

INSPECTION REPORT

THE CHAUNCY SCHOOL

Ware

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117551

Headteacher: Mr D O'Sullivan

Lead inspector: Mrs J Greenfield

Dates of inspection: 15th - 18th March 2004

Inspection number: 259321

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:	Mixed
Number on roll:	703
School address:	Park Road Ware Hertfordshire
Postcode:	SG12 0DP
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Alan Thomas
Date of previous inspection:	9 th February 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The Chauncy School is a Specialist Arts College. With 703 students on roll, it is smaller than most secondary schools. Attainment on entry is below average but is rising with the increasing popularity of the school. Students come from a wide cross section of social and economic backgrounds, which is average overall, although a significant minority come from an area of considerable deprivation. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is broadly average. Nearly all students are of White-British origin. A small number of students are from Black-African or mixed heritage. Four students receive a small amount of additional support to develop their fluency in English. There are no students from Traveller families or with Refugee status, but four students are in public care. The proportion of students with special educational needs is broadly average, as is the proportion with a Statement. The range of special needs includes general and specific learning difficulties, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, physical disabilities and other medical conditions. The school gained a School Achievement Award in 2001 and 2002, as well as Artsmark and Sportsmark Awards. In 2003, more students left, rather than entered, the school at times other than the normal transfer times.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
7070	Mrs J Greenfield	Lead inspector	Citizenship, English as an additional language
15181	Mrs M Hackney	Lay inspector	
20709	Mr D MacIldowie	Team inspector	English and drama
6044	Mr R Perkins	Team inspector	Mathematics
19043	Dr D Lewis	Team inspector	Science, physics (sixth form)
7558	Mr O Nicholson	Team inspector	Art and design
10894	Mr P Reynolds	Team inspector	Design and technology, information and communication technology (sixth form)
19530	Ms J Bray	Team inspector	Geography
18032	Mrs I Randall	Team inspector	Information and communication technology, history
4829	Mr I Waters	Team inspector	French, German
11021	Mrs L Davies	Team inspector	Music
4647	Mrs J Evans	Team inspector	Physical education
4372	Mr R Fordham	Team inspector	Religious education
4720	Mr Graham Carter	Team inspector	Special educational needs

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The Chauncy School is a good and improving school. It provides a good standard of education and **its overall effectiveness is good**. Standards have risen considerably since the last inspection and, by Year 11, students do better than others in similar schools. The very good leadership of the headteacher, who wants the best for all in the school community, provides a clear sense of direction to the school's development. The school's profile and standing in the local community and with parents have improved considerably, and its Arts College status is beginning to have a positive impact on its work. The school gives good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- the headteacher's very good leadership and high aspirations have been major factors in the school's improvement in recent years;
- the school's GCSE examination results in 2003 were well above average when compared with those in similar schools;
- standards in most subjects are at the level expected nationally and are above this in mathematics and history but lower than this in German, especially in Years 8 and 9;
- most students achieve well as a result of good teaching, the setting of clear targets and the careful monitoring of their progress;
- the school takes positive steps to ensure that the needs of all students are effectively catered for and supported;
- the arrangements for citizenship and personal, social and health education are unsatisfactory and do not support students' personal development adequately;
- students' attitudes to work are mostly good but the behaviour of a minority of students is unsatisfactory and in some lessons hinders the learning of others; and
- students benefit considerably from the good range and quality of the enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities provided by the school, especially in sport.

The school has made good progress since the last inspection. Standards have risen at a faster rate than nationally and the quality of teaching has improved considerably. The provision for students with special educational needs and for students in the sixth form is now good. Progress in developing students' reading and writing skills has been satisfactory and the library has become a central and well resourced area, especially for information and communication technology (ICT). Levels of attendance have improved, although they remain below the national average. Very good progress has been made in the arrangements for monitoring standards and performance across the school and in improving schemes of work.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average
For Year 11, similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

Students' achievement is good throughout the school. By Year 9, standards are in line with the national expectation in most subjects, which is good achievement in view of their below average attainment on entry to the school. This picture reflects last year's test results at the end of Year 9, which were in line with the national average and better than the results in similar schools. By Year 11, standards are at the expected level in most subjects and students' achievement is good. The

GCSE examination results have improved at a faster rate than that found nationally and, in 2003, they were similar to the national average overall and above average at five or more grades A*-C. When compared with the results in similar schools, the results were well above average. In the sixth form, standards are in line with course expectations and students are achieving well. This is a considerable improvement over the A-level examination results last year. Students with special educational needs achieve well in Years 7 - 9 and satisfactorily in Years 10 and 11. Gifted and talented students and students from minority ethnic heritages achieve well, in line with their peers.

Students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are satisfactory. Attitudes are good. Behaviour is satisfactory overall in Years 7 - 11 and good in the sixth form. Attendance, although it has improved since the last inspection, remains unsatisfactory.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching is good overall and enables most students to learn and achieve well. It is better in Years 10 - 13 than in Years 7 - 9, where there is some unsatisfactory teaching. The assessment of students' work is mostly good. The curriculum is satisfactory overall and is good in the sixth form. It has strengths in many areas but has weaknesses in German, citizenship and religious education in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, and in the programme for personal, social and health education. Provision for students with special educational needs is good. Extra-curricular and other enrichment opportunities are good and are particularly good in sport. Standards of care, welfare, health and safety are good. Students receive good support and guidance from their teachers and there are good arrangements for involving students in the work of the school. The school's partnership with parents is good. Links with the community and other schools are very good.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are both good. The headteacher gives very good leadership to a committed team of key staff, resulting in substantial improvements in standards and provision in recent years. Governance is good, contributing to the school's vision and direction and maintaining a very good balance between challenge and support for the senior staff. Some statutory requirements are not met, however. Management is effective, with well-embedded structures for self-evaluation and continuing professional development. Financial management is good.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents express very positive views about the school and the way it is run. Nearly all parents feel comfortable in approaching the school if they have a problem or concerns. Some express concerns about behaviour and a significant minority do not feel that they are well informed about their child's progress. Inspectors consider that the quality of reports to parents is good. Nearly all students say that it is a good school to be at. Many comment on its friendly nature and that they are expected to work hard and do their best. Many students also comment unfavourably about behaviour. Inspectors support parents' and students' views about the unsatisfactory behaviour of a minority of students.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- raise standards in German by improving the quality of teaching and learning;
- improve the provision for citizenship and personal, social and health education;
- continue to improve teachers' skills in managing the behaviour of a minority of students;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- provide religious education in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, and a daily act of collective worship for all students; and
- ensure that more use is made of ICT in music in Years 7 - 9.

THE SIXTH FORM

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is an effective sixth form that provides satisfactory value for money. Standards are improving and are average overall. Teaching is good and most students achieve well.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Arts College status is having a positive impact on the sixth form curriculum in broadening the range of courses available to students;
- teachers use their good subject knowledge well to challenge students and help them learn;
- the school's Federation with other local sixth forms enhances the opportunities available for students;
- students' attitudes to school and to learning are good;
- not enough is done to monitor and co-ordinate the development of key skills across the curriculum; and
- sixth formers provide good support to younger students.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Good in English. Standards are average and students achieve well. Teaching and learning are good. There is a good sense of partnership between students and teachers and strong encouragement to develop individual views through active exploration and discussion.
Mathematics	Satisfactory in mathematics and improving. The A-level results have been well below average but very good leadership and effective teaching mean that students are now achieving much higher standards.
Science	Good in physics. Standards are average and students' achievement is good. The good teaching challenges students to think for themselves, which leads to good understanding. The small amount of teaching seen in biology is good; in chemistry , the teaching is very good.
Information and communication technology	Very good in ICT. Standards are average for students taking the single award and above average for those taking the dual award. Teaching is very good and results in good achievement.
Humanities	Good in geography. Standards are broadly average and the quality of individual projects and coursework are better than this. The quality of teaching is good and enables students to achieve well. The small amount of teaching seen in history and in sociology is satisfactory.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	The small amount of teaching seen in design and technology is good.
Visual and performing arts and media	Good in art and design. Standards are average. The good teaching enables students to learn and achieve well. The small amount of teaching seen in media studies is good. In music

technology, the teaching is satisfactory.

Business	The teaching in the small number of lessons seen in business studies is good.
General education	No lessons were seen in this area.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Relationships between students and staff are good throughout the sixth form. The induction arrangements into the sixth form are good. Students receive informed advice and guidance on the subjects to study and on managing the demands of A-level study. Personal and academic targets are set and reviewed regularly.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The assistant headteacher with responsibility for the sixth form has a very clear view of how it should develop. He communicates his views well to his colleagues, both those with specific pastoral roles as well as those with subject teaching roles. Subject leadership and management are generally good and sometimes very good. There is very good use of performance data and the progress of students is monitored well. As with the main school, self-evaluation is continual and rigorous.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Most students enjoy being at the school. They feel that their views are valued and they are able to make a good contribution to the life and work of the school, through, for example, their student representatives on the governing body, supporting younger students in various ways, organising clubs and their leading role on the school council. Most students consider that the courses available to them meet their needs and aspirations and that the school is well run.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Students' achievement is good overall, given their below average attainment on entry to the school. Standards are in line with national expectations in most subjects by Year 9, Year 11 and Year 13, and are improving. Students with special educational needs achieve well in Years 7 - 9 and satisfactorily in Years 10 and 11. The small number of students from different minority ethnic heritages achieve as well as their peers. Girls do better than the boys in a few subjects but the differences are not as great as the GCSE examination results in 2003 would suggest. Gifted and talented students achieve well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The GCSE examination results have improved considerably over the past few years and are now above the national average at five or more grades A*-C.
- Standards are well above average in history and above average in mathematics by Year 11.
- Standards in German are below average and students' achievement is unsatisfactory.
- Standards in music are below average by Year 9 and Year 11 but are better in Years 7 and 8 and Year 10.
- Students in the sixth form are achieving well in English, mathematics, physics, art and design, geography and ICT.

Commentary

1. The school's overall results in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were in line with the national average but were above average when compared with the results in similar schools. The results in mathematics were similar to the national average but were below the national average in English and science, although in all three subjects the proportions attaining the expected Level 5 or above were average. When account is taken of the students' attainment in the national tests at the end of Year 6, which was below average, they made much better progress than might have been expected. Over the past five years, the improvement in the school's performance has been at a similar rate to that found nationally. The school exceeded its targets in mathematics and science but was slightly below its target for English.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	32.4 (33.3)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	36.0 (34.3)	35.4 (34.7)
science	32.5 (33.8)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 106 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

2. Current standards of work by Year 9 are in line with the national expectation in most subjects. Most students are achieving well, although not consistently in all subjects. In the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science, standards are as expected. Current standards in mathematics reflect the test results in 2003 but are better in English and science, brought about by improvements in the quality of teaching in these subjects. In all three subjects, students are achieving well by Year 9, including those with special educational needs, those who have been identified as gifted and talented, those who are from different minority ethnic heritages or those in the early stages of learning English.

3. By Year 9, standards are at the expected level in nearly all the remaining subjects, with the exception of history, where standards are above average, and German and music, where standards overall are below average. In art and design, design and technology, geography, ICT, French, physical education and religious education, students are achieving well. They are achieving very well in history, but their achievement in German and music is unsatisfactory. There is insufficient evidence to make firm judgements about standards or students' achievements in citizenship and in personal, social and health education. The timetabling of these areas provides insufficient time for adequate coverage of the programmes of study, particularly in Years 7 - 9, or for the systematic development of students' skills, knowledge and understanding.

4. The school's GCSE examination results have improved considerably over the past five years and the rate of improvement has been faster than that found nationally. In 2003, the school's overall performance was similar to the national average and was above average for the proportion of students attaining five or more grades A*-C. At one or more grades A*-G, the results were above the national average, but at five or more grades A*-G, they were below average. The below average results at five or more grades A*-G were a consequence of the weaker performance of a small group of students, mostly girls, who had considerable personal, social and other difficulties. When compared with the results in schools with a similar level of performance in Year 9, the results were well above average. There was little difference between the overall performance of boys and girls in 2003 or over the past three years, although there have been differences in particular subjects. The school exceeded its targets in 2003 at five or more grades A*-C and for the average points score.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	55 (45)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	84 (82)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	98 (94)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	32.4 (29.5)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 101 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

5. There were considerable variations between the different subjects at grades A*-C. Students' performance was above the national averages in mathematics and English literature and well above the national averages in history, geography, ICT and for the small group taking German. The results were below average in French and food technology, and well below average in art and design, biology, chemistry, graphics and child development. In the remaining subjects, the results were in line with the national averages.

6. By Year 11, standards overall are above the national expectation in almost all subjects and most students achieve well. They achieve particularly well in history and attain well above average standards, reflecting the GCSE examination results in 2003. Standards also exceed the national expectation in mathematics by Year 11 and students in Years 10 and 11 achieve well. In the remaining subjects, including English, science, art and design, design and technology, geography, ICT, French and physical education, standards are broadly in line with national expectations and students' achievement is good, with the exception of ICT, where it is satisfactory, as students do not give sufficient consideration to the design, application and evaluation of their work. In German, standards for the small number of students taking the course in Year 11 are close to the national expectation, but they are below the expected levels for the much larger group of students in Year 10. Achievement in German is unsatisfactory as teachers' expectations are not high enough and students are not challenged sufficiently. As in Years 7 - 9, there is insufficient evidence to make clear judgements about standards and students' achievement in citizenship and personal, social and health education by Year 11. Students do not study enough religious education in Years 10 and 11 to meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus, and this constitutes a breach of statutory requirements.

