

INSPECTION REPORT

ST GEORGE'S SCHOOL

Harpenden

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117556

Headteacher: Mr Norman Hoare

Lead inspector: Mrs M J Kerry

Dates of inspection: 26th - 29th January 2004

Inspection number: 259322

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:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1,065
School address:	Sun Lane Harpenden Hertfordshire
Postcode:	AL5 4TD
Telephone number:	(01582) 765 477
Fax number:	(01582) 469 830
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Kevin Parsons
Date of previous inspection:	8 th December 1997

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St George's is a mixed 11-18 voluntary aided specialist technology college. It is a non-denominational Christian foundation based on the aims of its founder, the Reverend Cecil Grant. The provision of boarding accommodation for 106 pupils, both boys and girls, is an important aspect of the school's work. The main school is average in size and the sixth form is larger than average with an increasing roll. The school is oversubscribed for both day and boarding pupils. The school takes a broad range of pupils, including those with special educational needs, and those with English as an additional language. It is a comprehensive intake, but overall attainment on entry is well above average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and the proportion with statements of special educational needs, are both below average. The proportion of pupils with English as an additional language is above that found nationally and 25 languages are spoken in the school. A very small number of pupils (four) are at the early stages of language acquisition. Pupils come from a wide diversity of backgrounds, covering most ethnic groups, although the majority of pupils (86 per cent) are white. A significant proportion of pupils are Chinese, (three per cent), black (two per cent) or have mixed background (two per cent). Forty per cent of boarders are from overseas. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average. The sixth form is part of a consortium, but almost all provision is made within the school. Many pupils from Year 11 move into the sixth form and there is also a significant intake of pupils from other schools. The school has been awarded Artsmark Gold and Sportsmark, as well as an Achievement Award on three occasions, most recently in 2003. Pupils participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Award, Combined Cadet Force and Young Enterprise.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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9052	Mrs Helen Barter	Lay inspector	
2739	Mr Ian Benson	Team inspector	Psychology
12844	Mr Mick Saunders	Team inspector	English
19152	Mr Richard Merryfield	Team inspector	History
15075	Mr Bryan Goodman-Stephens	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages English as an additional language
12475	Mr Stuart Johnson	Team inspector	Music
23268	Dr Kevin Corrigan	Team inspector	Business education Physical education - post 16
15590	Mrs Susan Slocombe	Team inspector	Physical education Special educational needs
15163	Mr Eric Deeson	Team inspector	Design and technology
6044	Mr Roger Perkins	Team inspector	Mathematics
27296	Mr Akram Khan	Team Inspector	Science Biology - post 16
4615	Mr Mike Bostock	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
11190	Dr Winifred Burke	Team inspector	Art
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a very effective school, which gives its pupils a very good quality of education. Standards in the main school are well above average and pupils achieve very well. Teaching and learning are very good. Leadership and management are highly effective. In the sixth form students achieve well and reach above average standards. **The school provides good value for money.**

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Leaders and managers have high aspirations and are rigorous and thorough in their work. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding.
- Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds achieve high standards and fulfil their potential.
- The quality of teaching is very good and teachers have outstanding knowledge of their subjects.
- There is outstanding support for pupils' personal development. The Christian ethos of the school is fundamental to this.
- Pupils are mature, responsible young people and have excellent attitudes to their work. They willingly contribute to the life of the school.
- The sixth form offers a very good quality of education.

Since the last inspection the school has made very good progress in a wide-ranging programme of improvement. High standards have been maintained and teaching has been significantly improved. Management, judged to have weaknesses at the last inspection, is now very effective. Weaknesses in pupils' competence in information and communication technology and in support for their spiritual development have been very successfully addressed.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Pupils reach high standards and achieve very well. At the end of Year 9, standards are well above average and pupils are doing very well when compared to those in similar schools. Achievement is good or very good in every subject. At the end of Year 11, pupils achieve very well across the range of subjects and standards are well above average. In both Year 9 tests and GCSE examinations, standards are improving at faster than the national rate. The results in GCSE examinations in 2003 placed the school in the top five per cent nationally when compared to similar schools. In the main school, achievement is good in English, ICT, business education, citizenship, design and technology, geography, history and physical education. Achievement is very good in mathematics, science, French and music. It is outstanding in art.

In the sixth form students achieve well from their starting points and this has been the case for the past three years. The fluctuation in A-level results, from above to well above average, reflects differences in the abilities of students entering the sixth form, not declining performance. In the subjects inspected in detail, achievement is good in biology, ICT, business education, design and technology, geography, history, physical education and psychology. In mathematics, English, music and French, achievement is very good. Achievement in art continues to be outstanding.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Supported by the Christian Foundation of the school they develop into mature, caring and responsible young people. The chapel services and house assemblies make a particularly strong contribution to spiritual development. Pupils are willing contributors to the school and to the community. They have excellent attitudes and their behaviour is also excellent. Attendance is good. Sixth formers provide very strong role models for younger pupils. There is a real spirit of caring within the school community. The ethos is of the highest quality.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided is very good. Teachers have excellent command of their subjects and are very skilled in helping pupils to improve. **The quality of teaching is very good.** Pupils work diligently and very productively; the quality of learning is very good. Teaching and learning in the sixth form is of a very high standard, with much that is excellent.

The curriculum is of very good quality. Resources are good and accommodation is satisfactory, although there are some deficiencies. The provision for extra-curricular activities is outstanding and very well supported by pupils. Sixth formers lead some activities. Care and guidance are very good. Rigorous monitoring of progress and very good advice on how to improve help pupils to raise their achievement. There is a strong partnership with parents. Very good relationships with the local community enrich and extend pupils' learning. Provision for boarding is good.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are highly effective. The leadership of the headteacher provides inspiration and direction. Leaders and managers throughout the school constantly seek ways to improve the education offered to pupils. Their success in this is evident in the high standards already achieved and in the continuing improvement of those standards. There is no complacency.

The governing body is highly effective. Governors are very well informed and are influential in shaping the direction of the school. They work through a very well structured system of committees and have a very good understanding of the school.

The statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils is not met.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are very well satisfied with the school. They give it active support in a number of ways. Pupils are very proud of their school. They feel very pleased to be a member of St George's.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Implement the school development plan.

The school development plan provides a well-founded and comprehensive plan for improvement, based on excellent self-evaluation. There is no need for any key issues beyond those already contained within the plan.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

THE SIXTH FORM AT ST GEORGE'S SCHOOL

The sixth form is larger than average, increasing in size and providing a wide range of GCE AS and A-level courses. The school is part of a consortium, but almost all provision is made on site.

OVERALL EVALUATION

This very effective sixth form provides a high quality of education for all of its students. Standards are above average and teaching and learning are consistently of very good quality. Students have excellent attitudes to school. They benefit from an outstanding programme of enrichment activities, take great pride in undertaking leadership roles and make a significant contribution to the wider life of the school. The sixth form is very well led and managed. It is cost-effective.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Very good quality teaching and learning enables students to achieve well and reach above average standards.
- Leadership sets a clear direction for the life and work of the sixth form and creates a distinctive ethos.
- Students have highly positive attitudes to school and to their work. Outstanding relationships, between peers and with adults, contribute significantly to the quality of the sixth form.
- The high quality curriculum and excellent enrichment programme provide significant support for students in their development as both learners and people.

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	Very good. Standards in English are well above average: students' very good achievement is supported by high quality teaching and learning. Leadership and management are very good. Very good. In French standards are well above average: very good teaching and learning enables students to achieve very highly. Leadership and management are very good.
Mathematics	Excellent. Standards are well above average: very good teaching and learning results in very high achievement. Leadership and management are very good.
Science (Biology)	Good. Standards are above average and achievement is good. The quality of teaching and learning is good as is subject leadership and management.
Information and communication technology	Good. Standards are above average: good teaching and learning enables students to achieve well. Subject leadership and management are good.
Humanities	Good. Standards in geography are above average: students achieve well as a result of good teaching and learning. Leadership and management are good. Very good. In history standards are above average: because of good teaching and learning students achieve well. Leadership and management are very good. Good. In psychology standards are above average. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching and learning. Leadership and management in this new subject are of good quality.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Very good. In design and technology standards are above average and very good teaching and learning enables students to achieve well. Leadership and management are good.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
Visual and performing arts and media	Excellent. The standards and students' achievement in art and design are very high and underpinned by excellent teaching and learning. Leadership and management are also excellent. Very good. Standards in music are well above average: very good teaching and learning enables students to achieve well. Leadership and management are very good.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Very good. Standards in physical education are above average: students achieve well. Teaching, learning, leadership and management are very good.
Business	Good. In business studies standards are average and achievement is good. The teaching, learning, leadership and management are also of good quality.

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

Very good quality guidance is provided for all students throughout Years 12 and 13. The programme for monitoring their progress is rigorously applied by both subject teachers and form tutors. Students accept responsibility for improving the standard and quality of work and make a very good response to the high expectations the sixth form has of each of them. The form tutors, the sixth form director and subject teachers are always available to help and support any students experiencing difficulties.

Students' views are regularly sought and, where possible, acted upon. The deputy headteacher with oversight of the sixth form and the sixth form director both meet student representatives regularly.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The leadership and management of the sixth form are very good. The governing body have provided a clear set of expectations and a secure framework within which the sixth form can operate efficiently and cost-effectively. The school's leadership group and sixth form director have established a clear educational direction for its work. Provision is very well planned and its breadth enables the learning needs of all students, including those applicants from outside the school, to be fully met. The director of sixth form undertakes a quality assurance role and reviews regularly the teaching and learning within courses. Leadership and management within courses are very good. They are excellent within art and very good in English, mathematics, French, history, music and PE. In the other subjects inspected in detail, they are good.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students have highly positive attitudes to school and to their work. They take great pride in their membership of the sixth form. Students value the wide range of courses and the extensive programme of enrichment activities that are provided. They enjoy acting as mentors to younger pupils, taking leadership roles within the house system and the wider school. They recognise the contribution that all of these activities make in supporting their personal development. The major student concern is about the cramped common room accommodation. In acting upon these views, the school has made additional provision for in-school study and access to computers and the library. The sensible and flexible arrangements for both boarding and day students to study "at home" are part of the response to students' expressed concerns.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Standards of attainment at the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11 are **well above average**. Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and very well in Years 10 and 11. Standards are above average in the sixth form and this represents good achievement from students' starting points. Overall, achievement is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards of attainment are high throughout the school and all pupils achieve very well.
- High standards are achieved across all subject areas.
- The provision for pupils with special educational needs is of very good quality and their achievement is very good.
- Standards in the main school have continued to rise since the last inspection and weaknesses in pupils' competence in ICT have been very successfully addressed.
- Standards post-16 have been maintained and students' achievement is good.

Commentary

1. Standards of attainment are high in the main school. At the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11, results are well above average and are improving faster than the national rate. The school is maintaining consistently high performance, from prior attainment that is well above average on entry. The leadership group and heads of department are assiduous in their work to raise standards through the rigorous and perceptive use of performance data. As a result of this, there are consistently good standards of achievement across all subject areas, including English, mathematics, science and ICT. Work seen during the course of the inspection, both during work scrutiny and in classes, was generally of a similar standard to the results being achieved.
2. Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9 because of good quality teaching and high quality support on how to improve. In all subjects, achievement is good or very good. It is particularly strong in art. Achievement is good in physical education, even though standards are only average. This is because teachers ensure that pupils make progress across all the activities, including new activities, whatever their previous experience.
3. In Years 10 and 11, pupils achieve very well. In art, modern foreign languages and music, achievement is better than in Years 7 to 9. Overall achievement is very good as these older pupils consolidate their learning skills and benefit from the high quality teaching on offer. Achievement is excellent in art, very good in mathematics, science, geography, modern foreign languages and music and good in all other subjects.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	38.0 (37.3)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	43.4 (41.5)	35.4 (34.7)
science	39.4 (39.5)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 152 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	85 (88)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	96 (95)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (98)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	48.2 (47.1)	34.7 (34.7)

There were 150 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

4. Pupils have very good levels of competence in basic skills. At the last inspection, pupils' levels of competence in ICT were too low. Since that inspection, the school has become a specialist technology college. As the result of a major programme of development in ICT, levels of competence are now good. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection and a very good use of additional funding to raise standards.
5. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress. They achieve as well as and in some subjects better than, their peers. On entry to the school underachieving pupils and those with special educational needs attend additional literacy lessons and reading, writing and spelling clubs. These are highly effective not only in improving pupils' progress but also in promoting their self-esteem and confidence. Clearly written targets on individual education plans (IEPs) provide a specific focus for improvement and a good way of measuring progress.
6. There is much good practice in meeting the needs of pupils who are gifted and talented. In most subjects pupils make good progress, with students in the sixth form making very good progress. Pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL) are very well supported through the use of, for example, writing frames, pair work and own language partners. They achieve in line with their peers. Pupils are offered the opportunity to take a GCSE in their home language and the success rate is very high. During the inspection, pupils who have EAL were observed making good progress in many subjects.
7. The careful analysis of the performance of different groups of pupils allows the school to target those who may be vulnerable to relative underperformance. Robust guidance and support is given in good time to aid improvement. This was particularly successful after last year's Year 11 mock examinations. There is good monitoring of the performance of pupils from ethnic minority groups and they often achieve better than their peers.
8. The school performs strongly against its statutory targets. These are sufficiently challenging. It also uses its own aspirational targets based on its internal value added analysis to raise performance yet further.

Sixth form

9. The sixth form admits pupils both from Year 11 and, increasingly, from outside the school. The sixth form is growing in size. It is not an open access sixth form and the school will look for appropriate courses for pupils who have not fully met entry requirements. There are also pupils coming onto courses such as business studies, where they may have no previous experience in the subject area. There is therefore, a broader range of prior attainment entering the sixth form than the entry requirements might suggest and there is significant variation between courses.
10. A-level results in 2003 were above average. Performance at grades A and B was especially strong. In 2002 and 2001 results were well above average. This does not indicate, however, declining performance. As in the main school, there is rigorous analysis of performance data, and a stringent value added measure is used. Minimum target grades are often very

challenging, due to very good performance at GCSE. For the last three years, students have achieved well from their starting points, whether results overall were above or well above average when compared to national averages. Therefore, although attainment against national averages has fluctuated, this is due to differing entry profiles to the sixth form and achievement as measured by value added is consistently good. In 2003 it was stronger in AS level examinations than in A-level results, which indicates that sixth form performance is improving still further.

