consistently so for the last four years. However, the proportion achieving the highest grades was slightly lower in 2003. Results in the GCSE exams were also consistently well above average in the same period both for English language and English literature.
86. By the end of Year 9, pupils' achievement in English is good. Their writing is varied and is directed at a wide range of audiences; for instance, stories based on the character types in Macbeth, good responses to poetry, well presented newspaper front pages and entertaining creative writing such as 'a day in the life of me'. Achievement in reading is good and the majority of pupils show an enthusiasm and responsiveness to books. They respond well to Macbeth and narrative poems such as 'The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner' and 'Charge of the Light Brigade'. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are very good and pupils are confident in expressing and developing their views. By the end of Year 11 pupils' skills in English are very well developed. Pupils have very good speaking and listening skills; for instance, in a Year 11 group where pupils discuss complex conventions in preparing for writing their own reviews of television documentaries. Reading levels are very good and pupils respond very well to literature, as in a lesson exploring how different poems express emotions through metaphor, word sounds and the juxtaposition of words. Pupils' own personal writing is also very well developed. There is evidence too of very good writing skills, for instance, an in-depth analysis of 'A Christmas Carol', imaginative narrative writing and reviews of television game shows. Overall, in Years 10 and 11, there is a high standard of varied work, well presented with a good feeling for the audience. Pupils of different ethnic heritage achieve equally well.
87. In Years 7 to 9, teaching is consistently good. Teachers structure lessons well with a variety of different activities and a good pace. Pupils are very well motivated and they collaborate very well with each other in group tasks. The good pace and variety of activity results in effective learning for pupils of all capabilities. Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is more varied in quality.

When it is very good, there is a consistently high challenge to pupils, clear objectives and plenty of varied and lively activity. Where teaching is satisfactory teachers have a sound subject knowledge but there is less excitement, pace and challenge. However, because of the very good motivation of pupils, they tend to achieve very well in these lessons too.

88. The department is very well led and clear vision and direction are provided. Improvement since the previous inspection has been well managed. Planning and assessment are now good, both gifted and talented and pupils with low attainment on entry make good progress, and speaking and listening skills are now good. The head of department has clear priorities for development and involves departmental staff in taking these forward.

### Language and literacy across the curriculum

89. Language and literacy skills are very good throughout the school. There are many opportunities for speaking and listening, both in lessons and extra-curricular activities, and pupils respond very well to these. Standards of writing are high in most subjects with a good development of technical vocabulary and use of key words. The literacy co-ordinator has lots of imaginative ideas and enthusiasm and has influenced the majority of teachers. However, there is some unevenness across the school and no clear strategy to ensure that all teachers place an appropriate emphasis on the development of literacy.

### Modern foreign languages

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

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Good	
Progress since previous inspection	Good	

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good; expectations of pupils are high.
- Pupils' achievement is good; they reach high standards throughout.
- The leadership of the faculty is strong.
- There is insufficient sharing of good practice between the three languages taught.
- There needs to be further development of the use of ICT and media to support learning.

### Commentary

90. In the assessments at the end of Year 9, only eight pupils out of 177 were below the national average last year. Over half were well above average and one in ten achieved very high standards. Over three-quarters of the pupils who took GCSE French achieved grades A\* to C, and almost half gained the highest grades (A\*/A). This is well above average for the country as a whole. The pattern was almost identical in Spanish, but results in German were well below average.
91. Towards the end of Year 9, pupils in all three languages are developing good language understanding and skills, especially in their listening, reading and writing activities. They can understand basic information given in the language by a native speaker at normal speed, obtain detailed information from what they read, and write at length and with good accuracy about their holidays and leisure time. Speaking skills are also good, but pupils are not always as confident at using the language spontaneously. All pupils achieve well in their first three years in the school, whatever their attainment level, and standards range from above-average

to around the national expectation. In the very small minority of cases where pupil achievement was below the high standards set elsewhere, this was due to lower expectations by teachers.

92. In Years 10 and 11, pupils of all levels of attainment show their ability to write accurately at length using a range of tenses, develop high-level listening skills and cope well with the oral demands of GCSE. More confidence is acquired in speaking as pupils begin to practise the range of responses and presentations required for the examination.
93. The high standards reached in modern foreign languages owe much to the combination of teaching which has high expectations of all pupils irrespective of their level of attainment and to the considerable enthusiasm and commitment of the pupils themselves. In all three languages, there is inventive and imaginative teaching to which pupils respond with flair. Only in a small minority of lessons was the teaching and learning more passive and less challenging. Even here pupils worked well but achievement was not as high as elsewhere. In some lessons, computers are used imaginatively to support learning.
94. Strong leadership has enabled the faculty to sustain its high standards despite a period of acute staffing difficulties. In all three languages, there are areas of excellence which need to be shared across the whole of the faculty, and the financial and general management of faculty affairs could be much simplified. Accommodation is dispersed and does not contribute to a sense of shared identity across the languages faculty.

## MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Very good	
Progress since last inspection	Satisfactory	

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are well above average.
- Teachers' assessment of pupils' work is constructive.
- There is too little variety in the teaching strategies used.
- There is an inequality of opportunity in the use of ICT.
- The 'using and applying' aspect of mathematics is limited.

### Commentary

95. Results at the end of year 9 are well above the national average. At the end of Year 11, the GCSE examinations results are well above national average with 86.2 per cent achieving grade A\*-C compared with 49.6 per cent nationally.
96. By the end of Year 9, standards are well above average, with pupils achieving well in relation to prior attainment in comparison to schools in similar contexts. The majority of pupils have a good understanding of number work, with mental starters being used to enthuse and motivate effectively. They are able to write algebraic equations, accurately solve equations to calculate angles and draw accurate constructions. Some pupils are able to use skills learnt in ICT to carry out mathematical investigations but these are not available to all. Year 13 students are used very effectively to provide support for Year 7 pupils who have not achieved the nationally

expected level before entering the school. By the end of Year 11, standards are well above average, with pupils showing confidence in their mathematical skills, including vectors and probability. They are able to assess where they need to improve. Pupils from the range of ethnic groups achieve equally well.

97. Although overall there is good teaching in all years, there is too little variety in teaching and learning strategies within lessons. When they are used, resources are used effectively. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. All pupils are attentive and work very hard in their lessons, usually making progress in their learning. The pace of learning varies from lessons in which clear learning objectives are met to those where pupils are left unclear about what they should be doing. Marking and assessment are good, with pupils knowing which levels they are working at and what they need to do to improve. The support offered to SEN pupils, particularly in relation to resources to assist learning, is good. Those pupils who have been absent are given the opportunity of support from teachers to make up their work. The use of data to set pupils and the flexibility of positioning allows the pupils to know that they will have the opportunity to move on when improvements are made. The formation of a 'gifted and talented' group in Year 7 will enable the pupils so identified to be challenged appropriately.
98. The department is well led and very well managed. A range of initiatives includes support for teachers who are new to the school or teach new areas of the mathematics curriculum. Satisfactory progress has been made since the previous inspection with schemes of work being more detailed and monitoring and evaluation in place. The use of ICT and 'using and applying' aspects of mathematics are still limited.