7. There is little difference in the achievements of the relatively small number of students from minority ethnic heritages in comparison with their peers. These students are generally fluent in English. The small numbers of students who receive additional support in learning English are mostly making good progress. The differences seen in the respective performances of boys and girls in the national tests and GCSE examinations in 2003 are not quite so evident in students' current work. Girls attain higher standards than boys in ICT, because their approach is more methodical, and also in history and art and design. The most capable students, including those identified as gifted and talented, achieve well, as in most subjects they receive work that extends them further.

8. The achievement of students with special educational needs is satisfactory overall. Their achievement is invariably good in Years 7 - 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. A significant minority of students with special educational needs in Year 10 do not achieve as well as they might, because of their unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour. Most students with a statement of special educational need achieve well in lessons. These students, particularly those with physical disabilities, are well supported by teaching assistants, who keep a close eye on their medical needs and liaise effectively with individual departments to enable them to learn well.

9. Students' language and literacy skills are sufficient to enable most to answer questions and contribute appropriately to class discussions. Their writing skills are not as well developed as other aspects of literacy. In a few subjects, for example, science and geography, weak literacy skills prevent some students from learning as well as they might. Students use their mathematical skills satisfactorily in most subjects to support their learning. Students' ICT skills are sufficient to enable them to make progress in all areas of the curriculum where opportunities are provided.

10. The school's performance in the national tests and public examinations has risen considerably in recent years. This improving picture is confirmed by the inspection evidence, which shows that standards are rising, especially in some of the subjects that did not do so well in the GCSE examinations in 2003. An important contribution to the higher standards has been the implementation of the approaches recommended in the National Key Stage 3 Strategy for improving the quality of teaching and learning and by the strong drive of the headteacher, with the support of senior staff, to raise the expectations of students, and their parents, of what is possible. The rigorous assessment, monitoring and tracking of students' progress and achievements have also contributed significantly.

Sixth form

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	69.6 (91.0)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	19.6 (30.8)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per pupil	168.8 (189.3)	258.2 (263.3)

There were 26 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

11. The school's overall A-level examination results in 2003 were well below the national average. As the number of students taking the examinations was comparatively small, great care has to be taken in making firm judgements about the results in some subjects. Students' attainment on entry to the sixth form is below average, and lower than that found in many schools. All the students entered gained a pass grade in biology, chemistry, media studies, English, French, geography, mathematics and sociology. However, the overall results in art and design, media studies, English, mathematics, sociology and ICT were below the national average. Students did particularly well in biology, chemistry, geography and in Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) business, gaining a greater proportion of the highest grades of A and B than the national averages. The AS

examination results in 2003 for the students who did not continue studying the subject at A-level were below or well below average in every subject, although the small numbers in several subjects makes comparison with the national picture inappropriate.

12. Standards of work in all the six subjects inspected in depth are in line with course requirements. This shows an improvement over the A-level examination results in 2003. Students' achievement in English, mathematics, physics, art and design, geography and ICT is good when account is taken of their lower than average attainment on entry to the sixth form.

13. In the small number of lessons sampled in other subjects, students' achievements are at least satisfactory, and sometimes good. There is insufficient evidence to make clear judgements about standards in these sampled subjects. Students use their literacy and numeracy skills satisfactorily in their chosen subjects to enable them to cope with the demands of their courses. Their competence in the everyday use of ICT to support the learning is satisfactory. However, in literacy, numeracy and ICT, although the school has undertaken an audit, there is no co-ordinated provision to ensure that all students have the required key skills to support their learning across all subjects.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students' attitudes are good. Behaviour is satisfactory overall in Years 7 to 11 and good in the sixth form. Relationships are good. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Attendance, although it has improved since the last inspection, remains unsatisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' good attitudes have a positive impact on the standards they attain.
- The school's systems for managing students' behaviour are good but are not always applied consistently.
- The school's positive ethos and good range of arts and sports activities make a good contribution to students' personal development.
- Tracking systems to monitor and improve attendance are good.
- Good and constructive relationships help to stimulate students to want to learn.
- Although students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory, provision for these areas is insufficiently well planned and co-ordinated.
- Some students do not take sufficient care of the school environment.

Commentary

14. Most students have good attitudes towards school and are interested in the range of activities that are provided for them. Relationships between students and with the staff are mostly good. Students are confident they can ask for help if they are experiencing difficulties with their academic work or with personal problems. Behaviour overall is satisfactory. Most students behave well and conform to the school's expectations. However, there are a number of instances of unsatisfactory behaviour. In many cases, teachers manage such instances firmly and effectively. The school has good and positive procedures for managing behaviour, but these are not always consistently applied throughout the school. In several lessons across subjects and year groups, the unsatisfactory behaviour of a small minority of students hinders the learning of others. This is particularly so when the quality of teaching and the content of the work do not engage students' interest, when classroom management is weak or where there is insufficient support for students with special educational needs. Most students move around the school in an orderly manner, although there are a few who show some lack of self-control. The school takes prompt action to deal with incidents of bullying and serious behavioural problems. Students are confident that the school deals well with all forms of bullying or harassment. The number of permanent and fixed term exclusions is comparatively low. The school does all it can to support disaffected students within the school and excludes students only when there is no alternative.

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	665	48	6
White – Irish	2	0	0
White – any other White background	6	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	1	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	4	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	1	0	0
Black or Black British – African	9	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1	0	0
Chinese	1	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	7	0	0

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

15. The overall behaviour and attitudes of students with special educational needs is satisfactory. In some lessons, behaviour is good and sometimes better. In one Year 8 mathematics lesson, students' very positive attitudes and very good behaviour helped them to achieve very well. However, in a Year 10 English lesson, the unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour of students had a negative impact on learning.

16. Students' personal development is satisfactory and, through its positive ethos, the school encourages those of all abilities to become mature and responsible young people. The majority of students in all year groups feel that the school is a good place to be in and they enjoy all that it has to offer. The school council and peer mentoring arrangements ensure that students have the opportunity to share their views and ideas to improve their environment. Students with these responsibilities take their roles seriously and are making a strong contribution to the life of the school. Not all students take sufficient responsibility for the care of the school's environment and the school's expectations are not high enough in this regard. For example, unacceptable quantities of litter are left on the floor and on the tables in the dining room at breaks and lunchtimes, as well as around the school. The majority of students enjoy the opportunity to join a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, sports, drama and musical productions. Students with special educational needs and physical disabilities are very well integrated into all the activities.

17. Religious education, English and history provide good opportunities for students' spiritual development but there are very few opportunities provided or taken in other subjects to enhance this feature of their personal development. Students have respect for the beliefs of others and have a sound understanding of them. They reflect on issues of belief and develop an understanding of different faiths. They are aware of right and wrong actions and know what is expected of them, but they do not always respond positively when corrected. Students work well together and there are clear opportunities provided for them to express their views in paired work, group work and general discussion. Students are aware of their own cultural heritage and that of others. Multicultural education is developed well through the English curriculum, and a few other subjects, such as art

and design and music, also contribute considerably to developing students' understanding of this area. However, the school's provision does not extend sufficiently to enable students to develop a clear awareness and appreciation of the rich variety of different cultures and traditions that exist in this country. The lack of a co-ordinated approach to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development across the curriculum works against a planned approach to this aspect of students' personal development. The unsatisfactory provision for their personal, social and health education is also a barrier.

18. Although the school works hard to improve attendance, this remains unsatisfactory and below the national average. Attendance has, however, improved since the last inspection. With the support of the education welfare officer, the school has improved its procedures for the prompt tracking of unauthorised absence and has established a computerised system for the recording and monitoring of attendance. Registration is prompt and the majority of students are punctual and arrive at lessons on time.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	8.4
National data	7.2

Unauthorised absence	
School data	0.5
National data	1.1

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

Sixth form

19. Students enjoy their time in the sixth form and find it rewarding. Their attitudes to work are good and their behaviour is mature and responsible. Students work hard and they collaborate well during lessons, showing respect for the values, attitudes and beliefs of each other. Some students take their responsibilities as senior students seriously and make a good contribution to the life of the school. However, as with the main school, attendance is unsatisfactory. The school is working hard to overcome current difficulties of accurately recording the attendance of students who are working off-site or within the Federation arrangements with other schools.

20. Students respond willingly to the many opportunities the school has to offer. During lessons, they show commitment and pride in their work and readily participate in a wide range of activities. Although students recognise their responsibilities for their work in the sixth form, their skills of independent study are not well developed. Some students make a strong contribution to their environment by taking a leading role in the sixth form council, the school council, the peer mentoring scheme and performance coaching for younger students. The opportunity for sixth form students to be members of the school's governing body as student governors is a significant strength of the school.

21. Students form good and constructive relationships with their teachers and with one another. They are very aware of the impact of their actions on others and they provide good role models for younger students. Students have trust and confidence in the school and in their teachers, and they have a clear knowledge and understanding of what is expected of them in the sixth form. As in the main school, satisfactory provision is made for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is good, although there are areas of weakness in aspects of the curriculum, including German, citizenship, religious education in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, and in the programme for personal, social and health education. The provision of a daily act of collective worship does not meet statutory requirements. Teaching is good overall and enables most students to learn and achieve well, but there is some unsatisfactory teaching,

especially in Years 8 and 9. Provision for students with special educational needs is good and the school provides good opportunities and access to all students. Extra-curricular and other enrichment opportunities are good and are particularly good in sport. The school's care, welfare, health and safety of its students are good. Links with parents are effective and those with the community and other schools and colleges are very good. Resources and accommodation are satisfactory.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. It is better in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form than in Years 7 - 9, where there is some unsatisfactory teaching. The assessment of students' work is good in most subjects.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge effectively to provide a variety of interesting and challenging activities for students.
- The teaching in science and history is very good overall.
- In some lessons, the unsatisfactory behaviour of small groups of students hinders the learning of others in the class.
- The teaching of German and personal, social and health education is mostly unsatisfactory.

Commentary

22. The table below indicates the quality of teaching seen across the school. The teaching is good or better in seven out of ten lessons in the main school and in over three-quarters of lessons in the sixth form. Across the school as a whole, about a quarter of the teaching is very good and some is excellent. The teaching in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form is slightly better than the teaching in Years 7 - 9, where there is a higher proportion of less than satisfactory teaching, mainly in Years 8 and 9. The teaching of German and in the personal, social and health education lessons held in tutor time is mostly unsatisfactory.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 143 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
7 (5%)	30 (21%)	66 (46%)	33 (23%)	6 (4%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)

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

23. The quality of teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection, when it was good or better in only a third of lessons. As part of its approach to raising standards, the school has successfully embraced the recommendations of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy, having been part of the initial pilot project. Most teachers have implemented the three-part structure to lessons. This includes a starter activity, focused individual, paired or group activities to meet the learning intentions of the lesson, and a concluding whole-class activity to check what learning has taken place and to outline what is to follow in subsequent lessons. In some subjects, there is good use of small whiteboards to enable teachers to check students' understanding quickly.

24. Teachers' subject knowledge is generally good and they use this knowledge well to plan work that meets the needs of different groups of students in the class and provides them with appropriately challenging work. The range of activities provided and the teaching methods employed are in most cases successful in engaging students' interest and involvement. Teachers generally make it clear to students what they are to learn in the lesson, although in some instances, where the

planning identifies activities to be undertaken rather than the knowledge, skills and understanding that are to be developed, students are less clear about the lesson's intentions.

25. Some very good teaching occurs in many subjects across Years 7 - 11. In these lessons, students make very good progress in their learning and achieve very well. Features of these lessons include the provision of challenging work, a brisk pace and teachers ensuring that students are fully involved and contributing well to the lesson. In a few lessons, for example, in art and design and ICT in Key Stage 3, and in English, science and history in Key Stage 4, some of the teaching is excellent. The characteristics of these lessons include prompt and orderly arrival, clear explanations, skilful management with little time wasted, tasks presented in an interesting and rigorous manner using appropriate resources, and constant praise and reinforcement. As a result, students' attitudes, response and involvement are of a very high order, and lead to very high levels of learning and achievement.

26. The teaching of students with special educational needs is good overall. In most lessons, teachers plan well for the needs of these students and effectively deploy teaching assistants. In the best lessons, teaching assistants take an active part in the process of teaching and learning. This occurred in a good Year 9 geography lesson, where students were studying coastal processes.

27. In a number of lessons, the quality of learning is not as good as the quality of teaching. In these lessons, there is a close correlation between the unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour of a small number of students in the class and the quality of learning in the class as a whole. In many cases, teachers are adept in managing this behaviour and use the school's discipline procedures effectively. Nevertheless, this disaffection does sometimes impair the learning of others in the class. In other lessons, teachers are less skilful in handling the inappropriate behaviour of a small minority of students or in establishing clear expectations; in such cases, the learning and achievement of students are unsatisfactory and occasionally poor.

28. Most teachers have good relationships with their classes and in many cases these positive relationships promote real enthusiasm for the subject, for example, in history. Most students work effectively in pairs and small groups, helping one another or extending their ideas and overcoming problems. Teaching is usually adjusted well to take account of the differing needs and capabilities of the class and teaching assistants provide good support to individuals and groups of students. Homework supports the work covered in lessons satisfactorily.

29. In general, subject teaching does not do enough to support students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There are many examples where these elements of the students' personal development are raised and enhanced, but this is not always planned for explicitly in lessons or sufficiently co-ordinated across the school. Similarly, aspects of citizenship are not well-enough identified or covered explicitly. Many teachers make a good contribution to developing students' literacy skills, giving appropriate attention to specialist terminology and key words, and to the development of reasoned argument.