11. This picture of achievement was confirmed by direct observation of the degree of challenge in lessons and through looking at students' work. In all the subjects inspected in detail, achievement was good or very good and in art it was excellent. There are very high retention rates on courses. Overall, the achievement of sixth form pupils is good. In a number of subjects the standards of work seen in school were well above average, confirming the picture of rising standards.
12. The standards of work seen during the inspection were above average overall and well above average in English, mathematics, French and music. In biology and ICT, the work seen indicated rising standards, as a result of focused improvement work. In business studies, although the standards of work seen were in line with the average, achievement is good as students come from a wide range of starting points.
13. High standards have been maintained in the sixth form since the last inspection.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	95.3 (96.4)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	42.9 (42.1)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per pupil	278.6 (289.3)	253.1 (254.5)

There were 138 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

14. The key issue at the last inspection, which required the school to ensure that all pupils made sufficient progress, has been very successfully addressed. The improvement to the quality of teaching and the rigorous use of performance data have been significant contributory factors. These are evaluated in more detail in the relevant sections of the report.
15. Since the last inspection improvement in raising standards has been very good:
 - Standards at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations have risen at faster than the national rate, maintaining and improving on well above average performance.
 - The achievement of pupils with special educational needs has improved and is now very good.
 - Pupils' competence in the use ICT has improved significantly.
 - Rigorous value added analysis now ensures that all groups of pupils make good progress.
 - High standards have been maintained in the sixth form.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

The development of the pupils' personal qualities, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects is **outstanding**. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are **excellent**. Attendance is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The pupils have excellent relationships with each other and with their teachers.

- The school has high expectations for pupils' conduct and these are fulfilled.
- Pupils are enthusiastic and eager to learn.
- Spiritual development is outstanding.
- The outstanding range of extra-curricular activities is extremely well supported.

Commentary

16. The school has a clear behaviour policy with a well-defined system of sanctions and rewards. Very high standards are expected as the norm and the pupils respond well to this, showing excellent attitudes and high self-esteem. The pupils are keen, eager to learn and willing to take on responsibility. They are courteous and caring both in lessons and around the school. There is an absence of bullying and racism, reflecting the excellent relationships the pupils have with each other and with teachers. The effects of the school's policies and practice to support the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils are highly instrumental in achieving these high standards.
17. The pupils' spiritual development is outstanding. There is a well-formulated whole school policy for spiritual development and there has been significant improvement since the last inspection. The chapel services and house assemblies make an excellent contribution. For example, in preparation for Holocaust Remembrance Day, the chapel service provided a powerful and moving reminder of man's inhumanity to man. The impact of the service was greatly enhanced by contributions from pupils who showed great confidence in performing in front of their peers. No pupil could fail to be moved and challenged to reflect by such a powerful experience. In lessons, many subjects such as art, music and drama make very strong contributions in getting pupils to understand and appreciate man's achievements in the arts.
18. The pupils' moral development is also outstanding. Moral issues are very well addressed in many subjects, for example citizenship, personal, social and health education and religious education. These issues are excellently reinforced in assemblies and services.
19. The social and cultural development of the pupils is excellent. There is a very wide range of extra-curricular activities, which provide many opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and leadership roles. These activities are extremely well supported with, for example, a very high proportion of pupils taking part in house sports activities.
20. Many departments organise cultural activities such as visits to concerts, theatres, art galleries and exhibitions. Very good opportunities are provided for pupils to visit other countries, including participation in World Challenge. All Year 8 pupils visit Brittany in a trip which is carefully planned to encompass a wide range of social, cultural and curricular experiences. There is also a very good focus on other cultures in many lessons.
21. Relationships are a great strength of the school. The house system greatly encourages social interaction between different age groups. Staff provide very good role models. There is good involvement with the local community and St George's musicians frequently perform at concerts and events in the local community and further afield. The school is a caring community; this is well demonstrated by the amount of fund-raising for various charities, which is undertaken by the pupils.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	7.8
National data	7.2

Unauthorised absence	
School data	0.0
National data	1.1

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

22. Pupils and parents both recognise the importance of regular and uninterrupted attendance at school. The school has very good systems for monitoring any pupils whose attendance gives cause for concern. Staff recognise and reward those who improve or consistently maintain high attendance levels. The rate of unauthorised absence is very low and attendance is good. Punctuality at the beginning of the day and at the start of lessons is good.

Exclusions

23. Exclusions are low.

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	872	22	0
Mixed – White and Asian	6	1	0

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

Sixth form

24. Sixth form students have outstandingly good attitudes, a very high commitment to their work and good levels of attendance. They are excellent role models and derive great personal satisfaction from working with and mentoring younger pupils. Many undertake significant leadership roles such as taking an active part in house assemblies and chapel services. Extra-curricular activities are lively and successful because of the participation of sixth form students in running school teams, the drama festival and a range of other social and cultural events.
25. The sixth form students receive excellent support for their own personal development. They respond with compassion to the needs of others, in and beyond the school. They are, for example, active participants in charity fund-raising and community work. Within a range of courses, students show a keen awareness of and interest in the human condition. They show great insight as they search for meaning and truth and explore the moral and ethical dimensions of topics.
26. Students have a strong sense of pride in the school and their membership of this community. They also recognise the benefits they have in receiving a high quality education within a strong and supportive Christian ethos. It is these factors that motivate them to contribute to the continuing success of the school.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided is **very good**. Teaching is of very good quality, especially in the sixth form. Pupils learn very well, supported by very good quality assessment, support and guidance, a rich and relevant curriculum and outstanding extra-curricular provision. The school is highly inclusive and supports all groups of pupils very well. Pupils have good opportunities to express their views and these are valued and, if possible, acted on.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are **good** in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form. Assessment is very good throughout the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' outstanding subject knowledge is used to good effect to support pupils' learning.
- The teaching of pupils who have special educational needs is of very good quality.
- Assessment is rigorous and helps pupils to improve.
- There is a high degree of consistency in the quality of teaching across the school and between subjects.
- There is a significant amount of excellent teaching, especially in the sixth form.

Commentary

27. The quality of teaching, already a strength of the school at the last inspection, has improved further. Pupils learn very effectively.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 168 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
17 (10%)	64 (38%)	58 (35%)	27 (16%)	2 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

28. The quality of teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. There is a high degree of consistency in the quality of teaching across the curriculum. In ICT, teaching is satisfactory; in business education, citizenship, design and technology, geography and physical education teaching and learning are good. In mathematics, science, French, history and music teaching is very good and in art it is outstanding. The very small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was in ICT and was related to weaknesses in planning.
29. Teachers' command of their subjects is extremely strong. It is outstanding in mathematics, geography, science, art and English post-16. This subject expertise makes a significant contribution to the quality of learning by supporting teaching which has both depth and range.
30. There is skilful and thoughtful planning which meets a range of learning needs. Expectations of both work and behaviour are extremely high. The quality of expositions and some highly effective methods, as well as some inspirational teaching, enables pupils to learn rapidly. Their productivity and pace of working is excellent.
31. High quality assessment plays a significant role in raising achievement. Verbal feedback and marking contains much encouragement but also precise guidance on how to improve. Pupils have a very good understanding of what they are achieving and how they can improve. Homework is very effectively used to support independent learning and extend classroom work.
32. All beginners in English are assessed for their level in English when they join the school and have IEPs prepared to support their linguistic needs. Some sixth form students support pupils with English as an additional language. There is very good monitoring and tracking of attainment and progress for these pupils.
33. The special needs co-ordinator and support staff provide detailed information on pupils with special educational needs so that subject teachers can plan their lessons appropriately. Usually the work is very well matched to pupils' learning requirements. Well-trained support staff work constructively with teachers enabling help to be targeted and focused on the needs of individual pupils. Very good ongoing assessment and monitoring procedures identify the

changing needs of pupils and those who are underachieving, so that staff can intervene quickly.

34. There has been very significant improvement in the overall teaching profile since the last inspection. There is a much greater proportion of good teaching, almost none that is unsatisfactory and nearly half that is very good or excellent compared to one fifth at the last inspection.

Sixth form

35. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is high, with much that is excellent. Two thirds of the teaching observed was very good or excellent and 12 lessons were seen in which teaching was judged excellent. This excellent teaching was found across a range of subjects: English, mathematics, ICT, art, design and technology, physical education and physics. On some occasions the teaching was highly creative, as in the example of outstanding practice given below. As in the main school, there was an impressive consistency of quality across subject areas. In all subjects inspected in detail, teaching was at least good. There was outstanding strength in subject knowledge, very high expectations and very good use of assignments to promote independent learning.

Example of outstanding practice

An excellent example of how students developed understanding of the “Doppler Effect”.

A highly effective teacher demonstration was well planned, well resourced and carefully structured, with clear and wide-ranging objectives. Power point presentations, video clips and a series of buzzer experiments provided the context to explain the “Doppler Effect”. The teaching exhibited a high level of scholarship, enthusiasm and expertise in the subject. The atmosphere was positive, supportive and secure. High expectations successfully motivated students to think imaginatively. Throughout the lesson the teacher asked searching and probing questions. Students’ contributions were well thought out, intelligent and extended. Their responses suggested excellent understanding of underlying physics principles. Theoretical models were explored and linked closely to practical applications, ranging from how police radar tracks speeding cars to the Doppler shift from stars and galaxies. Students were highly stimulated by the cut and thrust of debate. They made substantial gains in knowledge, understanding and investigational skills which they applied to solve complex and challenging problems.

The curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is **very good**. The provision for extra-curricular activities is excellent. Accommodation is satisfactory, although there are some deficiencies and resources are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum is well planned.
- There is outstanding extra-curricular provision.
- Resources in subjects have improved significantly since the last inspection and are good.
- Progression routes to post-16 are well planned.
- Pupils with diverse needs all have very good access to the curriculum.
- Accommodation is satisfactory, but there are significant pressures at times.

Commentary

36. The governing body’s curriculum policy envisages a broad curriculum that meet the needs of all learners and that also encompasses a wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities to support pupils’ personal development. These are to be provided within a Christian ethos that enables all to achieve well. The curriculum is carefully monitored. The most recent review of provision has resulted in proposals for more equitable time allocations to subjects, especially in Years 7 to 9. These arrangements are in the process of being implemented. In

Years 7 to 11 the curriculum is extended by good quality personal, social and health education and citizenship programmes.

37. The current curriculum is well conceived and planned, is of very good quality and fully meets the governors' objectives. Across the provision, there is a sensitive use of setting to enable pupils to be taught in groups appropriate to their aptitude. Within Years 7 to 9, pupils follow the required programmes of the National Curriculum and religious education (RE). This is enriched by drama and, in Year 8, by a second modern language. Progression from Year 9 to Year 10 is well planned.
38. In Years 10 and 11 a broader range of subjects is provided enabling pupils to have choice and select appropriate routes to success. Routes from Year 11 into post-16 provision are clear, well planned and ensure a smooth transition into the sixth form.
39. The provision for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) is very good. Few are at an early stage of English language acquisition and those who are bilingual cope well in lessons without additional support. All have full access to the curriculum as a result of the support offered and quickly become independent learners. The focus on key words in Years 7 to 9 has helped pupils with EAL in their language and learning.
40. The provision to support those pupils identified as being gifted or talented is good. Even though this area is seen as in need of further development, the opportunities provided in most subjects extend and challenge these pupils.
41. Pupils who have special educational needs benefit from very good provision. All have full access to the curriculum, but have the option to study only one foreign language. The extensive extra-curricular programme is highly valued and well supported by all pupils, including those who have special educational needs. The range includes sport, music, drama and an extremely rich variety of other activities. There are very good opportunities for enjoyment and social interaction, which increase pupils' confidence and self-esteem.
42. Both teaching and support staff are very well matched to the demands of curriculum. Teaching staff are very well qualified. Teaching and learning make use of a wide and challenging range of resources - including high quality displays in classrooms and the public areas of the school. The improvement in resources is marked, following concerns raised in the last inspection report.
43. The accommodation is adequate for the current curriculum. However, in some subjects the accommodation is insufficiently flexible and teachers work hard to ensure that pupils' attainment is not affected. There are significant pressures at some times when accommodation is at a premium and there are no alternative teaching bases. This is especially the case in PE during inclement weather.
44. The level of resources is good. There has been particular improvement in design and technology. Departments now have access to a greater range of opportunities to widen provision, including interactive whiteboards. However, there are insufficient ICT facilities for the courses in art.

Sixth form

45. The sixth form curriculum is of very good quality. Its breadth ensures that the needs of every learner can be met. Courses are provided which attract large numbers of students and, in the vast majority of subjects, the provision is made within the school. In the few cases where this is impossible, students are taught within a local consortium school. Most courses lead to GCE AS or A-level certification.

46. Students' learning and personal development also benefit from an outstanding programme of enrichment activities. As in Years 7 to 11, provision in both Years 12 and 13 is complemented by a tutorial programme and both house assemblies and chapel services.
47. Support for students with EAL and provision for those who have special educational needs or are gifted and talented, is of very good quality.

Care, guidance and support

Provision for students' care, welfare, health and safety is **very good**. They receive very good quality support, advice and guidance. The involvement of students through seeking, valuing and acting on their views is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The care and support provided for pupils through the house system is outstanding.
- Pupils have excellent and trusting relationships with adults in the school.
- There are excellent induction procedures for all pupils, particularly at Year 7.
- Pupils receive very good guidance on further study and career choices.

Commentary

48. The house system plays a highly effective role in providing all pupils with very good care, support and guidance. Pupils are very positive about the way in which their houses provide a clear structure for support. There are very good opportunities for them to discuss their views and to seek help because they have excellent relationships with their teachers, tutors and heads of houses. They know that their concerns will be listened to and that staff and senior students will discuss these with the leadership group.
49. Most, although not all, registration and tutor times are used well to monitor pupils' academic and personal progress and to advise and guide them. Tutor cards are an effective tool to record and assess pupils' efforts and attitudes. All adults in the school demonstrate high levels of care for the individual pupil, whatever their needs. In lessons, there is very effective personal support and guidance for everyone. Pupils themselves remark on how they are supported and encouraged to improve, no matter what their ability. This gives them confidence to learn and to achieve their best.
50. The school's attention to detail in providing for the needs of pupils is exemplified in its arrangements for induction. Staggered entry in September for different year groups, sixth formers and boarders ensures that all settle very quickly into school life. Excellent work has been done to make the transition for pupils into Year 7 as positive and trouble free as possible. There is rapid analysis to identify where pupils may be having difficulties in settling or in making friends. Sixth form students play a very important role in mentoring the youngest pupils in their houses, who are very positive about the good support that they receive from their peers.
51. Procedures for the identification and assessment of pupils' special educational needs are clear and very well implemented. Well-trained support staff provide very effective help and guidance both within subject lessons and in lessons for individual or small groups of pupils in the learning support department. Statutory requirements are met in full.
52. The school provides pupils with very good guidance on further study and career opportunities from Year 9 onwards. Timetabled lessons and visits to the careers library, interviews with careers advisors and well-organised work experience opportunities enable students to make well informed choices. The careers library is well stocked and there is very good access to publications and careers software to enable pupils to research possible options independently.
53. Satisfactory procedures are in place to ensure the health and safety of pupils.