### Mathematics across the curriculum

99. Overall provision for mathematical competence is good. The standards which pupils demonstrate across those subjects where it makes an important contribution are above average; in no subject do pupils' capabilities in mathematics hinder their learning.

### SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Very good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Satisfactory	
Progress since previous inspection	Good	

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' subject expertise is very good and is well matched to the classes they teach.
- The very good attitudes and behaviour of the pupils contribute to a purposeful learning atmosphere in all classes.
- Teaching needs to be matched more closely to the learning needs of the most and least able pupils, especially in Years 10 and 11.
- Feedback given to pupils about their work needs to be more detailed so that they know what to do to improve.
- Insufficient resources within the department are preventing a wider range of teaching methods being used.

### Commentary



100. Above average standards at the start of Year 7 are maintained through to Year 9. Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 have continued to improve over the last three years. Results in GCSE examinations are well above average, although in 2003 the number of pupils achieving the higher grades fell. All pupils gained a pass in GCSE science.
101. By the end of Year 9 pupils have a detailed knowledge and understanding of the basic concepts in science. Their scientific vocabulary is very good. Pupils' investigative skills are generally sound, although there are too few opportunities to develop these skills in everyday practical work. By the end of Year 11, the majority of pupils demonstrate high achievement in all areas of science; however, the most and least able pupils in classes sometimes do not achieve their full potential. There is no identifiable difference between the achievement of pupils across the range of ethnic groups.
102. All classes in Years 7 to 11 benefit from knowledgeable and dedicated teachers. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good. Time is used effectively and the technical staff provide very good support. Homework is used well to reinforce learning. Teachers are using an increasingly wider range of activities to promote learning and motivation. In the best lessons, tasks are well matched to the capabilities of pupils in the group; opportunities are provided for pupils to work at an appropriate level of challenge and to learn from the work of other pupils.
103. Teachers' planning meets the learning needs of most pupils; however, at times, the most able pupils are not sufficiently challenged to think for themselves and lower ability pupils are not given enough support. In a lesson on gravity pupils were confused about the difference between weight, mass and thrust because the concepts had not been explained clearly enough by the teacher. Whilst the pupils dutifully copied notes into their books, there was little understanding about what they were writing.
104. There is great variation in the use of assessment to support learning within the department. Some teachers use effective strategies to monitor the progress of their pupils' learning during a lesson; however, this is not a consistent feature in all science classes. Marking frequently fails to inform pupils what they need to do to improve their work.
105. Leadership is good. There is a clear vision for the future of science learning at the school, which is identified in the development plan. The department works well as a team. The National Key Stage 3 Strategy has yet to fully impact, although work is planned for later in the year. Management of the subject is good in many respects, ensuring smooth day-to-day operation. Resources and finances are well managed, ensuring that the limited capitation is used effectively to support learning. Data are well used in Years 7 to 9 to monitor the progress of individual pupils. However, patterns in the 2003 GCSE examination results have not been adequately analysed, and there is too much variability in practice, as described above. Hence, management of the subject can be best described as satisfactory.
106. ICT resources within the department are poor and are having a negative impact on learning; laboratories and corridors are cluttered, and storage is inadequate.
107. Progress since the last inspection is good because of the developments in leadership and development planning.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in ICT in the main school is **good**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Good	
Progress since previous inspection	Good	

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The pupils have great enthusiasm for the use of computers and communication and achieve well in Years 7 to 9.
- The recently much improved ICT facilities are as yet under used in and out of lesson time.
- The quality of ICT teaching and learning is good throughout.
- The assessment of the pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding is particularly effective in Years 7 to 9.
- The pupils have little opportunity to develop their ICT skills and capability through work in their other subjects, or by using computers outside of lesson time. Homework is not well used to support their learning.

### Commentary

108. Teachers' assessment of what Year 9 pupils can do, know and understand, shows their grasp to be much better than the national standard in recent years. In 2003, all but one achieved the target of Level 5, compared to two-thirds in the country as a whole, and nearly 90 per cent reached or passed Level 6 (the national figure being a quarter). Pupils entered GCSE in ICT for the first time in 2002 - over three-quarters reached or passed the target Grade C compared to just over half nationally, and nearly everyone obtained a grade. The 2003 results were better still, with over 80 per cent reaching or passing Grade C and all obtaining a grade.
109. These high standards - far better than at the time of the previous inspection in 1998 - were confirmed during the inspection by studying the pupils' work, observing them in lessons, and talking with them. With very few exceptions, pupils with additional learning needs do as well.
110. Standards when pupils enter the school are generally above average. Even so, they achieve well in Years 7 to 9, developing their general skills to high levels (often very high). They are also learning fast about how and why people use IT systems in the world of work and gaining a general understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of these technologies in practice. However, in Years 10 and 11, as they work towards a half GCSE in a period a week, for various reasons their overall achievement is no better than satisfactory and there is some disruptive behaviour. The achievement of pupils from different ethnic backgrounds is similar.
111. Apart from in lessons with such poor behaviour, the quality of teaching is good overall. Particular strengths, shown especially in work with Years 7 to 9, are the teachers' command of the whole subject, their encouragement of the pupils to think and work hard, their effective and often imaginative use of a wide range of resources (sometimes including the pupils themselves), and the very high quality and use of assessment. On the other hand, in general, teachers do not work with specific enough learning objectives for them to be able to evaluate their teaching and take appropriate action.
112. The department is well led, with good communications between the subject leader, the teachers and the very effective technical support staff, good consultation, and very good

working relationships. Management of the subject is also a strength, as regards, for instance, planning the department's work and use of resources (which are also much improved since the previous inspection), curriculum development, monitoring what is happening, and ensuring that work in the subject meets National Curriculum requirements.

### Information and communication technology across the curriculum

113. The National Curriculum requires pupils to develop as skilled users of computers and communications in all subjects, both to develop the work they do in their ICT lessons and to improve their enjoyment and grasp of those subjects. A head of a large department has taken on the additional, difficult role of ICT co-ordinator to help guide the school in this direction. However, as yet, there has not been much improvement. This is mainly because:

- the ICT co-ordinator does not have sufficient support, understanding of the role, resources, or power to allow the school to make rapid progress; and
- the high quality ICT resources, that followed the school's gaining Business and Enterprise College status, have not been long enough in place for people to become familiar with them and their use.

114. The teaching staff as a whole have received some training and many are enthusiastic, and an informal working party has tried to highlight some of the things that need to be done. However, at the time of the inspection, the usage of the school's computers in and out of lesson time is still well below average. Only in ICT itself, in business studies and in geography is there good and appropriate use of the technologies as tools for learning.

## HUMANITIES

### Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Very good	
Management	Very good	
Progress since previous inspection	Very good	

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The leadership of the subject provides a clear vision for raising standards.
- Improvement since the last inspection has been very good, particularly in the standards of coursework and use of assessment.
- Pupils achieve well, work independently and respond with enthusiasm to good teaching.
- More sharing of good practice is needed to ensure consistently very good teaching.

### Commentary

115. Results in the GCSE examinations, and standards of individual project work, are above average for both all maintained and girls' schools. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 are above average.

116. Pupils achieve well by the end of Year 9 and by the end of Year 11, reaching above average standards. They use technical vocabulary well and their understanding of spatial patterns and processes is good. They balance the economic and physical consequences of environmental

decisions and can analyse accurately the contrasts between more and less developed countries. Gifted and talented pupils produce very good independent research and extended essays. Pupils with English as an additional language and those with special educational needs achieve well when supported by sixth form students. Pupils of different ethnic heritage achieve equally well.