30. Students' progress is assessed regularly in most subjects and the outcomes shared with students. Day-to-day assessment and marking by teachers are generally accurate and in most cases informative and encouraging, showing students what they need to do to improve. Occasionally, as in German, the marking lacks rigour and fails to give students guidance on how they can improve their work. In some subjects, for example, science and history, marking is more spasmodic.

31. Assessment data are used well to track students' progress and this is effective in setting targets for improvement. The whole-school assessment systems are comprehensive, thorough and rigorous, although not all subject areas use them as effectively as they might in setting targets - for example, religious education. Assessment procedures in German, citizenship and personal, social and health education are unsatisfactory.

32. The use of assessment to plan the next stage of learning and to meet students' needs is variable, although satisfactory overall. On the whole, it is stronger in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 - 9 because teachers are more confident in applying the GCSE criteria than the National Curriculum level descriptions. In general, students have a clear understanding of how well they are doing and of their targets for improvement.

Sixth form

33. Teaching in the sixth form has a number of similar features to those in the main school. All the teaching is at least satisfactory and almost four-fifths of the teaching is good or better, which is a higher proportion than in Years 7 - 11. Students in the sixth form respond well to the good teaching and are making good progress overall. Some of the teaching is very good in English, mathematics, chemistry, art and design and geography, and it is sometimes excellent in ICT.

34. Lessons are carefully planned and the most effective teachers use their very good subject knowledge to make the work accessible and understandable for their students. Most students apply themselves conscientiously and productively to their work. Occasionally, teachers, in their enthusiasm for the subject, talk for too long and do not involve students enough in contributing to the lesson or challenge them sufficiently through questioning them closely. The result is that students are not always actively engaged in learning, especially when group sizes are small. Relationships between students themselves and with their teachers are very positive, which means that students are able to develop their knowledge and understanding effectively in a safe and supportive environment.

35. Teachers mark students' work carefully, regularly and constructively. This gives students a clear understanding of how they stand and what they need to do to make progress. Preparation for examination and revision techniques is good.

The curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory overall and is good in the sixth form. There are good opportunities for extra-curricular and enrichment activities, especially in sport. Accommodation and resources to support the curriculum are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A good range of GCSE, AS, A-level and vocational courses caters for the diversity of students' needs.
- Vocational courses and work-related learning have been successfully introduced.
- There are good opportunities for enrichment and extra-curricular activities, including very good provision for sports.
- Provision for citizenship and personal, social and health education is unsatisfactory.
- Provision for religious education in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form does not meet statutory requirements.
- Specialist school status has led to the provision of a wider range of arts-related courses in the sixth form.
- Arrangements for monitoring the development of key skills in the sixth form are unsatisfactory.

Commentary

36. The curriculum has several strong features as well as some areas of weakness. It is inclusive and caters well for the diversity of the student population. The school meets National Curriculum requirements, with the exception of citizenship and in the use of ICT in music. Students do not have the opportunity to participate in a daily act of collective worship, and in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, students do not follow a specific course in religious education that covers the

requirements of the Agreed Syllabus. Consequently, the school's provision in these areas does not meet statutory requirements.

37. The school offers a good range of GCSE examination courses for students. These include a variety of courses in science and the reintroduction of an examination course in physical education. Geology and environmental science are offered as after-school classes for a small group of students in Years 9 and 10, which support both science and geography well. A group of fast-track students are well challenged by sitting GCSE mathematics in Year 10 and starting their AS-level studies in Year 11. The school has been successful in introducing a range of double and single vocational courses in science, ICT and business, which enables some students to achieve the equivalent of 14 GCSE passes. A few students in Year 10 are appropriately placed on a work-related learning and basic skills programme. The school keeps the curriculum under constant review to ensure that it meets the needs of all students. Innovations to the curriculum over recent years have enabled more students to qualify for entry into the sixth form.

38. The overall curriculum provision for students with special educational needs is good and contributes to the school's aims of providing an inclusive education. Students with special educational needs have good access to the full range of curriculum experiences. Teaching assistants are particularly attentive to the needs of students with physical disabilities, ensuring that they can move between lessons around the school site with no difficulty. The base for the learning support department provides good teaching, storage and office space. The learning support department is beginning to use a commercially produced interactive software package to improve basic literacy skills, but is aware of the need to expand the use and range of such resources.

39. The provision for citizenship does not meet requirements and the arrangements for the personal, social and health education programme are unsatisfactory in all year groups, but particularly in Years 7 - 9. These aspects are covered during the afternoon registration and tutorial period of 15 minutes, which allows insufficient time for students to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding adequately. Facilities for teaching ICT as a separate subject have improved since the last inspection but its use to support teaching and learning in other subjects remains variable. Some students have the opportunity to take two languages in Years 8 and 9.

40. A good range of opportunities exists for students to enrich and extend their personal and academic development. There is a high level of participation in a range of sports and staff give generously of their time. High standards have been recognised by the Sportsmark Award. A good range of visits supports individual subjects, such as those to Germany and the world war battlefields in France. There is a varied programme of visits to theatres and art galleries, local and residential field work, and opportunities to participate in the national Maths Challenge competition. Every day during the Easter holidays, revision classes are offered for GCSE and A-level examinations, as well as for the national tests at the end of Year 9. Both parents and students express a high level of satisfaction with the school's provision. Extra-curricular music activities, however, have been curtailed at present by the focus on a single major school musical production. Summer school activities provide good links with the primary schools.

41. Overall, there are sufficient teachers with qualifications and experience to meet the needs of the curriculum. They are appropriately deployed in their specialist subjects and careful attention is paid to their recruitment and retention. The number of learning support assistants is good and they contribute substantially to the progress being made by students with special educational needs. Technical support in science and design and technology is good.

42. The overall provision for accommodation and resources is satisfactory. There is good accommodation for mathematics, design and technology and physical education. The specialist ICT rooms are now of a good standard and the school benefits from a new multi-media room. Space for the teaching of music is unsatisfactory. The external areas suffer from a lack of greenery and a drab appearance. Students do not care sufficiently for the dining room environment and leave unacceptably large quantities of litter around the building. The school library and the resources for the teaching of most subjects are satisfactory.

Sixth form

43. The school itself offers a good range of AS and A-level courses. Joint arrangements with local schools as part of a Federation have extended this provision to include, for example, courses in sports studies and psychology. The Federation has also increased the viability of some groups, although many groups still have fewer than five students. The provision of vocational courses in ICT and business has enabled more students to gain access to post-16 courses. The school has achieved an Artsmark award and has successfully introduced subjects such as photography, dance, drama and media studies into the curriculum. Students do not follow a course in religious education, which is a breach of statutory requirements. There is no separate teaching of key skills and cross-curricular provision of key skills is not monitored closely enough.

44. There is good provision for enrichment and extra-curricular activities and both parents and students see this as a strong feature of the sixth form. The Sportsmark award reflects the high level of participation by students in a wide range of sports. Students are able to develop leadership skills in training and in coaching younger students. Fieldwork and a programme of cultural visits support the curriculum well and staff provide good support for examination preparation.

45. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory. Teaching staff are well qualified to teach in their specialist areas at A-level or on the vocational courses. Sixth form and study centre accommodation has been refurbished and students use the library well. Access to ICT facilities has improved since the last inspection. The quantity and quality of teaching resources are satisfactory.

Care, guidance and support

Standards of care, health and safety are good. All students, including those in the sixth form, receive good support, advice and guidance from their teachers. There are good arrangements for involving students in the school's work and development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Some targeted students are well supported by the pupil performance coaching scheme.
- The improved provision provides good support and advice for students in the sixth form, which ensures that their choice of course is appropriate.
- Students relate well to their teachers with whom they have a good and trusting relationship.
- The successful peer mentoring arrangements contribute well to the pastoral care and support of students.
- Students effectively contribute their views through the school council and student representation on the governing body.
- Good induction arrangements ensure that students settle quickly into the school in Year 7.

Commentary

46. The school has good procedures for ensuring the safety and well being of students. The statutory requirements for health and safety are fully met through regular monitoring and risk assessments. Procedures and rewards to promote good behaviour and academic progress are well established, but they are not always implemented consistently. Child protection procedures meet requirements, and all staff are aware of their responsibilities. There are good arrangements, including efficient filters, to ensure that students are protected when using the Internet. The good relationships, and the school's supportive ethos, help to raise students' self-esteem and confidence, which contribute to the good progress they make and to enhancing their personal development.

47. Students feel confident that staff, especially the headteacher, form tutors and heads of year, know them well, and that their progress and achievements are monitored and assessed well. They understand the school's good system for setting targets. Through regular tutorials with subject and form tutors, they are effectively involved in deciding their own targets. Students with special

educational needs, including those with physical disabilities, receive good support and are fully integrated into all aspects of school life. Good support is provided for identified students by the performance coaching scheme, which is successful in helping a significant number of students to re-focus their efforts, gain confidence and to develop a sense of self-worth.

48. All students with special educational needs have effective individual education plans, which form the basis of support in lessons by teachers and teaching assistants. Good progress has been made on this issue, which was an area of concern at the time of the last inspection. They are used well to monitor the achievement of students through regular review processes. Teaching assistants review the progress of students on a regular basis with the co-ordinator for special educational needs, when the welfare and safety of students are also considered. Good opportunities for personal development are available for students through a lunchtime club, which allows them access to the new computer/software support package. Additional support is given to students with behavioural problems by the senior teaching assistant, with the result that the overall care for students with special educational needs is good.

49. There are good induction arrangements for students entering Year 7, including the sharing of information from the primary schools, well organised exchange visits and involvement in a number of joint activities. The system of trained peer mentors in all year groups has effectively extended the school's good provision for pastoral care. Students in Year 9 are well advised when making their subject choices for GCSE examinations through tutorial discussions and joint interviews with their parents. The provision for careers education is satisfactory and is supported effectively by the Connexions Service and opportunities for work experience in Year 10. Careers education is linked closely to the provision for personal, social and health education, but insufficient time is allocated to ensure that students, especially in Year 9, take part in regular well-planned activities to help them to make informed career choices.

50. The school has good systems in place to involve students in its work and development. These include the use of questionnaires and interviews with students, as well as more formal mechanisms through the school council. The school council, with representatives from each year group, provides a good opportunity for some students to develop their communication and organisational skills and to make an important contribution to the life of the school. The majority of students feel that the school listens to their views, but there are a few who do not feel empowered to make a difference.

Sixth form

51. The good relationships that students have with their teachers are maintained well throughout their time in the sixth form. Since the last inspection, the school has reviewed its induction arrangements and now ensures that students are well advised about their chosen courses. The majority of students feel that they are well supported and appreciate the informed advice and guidance they receive for individual courses in school or as part of the Federation with other schools. Form tutors know their groups of students very well and provide them with good pastoral care and encouragement. Students are given up-to-date guidance on managing the demands of A-level courses and are set personal and academic targets, which are reviewed regularly.

52. Students in Years 12 and 13 feel that their views are valued and they are involved effectively in the work of the school through taking a leading role on the school council and the sixth form council. A strong feature of the school is that elected students represent the school as members of the governing body. Students in the sixth form provide good support for younger students and are willingly involved in regular peer mentoring. This makes a strong contribution to developing good relationships and establishing those in the sixth form as senior students in the school. Although students are encouraged to become independent citizens, insufficient emphasis is placed on developing their skills in independent study.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has established a good partnership with parents. The very good links with the community and other schools enrich the curriculum and students' experiences.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The majority of parents are supportive and have a very positive view of the school.
- The school provides parents with a good amount of helpful information about the curriculum, activities and organisation through regular communications.
- The reports and termly reviews are good and ensure that parents are kept well informed about students' targets and progress.
- The parents of students with a statement of special educational needs are involved well in annual reviews.
- The very good community links and partnership with other schools enrich the curriculum.

Commentary

53. The contribution of parents to the work of the school is good and has a positive impact on students' attitudes and achievements. Some parents provide valuable help with extra-curricular activities by assisting when students go out on visits. The Association of Chauncy Friends (ACF) is active in providing additional resources for the school. The school seeks parents' views through questionnaires and discussions at open days, consultation evenings and Year 7 taster days. All these events are well attended by parents.

54. The parents of pupils with special educational needs are now adequately involved in the provision of statements and individual education plans and in the review of these plans. At the time of the last inspection, this was identified as an issue and good progress has been made in improving the situation. The school takes good steps to secure the attendance of parents at the annual review meeting for those students with a statement of special educational need. There is a very valuable induction visit for Year 6 students with special educational needs in the summer term. This provides appropriate familiarisation with the site layout and school routines.

55. Parents receive regular and helpful information about the curriculum and organisational matters. The termly newsletter, *Chauncy News*, celebrates the work of the school and students' achievements. The school's website contains a good range of attractively presented and up-to-date information. Although some parents do not feel well informed about progress, the school's reporting procedures are good. The reviews, which are provided three times a year, give clear information about students' targets and achievement grades. Parents are kept well informed of developments regarding the support and progress of students with a statement of special educational need.

56. Community links are very good, and the school has worked hard to establish itself as a community school, both before gaining Arts College status and since. The school's accommodation is used for a wide range of sports and arts activities, and local clubs are regular users of the school's facilities. Students provide regular support for a number of local and national charities. Support from the community includes local businesses, which provides work placements for students in Year 10 and organise a series of job applications and mock interviews for students in Year 11. A range of visitors from the community provide practical support for students' work and experience in many areas of the curriculum, including A-level courses and other activities.