Sixth form

54. All students receive very good quality guidance regarding their choice of sixth form courses and about universities, training and employment. During Years 12 and 13, both subject and form tutors monitor students' progress and provide each with a clear evaluation of both their strengths and areas for improvement. The system is rigorous and challenging, especially for those who need to improve the standard and quality of their work, the meeting of deadlines or their attitude or attendance. Students appreciate the personal response that is expected from them and the availability of advice and support from teachers, tutors and the director of sixth form.
55. The views of students are regularly sought, listened to and many concerns are acted upon. The growth in student numbers has placed a considerable restriction on the common room. However, the school has responded by providing a dedicated work area and agreed occasions when flexible study arrangements for both boarders and those living at home can be used.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Links with parents, other schools and the community are all **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents' views are strongly supportive of the school.
- School publications keep parents very well informed.
- Parents are closely involved in pupils' learning.
- There are very good links with the local community and businesses which support pupils' learning.
- Very good partnerships are formed with other schools through specialist college status and through the Year 7 induction programme.

Commentary

56. Parents actively support the school. They regularly attend services in the chapel and are deeply involved in many aspects of school life. They raise funds, accompany trips, assist in redecoration and help to run the library and the school shop. The Parents' Association makes substantial donations towards, for example, the cost of refurbishing the library or the learning support base. Parents are very interested in their children's education and they support them very well at school and at home. Parents' and consultation evenings are well attended. A very high proportion of parents attend the annual reviews of pupils who have statements of special educational need. These parents especially regard the school as approachable and helpful, and are highly appreciative of its work.
57. The questionnaire, which parents completed as part of the inspection process, reveals that parents are pleased with almost every aspect of the school's work. Their responses reflect the fact that the school has a very good reputation in the local area and is heavily over-subscribed. They are particularly impressed with the school's leadership and management and the expectations that their children will work hard. A minority of parents expressed concerns about homework, a lack of consultation or insufficient information about their children's progress. Inspection evidence showed a different picture; annual reports are high quality and are supplemented by regular progress checks on tutor cards and yearly parents' evenings. The school prospectus, headteacher's termly letters and governors' annual report contain a wealth of information and explanation. There are good opportunities for parents to discuss changes face to face, at the governors' annual meeting for example, which was attended by senior staff able to answer parents' questions.

58. The special needs co-ordinator has developed very strong links with the parents of pupils with special educational needs. She provides detailed information on the progress of each pupil and responds promptly to requests for help and guidance. Parents are very appreciative of the work of the learning support department in the care, help and guidance provided for pupils.
59. The school's links with the local community are a significant strength. They are used to the advantage of both the pupils and the community itself. Across the curriculum, very good use is made of visits outside school to make learning more interesting. Theatre visits, painting courses, European exchange programmes and sports matches are just a few examples. Pupils in the boarding houses also experience a good range of recreational and cultural activities at evenings and weekends. Pupils have a visible presence in the community; for example, when performing for senior citizens, attending the Harpenden Youth Town Council or supporting patients at a local hospice. Pupils give up their free time to help with a summer camp for underprivileged children in London, to accompany disabled people on holiday and, in houses, to raise funds for charity. These wide ranging experiences make a considerable contribution to personal development.
60. The local community supports the school very well. For example, there are strong links with local churches, the Rotary Club and the Harpenden Trust, which supports pupils in financial need. Through Old Georgians, local businesses and professions, pupils have very good access to work experience placements and sponsorship. Community service in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme benefits pupils' personal development and is seen by the school as a valuable opportunity for them to make a worthwhile contribution to local voluntary services.
61. Links with partner primary schools are very good. Despite having to deal with a large number of partner schools, the school works very hard with them to ensure a smooth transition for all Year 6 pupils, to develop curriculum links and to share good teaching practice with primary colleagues. Good work is being done with local secondary schools to develop the curriculum for students aged 16 to 19. Through its technology college status, the school makes its computer facilities available to the community, including members of the local Probus Club. There are good developments with partner schools to create opportunities for primary pupils to benefit from the school's resources, including its teaching expertise.

Sixth form

62. Links with the community are very strong and all sixth form students benefit greatly from a wide range of opportunities to be involved in life beyond the school. Many contribute to working with partner primary schools, local organisations, charities and a local hospice. Some act as ambassadors for the school within the community. A valuable contribution to sixth form education is made by the local Lions Club and provision of pre-Oxbridge application interviews by Rotarians. The sense of service exhibited by students is highly regarded by the organisations and establishments with which they work.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are **very good**. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. Management is very effective. The quality of governance is very good.

There is non-compliance with statutory requirements in that a daily act of collective worship is not provided for all pupils.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher provides inspiration, direction and the highest aspirations for colleagues and pupils.
- Leadership across the school is very good and subject leaders are very effective.
- Self-evaluation is excellent and is based on extremely rigorous monitoring of performance.

- The analysis of performance data is of excellent quality.
- Governors are very knowledgeable, active and highly effective in their strategic role.
- Management, including financial management, is very effective.
- Very good use is made of performance management to raise standards.

Commentary

63. The consistently high quality of leadership and management is a major factor in the school's strong performance. At all levels within the school there is a commitment to high quality education and a striving to attain the highest possible standards. The Christian values of the school's Foundation underpin the work of leaders and managers.
64. The governing body is active, well informed and works through a well-designed committee structure. The liaison between committees is very good and the complexities created by having a company as well as a school budget to deal with are well managed. There is a strong relationship between the governing body and senior managers, with detailed reporting of every aspect of the school's performance. The governing body challenges and supports senior managers very well and is highly influential in shaping the direction of the school.
65. The headteacher provides outstanding educational, spiritual and moral leadership, creating an ethos that is both inclusive and aspirational. He has a pivotal role in raising achievement, monitoring performance and improving the resources available to the school through strategic planning. His professional work is characterised by a meticulous attention to detail and a personal interest in the welfare of every member of the school community. He makes a high quality professional contribution to the school.
66. The leadership group, together with the head of sixth form, provide clear educational direction. They are cohesive, consistent and highly rigorous in their approach. They undertake their individual responsibilities with a high degree of professional competence. Subject leaders also are very effective in their role. The links between the leadership group and subject areas are strong, providing both challenge and support to departments. Expectations of the quality of professional work are very high.
67. The co-ordinator for special educational needs provides very good leadership to a very well organised and managed department. She deploys the staff in her department very effectively, ensuring that the needs of pupils are appropriately and adequately met. Guidance on teaching strategies and information on managing individual pupils are very helpful and well used by subject teachers. The special educational needs co-ordinator and the staff in the learning support department play an important role in maintaining standards and in promoting the well-being of pupils in the school.
68. Management is very effective. Very good use is made of performance management to raise standards, supported by a good programme of whole school professional development. The quality of the school's self-evaluation is excellent. It is informed by rigorous analysis of data, intelligently interpreted and convincingly used with subject departments.

Example of outstanding practice

Highly rigorous analysis of performance data is used very successfully to raise standards and achievement.

The school uses a wide range of performance indicators. These are used both to monitor whole school performance and to target groups of pupils, or curriculum areas where there is relative underperformance. This identification then results in well-defined strategies to support the performance of the pupils or subject areas. Extremely good use is made of the information obtained from the analysis. The really outstanding feature is the interpretation of the data to evaluate whole school performance. The intelligent and informative interpretation takes account of the detailed circumstances of the school, the pupils' previous performance and the degree of aspiration which might be realistic. It shows a real understanding of the pupil population and so translates the statistics into powerful tools for improvement.

69. Strategic financial planning is very good and has been much improved recently. Financial arrangements have been simplified and made fully transparent. There is an appropriate balance between the different areas of expenditure, given the school's educational priorities in terms of recruiting and retaining staff with high levels of subject knowledge and expertise.
70. The school's costs are above average. They include the costs of providing boarding and of maintaining a wide variety of buildings. There is also additional funding resulting from technology college status. The school has made very good use of this funding to raise standards in ICT. This is a very effective school which, despite high costs, gives good value for money.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,838,940	Balance from previous year	97,512
Total expenditure	3,936,452	Balance carried forward to the next	0
Expenditure per pupil*	3,696		

71. There has been excellent improvement in management since the last inspection. Development planning, monitoring of performance and budget planning, all weaknesses at the last inspection, are now of very good or outstanding quality. Value for money has improved.
72. There is non-compliance with statutory requirements with regard to providing a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. In this Christian Foundation, worship in the chapel is seen as central to the school's ethos. The chapel is not large enough to accommodate all pupils and so houses attend twice weekly, in addition to a house assembly. These occasions not only meet statutory requirements, but are sometimes outstanding in their contribution to pupils' spiritual development. In addition, all pupils in the main school attend at least three Sunday services per term. From the beginning of this year, a tutor-based act of collective worship is being piloted by one house. In discussion, pupils indicated that this is a meaningful and good quality experience. The governors' and headteacher's overriding concern is that the act of collective worship should offer pupils an experience of high quality as part of their spiritual development. The inspection team recognises the importance of this concern, as a part of maintaining the school's Christian ethos. The chapel services and house assemblies make a very significant contribution to the spiritual development of pupils, which is excellent.

* This includes boarding provision.

Sixth form

73. The governing body have a strong commitment to the sixth form. They have provided a secure framework within which it can operate well and be cost-effective. The leadership group and director of sixth form have created a clear educational direction within which very well planned provision is made to meet the learning needs of a diverse range of students. Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good.
74. The monitoring of classroom practice is systematic and effective in identifying high quality teaching as well as areas for improvement. There are regular discussions with departments, the scrutiny of students' work, the monitoring of homework and the ongoing review of students' progress. As a result, the school has a clear overview of the effectiveness of the provision within post-16 courses.
75. The leadership provided within courses is very good. Outstanding leadership is provided in art and leadership is very good in English, mathematics, French, geography, history, music and PE. In all other subjects inspected in detail it is good.

BOARDING PROVISION

The overall provision for boarding is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good relationships, between pupils and with adults, contribute to the strong community ethos in both boarding houses.
- Older pupils show great maturity in their ability to listen, provide help, support and advice for younger members of the house.
- The lack of a programme of maintenance and refurbishment results in the quality and comfort of the accommodation for girls being inferior to that provided for boys.
- The very good level and quality of supervision provided, together with the clear expectations and procedures that operate in both houses, contribute significantly to pupils' health, welfare and safety.
- The well-developed links between the boarding houses, parents and the school provide positive support for pupils' progress and personal development.

Commentary

76. In this school, boarding is an integral part of the provision. The resident pupils benefit from, as well as contribute to, the overall effectiveness of the boarding houses.
77. The governors have an effective strategic role that they undertake conscientiously. Their expectation is that pupils will be nurtured towards maturity within an environment where they learn to live, work and grow up together. With the help and support of an effective team of adults, pupils take responsibility for themselves and each other. They also readily accept responsibilities and undertake significant leadership roles within the house.
78. A recent innovation has been to establish the post of director of boarding. This has resulted in the drafting of a strategic plan for the future development of boarding within the school. While current leadership of this aspect of the school's work is satisfactory, improving the coherence and consistency of provision between boys' and girls' houses is a priority. The accommodation aspects of this improvement are recognised within the plan.
79. The quality of care is good across both houses and pupils have a considerable respect for each other as well as for the adults who care for and support them. Both houses have established clear expectations about behaviour, health and safety and the operation of effective

systems and procedures for the smooth running of the houses. There are very clear protocols for signing in and out when, for example, going to town. Well-documented systems are in place for approving invitations to other pupils' homes and for visiting carers or relatives. Pupils respond to all of these positively and with understanding.

80. In both boarding houses, there is a strong sense of community identity. Older and younger pupils know each other well and enjoy very productive relationships. Older pupils often provide help and support to younger house members. They show considerable maturity in their ability to listen, respond to a pupil's concerns or provide simple but effective strategies for helping a new house member to fit in and make friends. House meetings provide a forum where all pupils can discuss openly with the head of house and the house captain any concerns or plans for events and activities. The programme of extra-curricular and weekend activities is extensive and caters for a wide range of interests.
81. Within dormitories, pupils establish their own personal space and show respect for that of others. Most rooms are of adequate size but, because of the freedom to choose room-mates, some dormitories become overcrowded and provide less living space than others. Some older pupils enjoy the opportunity for bed-sitting rooms with en-suite bath and washroom. However, the quality and comfort of the provision for both younger and older girls is inferior to that provided in the boys' house. The priorities for maintenance, repairs and refurbishment within the girls' boarding house are issues that require speedy resolution.
82. Levels of adult supervision are very good. Adults work sensitively with the young people in their care and ensure that they are available when needed. On weekdays, both rising and going to bed are well planned and sensitively managed, according to the pupils' age. Good house procedures, including roll call, ensure that pupils are well organised to face their school day. On their return to the house pupils are always assured of a ready supply of fresh fruit, milk, juices, toast and spreads prior to supper.
83. Strong links exist between the boarding houses and parents, the heads of the school's house system and subject teachers. Parents are kept fully informed through the boarding report system and also through telephone calls, e-mails and faxes. Heads of houses in the school and the two boarding heads meet regularly for the exchange of information. Boarding house heads ensure that, as a result, they are able to support effectively the pupils within their care.

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

- Very well planned schemes of work promote the good progress of pupils of all abilities.
- Teachers' detailed and supportive marking leads to high standards in writing.
- Teachers know their subject and their pupils very well.
- Pupils attitudes to learning, their teachers and each other, are excellent.
- In a very few lessons pupils' achievement is only satisfactory because there is not enough opportunity for active learning.

Commentary

84. Pupils' attainment when they enter the school is well above average. Standards in tests in 2003 taken at the end of Year 9 were also well above average, with a high proportion of pupils attaining Levels 6, 7 and above. Ninety six per cent of pupils gain A* to C grades in GCSE examinations in language. A similar percentage gain grades A* to C in literature but with a lower proportion entered than nationally. Standards seen during the inspection were in line with these very good results. The school's careful analysis of results indicates that most pupils make at least satisfactory progress from Years 7 to 9 and good progress from Years 10 to 11. The inspection confirmed this picture of good achievement.
85. The department's focus on literacy skills raises standards across the board. Through drafting, and with specific attention to spelling, grammar and organisation, all pupils produce well-ordered and accurate pieces in a range of styles. Pupils' self-assessment is well developed by Year 11 because targets for all aspects of work in English are carefully negotiated, recorded, and monitored. Teachers know their subject and their pupils very well. Detailed marking encourages pupils' talent and potential across the range of age and ability. From Year 7 onwards, pupils are required to be thoughtful (through the Reading Award scheme for example) about their reading. Regular opportunities are provided in lessons and through debating and public speaking clubs, for discussion and presentation. These lead to generally high standards of speaking and listening. As a result of such procedures, pupils' work is extended and they are capable at all levels of ability, including those who are gifted and talented and those who have special educational needs. Work becomes progressively more assured (as in imaginatively managed narratives, or in perceptive analyses of GCSE texts) as pupils go through the school.
86. Pupils are interested, well behaved and motivated. They enjoy and respond positively to the good teaching which enables them to do well throughout the school. No lessons were seen that were less than satisfactory. Two thirds were good, or better. For example, a lesson with a lower set Year 11 class examined the issues raised by the media coverage of the Hillsborough disaster. The tight organisation and high expectations ensured all pupils were closely involved and made good progress. This standard was more typical than that in the few lessons where pupils spent too long passively listening, or copying from the board: approaches which failed to energise pupils or accelerate progress, and resulted in only satisfactory achievement. Overall, teaching and learning are good.