117. In Years 7-11, pupils benefit from teachers who have very good subject knowledge and who plan well-structured lessons, varied and interesting activities, and challenging questions and debates. Pupils are very well motivated, work well in groups and are quite prepared to exceed the expectations and pace of learning set by their teachers. Their skilled extraction of evidence from global case studies contributes to their good cultural development. Homework is used to reinforce learning. Assessment is used well to set clear targets for improvement. Pupils develop good literacy skills through a range of written tasks. Consistent teaching of numeracy skills is reflected in the accurate use of graphs and statistics. ICT is now well integrated into most units of work.
118. The department is energetically led, with commitment, and has a clear plan for raising standards and for improving the relative performance of geography within the school. Detailed schemes of work are in place, which include the teaching of key skills, and routine management is very efficient. There is no longer any unsatisfactory teaching and, since the last inspection, there has been very good improvement in assessment and the matching of work to the needs of all pupils in a class.

## History

Provision in history is **good**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Good	
Progress since previous inspection	Very good	

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Predominantly good teaching with a variety and range of activities.
- Very good assessment for learning provides good information to pupils on their attainment and ways to improve.
- Good quality leadership, which is focussed on improving teaching and learning.
- A consistent focus in lessons on historical questions and methodology.
- Teachers' good relationships with their pupils supports a productive working environment in lessons.
- The use of ICT is inadequate and inhibits pupils' progress.

## Commentary

119. Results at GCSE are well above average and improving.
120. By the end of Year 9, pupils demonstrate above average standards and have a secure grasp of historical knowledge, which they use to produce well-structured work and increasingly extended pieces of writing. By the end of Year 11, standards continue to be above average; pupils draw increasingly on their prior learning and make good links between different aspects of their studies. They evaluate source material well and use it to support increasingly sophisticated views. They show confidence when asked to express their views and are able to

support those views through appropriate references to knowledge and evidence. There is no discernable difference between the achievement of different ethnic groups.

121. Teachers make effective use of interesting and imaginative activities, which engage pupils well and motivate them to produce work of a good standard. Relationships with pupils are strong and promote good attitudes to the subject. Pupils show interest and are keen to learn. Consistent approaches to assessment and marking provide pupils with a clear idea of their attainment and how to improve their work. Lessons are well planned, and activities sequenced in such a way as to enable the pupils to build their knowledge and understanding as the lesson progresses. There are good opportunities for curriculum enrichment through visits, lectures and a lunchtime club.
122. The subject is well led and managed. Very good use is made of training opportunities to bring clear improvements in teaching and learning. Almost all areas identified at the last inspection as needing improvement have been addressed and the proportion of good teaching increased significantly, although pupils are still provided with too few opportunities to use ICT. Schemes of work have been introduced to ensure all requirements are covered. A very good range of improvements has been achieved and development is ongoing.

## Religious education

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Average
Achievement	Good	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Good	Satisfactory
Leadership	Satisfactory	
Management	Satisfactory	
Progress since previous inspection	Satisfactory	

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average, reflecting good achievement up to Year 9, but progress is less noticeable in Years 10 and 11.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory, though better in Years 7 to 9, where pupil attitudes to the subject are more positive.
- Some aspects of leadership and management are good, but the department needs to function better as a team.
- GCSE results are well above average, but the provision for non-examination classes in Years 10 and 11 needs to be reviewed.

## Commentary

123. GCSE results, for the 25 pupils who took the examination in 2003, were, as in the previous year, well above average. No candidate received less than a grade C and over 75 per cent were awarded grades A\* or A.
124. By Year 9, pupils are reaching above average standards and are achieving well. They write with some sensitivity about the world faiths they have studied and about their own experiences. They are also able to discuss religious and moral concepts with some maturity in lessons. This provides a good platform for the small number who go on to take the GCSE course, who continue to achieve well, with many reaching a high standard in their work. The majority who do not take the examination course make less progress. Some pupils lack motivation, particularly in Year 10, and standards are no more than average overall.

125. Pupils learn well in Years 7 to 9, where the teaching is good. Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory overall, although the lessons seen varied from very good to unsatisfactory. The quality of teaching and learning depends much on how well teachers are able to manage the small minority of disaffected pupils; all teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of their subject and plan and resource their lessons well. Teachers make good use of the different religious backgrounds that pupils come from, although a task in one lesson, that involved pupils drawing on their experience of Christmas, had the effect of marginalising some minority groups. Assessment is good, drawing on the non-statutory guidance for religious education.
126. In the relatively short time that the head of subject has been in post, it has been difficult, due to staffing changes, to develop a cohesive team and delegate tasks appropriately. Leadership and management are, however, satisfactory: there is good documentation and the scheme of work is effective in ensuring that teachers new to the department can teach with some confidence. The school has a sound programme for monitoring and evaluating teaching; peer observation would assist the department to learn from each other's strengths and weaknesses. They are hampered partly by the unsatisfactory attitude of a minority of pupils in Years 10 and 11, whose resentment to the subject is partly fuelled by the fact that it leads to no certification for them. Some of those taking the GCSE course resent the fact that they repeat work done in general religious education lessons. Given the fact that a shrinking number are choosing the GCSE option, the school should consider again the wisdom of not offering a short GCSE course.
127. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection, notwithstanding the fact that the quality of teaching and learning is not now judged to be as good as when previously reported. The high standards at GCSE have been maintained and all pupils up to Year 11 are now receiving teaching according to the Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus.

## TECHNOLOGY

### Design and technology

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

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Well above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Good	
Progress since previous inspection	Good	

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are well above the national average.
- Relationships and mutual respect between teachers and pupils are good.
- Leadership and management are good.
- Assessment and monitoring processes are well developed, although not all pupils are made aware of their National Curriculum level and understand what they need to do to progress.
- Lack of adequate technician support, especially in food technology.

### Commentary

128. GCSE examination results in 2003 were significantly above average and continue a slight rising trend over the past three years, especially in A\*-C grades, with 80 per cent attaining this level in 2003. Teacher assessments for pupils in Year 9 in 2003 suggest standards were

above average. Improvements over the past three years indicate a slight upward trend in all areas of the subject.