57. The school has developed very good links with the large number of contributory primary schools. These include the sharing of information and well-organised induction activities, a summer school for junior-aged pupils from local schools, French, ICT and technology days, as well as classes in a number of subjects for pupils in Years 5 and 6 throughout the year. In addition, the art and design department has worked with a local infants' school and has organised a series of family learning activities in art for parents and their children on Saturday mornings. Links with other

secondary schools, especially through the sixth form Federation, and with the local college of Further Education, are productive.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall, leadership and management are both good. The headteacher gives very good leadership to a committed team of key staff, resulting in substantial improvements in standards and provision in recent years. Governance is good, contributing to the school's vision and direction and maintaining a very good balance between challenge and support for the senior staff. Management is effective, with well-embedded structures for self-evaluation and continuing professional development. Financial management is good. Some statutory requirements are not met, however.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher's very good leadership and high aspirations have already brought about substantial improvements.
- The school's inclusiveness and concern for individual students are very evident.
- The leadership and management of key staff are good, creating a very strong sense of teamwork and commitment.
- The governing body plays a particularly strong role in contributing to the school's strategic direction and supporting and challenging senior managers.
- Statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship and for religious education in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form are not met.
- Proposals in the school improvement plan are not costed.

Commentary

58. The leadership of the headteacher is very good. He has a very clear vision for the school and very effectively involves staff, governors and students in its development. A very strong commitment to inclusion and the welfare of every student is embodied in his innovative approach to the curriculum, teaching and learning. Standards have risen substantially since his appointment, but he and other key staff are determined to raise them further for all students. Strategic planning has enabled the school to develop into a visual arts specialist college, enriching the curriculum and opening it to the wider community. Self-evaluation is continual and rigorous, identifying areas for further improvement. The members of the school management team and subject and pastoral leaders work hard and provide very good role models for their teams.

59. Leadership by the special educational needs co-ordinator is good. It engenders very good teamwork and a good sense of shared aims. This is helped by the regular monitoring meetings with teaching assistants in which the co-ordinator reviews the progress and achievement of all those students on the register. The co-ordinator is very well supported by the senior teaching assistant and other teaching assistants. Good management has produced the effective co-ordination of human and learning resources and provides continuing good access for all students. The monitoring of teaching and learning is at an early stage but is beginning to provide good quality data for planning further improvement. The departmental plan is well conceived and gives clear strategies for improving provision. Since the last inspection, improvement in the school's provision for pupils with special educational needs has been good.

60. Governance is good overall. The governing body plays a very strong role in shaping the vision and direction of the school, attending the annual school conferences and keeping policy under review. Curricular changes are fully discussed and closely monitored. Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, members having been trained in data analysis and lesson observation. Open and comprehensive information from the school enables them to both challenge and support the senior staff. They have good awareness of the school's work through regular reports and their links to subject departments. They have not ensured, however, that the provision for a daily act of collective worship and for religious education in Years 10

and 11 and the sixth form meets statutory requirements. Despite these breaches, the governors make a considerable contribution to the school's development.

61. The school is well managed. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and the school's priorities for improvement. The quality of teaching and learning is very well monitored through a well-established performance management process that is clearly focused on improving students' achievement. Staff are provided with appropriate training to develop their management and teaching skills. Those new to the school are very well inducted and there is a low turnover of staff from year to year.

62. Financial management is good. A very effective finance officer ensures that the budget is administered correctly, keeps detailed, up-to-date records of income and expenditure and carefully monitors all accounts. The headteacher and governors are well informed and able to monitor the budget and to consider and approve both routine and developmental expenditure plans. The lack of detailed costing in school improvement plans is a weakness in financial management, however. A large balance carried forward from the previous year was appropriately used to upgrade the school's ICT resources in the current financial year. Strategies for longer-term budget planning are currently being developed.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	2,462,505	Balance from previous year	95,528
Total expenditure	2,350,626	Balance carried forward to the next	207,407
Expenditure per pupil	3,898		

Sixth form

63. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The assistant headteacher with responsibility for the sixth form has a very clear view of how it should develop and has implemented a number of changes to improve the quality of provision and to bring greater rigour to aspects of its work. He communicates his views well to his colleagues, both staff with specific pastoral roles as well as those with subject teaching roles. Subject leadership and management are generally good and in some subjects very good. There is very good use of performance data and the academic progress of students is monitored well. As in the main school, self-evaluation is undertaken rigorously on a regular basis.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good achievement by students in all years has led to improved standards in national tests and GCSE examinations.
- Teachers' very good planning provides a coherent programme of study for all students.
- The subject is very well led and management is very good.
- In most lessons, teachers insist on good behaviour and they have high expectations to which the students respond well.
- Teachers' enthusiasm is infectious and relationships with students are positive.
- In a small number of lessons, the management of time and learning is not effective enough.

Commentary

64. In the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003, standards were below the national average but close to the average of schools with similar prior attainment. Work seen during the inspection shows that students' literacy skills are below average on entry, but by Year 9, the overall standard is in line with national expectations, indicating good achievement. Most students speak clearly and listen well to the teacher, but not always to each other. They write perceptive character studies and summaries of their reading books, and their original writing for a variety of purposes is often lively and entertaining. The most capable students write with sophisticated style and vocabulary. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in their understanding of demanding texts, such as *Macbeth*.

65. In the GCSE English examination in 2003, the results were in line with the national average, with the gap between the performance of girls and boys being similar to the national one. In English literature, the results were above the national average, and boys attained nearly as highly as girls did. In view of their below average standards at the start of the course, the students made good progress. In students' current work, standards overall are in line with the national expectation by Year 11 and their achievement is good. Students speak at greater length and listen well to each other in most lessons. They read a range of literature with understanding and appreciation. They are able to explain the techniques used in persuasive writing and in films. A Year 11 class made good progress in their understanding of an unfamiliar poem, *Nothing's Changed*. Written work on novels and plays shows a sound grasp of plot and character, and the more capable students make perceptive comments on the impact of language, justifying them with apt quotations. In their original writing, most students improve in length and accuracy during the course and many can adapt their style to suit purpose and readership.

66. Students' attitudes and response are good overall in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. They generally arrive promptly and are ready for work. In the majority of lessons, they are fully engaged because the teacher's enthusiasm is infectious. Through encouraging them to think seriously about issues such as animal welfare and social justice, English makes a valuable contribution to students' development as young citizens. In Years 10 and 11, behaviour is more variable. In one Year 10 lesson, poor behaviour seriously impeded learning, whilst in a Year 11 lesson, attitudes and responses were exemplary.

67. Teaching and learning are good overall throughout the school, and some very good, and occasionally excellent, teaching was seen in several lessons. Teachers' very thorough planning enables students to build on existing skills and knowledge and provides a good variety of activities that holds their interest and involvement. High expectations of behaviour and achievement establish good pace and purpose in most lessons. In a few, firmer management is needed to enable students to achieve more. Well chosen starter activities quickly engage the students, although in some lessons these take too much time so that the main task is not completed. Teachers' good subject knowledge gives students confidence in them and broadens their awareness. Effective management and good knowledge of individuals ensure that all are actively learning. Visual aids provide a good focus for close exploration of texts. Relationships are purposeful and cordial, with humour and praise providing high motivation. Marking is regular and constructive, and students usually respond well to advice. Teachers have good partnerships with teaching assistants, enabling students with special educational needs to make good progress with carefully chosen tasks.

68. The detailed scheme of work provides students with a broad variety of language-based activities and enables them to study a stimulating selection of prose, plays, poetry and non-fiction, as well as media studies and oral work. The curriculum is enriched with theatre visits, poetry days and visits by authors. In Years 10 and 11, all students have the opportunity to take both English and English literature.

69. The English department is very well led, so staff work very effectively as a team and they are committed to the achievement of all students. The head of department provides an excellent role model for teachers and students. New teachers and those from other departments are given clear direction and advice. The recommendations of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy have been implemented well. The whole school staff has been provided with helpful guidelines on developing literacy across the curriculum. Management is also very effective. The quality of planning is very good. Assessment is used very well to track group and individual progress and to establish the department's priorities. Reports provide students and their parents with clear advice on progress and improvement. High quality displays throughout the department create a stimulating background to English lessons.

70. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Attainment is higher in Year 9 and in GCSE literature, particularly for boys. The overall quality of teaching is better, and tasks are now appropriate to students' differing abilities.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

71. There is a clear whole-school drive to raise standards of literacy through teaching in all subjects. Classrooms have attractive displays of key words, and teachers strongly encourage the correct use of subject vocabulary. Many subjects give good opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills, for example, giving spoken evaluations of the students' work in art and design or design and technology. Studying a good variety of texts and conducting research on the Internet contribute to students' reading skills, although few students were heard to read aloud. History and ICT provide a wide range of writing tasks. Standards of literacy are average overall and most students have sufficient skill to cope with the demands of the curriculum. In science and geography, however, students with low levels of literacy find that this makes the subjects difficult to study.

Modern foreign languages

All students begin the study of French in Year 7. Those students who have not experienced French in their primary school follow a six-week fast-track course. Two groups of higher-attaining students begin German in Year 8 and continue with it into Year 9. Some students are disapplied from the National Curriculum in Year 10, but the remainder choose either French or German for their GCSE course. Numbers taking German are small, although there are more students taking the subject in Year 10 this year.

French

Provision in French is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching helps students to achieve well.
- Students' attitudes and behaviour are good.
- Not all students complete corrections to improve the accuracy of their work.
- Excellent displays enhance learning in the classrooms.

Commentary

72. Teachers' assessments of students' attainment at the end of Year 9 in 2003 show that standards were below average. Girls performed better than boys. Students' current work shows that standards are in line with national expectations by Year 9. Concentration on tenses and key words is helping to raise standards, and the quality of written work is good. Most students in Year 9 are familiar with the perfect tense. Higher-attaining students use it accurately in extended writing, in conjunction with the future tense, to write about their exchange visit, for example, whilst lower-attaining students write individual sentences about household tasks with varying accuracy. Higher-attaining students in Year 8 already have a good command of the perfect tense. Students' understanding of the foreign language used in the classroom is good, because teachers use it consistently. Students' speaking and pronunciation are satisfactory. Students achieve well, because over time they acquire a wide range of topic vocabulary, particularly key words, and constructions and tenses. Gifted students and students with special educational needs make good progress.

73. In the GCSE examinations in 2003, the results at grades A*-C and A*-G were close to the national averages. Boys performed better than boys nationally; but in contrast, girls' attainment was lower than that of girls nationally. Girls performed better in all other subjects than in French. The standard of students' current work indicates that by Year 11 their attainment is in line with expectations. Students' achievement is good and they acquire a wide range of topic vocabulary, constructions and tenses over time. Higher-attaining students in Year 11 write accurately about different topics, which include present, past and future events and opinions. Average-attaining students are less consistently accurate. Oral tasks are supported well in writing. Students in Year 10 practise, with consistent regularity, the way in which tenses work.

74. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have a solid knowledge of their subject and they use the foreign language consistently and effectively in the classroom to challenge students. Planning includes a variety of activities and skills, which engage students' interest and help them to maintain concentration. They work productively and at a good pace. Resources are used well, particularly the mini whiteboards, which inject pace into lessons and make students think, as well as providing teachers with a good assessment of students' learning. Teachers make a good contribution to students' literacy with their systematic coverage of grammar. Homework is set regularly and the marking of students' written work is good, giving helpful comments and targets. However, too few students complete corrections in order to improve their accuracy.

75. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The two French teachers who have taken on joint leadership of the subject have only been in post since the beginning of the academic year. They also have additional duties within the school, and these enable them to bring their respective skills to strengthen their role within the department. Examples of students' work, key words and key verbs on display in all classrooms make an excellent contribution to the celebration of students' achievement and to learning in lessons. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

German

Provision in German is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching fails to capture students' enthusiasm and students underachieve.
- Marking lacks rigour and fails to show all students how to improve.
- The monitoring of students' work and of teaching and learning has been unsatisfactory.

Commentary

76. German is the school's second modern foreign language, which students begin in Year 8. Standards overall are below the level expected because the work is not challenging enough. By Year 9, students' attainment is below the standards expected nationally. Understanding is generally the students' best skill: in two lessons, students completed listening exercises successfully. Students in Year 9 all spoke one sentence in German to answer the register: they spoke fairly confidently, with quite good pronunciation. In other lessons, opportunities to speak or to read aloud are limited. A girl in Year 9 gave a good PowerPoint presentation about herself, which found favour with the other students, who applauded. However, the standard of writing of the other students in the class varied considerably and showed that basic principles had not been mastered - for example, expressing dates of birthdays in writing and in speaking. Students' progression in writing is not marked by an increase in accuracy, although the work of one girl in Year 9 was of a good standard, with accurate use of the past tense and a good range of relevant vocabulary. Inconsistent and inaccurate marking fails to identify some mistakes or to give students clear advice about improvement. Achievement is unsatisfactory, as progress over time is patchy and progress in class is limited.

77. In the GCSE examination in 2003, taken by a small group of students, the results at grades A*-C were above the national average. Current standards are much lower than these results would indicate. No lessons were seen in Year 11. From the very limited evidence available in their books, the work of a small number of boys taking German in Year 11 is close to the standard expected nationally. However, the work of a much larger group of students in Year 10, seen in lessons and in their books, is below the level expected for pupils of this age and lower than expected when account is taken of their earlier attainment. Students' progress over time is patchy because of weaknesses in teaching and learning. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory. Students read aloud reasonably confidently and with quite good pronunciation. In a Year 10 lesson, students participated in role-play in pairs, but their understanding of the phrases and of the activity were limited because the task had not been sufficiently explained or practised. Students lacked confidence when reading aloud, and their responses to oral work using flash cards were very short, because the teacher did not encourage them to extend their answers. Overall, students make limited progress in writing because inaccuracies are allowed to go uncorrected. Standards of presentation vary too much. One mistake made by some students in all years is their inability to write every noun correctly with a capital letter.

78. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory. Teachers' expectations are not high enough, and there is insufficient challenge to students, especially in the development of their skills of oracy. Teaching is directed too much by the teacher, and tasks fail to capture students' enthusiasm, with the result that they remain passive. Lesson planning does not always take into account where different skills are needed, so that sometimes too much time is spent on one task and on a single skill, to the detriment of other skills. Students are, therefore, not productive enough because time in the lesson is not used to best advantage. Marking lacks rigour and fails to show students how to improve.

79. Leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory because there has been insufficient monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning and of students' written work to ensure that the provision for German compares favourably with that for French. Improvement since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in GCSE examinations are above average and are better than those in most other subjects.
- Leadership and management are very effective, with a very strong sense of purpose.
- Teaching and learning are good so that students' achievement is good in both key stages.
- The behaviour of a few students is unsatisfactory because they have lost interest and motivation.
- The provision of mathematics across the curriculum is patchy.

Commentary

80. Students' results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were just above the national average. Their performance compares very favourably with that of students in similar schools. Girls achieved better results than boys in 2003 but not in previous years. The GCSE examination results in 2003 were above average and better than those in most other subjects. The early entry Year 10 group achieved very good results in the GCSE examinations. Girls also achieved better GCSE results than boys in 2003 but there is no significant difference in the standards of boys and girls in the current Year 11. Students achieve well in mathematics throughout their time in school because teaching and learning are effective. Test and examination results are confirmed by the standard of work seen in lessons and in students' work. Students enter the school at a below average level in mathematics, reach a broadly average standard by the end of Year 9 and are above average overall by Year 11. The very strong leadership and management of the department are key factors in generating both this feature and the improving Year 9 test and GCSE examination results year-on-year.

81. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers are enthusiastic and plan lessons effectively so that students acquire knowledge and understanding steadily. They involve students well and, in the best lessons, draw out, and then use, answers from students to enhance their learning very effectively. For example, in a very good Year 9 lesson on solving simultaneous equations, the teacher's very skilful questioning technique encouraged students to suggest a range of approaches, thereby broadening their understanding of the topic markedly. The pace of lessons is rapid and teachers have high expectations of what students can tackle. On occasions, though, the time allocated to explore students' perceptions is cut short and opportunities are missed. Teachers have a keen eye on test and examination requirements so that students are fully versed in developing appropriate techniques to maximise their success. They emphasise the correct use of mathematical terms so that students apply these correctly. The department has implemented the National Key Stage 3 strategy successfully and is using its methods effectively through all years. The teaching of students on the work-related learning course is particularly good. For example, Year 10 students used cones on the playground to investigate co-ordinates and translations practically, with great interest and success. Although teachers mostly manage students' behaviour well, there are a few disaffected boys in lower sets that remain insufficiently engaged. Teachers provide effective support for students with special educational needs so that they progress as well as other students. Teachers mark students' work conscientiously and give helpful comments to improve their understanding.

82. Leadership of the department is very good. There is a very positive sense of purpose aimed at raising students' achievement. Teachers work very well together as a team. Well thought out curricular innovations have been established to improve students' learning and achievement. For example, the early GCSE entry for some students in Year 10, followed by AS level work in Year 11, is raising standards considerably. Management of the department is also very good. There is extensive monitoring of data on students' performance in tests, and elsewhere, so that aspects of

work where students have difficulty are pinpointed and tackled. The commitment to staff development is strong and support for new members of staff is very positive. There has been very good progress since the last inspection. Results at the end of Year 9 and in the GCSE examinations are much improved. There is considerably more scope for students to talk about mathematics than at the time of the last inspection. The scheme of work is far better. Monitoring of the department is much more effective. The accommodation is now very good and enhances students' learning.

Mathematics across the curriculum

83. Students' mathematical skills are sufficient to enable them to make satisfactory progress in all areas of the curriculum. Teachers have attended two training days and a whole-school policy guides practice across departments. Whilst some departments make good use of mathematics, a few miss opportunities to highlight appropriate applications in their subject. Provision is good in geography, design and technology and ICT. It is unsatisfactory in history and art and design. Students' competencies are above average when handling data, such as population statistics in geography and design surveys in design and technology. They also have above average geometric skills in map work in geography. Students' use of mathematics is average overall in science. There are weaknesses in handling data and shape and space in ICT.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership creates a department which presents students with a consistent view of science.
- Nearly all the teaching is very good and occasionally excellent.
- The school chooses courses which meet students' needs very well.
- Unsatisfactory literacy skills are a barrier to learning for many students.
- The resources in science are old and in some cases do not work: very little ICT equipment is available in laboratories.

Commentary

84. When students enter the school, their attainment in science is below average. In the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003, the school's results were below the national average but were in line with the results of similar schools. In lessons, standards in Years 7 - 9 are broadly as expected for most students, although some achieve well and sometimes very well in Year 9. This picture reflects the rising standards of the last few years. Achievement in Years 7 - 9 is good.

85. Comparisons with national standards in examinations in Year 11 are difficult because only one group of students takes the GCSE examination in double award science. The remainder take a General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) course in science at either Intermediate or Foundation level. Discussion with students and observations in lessons indicate that these courses have been very successful because much of the work is assessed within the school. Students are well motivated to succeed, and the school's own evaluation provides good evidence that more students are successful, and at higher levels, than when all students took the GCSE examination. Overall, standards in science by the end of Year 11 are in line with national expectations.

86. In Years 10 and 11, the most capable students produce some superb work, which shows a high level of understanding of how scientists approach their work. They collect good data in lessons, record it accurately and know how to interpret it. They present it well, often using the excellent ICT facilities available to them in school. In a very good lesson in double award science, for example, students were developing resources for revision for presentation to the rest of the class. In both the GNVQ classes seen, the work was very closely matched to the requirements for assessment. A

particular strength is the way students use the GNVQ assessment criteria to refine their work and improve their understanding. Overall, therefore, achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good.

87. Teaching overall is very good and underpins the good achievement seen in many lessons. Teaching in almost all lessons was very good and occasionally excellent, but it was unsatisfactory in one Year 7 lesson. Teachers manage lessons very well, making them interesting by using a good variety of activities and by making sure that all students are involved in learning. They help students to understand what they need to do to improve, and support them well in their work. Very good ICT support was seen in a Year 11 GNVQ class. However, poor literacy skills sometimes prevent some students from doing as well as they could, and for these students achievement is not as good as it could be.

88. Leadership and management of the department are very good and there is a clear vision for the future. The curriculum has been carefully chosen; the success of new courses is carefully evaluated and there is a very high level of consistency in the approach to the subject by different teachers. This makes a good contribution to the way students' understanding of science develops, and helps them to achieve well. The resources of the department are managed well, and the laboratory staff provide very good support. The department is currently under-resourced. In particular, despite very good computer facilities elsewhere in the school, arrangements for using ICT in laboratories are unsatisfactory. The school has recently been successful in securing additional funds to improve the science facilities. Since the last inspection, an exciting new curriculum has been implemented and standards are rising. Overall, improvement since the last inspection has been good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are rising throughout the school as a result of increased time in Years 7 - 9 and very good availability of computers.
- ICT is now used to help learning in almost every subject, and is very well used in physical education, science and mathematics.
- The collaboration of key staff is effective in improving the provision in terms of curriculum and teaching approaches.
- Students give too much consideration to technical prowess rather than the relevance and impact of their work on set tasks.

Commentary

89. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2003 show that standards were well above average, with girls doing considerably better than boys. Students in Years 7 - 9 work at the expected levels, having entered the school with below average skills in ICT. Achievement is therefore good. Whereas their technical ability is above average, their ability to apply ICT to meet a range of circumstances is below average. Higher-attaining students create presentations very competently, but give too little attention to the extent to which its visual impact reinforces the intended message. Students with special educational needs achieve well, as they receive close guidance from teachers and teaching assistants.

90. In 2003, the results of the GNVQ course taken by students in Years 10 and 11 were above average, but with a lower than average proportion of distinction grades. A high proportion of students who began the course were not entered for the examination. Work seen in Year 11 lessons and in the scrutiny of work bears out the results already gained by students in the units that they have already covered; at present, standards are below average. Whereas students have a good understanding of the impact of ICT on society, and are making good progress in the technicalities of using a relational database, only higher-attaining students express clearly the reasons for their

designs and evaluate them well in the light of their purpose and context. Girls' performance throughout the school is better than that of boys, especially in their methodical approaches. Although some boys have a very good level of technical skill, they give too little consideration to the research, design and evaluation of their work. A few boys disrupt others' learning when they refuse to turn away from screens to look at demonstrations. The imbalance between process and the application of skills makes students' achievement in Years 10 and 11 satisfactory in relation to their earlier attainment.

91. Teaching is mostly good. Teachers plan very well for the development of the skills of students of all levels of attainment. They work very well in collaboration with teaching assistants to help students with special educational needs. They make lesson objectives clear and give good support to individual students. Teachers' informal assessment is very effective in lessons but written comment on work, which gives students guidance for improvement, is inconsistent. This is better in the GCSE course. Some teachers' planning identifies technical objectives but does not deal well with criteria for its application to different situations. As a result, students tend to value work in relation to their personal preferences rather than the extent to which it meets requirements.

92. Students have good experience of the full range of ICT so that statutory requirements are fully met. The time allocated to the subject has increased, allowing coverage of the requirements of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy and Applied GCSE courses. The department is well led, with responsibilities for different areas in the hands of specialists who work together well. This arrangement has brought about improvements during the past year but their impact remains to be fully realised. The specialists manage the department well, with regular meetings to maintain consistency for all students throughout the school. Assessments in Year 9 monitor the areas of strengths and weakness, on which the department is taking action. The most successful aspect of management is the organisation of the use of ICT in other subjects, made possible by very good new equipment in well arranged classrooms.

93. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. All staff have good subject knowledge. The department is monitoring and taking action on areas for improvement, and the use of ICT across the curriculum has increased substantially.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

94. The use of ICT across the curriculum has improved greatly as a result of the improvement in teachers' knowledge and the increased availability of both rooms and equipment. ICT is used appropriately in most subjects, except music and religious education, with very well planned use in mathematics and very good impact on learning in physical education. A GNVQ science course uses ICT very well. Computer use in design and technology meets the ICT requirement to control events. Students measure physical variables in science and analyse outcomes, but the equipment is old and limited. The ICT department monitors the level and quality of cross-curricular use through a steering group which meets regularly to discuss ways forward. Students who do not have their own computers work in the library or in ICT rooms outside lesson time. These rooms are always busy as students enjoy using ICT.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is very good leadership of the department, with a clear vision for raising standards.
- Students respond with enthusiasm to good and challenging teaching and achieve well.
- Standards are rising and are above the national average by both Year 9 and Year 11.
- There is very good use of assessment in Years 7 to 9 to monitor students' progress.

- The use of ICT is not yet integrated in all year groups.

Commentary

95. In 2003, teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 indicated that standards were average. The performance of girls was considerably higher than that of boys. For both boys and girls, the 2003 results were better than those in 2002, particularly at the higher levels. In the GCSE examinations in 2003, the proportion of students gaining grades A*-C was above the national average. The gap in the attainment of boys and girls narrowed, especially at the higher grades of A*/A.

96. Students have weak geographical skills on entry to the school. By the end of Year 9, standards are in line with the national expectation and their achievement is good. They use technical vocabulary well and have a good understanding of the processes that shape the earth's surface. They understand the main differences between weather and climate. Achievement by the end of Year 11 is also good. Standards of work are in line with the national average overall, but above average for the independent research and fieldwork components. Students understand how planning decisions may adversely affect the environment and are able to analyse the differences between more and less developed countries.

97. Boys achieve as well as girls in class in response to the variety of practical and competitive activities. The achievement of higher-attaining students is good and they are given challenging extension tasks for homework. Students with special educational needs achieve well with the support of teaching assistants and through the individual attention they receive in well managed classes.

98. Teaching overall is good. In all years, students benefit from teachers who have very good subject knowledge and who plan well-structured lessons with varied activities and resources. Students are interested in the subject, work well in groups and respond to the pace of learning set by their teachers. Lessons start briskly with activities that recall earlier learning, and questioning techniques are well used to encourage discussion. Teachers manage students well, including some occasional unsatisfactory behaviour by a small number of students. Homework is used well to extend learning. Assessment is very effective in setting targets for improvement and in tracking students' progress in Years 7 - 9. Self-assessment has been successfully introduced.

99. Students develop satisfactory literacy skills through the reinforcement of key words and the many opportunities for discussion, and there is good development of extended writing in Years 7 - 9. Good teaching of numeracy skills results in the accurate use of graphs and statistics. The use of ICT and Internet research are not yet integrated into all units of work, although the statutory entitlement is met. Citizenship opportunities in the subject are not made explicit. Students' skilled extraction of evidence from world-wide case studies contributes to their good cultural and moral development. There are many opportunities for enrichment through local studies and the after-school GCSE examination classes in geology and environmental science.

100. Leadership of the department is very good. There is a clear vision for the raising of standards, through specific teaching and learning strategies, as well as a drive and enthusiasm to restore a high profile for geography in the school. Both specialist and non-specialist staff work very well as a team. There have been very good improvements in standards, achievement and the quality of teaching since the last inspection. The routine management of the department is efficient.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Well paced and lively teaching engages the interest and enthusiasm of students, so that their achievement is very good overall.
- Very good planning both challenges and supports students of all capabilities.
- Very good leadership of the department has brought about very good improvement in standards and in the curriculum.
- The performance of boys is less good than that of girls overall because girls work more systematically and conscientiously.