87. The leadership and management of the department are good. Responsibilities are clearly delegated. Planning and development of the curriculum for Key Stages 3 and 4 goes forward with meticulous care. Schemes of work are detailed and well resourced. The beneficial impact of the National Literacy Strategy on planning and practice is clear. Pupils have exceptional opportunities to develop literary and other interests through a range of extra-curricular activities. However, because of the size of the department and the additional responsibilities of many of its members, there are particular challenges in making the quality of all the work of the department as good as the best. A focus on observing and supporting the development of active learning in all lessons is therefore of particular importance; as yet this focus is not sufficiently clear, although there is much good practice in monitoring and performance management.
88. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Specialist accommodation is bright and motivating (though not yet available to all). ICT is used in innovative ways by many teachers and pupils have good opportunities to develop ICT skills through their English work. Results have improved in advance of the national trend. These are notable developments in a department which has consistently, over time, served its pupils well.

Drama

89. Drama is taught in Years 7 to 9 in a 'carousel' arrangement with PHSE. Although the subject is still short of curriculum time this is an improvement on the position at the last inspection. Results at GCSE in 2003 showed good achievement. Seventy per cent of students gained A and B grades in A-level theatre studies in 2003: a substantial improvement on results in the previous year. Standards of teaching in the three lessons observed ranged from good to very good and showed why pupils do well. The good standards are supported by the well-planned curriculum and the very good support for practical and written work. Provision for extra-curricular drama is outstanding.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

90. Literacy development is a strong feature of the school's work. It is a priority in the school development plan and is overseen supportively and rigorously by the literacy co-ordinator and a designated 'literacy governor'. There is a comprehensive policy and a clearly documented system for auditing the work of departments and tracking pupils' progress. All subjects attend to matters of literacy in their schemes of work. Particular strengths were noted in English, art and modern foreign languages, where pupils' fluency, creativity and knowledge about language are especially well promoted. Because of this thoughtful provision pupils' literacy skills develop well during their time in the school and standards are very good.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average in French and German at the age of 16.
- Very good leadership and management lead to effective teamwork.
- There is good achievement in Years 7 to 9 and very good achievement in Years 10 and 11.
- Very good assessment of pupils' work helps them to improve.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and very good linguistic skills.
- There are very good relationships between teachers and pupils.
- There is some use of information and communication technology to enhance learning, but it is limited.
- The accommodation has many limitations and some classrooms impede effective teaching.

Commentary

91. Results in examinations in 2003 were well above what is expected nationally at the ages of 14 and 16, which represented very good achievement in both French and German. Girls attained higher results than boys in both languages at both the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11.
92. By the end of Year 9, the standards of French and German observed in lessons and in pupils' books are above average, which indicates that last year's teacher assessments were over generous. This, however, still represents good achievement, especially in German, where pupils have only a two-year course.
93. In a Year 9 German class, with a large number of pupils with special educational needs, pupils listened to a demanding text about physical descriptions and picked out an impressive number of details. By the end of Year 11, the standards of French and German observed in lessons, in pupils' books and in cassette recordings are well above average. This represents very good achievement. In a Year 10 French class of middle attainers, pupils had good accents and coped very well with complex aspects of grammar. Although most pupils pronounce French or German accurately, a significant minority has very Anglicised pronunciation. Most pupils, including the few with English as an additional language and those with special educational needs, achieve well, because of the clear structure of lessons and the support provided for individuals.
94. Teaching and learning in both French and German are good overall and very good in Years 10 and 11. Pupils respond well to brisk, well-structured lessons with a variety of stimulating activities and resources. They learn effectively, when given the opportunity to work in pairs and when the tasks match their needs and interests. This combination was particularly evident in a Year 10 German class of high attainers, who spoke with confidence about part-time jobs and who manipulated grammatical patterns with confidence. The marking of pupils' work is very thorough and helps pupils to progress by making standards and expectations very clear. Pupils understand the level of the work they are producing and know what they must do to reach higher levels. Pupils' learning is also enhanced by the very good relationships between teachers and pupils.
95. Leadership and management are very good and pupils achieve well as a result of this. The acting head of department has a very clear vision and, in a very short time, has developed a strong team of skilled teachers, who work very hard to achieve their goals. The leadership and management also have a positive impact on achievement through the systematic monitoring of pupils' attainment and progress. Some of the accommodation and the poor quality of some overhead projectors impede learning. Teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 are better than at the time of the last report and high standards at GCSE have been maintained. This represents good improvement.

Latin

96. It was not possible to observe Latin being taught during the inspection, but some written work from Years 9 and 10 was examined. The work was well presented and standards of translation were above average. The work was regularly marked and there were lots of encouraging comments, but no setting of targets or advice on how to improve.

MATHEMATICS

The provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' standards in Year 9 tests and in GCSE examinations are well above average.
- Teaching and learning are very good so that pupils' achievement is very good.

- Leadership and management are very effective with an excellent sense of purpose.
- The use of new technology to enhance teaching and learning is very advanced.

Commentary

97. Pupils' results in the 2003 tests, at the end of Year 9, were well above the national average. Their performance compares very favourably with pupils in similar schools. GCSE mathematics results in 2003 were very impressive. While boys performed slightly better in GCSE mathematics than in their other subjects, girls' results were on a par with other subjects. Test and examination results are broadly confirmed by the standard of work seen in classes and in pupils' work. Standards are well above average in both key stages.
98. Pupils' achievement through all their years in the school is very good, because of high quality teaching and learning. Teachers provide very challenging oral and written activities that involve all pupils in thinking rather than rote learning. They are enthusiastic and have excellent subject knowledge. There is rapid pace and plenty of variety in lessons so that pupils are interested and work consistently hard on tasks. The use of computers and inter-active whiteboards is of a very high standard and these help to broaden significantly the curriculum on offer. In an excellent Year 7 lesson on linear equations the teacher's enthusiasm, very high expectations and very effective use of computer facilities enabled pupils to reach a very high level of knowledge and understanding of the underlying algebra and geometry. Teachers take considerable trouble to mark pupils' work and then use the information gleaned very effectively to influence what is then taught. The assistance for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Teachers involve support staff very productively, contribute significantly to pupils' individual educational plans and monitor pupils' work and achievement very effectively.
99. Leadership and management of the department are both very good. There is an excellent corporate sense of purpose linked to ever higher aspirations for pupils' standards and achievement. The department continuously seeks to introduce relevant well-founded innovations in teaching and the curriculum. Monitoring of pupils' performance is maintained to a very high level so that any underachievement is acted upon and achievement that exceeds expectations is commended. There is a very strong commitment to staff development and teachers in the department themselves play a major part in contributing to improving teaching in other schools in Hertfordshire. There has been very good progress since the previous inspection. The quality of teaching and learning is very much improved, the Year 7 curriculum, for both lower and higher attaining pupils, is considerably better and emphasis on mental and oral skills for all pupils is much more evident.

Mathematics across the curriculum

100. Standards of mathematics across the curriculum are well above average and provision is good. Teachers have attended a training day, an audit of work in Years 7 to 9 has taken place and some useful collaboration has started in some subject areas, notably geography. In science, pupils are competent in using a variety of methods to represent data and to solve equations. They construct and interpret graphs to analyse numerical and statistical data. In geography, Year 7 pupils complete challenging work on proportional flow line maps while Year 11 pupils calculate, compare and contrast population densities in different places. In design and technology, pupils apply number effectively in various aspects of their work and understand and use imperial measures. In history pupils make extensive use of time lines, analyse Reichstag election results and discuss geometrical forms in the Renaissance period.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- High standards have been maintained consistently.
- Highly effective leadership enables pupils to achieve high standards.
- Pupils' attitudes and motivation are exceptionally strong and contribute significantly to their very good learning.
- Teaching methods using elements of the National Science Strategy contribute to highly effective learning. Highly effective teaching in Years 10 and 11 promotes high standards.
- The educational provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good and they achieve well in relation to their prior attainment.
- Pupils need more challenge with developing their critical thinking and evaluation skills.

Commentary

101. In 2003 results in science at the end of Year 9 were well above the national average and, in comparison with similar schools, pupils' performance was very high. There was no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls. The proportion of pupils gaining the higher grades A*-C in GCSE examinations in 2003 was well above the national average. The girls did particularly well in 2003 and outperformed the boys. High attaining pupils do particularly well. The proportion of pupils gaining the highest grades A*-A in the GCSE examinations was very high in comparison with all maintained secondary schools.
102. In Years 7 to 9, new schemes of work and the successful introduction of the National Science Strategy have contributed significantly to high standards. Achievement overall is very good. Evidence suggests that investigative science is well integrated into the teaching programmes. Most pupils make very good progress in learning new skills, increasing their knowledge of scientific facts and improving their understanding of scientific concepts. Most pupils show very good understanding of physical processes, food chains, environment and chemical reactions involving acids and alkali. Higher-attaining pupils have a very good understanding of complex concepts such as the water transport system in plants and the particulate nature of matter. Pupils with special educational needs benefit from considerable efforts to improve their investigative skills. In a Year 8 lesson, pupils with special educational needs were seen enjoying a series of experiments on sound energy and made very good gains in knowledge, understanding and practical skills.
103. Pupils' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is very good. Pupils can analyse data, draw sensible conclusions and tackle competently most aspects of National Curriculum work. Most pupils show very good understanding of concepts such as photosynthesis, reactivity of metal and forces and wave energy. They are encouraged to make hypotheses and to evaluate results in scientific terms. Most pupils cope well with extended writing as part of GCSE coursework assignments. Mathematical skills are well employed for scientific calculations such as solving problems on motion, forces and energy. ICT resources are well used for data logging and Internet researches to enhance teaching and learning.
104. The quality of teaching throughout the school is very good. The commitment and enthusiasm of the teachers contribute importantly to the achievement of pupils. They provide very effective explanations and ask probing questions which challenge pupils to explain observations or which assess pupils' knowledge and understanding. In the majority of lessons, planning, organisation and classroom management are effective and cater well for individual differences of ability. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils and homework is given, when appropriate, which either consolidates or extends class work. In all lessons, pupils work with enthusiasm and at a good pace. Their attitudes and motivation are exceptionally strong and contribute significantly to their very good learning. They work well both independently and in

groups, think out problems for themselves and concentrate carefully but in some lessons they need more challenge with developing their critical thinking and evaluation skills. Pupils' work is marked with helpful suggestions for improvement. Some teachers make good use of their oral assessment of homework to revisit areas of weakness, thus ensuring that misunderstandings are clarified.

105. The leadership and management of the science department are very good. The head of department provides clear educational direction. Curriculum planning is very good, highly effective and manageable. Since the last inspection, very good progress has been made. National Curriculum test and GCSE examination results have improved, particularly the number of pupils gaining the highest grades at GCSE. The provision for pupils with special educational needs, including those who are gifted or talented, is very good. The department organises clubs, surgeries and several visits to places of scientific interest to enrich and extend the curriculum. Procedures for assessment are well established and are used very effectively to monitor progress and identify underachievement. The number of teaching staff is adequate, they are well qualified and deployed effectively. Resources, in terms of books and overall scientific equipment are good. There are, however, shortages in some of the more specialised equipment needed for the teaching of modern courses.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment at the age of 14 and in GCSE examinations is well above the national average.
- Achievement is good and sometimes very good.
- ICT is developing more rapidly across subjects than is the case nationally.
- Teaching is satisfactory overall but is inconsistent in quality in Years 7 to 9.
- There are an above average number of computers and ICT resources for subjects.

Commentary

106. Attainment by the end of Year 9 is well above the national average. In Years 10 and 11, all pupils study GCSE ICT. Attainment in ICT by age 16 is well above the national average.
107. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average in Years 7 to 9. By age 14, pupils can undertake research to produce a booklet and multimedia presentation and they can produce a spreadsheet model to show the costs of a holiday. They can produce web pages describing musical instruments using a web page editor and by creating low-level script. Current standards in Years 10 and 11 are above average. By age 16, pupils can research a topic and create a detailed multimedia presentation, justifying their layout choices in relation to the target audience. They can evaluate a business document with reference to criteria. They can apply an understanding of data types in the design of a database application. Pupils are likely to reach higher standards by the end of the year.
108. Achievement as shown by results at age 14 is very good. The department has successfully adapted the teaching programme for Years 7 to 9 to extend the achievement of pupils to the higher levels of ICT capability. Pupils are very keen to learn when using ICT and have excellent attitudes to their work. They make rapid progress in the acquisition of ICT knowledge and skills, from levels of attainment on entry that are average. Pupils who have special educational needs make equivalent progress to other pupils. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good as a result of much teaching that promotes good progress and very good attitudes by pupils. The pupils' levels of ICT competence are further developed through the work they do within subjects. A new applied GCSE ICT course introduced this year offers a more vocational approach to ICT, but there is an element of mismatch between the coursework requirements and the very high levels of ICT capability, which these pupils have already achieved.

109. Teaching is satisfactory in Years 7 to 11 in the sample of lessons seen during the inspection. However, the quality of teaching is inconsistent, ranging from good to unsatisfactory. There is much that is good, supporting the standards that have been achieved in the past. In the best lessons there is good teaching of subject concepts and terminology and effective use of questioning to develop pupils' explanations. Practical tasks are well designed to enable pupils to extend further their ICT capability levels. Teachers are very skilled at encouraging pupils in the development of project work of a high standard. Teaching was unsatisfactory in some aspects of work in Key Stage 3, where the teaching programme insufficiently matched the ICT programme of study and where the progress made by pupils in the lesson was well below their capability. If the weakness in this area of planning is not addressed, it is likely to affect the high standards being achieved.
110. The management of ICT is good. The management of the programme to promote the use of ICT in subjects has been particularly effective. There has been significant improvement in the management of the subject since the last inspection. There are clear systems and policies in place and schemes of work are well developed. There is some inconsistency in the monitoring of the planning and teaching of lessons. This is especially important during a time of staff change, to ensure that the best practice of the department is shared and consistently implemented.
111. Leadership is good. There is a clear direction to ICT developments, in developing new courses and in promoting the use of ICT across subjects. There are very good facilities for the teaching of ICT. There is an above average number of computers and ICT resources for subjects. ICT systems are effectively managed by two technicians.
112. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection. Attainment by age 14 has improved and is now well above the national average. Attainment by age 16 is well above the national average whilst it was previously below average. The use of ICT across subjects now meets statutory requirements. Pupils follow the full programme of study, including control, measuring and modelling which they previously did not. The assessment of ICT is now well developed and the resources available have improved very significantly.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

113. All teachers completed a national training initiative and this has increased the interest of departments in making more effective use of ICT for teaching and learning. There are more good examples of the use of ICT in subjects than is usually the case. Some subjects, such as science and design and technology, have clusters of computers that are well used. Some teachers have a laptop computer. Data projectors are used by many departments. The ICT department makes effective use of online learning materials and this is starting to develop in other subjects. However, the systematic use of ICT for teaching and learning in some subjects is hindered by a lack of access to an ICT area. Many pupils are able to access their work from home. Pupils make very good use of ICT rooms and computers in the library during lunchtime and after school. This is developing their capacity to undertake research and use ICT for presentation.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are well above the national average.
- Pupils' achievement is very good in all years.
- Skilfully managed question and answer sessions challenge pupils and engage them in their work.
- Very good leadership and good management have successfully introduced a greater variety of learning activities.