129. Current standards in Years 7-9 are above the national average. Standards are improving in Years 7-9 as a result of revised schemes of work and effective teaching. In Year 7, pupils rapidly develop confidence in handling a range of tools and materials in all areas of the subject. By Year 9, their progress has been such that their standards are above average. Practical skills are well developed and written work is of a good standard. In Years 10/11, the overall standards are well above the national average. The quality of most design folders and practical work produced in all specialist areas in Years 10 and 11 are good. Pupils' practical skills are of a high standard. Pupils from all ethnic groups achieve equally well. Lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. They are well supported by their teachers and cope well alongside others but would benefit from specialist support, especially during practical sessions.
130. The quality of teaching is good in all areas of technology. All lessons are well planned and organised with clear objectives. Resources used are chosen well to suit the tasks set and ensure that all pupils make good progress. Teaching has a positive impact on learning by keeping pupils motivated and enthusiastic. In the odd lesson, where the pace was slower, the work was not challenging enough for the brighter pupils. In Years 10 and 11, there was good recap of previous work, supported by effective question and answer techniques, which aided the reinforcement of their knowledge. Pupils value the very detailed feedback notes and guidance they receive after their work has been marked, especially in resistant materials. Coursework is marked constructively. Teachers do not always use National Curriculum levels to inform pupils about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. All homework is relevant and outcomes are used as part of the lessons.
131. The department is managed well and there is good curriculum leadership. The department is now a strong, fully committed team with a clear vision for the subject. The monitoring programme is well developed. The improved facilities in ICT and enhanced CAD CAM provision needs to be more extensively used across the department. New staff require further training in the use of the equipment.
132. The improvement since the last inspection has been good. The new facilities in the resistant materials areas have enhanced the quality of teaching and learning; however, the food and textile technology rooms remain in need of refurbishment. The lack of technician support imposes inappropriate demands on the teacher.

## VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

### Art and design

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

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Average	Above average
Achievement	Satisfactory	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Good	
Progress since previous inspection	Satisfactory	

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Consistently good teaching gives pupils a secure foundation of art and design skills from which to develop.

- Inadequate facilities for ICT in the department slow the development of pupils' images and ideas.
- Poor accommodation has a detrimental effect on teaching and learning.



## Commentary

133. GCSE results in 2003 were significantly above the national average for A\*-C grades though relatively few pupils gained the highest A\*-A grades.
134. Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with very varied experiences of the subject from a large number of primary schools, but overall standards are a low average. A strong emphasis on teaching basic art and design skills and techniques enables lower and average attaining pupils to achieve well while higher attainers consolidate their skills. By Year 9, in work seen, standards are in line with national expectations, representing satisfactory achievement overall in Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11, pupils achieve well and by Year 11 standards attained are above average. They show strengths in drawing and painting from observation but expressive work is under-represented.
135. Pupils learn well from consistently good teaching by experienced and knowledgeable staff. In Years 7 to 9, well-planned projects consolidate and extend pupils' technical skills and homework is very effectively used to support and prepare for classwork. In Years 10/11, the teachers' good individual guidance helps pupils to clarify their ideas but there are few planned opportunities to explore spiritual and moral issues through their artwork. The department has inadequate facilities for teaching and promoting ICT as a creative and research medium, which slows the development of pupils' imagery and ideas.
136. Good leadership and management have helped to maintain good standards since the last inspection, despite an interim period of unsettled staffing. The leadership has clear priorities with policies and programmes of activities currently under review. Accommodation is poor. The recent loss of a studio has led to materials and equipment encroaching on the remaining working spaces and restricting the scale and range of activities offered.

## Drama

Provision in drama is **very good**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good
Leadership	Very good	
Management	Very good	
Progress since previous inspection	Satisfactory	

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are well above average.
- Pupils achieve very well in Years 7/8 and Years 10/11.
- The standards of teaching are very good.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to learning in drama.
- There is good extra-curricular provision.

## Commentary

137. Results in the GCSE examinations are well above average.
138. By the end of Year 9, standards are well above average and achievement is very good. Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of drama techniques and have a very good repertoire of techniques to express thoughts, feelings and actions through drama; very good speaking and listening skills are developed. By Year 11, pupils show confidence in developing

their own group performances and are confident and thoughtful about creating effective presentations using speech, gesture, movement and lighting effects.

139. Teaching is very good, benefiting from variety and pace; the focus on techniques is very good. As a result, pupils learn very well. For instance, in a Year 7 lesson, pupils learn to express the feelings on World War Two evacuee children as they leave home and are welcomed by their hosts. Pupils approach this improvisation very seriously and are able to present their work with confidence. Pupils' attitudes to work are very good; they work well collaboratively and on their own in Year 11 developing their GCSE presentations. Sixth form pupils perform a valuable role in supporting extra-curricular drama provision.
140. Leadership and management are very good and there is a clear focus on raising standards for all pupils. Resources are satisfactory but learning would benefit from the replacement of the current flooring and the updating of the lighting. Drama is not provided for Year 9 pupils and this does not help continuity with the GCSE course for those pupils who take it up. Pupils' achievement in drama has improved since the last inspection.

## Music

Provision in music is **satisfactory**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Good	Satisfactory
Leadership	Satisfactory	
Management	Good	
Progress since previous inspection	Unsatisfactory	

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- The extra-curricular enrichment programme that the department offers is outstanding.
- Teachers are enthusiastic and committed leading to positive attitudes.
- There is insufficient support provided for less able pupils in lessons and this hinders their progress.
- Pupils are not given enough opportunity to use ICT to support their work.

## Commentary

141. GCSE results are above the national average.
142. Standards at the end of Year 9 are above average, representing good achievement. Pupils understand musical techniques and forms and know about a range of styles. They evaluate their work articulately. In Year 11, pupils achieve similar GCSE grades to those that they achieve in their other subjects. They develop independent compositional styles and many have well-developed performing skills.
143. In Years 7 to 9, teaching is carefully planned so that understanding of theory arises from practical activity. Lessons are made interesting by the teachers' enthusiastic approach, to which most pupils respond well. Tasks provide a good level of challenge for the more able. There is not always enough structured support to help the less able, and they become less motivated, feeling that they cannot succeed. Restricted space and poor soundproofing inhibit progress in group work. In Years 10 and 11, a good range of interesting compositional exercises helps pupils to develop their own styles. The quality of some handouts is poor. Pupils receive constructive feedback on their work which helps them to improve.

144. The substantial provision of instrumental and vocal tuition is competently organised. The huge range of extra-curricular groups is musically led by teachers and instrumental tutors, resulting in very high standards. Teachers provide enthusiastic leadership which engenders good attitudes amongst pupils. There is insufficient focus on strategies for improvement, and the main issues identified at the time of the last inspection have not been addressed. Pupils have little opportunity to use ICT to support their music making. The needs of pupils who do not have instrumental tuition are not sufficiently well catered for in lessons, and the difficulties caused by the lack of soundproofing remain acute.

## Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Good	Very good
Leadership	Satisfactory	
Management	Satisfactory	
Progress since previous inspection	Satisfactory	

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very able pupils who grasp new skills and concepts quickly.
- Positive attitudes, very good attendance, participation and behaviour.
- Good support for extra-curricular sport.
- Although teaching is good or very good, lesson objectives are insufficiently focused.
- Assessment criteria are not adequately explained to pupils.

## Commentary

145. Results in recent GCSE examinations compare favourably with those in previous years and are well above average. A high proportion of pupils gain A\*/A grades.

146. By the end of Year 9, pupils' planning, performing and evaluating skills are well above average. Dance and gymnastics are particularly well developed, with good attention to movement quality and real originality in pupils' work. In games, basic skills are well established and the most able show versatility in attacking and defending play. By the end of Year 11, well above average standards are evident in both the core and examination groups. Trampolining is a particular strength, building very effectively on movement understanding from gymnastics and dance. In GCSE lessons, very good recall of earlier work, together with understanding of the links with other subjects, led, for example, to the development of a discussion on adrenaline into a detailed explanation of the effects of endorphins during strenuous exercise. Written work supports learning but marking is insufficiently diagnostic. There is no difference in the achievements of different ability groups or those from different ethnic groups.