Commentary

101. Although the attainment of students entering the school is below average, teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2003 showed that standards were above average. The GCSE examination results were significantly above average in 2003, with a substantial proportion of students gaining the highest grades. Students performed considerably better in history than they did in their other subjects. These results show a very good improvement over previous years when standards were below average. This picture is confirmed by work seen during the inspection. Standards are above the national expectation by Year 9 and well above expectations by Year 11. By Year 9, students understand historical situations and changes. Higher-attaining students link ideas gleaned from their analysis of sources to provide complex and convincing explanations or argument. The majority produce lively writing that demonstrates a keen interest in the subject. Lower-attaining students and students with special educational needs show a good grasp of the main ideas, using materials matched well to their needs with the help of teaching assistants. Achievement of all students by the end of Year 9 is, therefore, good in relation to the development of historical thinking and the means of expression.

102. Students in Year 11 work at very high levels and achieve very well. Most write well organised notes that they use effectively to support their arguments. The highest attainers produce fluent, articulate well-linked arguments. Lower attainers show satisfactory understanding of key ideas in their notes and diagrams, and so their achievement is good in relation to their capability. Girls' performance is generally higher than that of boys, with lower-attaining boys having some incomplete work. Very clear development of historical understanding in Years 10 and 11 brings about achievement that is good overall, with satisfactory achievement of those lower-attaining boys whose commitment is less strong.

103. These improvements are the result of some very good teaching throughout the school. There has been a steep rise in numbers choosing history as a GCSE course and the A-level course has been reintroduced to meet demand. Teachers' very good relationships with students are closely related to lively teaching that promotes real enthusiasm for the subject, except in a small number of lessons where relationships and, therefore, challenge are less good. In one lesson, teaching and learning were unsatisfactory, mainly because the work lacked sufficient challenge and interest, and the behaviour of some students was not managed effectively. Teachers make sure that students know exactly what is required of them, and challenge them to think by asking high quality open-ended and leading questions. They help lower attainers and students with special educational needs through very good co-operation with learning assistants and careful planning to meet the needs of different classes or groups. Teachers generally deal very well with the small minority, mainly of lower-attaining boys, whose behaviour sometimes threatens to disrupt learning. Assessment is systematic, allied to very good marking and feedback to students, so that they have confidence in their work and secure knowledge of how to improve. Teachers plan very thoroughly, to the extent that they include basic stages in source analysis for all students, but higher-attaining students could cope with an earlier concentration on evaluation and drawing conclusions. Teachers make a strong

contribution to students' literacy in their development of reasoned written argument. The use of ICT is still thin, but assists learning where it occurs.

104. Improved standards over the past two years are the result of very good leadership by the head of department, who has inspired and led a review of lesson content and teaching methods. His very good management has brought about a thorough analysis of strengths and weaknesses in learning, on which the department has acted very closely and effectively. Improvement has been very good since the last inspection in planning, teaching, learning and, therefore, in achievement.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The lack of curriculum time in Years 10 and 11 is having a serious impact on standards.
- The contribution made to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.
- Teaching is good and contributes well to students' achievement.
- Students do not receive enough information about what they need to do to improve.

Commentary

105. Religious education is not currently taught in Years 10 and 11, which affects standards adversely. Students do not receive their proper entitlement and, as a consequence, statutory requirements are not met.

106. Standards by Year 9 are average in relation to the requirements of the Hertfordshire LEA Agreed Syllabus. Given students' below average attainment on entry to the school, this represents good achievement. There are some good examples of students achieving well in developing their knowledge and understanding of religious language, principles and concepts. In one lesson, students demonstrated a clear understanding of the importance of the Sikh scriptures. They were able to link their knowledge of religion with their everyday experiences well.

107. Teaching is good in Years 7 - 9. Students develop their knowledge and understanding of religious language, principles and concepts through the teachers' effective use of discussion and questioning. The achievement of students with special educational needs is good because they are provided with effective support and with work to match their specific needs. The use of key words and technical language enables students to improve their speaking and listening skills. Students make good progress as a result of the teacher's good knowledge of the subject and an awareness of the needs of individual students. Teachers manage students' behaviour well and ensure that learning is productive, although on occasions the pace was slower than expected because of the attitudes and behaviour of a small number of students. Teachers have clear expectations of students and challenge them well to extend their understanding. Assessment procedures provide a sound basis for assessing what students know and understand. However, there is no specific assessment of *learning from* religion. Not enough work is done to set detailed targets; consequently, students are unclear about the standards they are reaching and what they need to do to improve.

108. Students' spiritual and moral awareness is good. There are plenty of opportunities in the curriculum to develop these aspects of students' personal development and these are exploited well. Students demonstrate a clear respect for the views, faiths and traditions of each other.

109. The school's arrangements for the leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. The newly appointed head of subject approaches the task with enthusiasm and commitment and is well supported by the school. The current departmental development plan does not identify clearly enough those priorities that will have an impact on raising students' attainment. The systematic monitoring of students' work is slowly being established but is at an early stage of development.

110. In the last inspection report, improving the provision for religious education in Years 7 - 9 and in Years 10 and 11 was identified as a key issue for the school. Since that time, the school has had serious difficulties in recruiting subject staff. Although satisfactory progress has been made in improving the provision for students in Years 7 - 9, it is currently unable to offer religious education in Years 10 and 11. As a result, improvement since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory overall.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good and promote good achievement.
- Teachers know their subject very well and transmit their enthusiasm to the students.
- The curriculum gives students opportunities to work with a wide range of materials.
- Students have very positive attitudes towards their work.
- Students with special educational needs receive good support.
- The GCSE examination results in the graphic products option in 2003 were well below average.
- There is not enough control technology in Years 7 - 9.

Commentary

111. Students enter the school with limited experience of design and technology. Throughout Years 7 - 9, achievement is good and by the end of Year 9, standards are in line with expectations. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2003 show that standards were well below average. However, students' current work, seen in lessons and in their folders, is at the standard expected nationally, indicating that standards are improving. Students work through the design process in a systematic way, developing ideas and applying practical techniques to produce products of good quality in resistant materials, textiles and food. Drawing skills are not developed as well as making skills and some designs lack sufficient detail to show how products will be constructed. Students are not given enough opportunities to learn about systems and control technologies.

112. In the GCSE examinations in 2003, standards were just below the national average. The proportion of boys gaining grades A*-C was above the national average for boys, but girls' results were below the national average for girls. The different design and technology subjects experienced varying success: the results were above average in resistant materials, a little below average in food technology, and well below average in graphic products. The work of students currently in Year 11 is in line with expectations, showing an improvement over the GCSE examination results last year. Students' achievement is good. They have very positive attitudes to their work and spend time after school completing ambitious projects.

113. The quality of teaching and learning is good in both key stages. Teachers have very good command of their subject and have high expectations. They plan lessons well to ensure that students learn through practical experiences and gain the skills and knowledge they need to work safely with tools and equipment. Relationships are very good and students help each other to carry out more difficult techniques. In a Year 11 class, students worked effectively in pairs to overcome the difficulties of working with projects using laminated constructions. Teachers encourage students to be creative and help them to adapt techniques and processes to make unusual designs. Teachers assess GCSE work well. Their examination experience ensures that they can and do give students constructive guidance on ways to improve their grades.

114. The quality of leadership and management is good. In a short time, systems to unify the different options have been introduced. There is a common approach to teaching design skills and the newly introduced rigorous and systematic assessment of work in Years 7 - 9 will ensure that more accurate data on standards are available. Essential policies and safety procedures, together with other useful information, brought together in a comprehensive handbook, underpin the work of the department. Staff are well deployed and technicians provide good support.

115. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards in resistant materials have risen and are above average. Students with special educational needs achieve well as a result of the good support they receive from their teachers. All elements of the curriculum for Years 7 - 9 are linked by a common approach and greater attention to detail ensures that students make products of good quality.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in art and design are improving.
- Effective planning ensures that lessons are well structured and the activities challenging.
- The subject is very popular and participation on examination courses is very high.
- The teaching of the basic skills of drawing and painting is not rigorous enough.
- The standards achieved by boys and the most capable students are not high enough.
- Students have insufficient access to good quality visual resources in classrooms.

Commentary

116. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2003 showed that standards were below the national expectation. The GCSE examination results in the same year were also below the national average. This contrasts with the last inspection during which standards were judged to be above the national average. However, a significant change over recent years has been the rapid growth in the popularity of the subject at examination level. The number of students following the GCSE examination course is now consistently more than double the national figure. Standards are higher than past results suggest and currently are in line with expectations by Year 9 and Year 11. From a generally low starting point when they join the school, students achieve well by Year 9 and Year 11 and develop reasonable skills and confidence in the use of a wide variety of materials, tools and techniques. This is because of knowledgeable, confident and, at best, inspirational teaching, coupled with an imaginative range of work. However, the standards attained by boys continue to be lower than those attained by girls. Also, the proportion of students achieving the highest grades at each key stage is low.

117. The teaching is good overall, and ranges from unsatisfactory to excellent. It is mostly good in Years 7 - 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. The range of subject expertise in the department is very good. Teachers strongly believe that the students can succeed in art and design, even when they have had little success in other subjects. Teaching is adjusted sensitively to take account of the differing abilities of the students. An appropriate balance is achieved between closely prescribed activities and more open-ended tasks. However, more could be done to ensure that basic skills in drawing and painting are rigorously taught and developed. The most effective teaching is characterised by high expectations of students and perceptive observation of their progress to help them improve. A brisk pace in lessons is achieved by giving advice and demonstration, and using interesting stimuli which results in creative activity from students. A consistently good feature is the use made of examples to illustrate a lesson objective. Displays of students' work are used well to show a range of creative solutions to a common problem. For example, while studying Australian

aboriginal painting techniques, students in Year 7 were given the confidence to extend their own explorations of paint and mark making, by being shown the outcomes of experiments carried out by Year 8 students.

118. Students usually sustain their concentration well during frequently lengthy tasks, and a productive atmosphere is enjoyed in most lessons. In some lessons, very poor behaviour by a small number of students slows learning. Day-to-day assessment by teachers is accurate, informative and encouraging. Students generally know how well they are performing and what they must do to improve. Teachers, however, are not sufficiently confident and accurate in carrying out end of key stage assessments.

119. Students' wide ranging research, in lessons and for homework, ensures that they are aware of cultural diversity and some of the influences that have shaped their own visual culture. This is further supported through visits to galleries and museums, for example, The Tate Modern. The students benefit significantly from visits to galleries and museums, the very wide range of extra-curricular activities and opportunities to continue their studies during lunchtime and after school. However, the quality and quantity of visual resources available in classrooms to support the curriculum is limited. The absence of computers within the art department disadvantages students, although some good use is made of shared facilities.

120. Subject leadership is good. The curriculum and the quality of teaching are reviewed regularly. The staff work well as a team and increasingly share effective practice in teaching and learning. Management in the subject is good. Monitoring and evaluation processes ensure that any weaknesses are identified quickly and rectified. The progress that students make is tracked carefully. Groups and individuals are identified for additional support. The school's specialist status as an Arts College has created a momentum for improvement. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Music

Provision in music is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Inconsistent staffing in recent years has had a significant effect on standards and achievement by the end of Year 9 and Year 11.
- Not enough use is made of ICT to meet in full the requirements of the National Curriculum.
- A good number of students enjoy instrumental tuition.
- Extra-curricular activities contribute effectively to whole-school performances.

Commentary

121. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2003 showed that standards were below average, with boys attaining significantly less well than girls. Students' current work by Year 9 is below the standard expected nationally. However, there is evidence from Year 7 and Year 8 work in lessons and in students' books that standards are improving and are closer to the standards expected of students in these year groups. In the GCSE examinations in 2003, taken by six students, the results at grades A*-C were close to the national average, but the small numbers involved makes comparisons with the national figures unreliable. By Year 11, students' attainment in the GCSE course is below average, although the standard of students' practical work in Year 10 is in line with expectations.

122. Students' achievement is satisfactory overall but it is inconsistent across the year groups. In both higher and lower-attaining classes in Year 7, students are more motivated and produce creditable interpretations of graphic scores. However, students in a lower-attaining groups in Year 9 were challenged by the process of organising themselves in practical work and were unable to produce a fluent performance of a simple four-part piece. In Year 10, students are well motivated in

practical sessions but in theoretical sessions, although they can recall the terminology, they are unable to recognise this in the music they listen to. Students in Year 11 find difficulty in explaining the most basic terminology, and levels of traditional note reading and understanding of notation are at a very rudimentary stage. Students with special educational needs are sensitively supported and their achievement is satisfactory.

123. The teaching ranges from unsatisfactory to good and, overall, it is satisfactory. Lesson planning is generally clear and well laid out, although the lesson objectives are not always clearly defined. Students in a Year 7 class made progress as a result of effective lesson planning using a three-part structure to the lesson, which built coherently on initial activities. Some teaching lacks expectation and challenge, particularly with the higher-attaining students. Questions are not sufficiently probing, nor do they encourage students to develop their thinking skills. Tasks are not always targeted appropriately, and in some lessons result in unsatisfactory learning, attitudes and achievement. For example, students in a Year 9 class failed to be motivated by a mundane task and poor behaviour ensued. In a Year 8 lesson, students were unable to relate theory to its practical application on the keyboard, with the result that they made unsatisfactory progress as they were not engaged. Assessment procedures are good, with individual pupil sheets that set out grades and National Curriculum levels.

124. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The head of department has worked hard to produce detailed schemes of work and efficient and detailed assessment procedures. These are helping to raise standards. Instrumental lessons are well organised and instrumental teachers are effectively involved, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Concerts and shows take place regularly and involve a wide range of students. There is no evidence that internal monitoring and self-evaluation systems are having any impact on the department. The department has recently invested in new keyboards and classroom instruments. Despite the introduction of music technology as an A-level examination option, the department is not yet fully satisfying National Curriculum requirements in ICT. It is difficult to make a clear judgement on improvement since the last inspection as there has been such inconsistency in staffing in recent years. However, under the current head of department, standards are slowly improving.

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership is very good and ensures the effective development of the subject.
- Teaching and learning are good; teachers are knowledgeable specialists, good role models and plan well.
- Students' attitudes to learning are very good and they respond well to the high expectations of their teachers.
- Extra-curricular activities, sporting partnerships and links with the community are very good.
- The provision for physical education and sport has been recognised with a Sportsmark Award.
- An emphasis on games in Years 7 - 9 reduces the amount of time spent on other areas of activity.
- Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 are inaccurate and in Years 10 and 11, assessment is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

125. Standards by the end of Year 9 are in line with national expectations. This picture does not match the assessments undertaken by teachers at the end of Year 9 in 2003, which showed that standards were well below average. These assessments are judged to be inaccurate. Since September, the department has reviewed its assessment procedures and, along with developing a baseline assessment of students' attainment on entry to the school, it is now in a better position to

assess and moderate students' attainments more accurately. By the end of Year 11, standards in the core programme are average. In September 2002, a GCSE examination course was reintroduced and in the lessons observed, standards were in line with national expectations.

126. Students achieve well in relation to their attainment on entry to the school and make good progress from year to year. Students with special educational needs are fully included in the physical education programme and achieve well. By the end of Year 9, students perform a range of skills in games with increasing control. They demonstrate a sound understanding of games play and recognise the importance of rules in individual, pair, group and team activities. The higher-attaining students in table tennis anticipate shots and place the ball accurately with consistent control in order to outwit their opponents. Pupils' achievement in basketball in applying skills and techniques in indoor invasion games is restricted by the lack of space and baskets. In Year 7, students achieve well in composing, performing and appreciating rhythmical step patterns and formations in different dance styles. However, in gymnastics, students' sequences lack a range of movement vocabulary, clarity of body shape, fluency and extension, and they do not achieve as well as in other areas of activity.

127. By the end of Year 11 in the core physical education programme, students perform a range of skills in a variety of activities with increased consistency, control and accuracy. In Year 10 rugby, students use advanced techniques and skills, demonstrating a good understanding of the principles of attacking and defending play. Students on the GCSE course and in the Junior Sports Leaders Award group achieve well and make good progress.

128. The quality of teaching and learning is good and sometimes very good. Teachers are knowledgeable specialists, confident in teaching a range of activities. Teachers are good role models and establish very good relationships with the students. As a result, students' attitudes to learning are very good; they respond well to the high expectations made of them, participation is high and behaviour is very good. Lessons are well planned, managed and organised and teachers are implementing the National Key Stage 3 Strategy well. Individual students are catered for well and ICT is used very effectively in a number of lessons to improve students' skills of observation, performance and analysis. Good questioning consolidates and extends learning effectively.

129. Leadership is very good. The head of department has established a shared vision and provides strong curriculum leadership. Management is good and the department has made good progress since the last inspection. The school has achieved a Sportsmark Award in recognition of its provision for physical education and sport and the very good extra-curricular activities and sporting partnerships. Teaching and learning have improved as a result of changes of staff, well planned schemes and units of work, and the development of ICT. Examinations in physical education have been reintroduced and students are able to study for the Junior Sports Leaders award. This is an improving and developing department.

130. The curriculum meets statutory requirements. Students benefit from a wide range of activities, but games dominate the curriculum in Years 7 - 9. The school is successful in many sporting fixtures and events and a number of students compete locally, at county level and nationally. Students' achievements in physical education and sport are also recognised and celebrated at an annual school Sports Awards evening.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is insufficient time in Years 7 - 9 to teach the requirements of the citizenship programme of study and the programme is not sufficiently well planned to meet statutory requirements.

- Teachers are not given enough guidance on the skills, knowledge and understanding to be developed.
- Procedures for recording and reporting students' achievements in Years 7 - 9 are in embryonic form and are currently unsatisfactory.
- Some of the whole-day events and other activities planned by the school have the capacity to make a strong contribution to citizenship.
- Systems for evaluating the quality of teaching and learning are unsatisfactory.

Commentary

131. The school recognises the important contribution that citizenship makes to students' personal and social development. However, the allocation of time in Years 7 - 9, where it is taught during a registration/tutor period of 15 minutes each week, is insufficient to enable students to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding about issues relating to citizenship to an acceptable level. In Years 10 and 11, citizenship is taught with personal, social and health education during one period each week, which is supplemented by additional registration time, as with students in Years 7 - 9. The outline scheme of work for personal, social and health education and citizenship does not clearly identify the topics that are relevant to each area. The scheme of work for citizenship identifies topics to be covered but does not specifically identify teaching approaches, the skills to be developed or how the three strands of the programme of study are related and developed. The programme for citizenship is still at an early stage of development. In its current state, it does not meet statutory requirements as the curriculum is not sufficiently well planned to ensure adequate depth of coverage and the assessment arrangements for tracking and recording students' progress are not firmly established. An audit has been undertaken of the contribution that other subjects can make to citizenship in Years 7 - 9. Topics have been identified, but the scheme of work gives no indication of when and how these topics are to be covered or how the work is to be assessed. Not all departments have clearly identified these contributions in their schemes of work or in their planning. The provision for citizenship is not monitored in a rigorous or systematic way.

132. It is not possible to make firm judgements about standards by Year 9 and Year 11 or students' achievement overall as some planned citizenship activities in tutor time did not take place, the time allowed was too short and there is little written evidence of work undertaken by students in, for example, portfolios or log books. The small amount of evidence suggests that standards are below average and that achievement is unsatisfactory.

133. Whilst some teachers made good use of the short time available in registration time, the limited amount of time makes effective teaching difficult. Many sessions lack a clear focus and fail to engage or motivate the students, with the result that many disengage from the activities. Only in a very few sessions was there a clear conclusion to the activity.

134. Leadership and management at present are unsatisfactory. Staffing difficulties last year meant that the progress initiated in the previous year was not maintained. The co-ordinator and senior staff recognise that more needs to be done to ensure that the school's approach to citizenship meets requirements. The developments made in the current year, including some recent staff training, have not yet had a sufficient impact on improving the curriculum. The school has good links with the community and organises a number of activities in the school, such as the school council, involvement in raising money for charities, the whole-school day on Political Education, work with the Youth Parliament and students' involvement in the hustings and in voting. All of these activities have the capacity to make a significant contribution to developing citizenship. As yet, they have not been drawn together in a coherent way and therefore do not contribute in a consistent and systematic way to developing students' knowledge of citizenship issues and their skills of active participation and responsible action as well as they might.

Personal, social and health education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Insufficient time and a limited programme of study severely restrict the opportunities for students' personal development in Years 7 - 9.
- Assessment is not used to enable teachers to measure standards effectively.
- The work of the subject is not monitored in order to ensure high standards.
- Not enough is done to ensure a systematic and developmental approach to the subject.

Commentary

135. Personal, social and health education is seen by the school to be a resource in supporting students' personal development. It considers it an important pastoral tool to enable students to develop skills, attitudes, values and independence of thought, feelings and actions. It is not possible to make an overall judgement about standards by Year 9 and Year 11 as insufficient extended work was seen. The short length of tutor time, especially in Years 7 - 9, precluded work in depth and in many of these sessions, students did not achieve as well as they might, often because the work lacked interest and challenge and because of their unsatisfactory attitudes. In addition, the lack of a systematic approach to assessment in all years means that there is no information available to make any judgement about students' progress.

136. Personal, social and health education is taught during tutor time in all years, although students in Years 10 and 11 receive an additional lesson each week. The length of the tutor time, which includes afternoon registration, is 15 minutes and is far too short to cover important topics in sufficient depth or breadth. In Years 7 to 9, the curriculum covers a wide range of relevant topics, including sex and drugs education, but the lack of time does not permit sufficient coverage of these and other important areas or enable students to develop the skills to make informed choices about their own lives. In Years 10 and 11, the curriculum is satisfactory. It contains all the relevant aspects of personal, social and health education, including sex and drugs education, and the time allowance of one lesson each week is sufficient. The curriculum is supplemented by four days during the year when the timetable is suspended. Many activities, including a range of activities provided by professionals from outside the school, enable students to develop their knowledge and skills further. It was not possible to see any of these during the inspection, but a review of the two days already held shows a clear contribution to students' personal development. However, not enough attention has been given to the planning and teaching of this area in order to ensure a systematic approach to students' personal development or to ensure that their knowledge, skills and understanding build logically from year to year. Not enough is done to monitor the subject in order to ensure consistently high standards.

137. Although there are a few examples of good teaching and learning in some of the short tutor periods, especially in Years 7 - 9, overall, the quality of teaching of personal, social and health education in tutor time is unsatisfactory across the school. Very few of the tutor time sessions involved productive work. In Years 10 and 11, students completed tasks and exercises in a commercially-produced booklet with little input from their tutors or discussion about the issues. Some of the activities fail to engage students sufficiently as they are dealt with at a superficial level and not all teachers ensure that students are attentive and participate in the sessions. As a result, learning is mostly unsatisfactory and many students lose interest, with a consequent deterioration in their concentration and behaviour. In a number of these tutor sessions, the attitudes and behaviour of a minority of students were unsatisfactory, which prevented effective learning. In a few sessions, teachers structure the time well and maintain real pace and challenge throughout, as, for example, in a Year 9 class on the topic of eating disorders and in a Year 8 class where the teacher effectively handled a discussion on the misuse of alcohol through sharply focused questions. The programme has been severely restricted in the provision of time since the last inspection and improvement has been unsatisfactory.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

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

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	19	63.2	80.1	15.8	23.7	21.6	29.9
Business studies	4	75.0	76.4	0.0	16.3	17.5	26.2
Chemistry	2	100.0	72.7	0.0	13.9	35.0	24.1
Media studies	3	33.3	86.4	0.0	23.8	10.0	32.0
English literature	3	33.3	85.9	0.0	19.1	6.7	30.2
Design and technology	5	20.0	74.9	0.0	15.1	8.0	25.3
Geography	4	0.0	74.3	0.0	19.8	0.0	26.5
Mathematics	6	16.7	61.9	0.0	17.1	3.3	22.1
Physics	4	75.0	68.6	0.0	14.4	20.0	22.7
Sociology	1	0.0	69.7	0.0	16.7	0.0	24.1

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	7	100.0	98.6	42.9	50.2	77.1	87.5
Biology	2	100.0	96.4	50.0	39.2	90.0	78.6
AVCE Business studies	7	85.7	98.7	42.9	36.8	80.0	80.1
Chemistry	2	100.0	97.6	50.0	49.0	70.0	84.9
Media studies	6	100.0	99.4	0.0	37.8	50.0	82.1
English literature	5	100.0	99.5	40.0	46.5	72.0	86.5
Geography	4	100.0	98.7	75.0	44.5	100.0	84.0
Mathematics	3	100.0	96.7	33.3	55.6	66.7	88.8
Physics	1	0.0	96.7	0.0	44.6	0.0	81.7
Sociology	6	100.0	98.2	33.3	44.3	76.7	83.6
AVCE Information technology	8	75.0	87.2	12.5	27.9	55.0	64.9

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus was on A-level and AS courses in English literature.

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' achievement is good during the two-year course leading to A-level.
- A carefully planned programme gives students a challenging variety of activities to encourage independent critical viewpoints.
- There is a good sense of partnership between teachers and students, particularly in Year 13.
- Marking is very detailed and gives clear advice on how to improve even the best work.
- In a few lessons, a better balance between the teacher's input and that of the students would give them more opportunity to develop their own ideas.

Commentary

138. In 2003, the A-level examination results in English were well below average, although all students gained a pass grade. In recent AS level examinations, students raised their performance to average, indicating good progress from the start of Year 12. Standards seen during the inspection are in line with course expectations overall. Students in Year 13 are able to comment briefly but accurately on a young woman's development of confidence and conviction, as shown by her words and actions in *The Color Purple*. In their discussions of *King Lear*, the most capable students made extended observations about the portrayal of Cordelia, referring to the text and to earlier events in the play. Other students' ideas were more brief but showed good knowledge of the plot and of the characters' motivation. All demonstrated sound understanding of the dramatic effect of costume, posture and position on stage. In Year 12, students were increasingly confident in forming and expressing their own interpretations of plays and novels. The more capable students' written work is well structured and makes close reference to the text. Others use too few quotations and some lack clear expression. Students' achievement overall is good.

139. Students have a positive attitude towards English. They value the subject for its interest, enjoyment, usefulness and the opportunities for success. This is reflected in their attention and concentration in class and their respect for each other's ideas. They consider that they are well taught and receive good guidance.

140. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. The programme of study is well balanced between different periods and genres of literature. It is enriched by theatre visits and study conferences. Students are actively involved in exploring and discussing the texts, presenting their ideas and developing confidence in their own opinions. The programme of study is very carefully planned and closely related to examination requirements. Teachers' very good subject knowledge enables them to help students to broaden their knowledge and understanding. Homework is thoroughly prepared and forms a logical extension of work in the classroom. Relationships are cordial and positive, leading to a good sense of partnership in Year 13. The variety of activities in most lessons maintains students' interest and enthusiasm, although in a few lessons, the teacher provides too much of the input. Marking is regular and very constructive, giving students detailed guidance on how to improve. Grading is accurate and gives them a clear picture of their progress.