Commentary

114. At the end of Year 9 standards are well above national expectations. Good teaching in Years 7 to 9 and the positive attitudes of pupils, ensure that pupils achieve very well. There has been an increase in the number of pupils, especially girls, reaching National Curriculum levels 7 and 8. This is a result of the introduction of more enquiry work. In Years 10 and 11, teaching is very good. Teachers have high expectations, extend pupils and prepare them well for examinations. Attainment in GCSE examinations has increased significantly over the last three years. In 2002 and 2003 over 40 per cent of pupils attained grades A* or A and over 85 per cent grades A* to C. Results of boys and girls are both well above average. The quality of GCSE coursework is the result of very good teaching as well as the high level of motivation of the pupils and their capacity to work independently. Pupils propose well-formulated hypotheses, use sophisticated methods to present and analyse their findings and evaluate their work well.
115. A strong feature of the teaching is the use by all teachers of challenging questioning during whole class sessions. This results in lively discussion and also raises pupils' interest because of the teachers' ability to introduce relevant and up-to-date comparisons. The excellent relationships between teachers and pupils and the high level of respect shown between pupils, mean that pupils contribute confidently in oral work. Pupils settle quickly to work on well-planned individual and group tasks. Examples of excellent and very good teaching were seen during the inspection. In a few lessons, however, inadequate preparation due to the pressure of teachers' other responsibilities in the school, or difficulties with resources, meant that pupils' learning was more restricted, although still satisfactory.
116. Class teachers provide good support for pupils with special educational needs so that the achievement of these pupils is at least in line with others. In one Year 9 lesson seen, a sixth form geography student provided excellent one-to-one support so that the pupil was engaged throughout the lesson.
117. The department has a strong culture of evaluation of its work, which has ensured that improvement since the previous inspection is very good. As well as the improvement in pupils' attainment, there is now a much wider range of teaching and learning styles. Excellent displays of poetry, board games and geographical advent calendars show the increasing role of creativity in the curriculum. The use of ICT is well developed, although access to ICT rooms for lessons is limited. Pupils present their enquiry work as 'professional' research documents and use Power Point at a high level of sophistication. Geography makes a very good contribution to developing pupils' numeracy, including ambitious teaching of mapping skills in Years 7 and 8. Pupils in the school express interest in their work in geography. It is a popular choice in Year 10 and in the sixth form.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very positive attitudes lead to highly productive classroom relationships and hence, very good learning.
- Very good teaching ensures pupils achieve well.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Very good care and support for pupils' learning underpins examination success.
- Errors in pupils' spelling are too often overlooked.

Commentary

118. The attainment of pupils at the end of Year 9, as reflected in teacher assessments in 2003, was well above the national average. Almost all pupils reached the expected level and the majority comfortably exceeded it. In 2003, as in previous years, the proportion of pupils obtaining grades A* to C in GCSE examinations was well above average, reflecting good achievement.
119. Standards of work seen at the end of Year 9 are well above expectations and achievement is good. Most pupils analyse and evaluate sources well and, when questioned, some can comment on how the provenance of sources affects their reliability. Overall standards of literacy are above average, although lower-attaining pupils' work is sometimes poorly presented and/or incomplete and contains too many spelling errors. Pupils understand and use subject specific terminology well in extended writing on challenging questions such as "Who reformed the Church more, Henry or Edward?" They make good use of computers for research and presentation. Access difficulties and shortage of curriculum time mean that this rarely happens on a whole class basis.
120. In the GCSE years, standards of work seen are also well above average and, as in earlier years, all pupils including those with special educational needs achieve well. Pupils demonstrate a detailed knowledge and understanding of the periods specified in the syllabus. They present their work well and link factors convincingly in explanations of historical events and developments. Source handling skills are well developed. Higher-attaining pupils complete very good, technically accurate, extended writing on how Stalin supplanted Trotsky as Lenin's successor. Errors in spelling and grammar are too common, especially in the work of lower-attaining pupils and there is insufficient reference to dates.
121. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Lessons consistently feature high expectations, challenge and pace, which actively involve pupils in their own learning. In all years, pupils are eager to learn, contribute readily and co-operate whole-heartedly with their teachers. Teachers plan very carefully and have considerable subject expertise, as is evident in the quality of the study support materials they produce. The enquiry-centred approach to learning and the variety of teaching activities and styles employed develops pupils' skills very well. Teachers know individual pupils well and offer detailed advice on how they may improve. The provision for pupils who have special educational needs is very good throughout Years 7 to 11. A more refined version of National Curriculum levels and the wider use of peer and self-assessment, would further enhance practice, which is already of good quality. Learning objectives are not always explicitly shared with pupils and there is an occasional tendency to tell rather than ask in furthering pupils' understanding.
122. The subject is very well managed and led. The head of department has worked hard to raise the profile of the subject¹ and despite their significant responsibilities elsewhere in the school, has been ably supported by his colleagues. He has a reflective and perceptive approach to his

responsibilities and analyses examination results exhaustively in order to raise attainment still higher. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

Provision in design and technology (DT) is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject is delivered in a new technology block by a highly collaborative team of teachers and technical support staff who are very well led and managed.
- The quality of assessment and target setting is a particular strength of the teachers' work and makes an especially important contribution to the pupils' excellent progress in Years 7 to 9.
- Changes to the Year 9 options system make it harder for the department to reach its target of full (as opposed to short) GCSE entries.
- The subject is very well resourced by information and communications systems and these are very well used; however, there is insufficient access for whole classes.

Commentary

123. In recent years, the pupils' GCSE results in the various areas of design and technology have improved from above average to well above average; in 2003, 90 per cent of the candidates achieved a grade in the range A*-C, compared to around two-thirds nationally. In the graphics and resistant materials courses, girls do better than expected compared to boys, but this is not symptomatic of a problem.
124. Pupils generally enter the school in Year 7 with below average DT skills and knowledge. However, by the end of Year 9 their standards in the subject have become very good - all but one or two each year reach Level 5, with around two-thirds reaching or passing level 6. This shows excellent progress through those years and very good achievement.
125. These standards are broadly confirmed by observing the pupils' work in files and folders and lessons, assessing the products they make and talking with them. At the time of the inspection, in late winter, the grasp of the subject by pupils in Year 9 and Year 11 is not yet as good as shown by results at the end of the year, although is already much better than nationally and likely to reach the standard set by previous results. Their skills of working with a wide range of materials are often outstanding. It is of particular note to find several sets of skills developing at the same time in the lower school. Examples of this are Year 7 pupils designing and making a badge out of pewter, plastic and wood and developing their graphics skills at the same time; a Year 9 food studies class designing and making a very wide range of Italian starters rather than being restricted to, say, pizza or pasta products; and a Year 9 graphics class programming a milling machine to work their often complex designs in aluminium blocks. The pupils' knowledge of underpinning science (such as the origins and relevant properties of different metals or fabrics and the nature of cereal crops and flours) is also better than is usual, as is their understanding of DT as a problem-solving subject whose central processes follow well defined and appropriate stages.
126. The pupils in Years 7 to 9 develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of DT at an outstanding rate and work very hard. This is partly because of their very positive attitudes - even excitement - and partly because of good quality teaching and the very good systems for and use of, assessment. Much the same is true of the GCSE pupils, though to a lesser extent and progress is not as rapid in Years 10 and 11 as it is for younger pupils. In both Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11, the rigorous use of assessment is a key factor in pupils' success.

127. In Years 7 to 9, the quality of teaching is good: in Years 10 and 11 it is satisfactory. Particular strengths (most notable in work with Years 7 to 9) are:
- The teachers' encouragement of the pupils and their very high expectations - so the pupils are challenged and motivated to rise to the challenge.
 - The effectiveness of their use of a wide range of teaching, learning and specialist resources - giving the lessons plenty of variety to keep the pupils interested.
 - Their often very good assessment of the pupils and their work.
 - The way they ensure that the needs of every pupil are met.
128. A weakness in the teaching is that, while the planning of lessons and of whole units of study is good, learning objectives within lessons are often insufficiently specific.
129. The leadership and management of DT are very good and, in particular, there is close working between what could be two very separate areas - food/textiles and electronics/graphics/resistant materials. The schemes of work for Years 7 to 9 are very good. The accommodation is a purpose designed and fairly new building (though there are some maintenance concerns) and there is remarkably free movement of groups of pupils between the different areas in lessons and during extra-curricular time. The department is also well resourced, particularly in the range of computer-aided design and manufacture (which is very well used by all the pupils).
130. At the last inspection National Curriculum requirements in DT were not met. Some pupils in Years 10 and 11 had no contact with the subject. Now all pupils in the main school do DT, although half - too many for a technology college - enter for only a short GCSE course. Standards of DT skills, knowledge and understanding, accommodation, resourcing, the range of courses on offer and technical support are all much improved.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Exceptionally high standards are attained in GCSE examinations.
- In Years 10 and 11, as a result of the high quality of teaching, pupils' learning and achievement is excellent.
- The quality of leadership and management is excellent.
- The accommodation is not adequate for the needs of the department.

Commentary

131. The standard of work is well above average by the end of Year 9 and far above by the end of Year 11. Pupils' achievement through Years 7 to 11 is very good, taking into account their average standard of knowledge, understanding and skill development in art on entry to the school. GCSE results over the past three years have been consistently outstanding.
132. In Year 7, pupils learn how to work as a team and to support one another when developing large-scale relief panels in the style of Archimboldo. By Year 8, they work sensibly and collaboratively, under cramped conditions, to produce terracotta face tiles in the style of Picasso. In both year groups, pupils learn to evaluate their own work and that of others and to set realistic targets for improvement. Year 9 pupils use correct technical terms when talking about processes such as batik. They are aware of health and safety concerns when working with hot wax. They read texts silently with understanding and listen attentively.

133. Pupils know how to develop an idea and how to produce a number of alternative design solutions. Teachers with very secure knowledge, a deep love for the subject and very high expectations inspire their pupils and pass on these attributes. Pupils with special educational needs, those for whom English is not their first language and the gifted and talented achieve very well because strategies are adapted to ensure they work in an inclusive learning environment.
134. All through Years 7 to 11, rapid gains in knowledge, understanding and skill development are evident in pupils' sketchbooks. Pupils undertake research on other cultures. They learn about the reasons for the unique features in Aboriginal and African art. They produce increasingly effective pencil studies of animals and other natural and manmade objects. They use ICT for research in Years 7 to 11 but there is very little evidence of computers being used for scanning or changing images. Evaluation sheets, affixed in sketchbooks, show that pupils are increasingly involved in the assessment process by being asked to set targets and see whether they have achieved them. In Year 11, the teachers provide valuable personal review sessions about work in progress. By Year 11 pupils understand the design process and excel when working on batik hangings and silk-screen prints. They successfully develop very effective large-scale wire and papier-mâché flower models.
135. The quality of leadership and management of art and design is excellent. The regular monitoring of the department has ensured that best practice has been shared. The department's contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

Example of outstanding practice

Inspirational leadership, which promotes creativity and spirituality, results in pupils' own work being of outstanding quality.

At the heart of this department is leadership which celebrates creativity and recognises very clearly the need for a spiritual dimension in human lives. In this Christian school, the sense of 'Our God is bigger than the light we see, the air we breathe' expresses an important dimension of the work in the department. Results at GCSE and A-level are consistently far above average, achievement for all learners is outstanding and teaching is of the highest calibre. It is not surprising that very large numbers of post-16 students opt to undertake their own personal creative journeys, either in fine art or art graphics. Pupils are guided in their development as artists by teaching which is assured, based on a wealth of subject knowledge and understanding and seeking always to understand the medium and to communicate through the visual image. Teachers are alive to the need to be sensitive and also to take risks in order to develop the dialogue with the inner self and nurture each pupils' own creativity and understanding. As one of the younger girls volunteered 'There is room for everyone to succeed in art. If you're not good at one thing then there is sure to be something that you will be good at'.

136. Improvement since the last inspection is excellent. Standards and achievement are considerably better. A breadth and balance of work has been achieved and the number of rooms allocated to the department increased. Rooms however, have not been refurbished, taps leak, there is no blackout for windows and heating systems are inadequate on cold days. Floor space is curtailed by the large-scale work in progress, which raises a health and safety concern. Storage facilities are poor with no suitable provision for coats or bags. Technician time is inadequate for ceramics preparation.

Music

The provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are very good.
- The quality and range of extra-curricular activities is outstanding.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good, resulting in well above average standards.

- Resources are very well used.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to music.
- The quality of the accommodation is unsatisfactory.
- There is insufficient use of ICT in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

137. Standards of attainment are well above average. The 2003 GCSE results were outstanding and improved even on the high standards of the previous year. Practically all pupils gained A*-C grades and almost half achieved A* or A grades.
138. Current work seen in Years 10 and 11 is well above average. Pupils perform with great sensitivity and musicality, holding independent parts confidently. They listen perceptively to music and identify features of style, mood and instrumentation well. When composing, they produce well-structured pieces with a good feel for harmonic development. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are above average. Pupils sing well, holding individual parts securely, for example when singing rounds. Notation skills are high, reflecting the large proportion of pupils taking instrumental lessons. When listening to music they respond well and show a good knowledge of technical vocabulary.
139. Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9. They enter with very varied musical backgrounds; whilst some have very little musical experience, others are instrumentalists. The department addresses individual needs well and all make good progress. This continues in Years 10 and 11, where those taking GCSE courses achieve very well as a result of a high level of individual attention, both in class and instrumental lessons. There are no significant differences in the performance of boys and girls; pupils from differing ethnic backgrounds achieve equally well. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because of work that is well matched to their ability. Gifted and talented pupils are given many opportunities for the development of their performing and composing talents and make good progress as a result.
140. The quality of teaching and learning is good at Years 7 to 9 and very good at Years 10 and 11. All the lessons seen were good or better. Class and instrumental teachers have very good knowledge of their subject. They use their expertise very well in planning lessons and explaining and demonstrating, often performing with the pupils. Lessons are well managed, so behaviour is very good; this also reflects the very good attitudes of the pupils. They concentrate well and can work productively both on their own and in collaboration with others. There is very effective use of a good range of resources including ICT. However there are insufficient ICT resources to enable it to be used sufficiently in Years 7 to 9. The pupils are well challenged, the teachers have high expectations and the pupils respond well to this. The teachers take good account of the special needs of the pupils and manage a high level of individual attention combined with work, which allows pupils to perform at different levels. Marking is conscientious and tells the pupils how they can improve their work.
141. The leadership and management of the department are very good. There is a sense of vision, characterised by a relentless pursuit of higher standards, which provides a clear direction for the department's development. Pupils' achievements are monitored and evaluated effectively to inform teaching and policy.
142. Through lessons and the wide range of extra-curricular activities offered, music makes an outstanding contribution to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Instrumental teaching is a major part of the department's work with 200 pupils taking lessons in school, which is well above the national average.
143. The quality of the accommodation for music is unsatisfactory. The size of the main teaching rooms is inadequate for the needs of a practical subject. This is particularly crucial when the department needs rehearsal space for the large extra-curricular groups. There are also

insufficient practice rooms to cope with the large number of visiting teachers and allow classes to divide for individual and group work.

144. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have improved, particularly at GCSE. Teaching and learning have improved. There has been an increase in the take-up for instrumental teaching. ICT resources have also been improved although there are still deficiencies.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is very good leadership and management of the department.
- Teachers' subject knowledge, expertise and enthusiasm are good.
- Some pupils in Years 10 and 11 have insufficient core curriculum time for physical education.
- Pupils have access to a range of good quality extra-curricular activities.
- Insufficient indoor accommodation limits the range of games and physical activities taught.

Commentary

145. Standards of attainment by the end of Year 11 are good overall. They are very good for those pupils studying for GCSE examinations. The 2003 results were very significantly above the national average, with 100 per cent of pupils achieving grades A*-C. This is a considerable improvement on the results of the two previous years. Very focused and effective teaching, the continuous monitoring of pupils' work and the extra time allocated for the subject underpin these impressive examination results.
146. The majority of pupils in Years 10 and 11 make good progress and achieve well. They enjoy taking part in physical activities and games and use the skills, techniques and strategies they learn to produce work of a good and often very good, standard. Challenging activities and pupil demonstrations were strong features of a good lacrosse lesson for Year 11 girls, where the skills of throwing, catching and passing were well executed. A reduction in the teaching time for non-examination pupils in Years 10 and 11 in this school year, is likely to have a detrimental effect on standards.
147. Assessment on entry to Year 7 shows that most pupils have limited experience of physical activities and games. The skills required to play some of the games taught at the school, such as rugby union and lacrosse, are new to the majority of pupils. However, the high expectations of staff, appropriate support and encouragement and activities and tasks that are well matched to pupils' abilities enable them to make good progress. By the end of Year 9, standards are satisfactory overall and good, or better, for some pupils. Good assessment and monitoring in Years 7, 8, and 9 records levels of attainment and highlights areas for improvement. This latter information is not always shared with individual pupils so they do not clearly understand what is required to improve.
148. Overall, the quality of teaching and its impact on learning is good and, in a significant number of lessons, very good. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. The range of the teachers' individual expertise and good subject knowledge provides pupils with well-informed and specialist teaching. Activities are well planned and appropriate so that skills and understanding are developed logically and build on previous learning. In a rugby lesson for Year 7 boys, the technique of rucking was introduced in small achievable steps that were practised and extended in difficulty until the majority of boys performed well. Opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own and others' performance are not a consistent feature in lessons. Relationships are very good, thus creating an atmosphere that is caring, safe and conducive to learning. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well.

149. Both leadership and management of the department are very good. The head of department provides clear educational direction and teachers work very well together in organising and managing the tasks necessary for the department's smooth running. They are committed to helping pupils raise their personal performance and to making improvements to the department. Pupils respond enthusiastically to the very good extra-curricular activities provided and many enjoy team and individual success at local, county and national levels. Pupils' interest and enjoyment of physical activities and games is also enhanced by participation in inter-house competitions.
150. The curriculum acknowledges that the school is very short of appropriate indoor sporting facilities. Provision for outdoor activities is very good and therefore there is an emphasis on outdoor games with a restricted choice of indoor activities. Pupils do not have the opportunity to play some indoor sports to a high standard in school because of the limited facilities. Many pupils attend local clubs to compensate for this and so further their interest and prowess in physical activities and games that are not taught at the school. A fitness room has recently been added to the school's facilities and is well used to promote pupils' general health and fitness. A dedicated classroom for the teaching of theory provides a proper base where information can be displayed and resources made easily available and makes a positive contribution to pupils' learning. The department has made good progress since the last inspection.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business studies

The provision for business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The monitoring and assessment of pupils' attainment and progress is very good.
- Leadership and management of the department is good with well structured programmes of study and very effective teamwork in delivering the courses.
- Teaching overall is good but learning objectives are not always sufficiently focused on pupils' understanding of lesson content.
- The department makes a very effective contribution to pupils' citizenship studies.
- Pupils have limited access to ICT facilities during timetabled lessons.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

151. Although the subject performs relatively less well than other subjects, 65 per cent of pupils attained grades A*-C in the 2003 GCSE examinations. This is above the national average and a considerable improvement on the previous year's results, which were below average. Current pupils are attaining at the level of national expectations and achieving well. Several pupils are producing work of a high standard and demonstrating in class a good understanding of important business topics such as the internal and external influences on business growth, basic motivation theory and the relationship between pay and types of work.
152. The department has very good procedures for monitoring and assessing pupils' attainment and progress in GCSE business studies and this is being used to good effect when designing programmes of study for pupils. This process is being used effectively to identify current pupils at risk of not achieving their full potential and to identify strategies, such as additional support, to ensure that the underachievement of some pupils in the 2003 examinations is not repeated. The department is aware that underachievement is mainly focused on boys and have identified specific strategies, including changing to a more appropriate syllabus, to tackle this. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, are generally very well supported

and have access to relevant visits and business competitions to support their learning of the subject.

153. Teaching overall is good with knowledgeable and very well prepared teachers delivering lessons authoritatively. Lively pupils are managed well. Teaching is very good where learning objectives are sharply focused on what pupils will know, understand and be able to do by the end of the lesson and as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of the lesson delivery. This worked to good effect in a very good Year 11 lesson on how and why businesses grow. In this lesson, clear learning objectives and stimulating activities ensured pupils grasped the fundamentals of the topic.
154. The department makes a very effective contribution to pupils' citizenship studies. For example, a Year 9 industry day is organised with a range of relevant and stimulating activities focusing on fair trade and the activities of charities such as Oxfam.
155. The accommodation for teaching business studies lessons is unsatisfactory with one long, fairly cramped room and with no dedicated computers to enhance learning and provide an appropriate environment for studying the subject. This is further compounded by the difficulties encountered in gaining access to the school's computer facilities during lesson time.
156. Leadership and management of the department are good with well-structured programmes of study in place and very effective teamwork in delivering the courses. The department's candid and thorough self-evaluation has identified areas for improvement and how the department could develop further, for example by extending the GCSE provision to include further subjects. Overall, there has been satisfactory progress since the last inspection.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Work was sampled in this area and seven lessons were seen. Four of these focused on personal, social and health education (PSHE) and the remainder on elements in the programme for citizenship education.

The quality of teaching and learning in PSHE ranged from satisfactory to excellent. Overall, it was good. Pupils achieved well and showed good and sometimes very good or excellent attitudes to their learning. Lessons were well planned and pupils were effectively challenged to think about a range of issues related to, for example, drug abuse.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of leadership is excellent and the effectiveness of management is very good.
- Citizenship education is promoted in a variety of ways.
- A very good programme of separate citizenship lessons has been developed.
- Some aspects of the school's timetable make it difficult to plan for a sequence of lessons, especially in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

157. The school responded quickly to the requirements for teaching citizenship. The co-ordinator has vision and high aspirations for the development of the subject. Since her appointment, she has created a programme which fulfils the requirements for teaching all aspects of knowledge and skills and has managed its implementation across wide areas of the school. A thorough audit of existing provision in other subjects and in the school's extra-curricular programme was made. As a result, developments have taken place in a number of ways. These include: new

units of work for discrete citizenship lessons on, for example, the law, crime and punishment, as part of the PSHCE (personal, social, health and citizenship education) programme; a citizenship day for Year 9 pupils on fair trade; involvement with charities; and sixth form students mentoring individual Year 7 pupils who research into news items and make presentations to their forms on global issues. The co-ordinator has a thorough oversight of provision.

158. Close liaison with other subjects and regular monitoring of their contribution ensures that National Curriculum requirements are fulfilled. Departments take their responsibility seriously. Citizenship objectives are identified in their schemes of work, they make them clear to pupils and arrange for them to be recorded. Very good examples of citizenship objectives being taught were seen in English and history lessons.
159. Lessons taught within the PSHCE programme are very thoroughly planned and raise pupils' interest. In one Year 11 lesson, the teacher's excellent subject knowledge, linked to very good materials, led to a very high standard of discussion by pairs of pupils resulting in excellent learning.
160. In lessons in which citizenship was the main focus, the quality of teaching and learning ranged from satisfactory to excellent. Teaching and learning are good overall. Pupils achieve very well in Years 7 to 9 and standards are well above average. Letters written by Year 8 pupils to their local member of parliament showed very good awareness of a wide range of local issues. Pupils achieve well in Years 10 and 11 and standards are above average, although there are very limited opportunities to develop a sequence of citizenship lessons in the PSHCE programme in these years.
161. There are suitable arrangements for recording and assessing pupils' work and their involvement in citizenship activities. The school is refining arrangements for reporting progress to parents and finalising arrangements for the first statutory assessment at the end of Year 9.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2003, the latest year for which national comparisons are available.

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	34	100	80.1	88.2	23.7	56.8	29.9
Biology	5	80	65.2	0.0	11.1	20.0	20.6
Chemistry	6	100	72.7	33.3	13.9	40.0	24.1
Geography	5	80	74.3	60	19.8	36.0	26.5
History	5	100	80.7	0.0	19.5	34.0	28.6
Information and communication technology	13	92.3	67.0	7.7	10.9	26.2	21.4
Mathematics	13	92.3	61.9	23.1	17.1	33.8	22.1
Physics	7	42.9	68.6	0.0	14.4	11.4	22.7
Psychology	6	50	69.7	0.0	16.7	13.3	24.1
Religious studies	10	60	80.2	0.0	22.6	21.0	29.8
Vocational studies	11	54.5	62.8	18.2	12.3	20.0	20.8

Note 1: The results tabulated above represent only those “cashed in” by students. However, inspectors in their subject report take account of the entire range of graded results, whether they have been “cashed in” or not.

Note 2: Subject data is only included in the above table if there are five or more entries. The school also had results in business studies, communication studies, economics, English literature, French, general studies, German, home economics, music, sociology and physical education.

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	38	100	98.6	78.9	50.2	103.7	87.5
Biology	17	100	96.4	23.5	39.2	75.3	78.6
Business studies	33	100	98.7	15.2	36.8	71.5	80.1
Chemistry	15	100	97.6	40.0	49.0	85.3	84.9
Drama	9	100	99.5	66.7	40.1	95.6	83.6
Economics	13	100	98.9	46.2	52.0	89.2	88.3
English literature	22	100	99.5	63.6	46.5	98.2	86.5
French	7	100	98.8	57.1	51.5	91.4	87.6
Geography	21	100	98.7	38.1	44.5	84.8	84.0
History	16	100	99.0	43.8	44.6	88.8	84.6
Home economics	6	100	98.1	50.0	34.6	90.0	76.6
Information and communication technology	27	96.3	95.6	7.4	24.6	64.4	69.5
Mathematics	40	100	96.7	72.5	55.6	100.5	88.8
Music	12	100	98.8	41.7	38.9	80.0	81.1
Physics	26	100	96.7	46.2	44.6	86.9	81.7
Religious Studies	21	100	98.8	28.6	46.7	81.0	85.6
Sports / PE studies	10	100	98.0	20.0	30.9	76.0	75.2
Vocational Studies	11	90.9	91.4	9.1	25.8	56.4	66.5

Note : Subject data is only included in the above table if there are five or more entries. The school also had results in design and technology, German, psychology, Chinese and Spanish. In the few instances where entry numbers in this table differ from those in subject reports this is due to students taking examinations in the third year sixth form.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The inspection focus in this area is on English and French, but work in German was also sampled.

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strength and weaknesses

- Independent learning is encouraged by discussion, high expectations and consistent challenge.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent; they model engaged critical reading well for students.
- Teachers' marking and assessment is very good and promotes high standards of writing.
- Students' attitudes to learning, to their teachers and each other, are excellent.

Commentary

162. Results in A-level literature examinations in 2002 were well above average. Seventy per cent of students gained A and B grades. In 2003 nearly two thirds were in the A to B category, again substantially above the national average. This indicates very good achievement with both male and female students at least gaining and very often exceeding their predicted grades.
163. Work seen during the inspection reflected these high standards. Students' contributions to lessons are often outstanding. For example presentations of research into the background and context of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* were beautifully done. There was a clear sense of purpose in all the work and a capacity to handle and explain to an audience, complex ideas with genuine understanding. Writing was equally impressive. Students can argue, justify, use quotation effectively and often subtly (as in examining different interpretations of Iago's character) referring to the play itself and a range of critical texts.
164. These achievements result from teaching that is at least very good and often excellent. Teachers expect much of students. They use their own highly developed subject knowledge to constantly challenge, to deepen response and give critical edge to students' thinking. They know and capitalise on students' interests and aptitudes. Discussions and research projects (Blake's art, for instance, or the growth and symbolic significance of the Victorian city) are organised in such a way as to make the knowledge and understanding of individual students available to the group. Teacher-student relationships are excellent and lessons are thoroughly enjoyable at the same time as being tightly purposeful. Marking and the use of assessment data are sharp, supportive, and maximise students' progress and potential. This all adds up to teaching of a high order which leads to learning of similar quality, which is very good overall.
165. Leadership and management are very good and focused clearly on the maintenance of high standards. The head of department offers a very good model in his own practice of challenging yet supportive teaching and a commitment to making students genuinely independent learners. Students' progress is tracked with meticulous care. Demanding yet manageable targets are set. The use of ICT by staff and students enhances the quality of work in English, as does the remarkable range of extra-curricular opportunities associated with the subject. Many of these features have been significantly developed since the last inspection. Improvement therefore has been very good.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

166. Students have very good language and literacy skills that contribute to the high standards they achieve. All subjects in the sixth form give close attention to the linguistic demands of their disciplines. In history, geography, science, PE, art and English inspectors noted extended writing of high quality, well supported by explicit modelling and careful marking. There are high expectations also concerning students' oral skills, with substantial requirements for discussion and presentation as a normal feature of lessons. Study skills are explicitly taught. Extra-curricular opportunities for drama, debate and public speaking further develop students' skills and interests. There is an optional assessed course in critical thinking. Standards and provision are therefore very good.