147. Lessons are generally delivered with an infectious enthusiasm. Brisk pace, challenging tasks and very good relationships engage the interest of pupils. Participation is very good and pupils work conscientiously. Well planned skill development in Years 7 to 9 ensures very good learning. Pupils understand not only what they are doing, but also, why. In Years 10 and 11, teachers expect pupils to take on more responsibility to use what they know. Pupils respond positively, helping each other, managing time and taking on coaching roles confidently and effectively. While teaching is good overall, and very good in Years 10/11, the lack of information which teachers provide to pupils on assessment criteria limits pupils' knowledge of how they can improve further.

148. The new head of department has yet to impact significantly on standards, teaching and learning. However, there is real enthusiasm, vision and direction to improve further. There remain inconsistencies and a need to address assessment, target setting and the narrow focus of the scheme of work. Progress since the last inspection is satisfactory.

### ***Extra-curricular activity and school sport***

149. A large proportion of pupils participate in the very good extra-curricular programme. School teams are very successful in local, area and national competitions and there are several outstanding individuals gaining representative status. Inter-house sports, often organised by older pupils, have been introduced to cater for other pupils who are keen to compete. There is room to extend further the links with local sports groups and community initiatives which currently provide recreational activity in table tennis, self-defence and aerobics.

## **BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES**

### **Business Studies**

Pupils' work on the GCSE course in **business studies** and **economics** in Years 10 and 11 was sampled and discussed. The pupils' observed standards are average overall, and, because of good teaching, most achieve well.

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

### **Personal, social and health education**

A small number of PSHE lessons was observed. Overall provision is **satisfactory**. As there are 16 members of staff who teach the subject, all of whom teach another subject as well, it is difficult for the subject leader to meet with the team and secure consistency across the subject. In lessons seen, the use of a television programme to introduce a topic on alcohol misuse, the use of a number of activities to encourage pupils to consider their personal strengths and weaknesses and the use of newspaper articles to analyse the reasons for discrimination, were all very effective.

### **Citizenship**

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Good	
Progress since last inspection	N/a	

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good leadership.
- Lack of assessment.
- Lack of monitoring and performance management.
- Inadequate time allocation for the subject within the curriculum in Years 7 to 9.

### **Commentary**

150. As citizenship is a new subject, there are no national standards for comparison. By the end of Year 9, pupils are able to take part in discussion and are able to express their values orally.

They develop good listening skills. By the end of Year 11, pupils are able to understand active participation within and beyond the school and how it affects them as citizens. They are also able to understand the terminology which describes aspects of local councils and how to raise issues in a non-confrontational way.

151. Teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11 are good. Since September 2003, schemes of work have been prepared which make direct reference to the National Curriculum. The time allocation in Years 7 to 9 makes the teaching of the planned citizenship curriculum difficult. Teaching in rooms used for other subjects makes effective discussion amongst pupils in citizenship difficult as desks and chairs are laid out formally in rows. Television and newspaper articles are used very effectively to contribute to aspects of the citizenship curriculum.
152. Leadership is good but has been hampered by insufficient time and resources being directed to the development of this new subject in the curriculum. Management is good and staff teaching citizenship have been well supported by the head of department. There is an urgent need for assessment, monitoring and performance management to be developed and delivered across the department.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, thirteen 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 tables below show entry and performance information for courses completed in 2003. National comparative data were not available at the time of the inspection, hence the missing information in the following table.

### Level 3 AS level courses

Subject	entered	% A-E		% A-B		Average point	
		School	National	School	National	School	National
Art and design	6	100		0		38.3	
Biology	6	83.3		0		28.3	
Chemistry	2	50.0		0		10.0	
Business	6	66.7		16.7		28.3	
English	15	86.7		40.0		34.7	
French	8	87.5		12.5		30.0	
Further mathematics	3	100		33.3		43.3	
Geography	1	100		100		50.0	
History	6	100		16.7		35.0	
ICT	14	92.9		28.6		32.9	
Mathematics	10	100		40.0		40.0	
Media studies	1	100		0		40.0	
Music	1	100		100		50.0	
Physics	1	100		100		60.0	
Psychology	11	81.8		36.4		33.6	
Religious studies	3	100		0		36.7	
Sociology	3	66.7		66.7		40.0	
Spanish	5	100		0		30.0	
Theatre studies	2	100		0		25.0	

### Level 3 A level courses

Subject	entered	% A-E		% A-B		Average point	
		School	National	School	National	School	National
Art and design	15	100		60.0		46.0	
Biology	36	100		61.1		50.8	
Economics and Business Studies	20	100		60.0		47.0	
Chemistry	21	100		66.7		47.1	
Classical Civilisation	2	100		0		30.0	
Dance	2	100		50.0		50.0	
English	44	95.5		29.5		38.4	
French	17	88.2		58.8		42.9	
German	1	100		100		60.0	
Geography	5	100		80.0		58.0	
History	17	100		88.2		54.1	
ICT	14	100		21.4		32.1	
Mathematics	33	100		72.7		49.4	
Media Studies	27	100		48.1		43.7	
Music	2	100		50.0		45.0	
Theatre Studies	17	94.1		52.9		42.9	
PE	7	85.7		42.9		37.1	
Physics	8	100		50.0		42.5	
Psychology	45	100		57.8		44.7	
RE	1	100		100		50.0	
Sociology	23	95.7		26.1		37.8	
Spanish	3	100		100		53.3	

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

### English

Post-16 provision in English is **very good**.

Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since the last inspection	Good

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at A-level are well above average.
- Teaching is challenging and lively and students' achievements are very good.
- Students' attitudes to study are very good.

### Commentary

153. GCSE A and AS level results in English Literature are well above average and have been consistently so for a number of years.

154. By the end of Year 13, students' skills in English are very good. They have very good speaking and listening skills, as in a discussion which focused on the richness of Othello's language and the self-delusion this causes him. There is a very high standard of written work, for instance, in a very good analysis of the opening pages of 'Persuasion' and discursive writing on McEwan's treatment of subjectivity in 'Atonement'.

155. Teaching is lively and challenging and students learn well because of the very good pace and energy of lessons. The good range of teaching and learning strategies and the very good use of plenary and group discussion ensure that all students are involved and contribute. There were very interesting discussions about the characters of Iago and Othello in Year 12 and a very good debate about the themes emerging from a study of 'Measure for Measure' in Year 13.
156. Post-16 provision in English is managed well with a clear emphasis on raising the standards of achievement of all students.

### Modern foreign languages

French and Spanish are taught in the sixth form at the school, and students from the school study German in another school. French was the focus of the inspection and Spanish was sampled. Two Spanish lessons were seen. Both in Year 12 and in Year 13 Spanish is well taught and students are achieving well. Standards are high.

#### French

Post-16 provision in French is **good**.

Standards	Above average
Achievement	Good
Teaching and learning	Good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching makes high demands of students.
- Standards are high and students achieve well.
- Good use is made of authentic material to support learning.
- Insufficient use is made of ICT and the Internet.