141. Leadership of English in the sixth form is very good, providing an excellent role model for teachers and students. Teamwork is strong and there is a shared commitment to improvement. Management is also very good. The programmes of study are detailed and well structured, and students' individual progress is very well tracked. Both teaching and learning have improved since the last inspection, and students show more confidence in tackling demanding texts.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

142. Students in geography and English make good use of background information found on the Internet. In art, they are encouraged to present and talk about their work to younger students. Overall, the students' communication skills are at least sufficient to enable them to cope with the demands of AS, A-level and GNVQ courses.

MATHEMATICS

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

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have been well below average but are rising to an average level.
- Students' achievement in lessons is good because teaching and learning are effective.
- Leadership and management are very innovative in increasing the popularity of mathematics.

Commentary

143. Only three students completed the A-level course in 2003 and their results were well below average. The six students taking the AS course also attained results that were well below average. Students' attainment was impaired by staffing difficulties in 2002-03, which caused their courses to be interrupted. Three students are taking the A-level examination in 2004 and their results are expected to be broadly average. They are achieving well because teaching and learning are good. There is a much better prospect of considerably increased numbers of students taking A-level mathematics in future years as a result of the very innovative leadership of the department. Combined classes of Years 12 and 13 students for mechanics and statistics in alternate years use resources efficiently. In addition, the 15 students in Year 11 who have already embarked on the AS course provide a very good basis for increasing the flow of mathematicians in the sixth form.

144. Teaching is good so students learn well. Teachers have a very secure command of pure mathematics, mechanics and statistics and use ICT effectively to enhance lessons. For example, in a well-taught Year 12 lesson on recurrence relations, the teacher used a spreadsheet displayed on an overhead projector screen to illustrate divergence and convergence very effectively. Students assimilated main concepts very readily as a result of the dynamic nature of the display. Teaching is lively and enthusiastic so that students become involved and enthused themselves, making good strides in their understanding. In a very good combined Years 12 and 13 lesson on vectors, students explained their answers and generated much useful discussion of alternative methods for determining velocity vectors. Teachers mark students' work conscientiously, especially the regular tests they are given. They provide plenty of helpful comments and corrections to help students overcome difficulties and boost their achievement.

145. Leadership and management of the department are very good. Teachers work very effectively as a team and are strongly committed to improving the popularity of the subject and raising students' standards. They are readily available outside lesson time to help students with any difficulties. The tracking of students' progress throughout the two-year course is very good. There has been satisfactory progress overall since the last inspection. After previous staffing difficulties, standards and students' achievement are recovering because teaching and learning are good.

Mathematics across the curriculum

146. Students' competence in mathematics is sufficient to enable them to make progress in the subjects they study. In geography and design and technology, students reach an above average standard whilst in science and ICT, they are average. For example, in geography, students successfully use statistical concepts, such as correlation, to test hypotheses.

SCIENCE

The focus of the inspection was on A-level and AS courses in physics. A small number of lessons were sampled in biology and chemistry. In the two lessons seen in biology, the teaching was good and the small number of students achieved well. In the one lesson seen in chemistry, teaching and learning were very good and students' achievement was satisfactory.

Physics

Provision in physics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teacher's subject knowledge and scholarly approach challenge students at a high level and lead to good understanding.
- Very good discussions with students help them to understand difficult ideas, and give them the confidence to ask questions when they do not understand.
- Much of the equipment used in teaching sixth form physics is old, and some is unserviceable.

Commentary

147. A few students choose to study physics each year: a small number of them have high GCSE grades but many have had much more modest successes in their GCSE examinations in Year 11. Overall, attainment at the beginning of the course is below average. Comparisons with national statistics are inappropriate for only a few students, but based on students' attainment at the beginning of Year 12, the AS and A-level results are usually better than expected. For these students, achievement is good and sometimes very good. Other students, who embark on the course with low GCSE grades, show unsatisfactory achievement, and fail to gain a pass grade in AS or A-level examinations.

148. The standards of students' current work are in line with course expectations. In lessons, students quickly learn to think as physicists do, and make rapid progress. Their teacher challenges them to think for themselves, to answer questions, and to challenge him if there is anything they do not understand. Students in Year 12 have a very good grasp of how to use the mathematical tools available to physicists, such as algebra. They know how important the use of correct units for physical quantities is, and they are developing a high level of confidence in their own ability. They work with ideas that are contrary to our everyday experience, such as wave/particle duality, expressing themselves in correct scientific English.

149. Most of the teaching is good, although some is satisfactory. Good teaching is based on very high quality discussion and questioning, which makes sure that students are continually challenged to think about their subject, and helps them to gain the literacy skills they need to express themselves in accurate English. Most students accept the scholarly approach adopted by the teacher and seek to emulate it in their own work. However, a few students need more help in making the best use of this approach. They become less well motivated than the others, and they often do not take part well in discussions. The use of demonstration in practical work and the preparation for the practical examination are of high quality, but demonstrations are often inhibited by old or unserviceable equipment, especially in the nuclear physics part of the course. Despite the best efforts of the teacher and the laboratory staff, this has an adverse effect on learning.

150. Leadership and management of the department are both good. The head of physics has a clear view of the progress of the subject in the medium and longer term. He manages the use of assessment very well and students understand how they can improve. Resources are well managed. Overall, improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus of the inspection was on the single and dual award Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) courses.

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Much of the teaching is excellent and results in the students achieving well.
- The relationships between students and teachers are very good.
- Very good resources support learning.
- The breadth of the curriculum and range of teachers' subject expertise provide very good choices for students to develop their interests.
- There are insufficient opportunities to develop ICT projects in the context of local businesses.
- The development of students' ICT skills through other subjects is not supported and monitored sufficiently.

Commentary

151. The results for the small numbers of students taking the A-level examination in 2003 were close to the national average. All students gained a pass grade but the number of students gaining the highest grades was lower than average. The standard of students' current work is average for those taking the single award and above average for those taking the dual award. Students are able to build on their GCSE work and are achieving well.

152. Teaching is very good and often excellent, which is why the students learn so well. Teachers use their very good command of the subject to design interesting courses, prepare very good learning resources and to plan lessons that engage and interest students. In a lesson where students were introduced to event-driven programming languages, the teacher combined active learning at the start of the lesson with a clear exposition using interactive whiteboard technology. In the main part of the lesson, students were quickly able to begin creating their own simple programs using files prepared by the teacher and available on the school's network. In another lesson, students were studying computer hardware. Their interest and enthusiasm reflected the way they were able to apply their skills to a real situation, which involved upgrading a desktop computer. They had acted as consultants to the school's physical education department, setting the specification and ordering and installing new parts of considerable value. The teacher very skilfully guided the fitting of the components without doing the work for them. Difficult techniques were clearly explained and this mix of activity, with analytical questioning, was used effectively to secure and confirm students' understanding. Teachers mark work regularly and add helpful comments, setting targets for students to improve their grades. Students express confidence in their teachers' enthusiasm for their work and high levels of satisfaction with their courses. There are, however, insufficient opportunities for students to experience working with local businesses.

153. The quality of leadership and management of the AVCE provision is very good. The co-ordinator has established a very strong team of teachers. Student numbers have increased considerably and courses are very well planned and assessed. Technician support is very good, resources are very good and students have ready access to resources on the school's network and via a broadband network to the Internet. The technician makes a very good contribution to the course on computer networking. Good progress has been made since the last inspection because of the growth in student numbers and the increase in standards.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

154. The provision for ICT across the curriculum is unsatisfactory because the development of students' ICT skills through other subjects is not supported and monitored enough. All students have access to computers within the ICT rooms but access to specialist equipment and software in departments is limited. In most subjects, students are expected to use ICT for research, producing reports and in the presentation of their project work. This makes an effective contribution in A-level

English. Standards of competence in the everyday use of ICT are satisfactory but the students' skills and progress are not monitored. There is no co-ordinated provision to ensure that all students gain the skills required to support their learning in all subjects.

HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was on A-level and AS courses in geography. In addition, two lessons were sampled in history and sociology, one in each subject. In both lessons, the teaching and students' achievement were satisfactory.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is very good leadership of the department and a vision for raising standards.
- Students are challenged to independent learning by good teaching and coaching.
- The standard of coursework is good and contributes significantly to improved achievement.
- The standard of extended writing is not high enough.

Commentary

155. Two students are currently studying geography in Year 13 and nine students in Year 12. Although numbers are too low to allow national comparisons to be made, three of the four students entered for the A-level examination in 2003 gained the highest grades of A and B. There are no AS level results for 2003 but standards in the modules already taken by students in Year 12 will, if maintained, lead to at least national average performance in 2004. The quality of individual coursework is particularly high.

156. In general class work in Year 13, standards are broadly in line with course expectations. Standards in individual project and coursework, including the use of ICT and statistical techniques, are above average and achievement in these areas is good. Students have a good understanding of demographic models and of the impact of government and local policies on the environment, for example, around the Aral Sea and in national parks. The cohort of students is too small for significant comparisons to be made about the relative performance of boys and girls.

157. The quality of teaching is good overall, with some very good teaching in Year 13. Students benefit from the very secure subject knowledge of the staff and questioning techniques that probe beyond the superficial answer. Students' general knowledge base is low but they are well challenged to extract and summarise information from a range of current sources. They respond with enthusiasm to the considerate and courteous approach of staff and are developing greater maturity. Preparation for examination and revision techniques is good. There are not enough opportunities for extended essay writing which allows students to balance evidence and draw reasoned conclusions.

158. Leadership of the department is very good and there is a clear commitment to raising both standards and the numbers taking geography in the sixth form. The induction of staff new to sixth form teaching has been very good and the specialists work very well as a team. Routine management of the department is efficient.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

A small number of lessons in design and technology were sampled. The teaching is good and students achieve well. Standards of work are in line with course expectations. The quality of practical work is very good and coursework shows extensive research, analysis, evaluation and high standards of presentation.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The main focus of the inspection was on art and design. Two lessons were sampled in music technology, which is a recent development, and in media studies. In music technology, the teaching was satisfactory and students are achieving as expected. The teaching was good in media studies and students are achieving well.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school offers a good range of art and design and media courses.
- Students show a good level of independence, commitment and creativity.
- The quality of teaching is very good overall; it is well planned, with good integration of theory and practical work.
- Students achieve well in relation to their earlier attainment.
- Some students have not developed basic skills sufficiently in drawing and painting.
- Learning opportunities outside school, such as gallery visits, are used effectively.

Commentary

159. Results in the AS and A-level examinations in 2003 were below the national averages. However, the standards of students' work seen in Years 12 and 13 are typical of the age group. This compares well with the standards seen during the last inspection involving a much smaller number of students.

160. Students achieve well. Students who study photography and art and design are mature and this gives them the confidence to respond positively and creatively to opportunities for exploration and experimentation. The quality of their independent research and investigation is good. Students in Years 12 and 13 demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of different artists, particularly where they apply comparative approaches to contrasting historical and contemporary work. For example, one student showed good analytical skills in her research into the *art nouveau* movement that informed her own large-scale painting on the theme of architecture. Students show a willingness to learn from their mistakes. Students studying photography, for example, demonstrate good darkroom skills in refining the contrast in their black and white prints to improve depth of field.

161. The good range of courses provides opportunities for students to make progress and enables them to study at a level appropriate to their needs and capabilities. There is a good level of cross-fertilization evident between the courses, with, for example, digital photography influencing painting and vice versa. A student was observed using a scanner to increase the scale of a digital image. It was then printed out onto heat sensitive paper prior to transfer onto a large canvas. The student planned to work on the canvas using both paint and mixed media. Most students show a strong commitment to their studies and use the resources of the school well, including contact with teachers, to organise their time productively.

162. The very good quality of teaching enables the students to learn well, although the development of the core skills of drawing and painting are not rigorously promoted. Group and individual reviews

of work are managed sensitively, enabling students to gain a clear understanding of examination assessment criteria and how they can analyse and evaluate their own work and so achieve better. Teachers are deployed effectively. Subject expertise is used well to enable the students to benefit from different teachers' perspectives, skills and experience. The availability of a dedicated study area for students of art and very capable support from a technician contributes to rising standards in the subject. Provision in art is also enhanced through an artist in residence scheme, which, for example, involved students in making large-scale figurative sculptures during the summer term in 2003.

163. Leadership and management are good. The subject leader has a clear sense of purpose. The staff team are reflective, self-critical and innovative, and are able to articulate a clear vision for the subject and its place in the school. There is a clear drive for improvement that the recent acquisition of Visual Arts College status has now formalised. The subject is popular with students and an increasing number are now applying for further and higher levels of study in art and design when they leave the school.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

No work was seen in this curriculum area.

BUSINESS

Two lessons were sampled in business studies, one in Year 12 and one in Year 13. The teaching was good in both lessons. Students are making satisfactory progress and achieving as expected.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The school does not provide any courses in this curriculum area.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

164. The tutorial programme in Years 12 and 13 provides a valuable opportunity for students to develop a range of skills. The curriculum includes advice and activities that enable students to enhance satisfactorily their organisational and study skills relating specifically to their examination programme. Topics such as effective reading and note taking, progress reviews and target setting, and advice on how to determine priorities give students valuable guidance. There is no specific provision for ensuring that students develop the key skills of communication, application of number and ICT. Their development through the examination subjects they study is not co-ordinated or monitored well enough.

165. Although it was not possible to see any lessons during the inspection, a review of the planning for the tutorial sessions indicates that teachers provide good advice and guidance concerning applications for university and careers support. One lesson explored the processes involved in target setting and in developing action plans for their subjects. However, not enough is done to provide for other aspects of personal development that enable students to explore personal, moral and social issues.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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