Modern foreign languages

167. The main focus was on French, but German was also sampled. One Year 13 German lesson was observed and some of the Year 12 and Year 13 written work was analysed. The teacher had very good subject knowledge. Very good teaching and learning, supported by high quality subject knowledge, enabled students to achieve well. Standards of attainment were above average. Very effective use was made of ICT to present aspects of Nazi propaganda in a lively and informative way, using authentic materials.

French

Provision in French is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teachers have very good subject knowledge and linguistic skills.
- Attainment is well above average and (the) spoken French in Year 13 is excellent.
- Relationships are very good.

Commentary

168. Results in French at GCE A-level over recent years have been consistently well above average and in 2003 results were again very high. Standards in lessons and in coursework are well above average, which represents very good achievement.

169. Listening, speaking, reading and writing skills are very well developed. In Year 12 and Year 13, students coped well with very demanding lessons conducted entirely in French and read challenging texts on complex topics.

170. There is excellent progression from Year 12 to 13. Students in Year 12 spoke enthusiastically about holiday travel and Year 13 students were confident and at ease discussing issues relating to the points of view of different religions. Some of the oral work in Year 13 was outstanding. The quality of written work is very high. Students produce coursework containing a range of complex structures and appropriate vocabulary on a wide variety of GCE A-level topics.

171. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and linguistic skills. Relationships between students and with the teachers are very good. Students are committed and display an excellent attitude to work.

172. The leadership and management of French are very good. There is very good teamwork between the teachers. The schemes of work and departmental documentation are very comprehensive. Formative assessment is very effective in helping students improve the quality of their work.

173. Progress since the last inspection is good.

MATHEMATICS

The provision in mathematics is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' achievement is very good and their GCE A and AS-level results are well above average.
- The implementation of a 'mathematics for scientists' course is excellent.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent; teaching and learning overall are very good.

Commentary

174. GCE A-level results in 2002 were above average and AS-level results were very high. GCE A-level performance improved in 2003 with nearly half of those entered attaining a grade A. Results prior to 2002 were consistently well above average or very high. A-level mathematics is a popular subject with a consistently large entry. There is a wide choice of courses. Students can opt for mechanics or statistics, alongside pure mathematics, while more able students can also take further mathematics. Examination results are confirmed by the very high standard of work seen in classes and in students' work.
175. The department has introduced an excellent course in Year 12 for those A-level science students who are not studying A-level mathematics. Separate sessions for physicists, chemists and biologists enable students to concentrate on the specific aspects of mathematics required for these A-level science courses. The teaching and learning on the non-specialists course are excellent. Students are fully involved in practical activities, such as holding three spring balances in equilibrium horizontally at various angles, before contemplating the underlying mathematics.
176. Teaching and learning overall are very good so that students' achievement is very good. Teachers have excellent command of the subject enabling students to make rapid strides in their knowledge and understanding. Lessons are very brisk and students are fully challenged by presentations, questions and tasks set. Students are highly motivated and confident. They respond very capably and shrewdly in class discussions.
177. Teachers use computers and interactive whiteboards very effectively to enliven lessons and to highlight nuances in the work. For example, in a very successful Year 12 session on graphical transformations the teacher and then the students, made very good use of Autograph software to give a dynamic flavour to translating, stretching and reflecting various curves. Students' understanding was very significantly enhanced.
178. Teachers select homework and other tasks to meet the needs of the course very carefully. They mark the work very thoroughly, providing perceptive comments to help students make further progress.
179. Leadership and management of sixth form work are very good. Mathematics is a highly popular and successful subject. The department is at the forefront of developments in the curriculum, such as preparing for a new A-level syllabus or using computers and interactive whiteboards to enhance the subject. Students' progress through the course is monitored rigorously. There has been very good progress since the previous inspection in maintaining and broadening students' standards and achievement through very high quality teaching and learning.

Mathematics across the curriculum

180. Standards of mathematics across the curriculum are well above average and provision is excellent. All departments are offered the opportunity for their A-level students to receive tuition in the specific elements of mathematics relating to that subject. At present, the science students attend the course run by the mathematics department while others receive help within the various subject departments. In science, students cope very well with demands, solving scientific problems using mathematical models. In geography, students are strong in their use of statistical procedures. In design and technology, students employ sophisticated numerical techniques successfully in computer-aided design.

SCIENCE

Biology was the focus subject for the inspection, but physics and chemistry were also sampled. In both physics and chemistry students are achieving well in relation to predictions based on their GCSE results. In 2002, GCE A-level results in physics were above the national average and, in chemistry, they were in line with the average. In 2003, results in GCE A-level physics and chemistry improved significantly; they were well above the national average. In chemistry two lessons were seen. Evidence suggests that most students are clearly making advances in their knowledge and understanding as a result of good teaching. They are given good opportunities to plan and design experiments and test hypotheses.

In physics, one excellent lesson was observed and is included as a cameo in the sixth form teaching section of the report.

Biology

Provision in biology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' attainment in the 2003 GCE AS and A2 examinations dipped below the national average
- Teachers use their very good knowledge of the subject to promote effective learning.
- Students have very positive attitudes towards their work.
- Students' skills of enquiry through designing experiments to investigate their own hypotheses are well developed.
- Students need more opportunities for independent learning and more opportunities to discuss and debate biological concepts.

Commentary

181. In 2002, A-level results were above the national average and the proportion of students gaining higher grades A and B was also above the national average. Over the last four years, A-level results have fluctuated and were best in 2000, when they were well above the national average. In 2003, there was a slight drop in the AS and A2 results and although, with the exception of one, all students gained a pass grade A-E, the average point score was lower than in previous years and fewer students gained the higher grades. In both years, male students performed significantly better than female students.

182. Analysis of work, observation during lessons and discussion with the students show that their achievement is good in both Years 12 and 13. Effective teaching challenges all students and as a result they make good progress. Their written work shows that students in Year 12 have a good understanding of all the elements of the course, ranging through exchanges with the environment, cell bio-chemistry, red blood cells and cardio-vascular and digestive systems.

The majority of students in Year 13 show good knowledge and understanding of biological concepts such as the primary role of reflex action, genetics, evolution and biodiversity.

183. In both years, students' practical skills are well developed. They show confidence in setting up extended investigations to test hypotheses, analyse experimental data and interpret findings. In best lessons students demonstrate higher order investigational skills. Year 12 students investigating enzymes, for example, varied temperature, size and concentration and paid attention to accuracy and precision measurement before making valid and reliable hypotheses. Students' coursework assignments are completed with care and attention to accuracy and detail. Scrutiny of students' folders shows some impressive pieces of individual research on topics such as 'Effects of cyanide on respiration'.
184. The quality of teaching is good overall. In most lessons there are high expectations for learning and questioning is used effectively to encourage students to think about the reasons underlying the observations they make. In one very good lesson, the teacher showed an obvious enthusiasm for the subject that motivated and inspired the students who made well-researched Power Point presentations on genetically modified organisms. It raised their self-esteem and made the lesson enjoyable for all. Support for continued learning out of formal lessons is good. Students are mature, confident and show very positive attitudes to learning.
185. Leadership and management are good. Progress since the last inspection is good. There is a clear commitment and determination to reverse the dip in 2003 results and raise standards as the first priority. The new head of the subject has introduced several initiatives to improve further the quality of teaching and learning and support for students' learning. The teachers work well as a team to ensure continuity in learning. The students' work is monitored regularly and helpful and supportive comments are given which enable the students to identify their weaknesses and improve further. The students feel that they are well informed about the progress they are making with their work. Illustrations of topical interest and current research are well used to challenge the higher-attaining students. Book provision has improved considerably and enhanced ICT resources are well used for data logging, Power Point presentations and to enrich teaching and learning.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results in GCE AS and A-level courses are below national averages.
- Standards in work seen are rising and are now above the national average.
- The teaching of ICT at this level is good with some excellent teaching.
- Project work is well developed and shows good achievement.

Commentary

186. Examination results at AS level and A2 level are below the national average but in line with students' prior attainment. Boys attained higher grades than girls. Current standards of work seen at GCE AS and A2 level are above the national average with around a third of students expected to achieve at the higher grades.
187. Students can create a database system for a company with good emphasis given to the design, implementation and testing stages of the project. The chosen systems offer good scope for introducing features that will gain high marks. They have a good understanding of database design concepts like entity relationships and normalisation. Project work is of a high standard with a good awareness by students of how marks are awarded across each stage of the project. These assignments are underpinned by theory work which includes a study of the use of ICT in organisations. Students can describe the impact of ICT on society and

organisations. Students' work over time shows a very good balance of learning opportunities through theory, practice, case studies, examination questions and tests.

188. Most, but not all, students begin the GCE AS level course with GCSE A grades. Achievement over this course and through to GCE A-level is good in relation to students' prior attainment. Progress in the development of project work involving programming a spreadsheet application is particularly effective with pupils setting themselves challenging design problems in some cases. The subjects of these projects draw from real businesses and organisations such as a hospital patient booking system. Teachers make good use of resources and time.
189. The teaching of ICT is good overall. There is some excellent teaching. Teaching methods used are often highly effective in promoting learning. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. In the best lessons, teaching methods were well matched to learner needs and there was a driving pace. Questioning was effectively used to encourage students to think critically, develop arguments and justify their choices. Very good relationships operate in lessons and teachers have high expectations for what students are able to achieve. Good resources are available for teaching and learning, including online materials. Teachers structure their lessons around presentations using a data projector. The teaching is well matched to students who commence the course with less advantageous GCSE grades.
190. Leadership and management of the subject are good. Current high standards are a consequence of a well-organised subject, with good planning, good resources and effectively managed ICT systems. The assessment of students' work is effective in promoting student progress. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

191. There is no dedicated ICT area for the sixth form. However, the practice of allowing sixth form students to make use of free computers during lessons provides a satisfactory level of access. Many sixth formers have computers at home and are increasingly choosing to use them as a medium in which to research, create and present their work. The use of ICT is significant in students' assignments where it gives rise to a good quality of presentation. ICT is used in some way in most subjects in the sixth form, and this is a rapidly developing area as teachers are increasing their own expertise in, for example, presenting lessons using electronic whiteboards. The use of the Internet for research purposes is a dominant activity. There is a significant contribution of ICT to the music technology course and to the sixth form art graphics course.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at GCE advanced level in the last two years were lower than in previous years.
- Teachers have excellent knowledge of the subject and a high level of enthusiasm.
- Good teaching challenges students who achieve well.
- Relationships between teachers and students are outstanding.

Commentary

192. The results of students who sat the GCE A-level examinations in 2002 and 2003 were in line with the national average. In 2002 the attainment of girls was higher than boys, especially the number gaining an A grade, which was above average. The results in 2003, particularly of

boys, were provisionally slightly higher than in 2002. Results of the students who took the AS examination in 2002 were well above the national average.

193. The subject accepts students with a wide range of attainment in geography at GCSE and in 2002 and 2003 students generally achieved the grades anticipated by their teachers. Other possible reasons for the fall in attainment compared to earlier years have been explored and teaching strategies reviewed. For example, there is now more practice in written answers and often, during lessons, teachers focus on aspects of examination technique. This is especially to increase performance in the human geography papers taken in Year 13.
194. Observation of lessons and analysis of students' work during the inspection indicate that standards in the current Years 12 and 13 are again above average. This represents good achievement. This is in part due to the increase in attainment at GCSE in the last two years. Students' positive attitudes to work and the high level of interest fostered by good teaching, also enable them to achieve well.
195. The overall quality of teaching was good. Teaching and learning were good or very good in all of the lessons seen. Thorough planning and well-selected resources direct students' learning very effectively. The teachers' enthusiasm passes on to the students who show a high level of commitment and respond to the challenge set; for example, to prepare and follow up work independently to an extent greater than is usually seen. Students organise their work well. They are well supported by thorough marking of assignments and good use is made of assessment data to monitor students' performance. The excellent relationships in the classroom allow high quality discussion, often initiated by lively question and answer sessions. Teachers demand precision in explanations and students contribute confidently and raise pertinent questions. The teachers' strong command of subject knowledge allows them to develop alternative perspectives during class discussions.
196. The management of the department is good. The quality of leadership is very good. The head of department provides a role model for teachers and students. Together with the other two sixth form teachers he shows a strong commitment to re-establishing high levels of attainment by students. The achievement of students in Years 12 and 13 indicate that progress is being made. Overall, there has been satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent attitudes and highly productive classroom relationships support very good learning.
- Very good teaching enables students to achieve well.
- Too few opportunities are provided for students to develop independence in their learning.
- Very good care and support for students' learning underpins examination success.
- Leadership and management are very good.

Commentary

197. The proportion of students obtaining grades A and B in the A-level examinations in 2003 was average. Results in previous years and in the 2003 AS examinations were well above national averages. In lessons and work seen, standards at the end of Year 13 are above average. Achievement is good in relation to students' starting points.
198. Students complete large files of very detailed and in most cases, well-organised notes. In high quality extended writing, they evaluate original sources well and draw upon wide reading, although lower-attaining students are less likely to refer to historical debate in their essays.

Standards of literacy are good, although some work still contains basic spelling errors, most students understand and use historical terminology, such as anti-scholasticism, very well. In oral work, students understand and correctly pronounce terms such as 'reconquista' and 'convivencia'. A distinctive feature is the very good use of "spider" diagrams, tables, charts and summary sheets that provide a secure basis for revision. Students are not yet as independent in their learning as they might be; for example, during class discussion many do not take notes on their own initiative. In the British history part of the course, students have a clearer knowledge and understanding of the political, as compared with the economic and social, aspects of the Tudors.

199. The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form are consistently very good. Excellent subject knowledge and voluminous study guides in the European side of the course enable students to learn very well, although they are heavily dependent on their teacher's expertise. Examination and essay writing skills are regularly practised and students' individual learning needs are very well met because teachers give freely and regularly of their time. Challenging assignments, such as assessing the importance of Erasmus or reconciling the conflicting interpretations of Richard III, develop historical skills well.
200. The subject is very well managed and led. The head of department and the teaching team have worked hard to support and retain students. The head of subject and the department's work is well supported by a team of committed colleagues, despite their significant responsibilities elsewhere in the school. Examination results are exhaustively analysed and justified appeals to the examination board have resulted in significantly improved marks and grades. Curriculum planning should result in the introduction of a new GCE A-level course. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Consistently good quality teaching and learning supported by high quality relationships, between students and with their teachers.
- Good leadership and management that is underpinned by a clear direction for the subject and effective development and curriculum planning.
- Meticulous assessment and marking of students' work that provides rigorous analysis of their assignments and clear advice about the improvement of the standard and quality of their work.
- Occasionally there are insufficient opportunities for students to be independent in their learning.
- Insufficient planned use of ICT to support students' learning.