#### Commentary

157. Standards in GCE A-level examinations in the school are consistently high. In 2002, the last year for which there are comparative data, attainment in French was well above the national average. As in the previous five years, half of the students entered achieved the highest grades (A/B), and their performance in French was better than in the other subjects they took. In 2003, half of the students again achieved the highest grades, but there was a greater proportion of lower grades than previously.
158. Students make rapid progress from the beginning of their sixth form course, and achievement is good in both sixth form years irrespective of the level at which students began their sixth form studies. In Year 12, students are developing a good understanding of French through the linguistic demands placed on them by their teachers and through the effective use of media such as televised news reports and media advertising. In Year 13, they are maturing into good all-round linguists with good understanding of the language and the ability to express themselves orally and in writing on a range of complex social, moral and political topics. Many intend to continue with their language study into higher education.
159. The principal characteristic of the teaching is the high level of challenge which it presents for students. Both teachers use French exclusively and at normal speed throughout the lesson and students' listening and understanding skills are pushed to the limit. The faculty makes

effective use of the school's facilities to provide authentic televised material to support teaching and learning, but more use could be made of the excellent ICT facilities to promote self-directed learning and independent research.

160. Sixth form courses are well managed and well planned by the two teachers involved. There is an appropriate division of topics geared to the requirements of the examination. Resources available are good, and the media resources well used. The faculty has done well to sustain high levels of performance since the last inspection, when entry requirements for a sixth form course in French were markedly higher than today.

## MATHEMATICS

Courses are offered in A-level and AS mathematics in pure mathematics, statistics and mechanics. Each year, these courses are taken up by high numbers of students from within the school and others joining through the consortium arrangements. Pupils wishing to study further mathematics transfer to other schools within the area.

Post-16 provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Improvement since the last inspection	Good

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are consistently well above the national average.
- Students work hard and have very good study skills.
- Teaching is very good.
- The department is very well staffed and led.
- The lack of further mathematics courses limits the range of mathematical experiences for students.

### Commentary

161. Results in both AS and A2 courses are consistently well above national averages and often results are very high, being in the top five per cent of schools nationally. In 2002, results were well above national averages and, in 2003, the percentage attaining the high grades had increased further, with fewer students attaining the lower grades. Attainment compares very favourably with other subjects in the school.
162. The standards of work seen during the inspection reflected examination results and were well above average. Students achieve very well because of their high levels of commitment and hard work. They have very well-developed study skills and are organised and systematic in their work. Recall of previous work is good, and students apply what they know with confidence in new situations.
163. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and understanding and use this well to plan lively and enthusiastic lessons. Teaching uses a range of strategies and meets the needs of students well, focusing them effectively on examination requirements. Teachers make very good use of regular assessments so that students understand their own mistakes and learn and improve from them. Teachers use a range of methods suited to the topics under consideration, and video, group work and ICT are well used to promote good learning. All teachers have very high expectations of their students and question them in a way which



makes them think for themselves and draws together their knowledge from previous topics. The quality of relationships between the students and their teachers is very positive and students are appreciative of the additional support teachers give. Many sixth form students help to provide booster classes for pupils in Years 7 and 9 and, in so doing, develop their own understanding and teaching skills.

164. The subject is led very well by the head of department and teacher with responsibility for the sixth form. They work well together, have a common understanding of developments and share this well with other members of the department. Teachers are well qualified and experienced, teaching rooms of good quality and book resources good. However, there are limitations in other resources, particularly projectors and immediate access to ICT facilities. Improvement since the last inspection is good with the standards achieved and numbers taking mathematics courses consistently high.

## SCIENCE

The focus of the inspection was on physics. Two biology and chemistry lessons were sampled and both were judged to be very good. Biology and chemistry results were well above average in 2003.

### Physics

Post-16 provision in physics is **good**.

Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Good
Management	Very good
Improvement since the last inspection	Good

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- A very enthusiastic and knowledgeable teacher enthuses and motivates students.
- Students are capable of a high level of independent learning.
- Efficient assessment and monitoring keep students aware of their progress.
- ICT resources are used well to support teaching.
- Capitation is poor. Some of the physics equipment is nearing the end of its life.

### Commentary

165. The A-level results in 2003 were well above average.

166. Achievement is very good. Students have a good understanding of the work they are covering and make good progress. Most complete a two-year course. In 2003, two students followed the course in Year 13 as an additional AS subject. The majority of students are also studying mathematics at advanced level, which supports their learning in physics and contributes to their high achievement. Where mathematics is not being taken, the teacher provides individual tutorial work for the student. Students from other schools study physics at the school as part of the consortium arrangements. Arrangements to support these students are very good, for example, with access to resources and feedback about their performance. Although physics is the least popular option of the sixth form sciences, the percentage of students taking the subject is in line with that nationally for girls.

167. Independent learning is encouraged and the teacher provides very effectively for it. Learning from each other is also a key feature of lessons. The very high quality of student-staff relationships allows tutorial-style help to be always available and lessons are characterised by

free-flowing question and answer in both directions. Students taking the course are well motivated by the high quality teaching. ICT is used very effectively in the teaching of the subject. In a lesson on measurement, a data projector was used to demonstrate the use of a vernier scale and a micrometer, using software from the Internet. All pupils were able to manipulate both pieces of equipment with great accuracy by the end of the lesson because of the visual support the projected images had given. Experimental work is serviced by excellent technical support.

168. Leadership and management are very effective. The head of department is developing a good range of strategies in Years 10 and 11 to increase the number of students opting for physics A-level which includes the running of a physics club and in ensuring that all GCSE physics modules are taught by a physics specialist. Funding for sixth form physics is very low. Equipment is often out-of-date and unsuitable. Accommodation is cramped, in need of refurbishment and has a negative impact on teaching.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology in the sixth form is **good**.

Standards	Above average
Achievement	Good
Teaching and learning	Good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have much enthusiasm for the subject and achieve well.
- The school becoming a Business and Enterprise College has led to greatly improved ICT facilities, which are often well used in and out of lesson time to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- There is no formal or informal system in the sixth form for developing all students' skills to the nationally expected level.

### Commentary

169. Of the students entered for the A-level examination in the subject in 2003, all passed and a fifth achieved the top grades of A or B. This is in line with the national average.
170. Assessment during the inspection of what the students now in the A-level groups can do with computers and communications and of their knowledge and understanding of applications in the world of work, showed their standards to be good. This is as true of those with different backgrounds or learning needs as of the majority. However, the ICT-related standards of the sixth form as a whole are only satisfactory. There is no attempt to ensure the pupils gain a grasp of key ICT skills to the nationally expected levels (2 and 3) and no central monitoring of how appropriate their computer use is in the various subject areas. As a result, the sixth formers' usage is unusually light and few feel at home enough with ICT to be able to choose to use it effectively in a wide range of circumstances.
171. Particular strengths of the overall good teaching are the teachers' constant challenge and encouragement of the students to develop a high quality grasp of the subject, the effectiveness of their work with a range of resources, and their use of assessment to respond to individual students' needs.

172. Much of this follows the high quality of the department's leadership and management, there being a shared determination to focus on quality and understanding of how to raise standards, and a wide range of effective systems.

## HUMANITIES

Three part-lessons were observed in sociology. Provision is good. Above average standards were demonstrated in each by most of the students. They have very positive attitudes to the subject, although attendance at the observed lessons was unsatisfactory. Teaching has a number of strengths and is well planned; it gives students ample opportunity to contribute and to develop their thinking and understanding, although there is a need to draw in the less confident students more. Pace is a little slow at times and, although resources are often imaginative, a somewhat narrow range is used in some lessons.

### Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Standards	Above average
Achievement	Good
Teaching and learning	Good
Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of leadership and management is very good and provides a clear vision for raising standards.
- Improvement since the last inspection has been very good, particularly in the standards of coursework and the application of key skills.
- Students achieve well, work independently and respond with enthusiasm to good teaching.
- Lessons of three hours are not conducive to a consistently high pace and challenge in teaching.

### Commentary

173. Results in the 2003 A level examinations, and standards of individual project work, are above average for both all maintained and girls' schools.

174. Pupils achieve well throughout the sixth form. They use technical vocabulary with ease and their understanding of spatial models and their applications is good. They use evidence from previous case studies well and draw well on general knowledge to support their arguments. They can explain the impact of globalisation and the changing importance of location factors over time on more and less developed countries. Gifted and talented pupils produce very good independent research and extended essays.

175. The course is jointly taught with a neighbouring school and on both sites, but this does not have a negative impact on standards. There is a temporary arrangement for teaching in the sixth form but students benefit from an experienced teacher who has very good subject knowledge and a secure understanding of examination requirements. Well-planned lessons are supported by a range of resources and focused questioning. Students are well motivated and challenge each other in group discussions. Homework is used well to reinforce learning and to prepare students in examination techniques. Assessment is used well to set clear targets and students know what they must do to improve. They develop good literacy skills and use an appropriate range of statistical techniques. The Internet is well used for research and integrated into most units of work.

176. Both leadership and management of the department have improved since the last inspection. There is now a clear vision for raising standards and management is very efficient.

### History

Post-16 provision in history is **good**.

Standards	Above average
Achievement	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since the last inspection	Very good

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching focused well on key aspects of the subject required by the examinations syllabus.
- Very good assessment for learning.
- Good relationships between teachers and students.
- Inadequate use of ICT to support learning.

### Commentary

177. Results in AS and A2 examinations are well above average.

178. By the end of Year 13, students demonstrate detailed and comprehensive knowledge of the subject and engage critically with the content. They adopt a discursive approach in their analyses of events. They demonstrate clearly an awareness of differing points of view and ask cogent, relevant and perceptive questions.

179. Lessons are well planned and structured. Students receive very good feedback on their progress and guidance on how to improve. They respond well to their teachers and are motivated and keen to learn. Well-planned teaching strategies encourage them to adopt suitably historical ways of thinking and presenting arguments. Lessons are active and seek to engage the pupils. The use of ICT to support learning and for research is, however, very limited.

180. Sixth form provision is integrated well into the work of the history department. Leadership of the department is well focused and the approaches which have achieved very good progress since the last inspection with provision in the main school have been used with equal success in the sixth form.

### Religious education

Provision for religious education is **satisfactory**.

Standards	Above average
Achievement	Good
Teaching and learning	Good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since the previous inspection	

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching that results in good learning. Lessons are well planned and well delivered.

- Good accommodation which enhances the status of subject.
- Students' response in class is very good.
- Good effective and efficient management and leadership of the department, though delegating some aspects would mean even greater success in future developments.
- ICT activities need to be further developed.
- Students do not read sufficiently widely round the subject.
- There is insufficient time allocation to religious education for those not taking the examination course to allow the provision to fully comply with the locally agreed syllabus.

## **Commentary**

181. There have been no A2 results so far. Standards attained by students at the end of Year 12 were in line with the national average.
182. Classroom observation of the current Year 13 and a scrutiny of their work indicate burgeoning standards which are above national norms. Students apply high order analytical skills to extract arguments to uphold or refute religious concepts. For example, Year 13 students, in their studies of religious ethics, consider the views of libertarianist, compatibilist and determinist thinkers to discuss the relationship between predestination and moral responsibility. Year 12 students are introduced to deeper religious thinking by studying a unit on religious and ethical theories concerning the existence of God. Most students attain standards above national levels, but a small minority struggle to understand fully such concepts as the ontological argument for the existence of God. Students' achievement in each year is good. Students enter the sixth form with an average baseline of skills and knowledge. By the end of this stage of their learning students have made good progress and they are skilful at not only selecting and demonstrating clearly relevant knowledge and understanding but also at using them to sustain a philosophical argument. However, students' achievement is hindered by their lack of wider reading round the subject and by their lack of the use of IT to enhance their deeper understanding.
183. Teaching is good overall throughout Years 12 and 13 and students learn well as a result. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject. Lessons are well planned and well prepared. A developing characteristic of teaching is that the teachers' belief in the value of the subject is reflected in their enthusiasm for it. This is beginning to have a strong impact on students' learning. Teachers are particularly good at establishing good relationships. In some lessons, teachers tend to be overly didactic and students are not sufficiently encouraged to become independent learners. In the best lessons, however, teachers are particularly adept at using a range of strategies to draw out significant points from material which is both challenging and exciting and teachers successfully exhort students to become more active participants in their own learning. Lessons are lively, stimulating and enhance students' learning and some make an effective contribution to students' attaining appropriate levels in key literacy skills, as well as enhancing their personal development. However, this is not universally the case. Students apply themselves well. They respond diligently, settle quickly to task and sustain concentration. Their positive behaviour and response, which is often a direct result of good teaching and good classroom management, is an important factor in their increased learning.
184. Leadership and management are good. The recently appointed head of department leads the department effectively and efficiently and is an excellent role model for a department team committed to raising standards and to the encouragement of students to even higher achievement. She has a vision for the future which is based on a realistic evaluation of the department's strengths and the areas for its development. She must now delegate aspects of her work to colleagues so that she can develop her vision, particularly for the further development and implementation of the non-examined sixth form religious education syllabus.

## **ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING**

## Technology

One Year 12 textiles lesson was observed. This subject has just been introduced. Students are progressing well as result of the good teaching; however, they do not display any great enthusiasm and rely heavily upon the teacher. There was little evidence of the use of ICT.

## VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

### Art and design

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

Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Good
Teaching and learning	Good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good individual tuition is very effective in helping students evaluate and develop their own work.
- Inadequate facilities for ICT in the department slow the development of students' images and ideas.
- Poor accommodation has a detrimental effect on students' course work.

### Commentary

185. In 2002, A-level results were well above the national average with all students gaining the higher A-B grades and improving on the above average results of the previous three years.
186. By Year 13, standards are well above average in the work seen, representing good achievement over the A-level course. Strengths in observational work are shown in very good paintings and mixed media work enhanced by a growing maturity and individuality of approach. Students make effective, and sometimes imaginative, use of photography as starting points for pictures but there is little use of ICT to further manipulate these images.
187. Good relationships and the teachers' sensitive approach are successful in guiding and encouraging students to find their own style and subject matter, leading to a good range of media and techniques being employed. Individual discussions with students are very effective in assessing progress and helping them to evaluate their own work. The department has inadequate facilities for teaching and promoting ICT as a creative and research medium, which hinders the development of students' imagery and ideas.
188. Good leadership and management of the department have helped it to improve standards since the last inspection despite an interim period of unsettled staffing. The present staff are very experienced and well matched to the needs of the course. Accommodation is poor, with old and mismatched furniture and fittings. The recent loss of a studio has led to more intensive use of the remaining spaces, leaving sixth form students with fewer opportunities to continue their work in their private study periods. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory overall.