Commentary

201. Prior to the current academic year, students wishing to study psychology were taught within a consortium partner school. Results at GCE AS and A-level show that most students gained pass grades in the A to E range, but few achieved the highest A and B grades. The newly appointed head of subject and his assistant work hard together to ensure that students gain the highest grade of which they are capable and have, as a result, planned meticulously to achieve that objective.
202. Work seen during the inspection shows that current standards are of a higher order than the most recent results suggest; they are above average across both Years 12 and 13. Students have good levels of knowledge and understanding of the topics they are studying; they can use the psychology technical terminology accurately and within appropriate contexts. In Year 12 students are increasingly able to present their viewpoints with evidence to support their argument, as in their analysis of the principles within the GAS theory.

203. Standards of literacy and numeracy are good. Language, in oral presentations and written assignments, is increasingly sophisticated and students write well for a range of purposes and audiences. Number is sensitively used and is subjected to careful analysis. Students' use of ICT, especially word processing and investigating a range of websites, is adequate, but uses a rather limited range of applications.
204. The level of students' achievement is never less than good. It is often very good where they make rapid progress from a low baseline of knowledge and understanding, as was seen in a Year 12 lesson on stress and its possible contributory causes. Some groups respond well to question and answer sessions but, where achievement is very good, students use questions to clarify and further explore their understanding of a concept or the content of an empirical study. All Year 12 students, including those who have English as an additional language, are achieving well and have a high commitment to and lively interest in, the subject. Students' work is marked in great detail and provides very effective feedback about how to improve the standard and quality of their work.
205. The quality of teaching is never less than good; some of it is very good. The teaching and learning in all lessons is well planned and is informed by excellent subject knowledge. Teachers have high expectations of all students; they provide demanding tasks with a range of learning opportunities and enable all to develop higher order thinking, writing and research skills. Occasionally, teachers are too eager to provide responses to their own questions rather than prompt a student to explore and find their own answer. Teaching and learning are well supported by good quality resources.
206. Leadership and management are good. The psychology team work well together, share expertise, ideas and practice. The department's work and teaching are carefully monitored. Planning, for the curriculum and further development, is detailed and provides a clear direction for the department's work. The subject was not inspected at the last inspection. However, since it has been established within the school, considerable success has already been achieved in recruitment and in the making of good provision for students.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

The focus on this area includes provision for food technology and product design courses at both GCE AS and A-level.

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students enjoy excellent relationships with their teachers and work hard to achieve success at GCE A-level.
- The quality of teaching is very good and students achieve well.
- Students' motivation and achievement are considerably enhanced by good links with the local community and businesses, other schools, the local authority and with national initiatives; these links have been increasingly influential since the school gained technology college status.
- The numbers of students entering the courses have significantly increased.

Commentary

207. The department has recently begun to offer the current post-16 courses, food technology and product design at both GCE AS and A-levels. The numbers of students entered have sometimes been small or very small. The standards achieved at the ends of the courses have also varied from year to year, although they have rarely been below national levels. The

numbers entering the sixth form are now viable and standards reached at the end of the courses, which have tended to be higher in food technology, are improving. In 2003, five students were entered for GCE A-level food technology. Two achieved the highest grades of A and B and the rest received grade C. One student was entered for GCE A-level product design and passed with grade D. In so far as comparisons on such small numbers can be made, these results are above average. The total number of students has significantly increased since the last inspection.

208. Standards seen in lessons, in the students' work and ascertained through discussion with them during the inspection are, overall, in line with the average. Their practical skills are at least up to the average in all cases where this could be assessed. Also, already, the students show a good basic knowledge of the subject and its ways of working and of the science and business principles that lie beneath it. They have a mature understanding of how to use core design and technology techniques appropriately and thoughtfully to try to solve real world problems.
209. The rate and quality of the students' learning throughout their time in the sixth form is good. Their achievement is good. Teaching is generally very good - the teachers spend a great deal of time with individuals, expect a great deal from them and encourage them to work hard, both on their own and as collaborators. Teachers recognise and take full account of, individual pupils' strengths and weaknesses and ensure that time is well used, both within and outside of lessons. Teachers provide a very good variety of learning experiences and resources, including an increasing range of uses of computers, links with the local community and with the world of work in general. Leadership and management are good. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The detailed inspection focus was on art and design and music. Other areas of art education were also sampled, while in music two courses were inspected in depth.

Art and design

The focus of inspection was on fine art and graphics. Art history was sampled.

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The standards attained at A-level are exceptionally high.
- Students' achievement in Year 13, in fine art and art graphics, is excellent.
- The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.
- The accommodation is not adequate for the needs of post-16 art students.

Commentary

210. GCE A-level results are outstanding and very well above the national average. Standards in the current Year 12 are also high. Considering that not all students have studied art at GCSE level this represents very good achievement, particularly for those who have limited prior experience. Students benefit from being able to make important choices: they can choose fine art and art graphics; they can also benefit from being taught by more than one teacher.
211. During the inspection, a group of Year 12 graphics students benefited from the reviews carried out with one teacher and the advice given before going on to another teacher who listened to the individual presentations, challenged lines of development and evaluated progress. In the second session, students were confident to act as 'critical friends' for one another as they asked deep questions, were curious about techniques or offered advice. In a Year 12 fine art

lesson, students learned through first hand experience how Renaissance apprentices would have made egg tempera. Their subsequent experimentation helped them to understand the strengths and limitations of using this material. At the end of the session they were better prepared for the forthcoming trip to Florence.

212. Standards in the current Year 13 are outstanding. Journals and visual diaries in both fine art and graphics show very good progress from Year 12. Students at this stage have ownership of their work and clear ideas of what they want to achieve. Girls are more intense than boys in their approach to their studies and in their ability to stay focused but nevertheless the boys in this subject succeed very well, particularly in three-dimensional work using aluminium, wire mesh and plaster.
213. The overall quality of teaching and learning are excellent. Teachers know individual students very well but sometimes they are surprised by their students' maturity as learners. During the inspection, Year 13 students anticipated what would be asked of them during the session and did the task in advance. As a result, the teacher was able to increase the pace of the learning and raise expectations further by concentrating on improving written expression to match the high quality of visual images presented.
214. Graphics students use ICT provision very well for presenting and manipulating images and layering colours and textures. Presentation is of a very high standard. All students research ideas thoroughly. The level of discussion is very sharp indicating secure knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being considered.
215. Fine art students have a clear understanding of the creative journey they are engaged upon. They are articulate and justifiably proud of their achievements. An open house policy is adopted with all students dropping in to the department to use the facilities, as and when time allows. The dedicated sixth form art room is a valuable resource but inadequate to serve the needs of the 107 students currently on roll at this level.
216. The subject leader manages the courses well and has an exceptional vision of what is possible in helping young people to regulate their own learning. Currently the standard of accommodation is inhibiting that dream from becoming an immediate reality. Improvement since the previous inspection has been excellent; standards are much improved and the number of students taking the subject has increased considerably.
217. Art history is a relatively new post-16 course, which has proved popular, especially with female students. Outstanding standards are attained at GCE A-level. Students' achievement was exceptional in the lesson sampled as they actively discussed paintings and made perceptive links between the styles and cultural influences of artists in for example, Flanders and Italy. This was valuable preparation for fieldwork they will undertake in Florence. The quality of teaching and learning was excellent, in spite of having to borrow a laptop computer for showing slides of works of art, in a room with no blackout facilities.

Music

In this focus subject, two courses were inspected: music and music technology.

Provision for music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are very good.
- The quality and range of extra-curricular activities are outstanding.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- The students' attitudes are excellent.

- ICT is used very effectively.
- The quality of the accommodation is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

218. The school offers GCE A and AS level courses in music and in music technology. The number of entries is so small that statistical comparisons with national averages are not reliable. However the pass rate is very high with all the students achieving higher grades in music. Music technology also has a very high pass rate but fewer higher grades. Standards overall are well above average.
219. In current work seen, standards in music are well above average and above average in music technology. The level of achievement is very good in both courses. The music students do better than could be expected as a result of extensive performance opportunities and high level of instrumental teaching. The music technology course attracts some students who lack a formal music background, in some cases with no GCSE music experience. The course is also open to some pupils with special needs. From these varied starting points the students make good progress and achieve very well. There are no significant differences in the performance of boys and girls or students of different ethnicity.
220. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good. All lessons seen were good or better. The teachers have very good subject knowledge and use it well in planning their lessons. Resources are very well used; ICT is used most effectively in both courses. In the music course, the students use notation programs to present their compositions. Technology students use sophisticated sequencing programs to arrange and compose. All the students work well independently and collaborate well in performances. Teachers encourage students to perform their work and many do, thus gaining experience in directing ensembles. For example, one student was observed directing the senior choir in a performance of one of her arrangements. Marking is conscientious and informative with good guidance given for improvement. There is a high level of individual attention that ensures which students with special needs do better than could be expected and gifted and talented pupils are well challenged.
221. Leadership and management are very good. Both courses are well managed with work well planned. Results are evaluated and action taken to secure improvement. For example, course changes have been made in music technology to respond to the needs of the students. The attitudes and behaviour of the students are excellent. They are enthusiastic and take a leading role in the many extra-curricular activities, in some cases organising and directing them. This is one of the many ways in which the department makes an outstanding contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students. ICT resources have been improved since the last inspection. Standards of performance have improved also, with many students developing into outstanding musicians playing at a high level.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management of the department are very good with a clear vision, high aspirations of student performance and very well planned programmes of study.
- Teaching and learning are very good when lessons are stimulating and students consistently challenged.

- The assessment and tracking of student progress is thorough and informs curriculum planning.
- The provision of timetabled and extra-curricular activities for examination and non-examination students is very good.
- Inter-house activities are extensive and provide many additional opportunities for sixth-form students to develop their leadership and organisational skills.

Commentary

222. The enthusiastic and inspiring head of department sets high standards in terms of student participation and performance, has a clear vision for the development of the department and effectively manages and deploys an experienced team of subject experts. The well-structured programmes of study ensure the sports studies course at GCE A-level is taught very effectively and students appreciate the guidance and support given as an integral part of these programmes. The teachers provide good role models; the teaching is highly effective and sometimes excellent. This was the case in a Year 12 lesson on the structure and workings of the heart, where there was the use of stimulating activities, ICT and constant challenge provided for students to reinforce learning and check understanding. Every pupil made excellent progress. Student presentations on international sport, in a very good Year 13 lesson, provided opportunities for students to develop their understanding of key issues in international sport. Monitoring of lessons and the consequent sharing of good practice will lead to a more consistent approach to the teaching of sixth form lessons.
223. The standard of current student work is good with students' portfolios covering the topics in depth with many difficult topics, for example, those on anatomy and physiology and skill acquisition in sport, well laid out and clearly understood. Students are also assisted with their learning with the provision of relevant and stimulating materials, past papers and course information. With this and the very good teaching and learning, GCE A-level results are consistently above the national average with all students gaining at a least a pass grade each year and achievement overall being good. Although no student gained the top grade in 2003, of the 11 students entered all gained at least a D. The department monitors student progress very well and assesses their performance accurately. Student work is thoroughly marked, although not always consistently across the units where feedback to students does not always contain sufficient information on what students need to do to improve.
224. The importance of physical activity for sixth form students is emphasised with non-examination students being provided with timetabled activities both on and off site. These are enhanced with an impressive range of extra-curricular activities, including extensive inter-house competitions and school teams, which provide many additional opportunities for sixth-form students to develop their sporting, as well as their leadership and organisational skills. Further opportunities should be sought for developing and accrediting the latter. External facilities are very good but the development of sports such as badminton and volleyball are limited by the unsatisfactory internal facilities. For examination students, the dedicated room for theory lessons creates a positive and relevant learning environment for them. There has been good progress since the last inspection.

BUSINESS

Although the inspection focus was on business studies, the courses in economics and accounts were also sampled. In economics teaching was good and students achieved well. In accounts teaching was very good and enabled students with a wide range of needs and prior experience to achieve very well.

Provision for business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The monitoring and assessment of students' attainment and progress and support for students' learning, is very good.
- Leadership and management of the department is good, with well-structured programmes of study and very effective teamwork in delivering the courses.
- Reduced curriculum time makes it difficult to cover all the relevant work for some courses.
- Teaching overall is good with expert teachers delivering lessons authoritatively.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory.
- There are no dedicated computer facilities in the department.

Commentary

225. The department has very good procedures for monitoring and assessing students' attainment and progress in GCSE business studies, as well as in the two sampled courses, economics and accounting. These are being used to good effect when designing programmes of study for students and in providing additional support where needed for those likely to underachieve in the final examination. The department consistently achieves very high levels of pass rates at both GCE A and AS levels across the range of grades, but with relatively few A and B grades. For example in 2003 all 34 GCE A-level students achieved a pass but just five gained the higher grades. Current students are achieving well and their portfolio work shows a good understanding of basic business topics such as the market mix, supply and demand and finance, including costing, basic accounts and break-even analysis.
226. Leadership and management of the department are good with well-structured programmes of study in place and very effective teamwork in delivering the courses, although the two teachers are fully stretched. The department has produced a number of very impressive resource booklets to provide important subject information for students as one of several strategies designed to improve the achievement of students resulting the thorough self-evaluation process carried out after the most recent examinations.
227. Teaching and learning are good overall with expert subject specialists teaching well-structured lessons with great confidence. Occasionally, there are not enough student centred activities and lesson objectives do not focus sharply enough on what knowledge, skills and understanding students are expected to have achieved by the end of the lesson as a means of checking the students' understanding of the lesson content. However, good practice in these areas was evident in a very good Year 13 lesson on the use of reading strategies to access case studies where students were enabled to understand the implications for businesses involved in takeovers and mergers. Student work is assessed thoroughly and relevant feedback given although it does not always include what students need to do to improve.
228. The reduced curriculum time for business studies and for economics and accounting in Year 13, makes it difficult to cover all the relevant work on the syllabus. However, teachers accommodate this with additional resources for students and research work. The working environment for the business related subjects is not ideal, with at least one inappropriate room and with no dedicated computers to assist students' learning during lessons. Overall, there has been satisfactory progress since the last inspection.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

It was not possible to sample any work in this area during the inspection.

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	2	2
How inclusive the school is		1
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	2	2
Cost effectiveness of sixth form / value for money provided by the school	3	3
Overall standards achieved		2
Pupils' achievement	3	2
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		1
Attendance	3	3
Attitudes	1	1
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	1	1
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		1
The quality of education provided by the school		2
The quality of teaching	2	2
How well pupils learn	2	2
The quality of assessment	2	2
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	2	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		1
Accommodation and resources	3	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		2
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		2
The governance of the school	2	2
The leadership of the headteacher		1
The leadership of other key staff	2	2
The effectiveness of management	2	2

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