### Drama

Post-16 provision in drama is **very good**.

Standards	Well above average
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at A level are well above average.
- Students achieve very well because of the very good teaching.
- Extra curricular activities are good.
- Students provide good support for drama for younger pupils.
- The head of department provides very good leadership.
- Old lighting needs replacing and drama rooms need new flooring and furniture.

### Commentary

189. Examination results at A- level are well above average.

190. By the end of Year 13, students' skills in drama are very good. Students show a very good understanding of physical theatre following their research on classical drama. For instance, there is very good recognition and articulation of mood, emotion and feeling in a discussion of the father and son relationship in 'Antigone'. In a Year 13 lesson, all students make good progress in gaining a deeper understanding of 'Our Country's Good'. They have very good insights into how a particular scene can be acted, directed and staged.

191. Students benefit from knowledgeable and enthusiastic teachers. They are actively engaged in a variety of interesting and challenging activities. For instance, in a study of 'Our Country's Good', one student gave a skilful account of Mary's views under cross-examination from the rest of the group. The challenging teaching encourages good progress for less confident students and teachers take care to ensure all students are actively involved.

192. Drama is managed very well by the recently appointed head of department. He has clear priorities which include the introduction of a more flexible syllabus and closer working with other members of the faculty.

### Media Studies

Provision in media studies is **good**.

Standards	Above average
Achievement	Good
Teaching and learning	Good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Above average numbers of students take media studies courses and achieve well.
- Students benefit from the good subject knowledge and enthusiasm of teachers.
- Teaching is lively and supports the development of independent and group work.
- Students are very enthusiastic and show very good attitudes and commitment.
- Students make a good contribution to the school as a whole as media prefects.
- The subject is well led and there are clear priorities for development.

## Commentary

193. Results in the 2003 A and AS level examinations were above average and continue a rising trend.
194. By the end of Year 12, students have made good progress and achieve well from what is frequently a low level of GCSE attainment. Their knowledge of key concepts and understanding of the advertising industry is sound and they can articulate why some advertisements are more effective than others. Students' work on the production of videos as part of Year 12 coursework is good, and they achieve impressive and varied results, such as the horror film set in school and the music videos. By the end of Year 13 standards and achievement are good. For instance, they understand and can articulate the characterisation of different sitcom characters and their appeal to the audience; they develop in detail how different social aspirations in the UK, Australia and the United States are reflected in different programmes.
195. Lessons have a good variety and pace and the teachers' enthusiasm contributes to good learning. Some difficult concepts are introduced well in stages and through paired work and discussion. Teachers encourage independent work well and students grow in confidence. Their independence and confidence is further enhanced in their work with younger pupils through editing the school magazine and by acting as media prefects. Learning is well supported by a number of parents who are in the film industry and contribute to lessons.
196. The subject is well managed and the head of media studies has clear priorities for development.

## Music

Post-16 provision in music is **good**.

Standards	Above average
Achievement	Good
Teaching and Learning	Good
Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Unsatisfactory

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good as a result of good teaching.
- The excellent extra-curricular opportunities support the development of students' musicianship.
- Students are not given enough opportunity to use ICT to support their work.

## Commentary

197. Examination results have been consistently above the national average in recent years.
198. Students make good progress in their understanding of compositional techniques and in creating independent compositions. Many have very high levels of aural ability, resulting from the range of musical experiences in which they take part. Students develop good musical knowledge but are less confident in essay writing.
199. Students benefit from the excellent knowledge of the teachers. Lessons are taught enthusiastically and this inspires them to learn. Relationships between students and teachers are excellent. The lack of music technology in the department means that students with less well-developed aural and performing skills have to compose music without knowing how it



sounds. Work is marked consistently, but sometimes there is insufficient guidance given on how to improve.

200. The department is well managed and students are given good opportunities to participate in high quality instrumental and vocal ensembles, and also to lead their own groups. The lack of progress in developing the department's ICT resource puts students at a disadvantage when developing their compositional work.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **satisfactory**.

Standards	Average
Achievement	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory
Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since the last inspection	Satisfactory

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very positive attitudes of students, who work conscientiously.
- Well developed literacy skills and use of subject terminology.
- Lack of resources to support learning.
- Lack of breadth in course provision.

### Commentary

201. Too few students take either AS or A-level courses to make a valid comparison with national data. Results in recent years indicate most students achieving mid-range, B or C grades in both examinations.
202. Standards seen were average for individual students, with strengths in written work and in discussion. Students work hard to understand complex topics and try to use their own experiences to inform and illustrate the points they make. However, they do not always link together different aspects of the course sufficiently or have access to high quality technical resources which would enable more detailed independent research.
203. Good use is made of specialist teachers to deliver different aspects of the courses. However, whereas they have detailed knowledge of their own subject areas, they do not always link the areas together sufficiently, making it difficult for students to understand and apply their knowledge within the context of the PE examinations. Students show good understanding through their detailed written work, although they would benefit from more comprehensive feedback from their teachers.
204. The newly appointed head of department has already identified concerns and has plans to improve provision, both in the examination courses and in widening recreational opportunities for the whole sixth form. Students are already involved in extra-curricular activities with younger pupils and play a significant role in supporting the inter-house sports.

## BUSINESS

### Economics and business

Provision in economics and business is **good**.

Standards	Above average
Achievement	Good
Teaching and learning	Very Good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Insufficient evidence

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students work very hard and learn fast because of the teachers' great knowledge, enthusiasm, and encouragement.
- The impact of the school becoming a Business and Enterprise College includes improvements in the work of this (and other) departments and the pupils' greater involvement in the community.

## **Commentary**

205. All the students passed the A Level economics and business studies examination in both 2002 and 2003, which is a better result than in the country as a whole. About a third achieved the top grades of A and B in 2002, also better than the national picture - and two-thirds did so in 2003.
206. These high standards were confirmed during the inspection by assessing what the students can do, know and understand in the business context, although sixth formers who did not study the subject before they came into the sixth form tend to be less confident and not to achieve as well. As the numbers on the course are rising significantly, it may become possible to run two parallel groups to help the latter group catch up. Overall, however, students learn at a very high rate - they work very hard and effectively, even when on their own, and generally collaborate very well when working with others.
207. Teaching is of a very good quality, its particular strengths being:
- the teachers' deep and up-to-date practical knowledge of business theory (including economics) and practice;
  - their mature and close productive relationships with the students;
  - their high expectations and continual challenge; and
  - the appropriate use of a wide range of resources, including resources within the local community.
208. The department is somewhat fragmented - the rooms used do not form a specialist unit and two of the three teachers have major responsibilities elsewhere in the school. However, leadership is good, with a clear vision of the direction in which the subject should move; this includes developing coverage of business concepts for all pupils in Years 7 to 9, offering some pupils in Years 10 and 11 an element of the post-16 curriculum, considering other possible sixth form courses, and extending the already extensive Young Enterprise provision. Management is good, particularly as regards staff development and the best use of the department's resources as effective tools for learning.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

No courses in this curriculum area are taught at the school.

## **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES**

No general programmes are taught.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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

