

INSPECTION REPORT

THE TOWERS SCHOOL

Ashford, Kent

LEA area: Kent

Unique reference number: 118822

Headteacher: Malcolm Ramsey

Lead inspector: William Goodall

Dates of inspection: 22nd - 26th September 2003

Inspection number: 259324

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Modern (non-selective)
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-18

Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1,133
School address:	Faversham Road Kennington
Postcode:	TN24 9AL
Telephone number:	(01233) 634171
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Rita Hawes
Date of previous inspection:	28 th February 2000

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The Towers School is a secondary modern school of 1,158 pupils, 142 of whom are in the sixth form. Attainment on entry to the school is low, but pupils' overall social and economic background is around the average. Very few are from ethnic minority backgrounds or do not have English as their home language. The number of pupils identified as having special educational needs, or having statements of educational need, is around the national average, as is the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals. The school is involved in an Excellence in Clusters initiative. The school was identified as underachieving in the inspection three years ago; the follow up visit a year later reported that standards, behaviour and teaching had declined dramatically. In the past three years there have been extensive changes to the teaching staff and three headteachers, the most recent being appointed a year ago. There are nine new teachers who started just before the inspection visit and 13 unqualified teachers.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
15127	William Goodall	Lead inspector	
13874	Jane Chesterfield	Lay inspector	
22958	Terry Bayliss	Team inspector	English
20527	Brian King	Team inspector	Mathematics
16786	Selwyn Hodge	Team inspector	Science, biology
7558	Oliver Nicholson	Team inspector	Art and design, special educational needs
2971	Kathy Hooper	Team inspector	Design and technology, health and social care
30072	Joe Skivington	Team inspector	Music, sociology
11751	David Sutcliffe	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages, English as an additional language
23268	Kevin Corrigan	Team inspector	Physical education, business studies
31863	Adrian Cornelius	Team inspector	Geography
15576	David Nebesnuick	Team inspector	History
1517	David Griffith	Team inspector	Religious education, citizenship
20619	Jenny Hazlewood	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

The Towers School is a secondary modern school of 1,158 pupils, including a sixth form of 142, on the outskirts of Ashford and was inspected on 22nd – 26th September 2003 by an inspection team led by William Goodall.

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is an effective and rapidly improving school. The new headteacher has introduced a change in ethos and expectation which has had a dramatic effect on a school that was judged to be underachieving in the previous report and had declined drastically a year later when the follow up visit took place. Leadership and management are good overall. Pupils' attainment is overall below the national average, but their achievement, in terms of how well they are reaching their potential, is now satisfactory. Girls often do better than the boys and a number of pupils whose education had been disrupted by the situation gained no GCSE grades last year. Teaching, learning and behaviour are satisfactory, although there are some inconsistencies. The sixth form is expanding and providing opportunities for students who might otherwise have not continued in full-time education. With average income and expenditure the school provides satisfactory value for money. It is progressing well towards the headteacher's stated intent of making this the school of choice for the area.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Clear leadership and direction which have turned the school around in a very short time.
- Standards of attainment against national averages are still too low.
- Provision for pupils with additional educational needs, usually known as SEN, is unsatisfactory.
- A thriving sixth form that has developed very well.
- There are still inconsistencies in teaching and the expectations of pupils. Some teachers need more support to maintain the progress being made by most.
- The new curriculum for the main school is satisfactory overall, and is innovative and flexible, particularly in the 6th form, and provides good progression to the next stage of learning, although provision for citizenship is unsatisfactory and some requirements for control technology are not met.
- Assessment is not used well to identify which areas pupils need to work on to improve.

Since its last inspection in 2000, the school has made satisfactory progress. From the follow up visit by HMI in 2001 and subsequent monitoring reports, which indicated a serious decline in behaviour and teaching, the school has made very good progress. Leadership and management, teaching and the curriculum have all improved. Relevant policies are now in place, but the provision for pupils with additional needs is not as good as reported previously.

Achievement is satisfactory overall. Pupils are achieving appropriately by the age of 14, the improvement in their attainment in primary schools is satisfactory and they make satisfactory progress on their GCSE courses, although their standards are still very low when compared to national averages. Achievement is unsatisfactory in mathematics, French and religious education (RE) by the age of 16, but good progress is being made up to the age of 14 in English and through all years in art and design, music and PE. The standards seen in class are not reflected in the examination results, which remain poor. Girls are generally doing better than boys. Some pupils with additional educational needs do not achieve as well as they should. Sixth form students achieve well, particularly in their vocational courses, where results are around the national average, but poorly in A/AS examinations.

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2000	2001	2002	2002
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	E	E	E	E
Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	N/A	E	E	

Key: A - well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E – well below average.

For Year 11, similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.

The development of pupils' personal qualities is satisfactory. Their attitudes, behaviour and personal development are satisfactory in the main school. They are good in the sixth form. Attendance is now satisfactory, but the punctuality of some pupils is not. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are satisfactory, except for the pupils' appreciation of cultures other than their own.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of pupils' education is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, both in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 to 11. They are better than they were at the last inspection and much better than during the section 5 inspection a year later. There are still inconsistencies; pupils' experiences vary with different teachers. The use of assessment to improve pupils' work and homework are unsatisfactory. The broad range of curriculum opportunities is good, especially in the sixth form. The opportunities for enriching the curriculum are good. The quantity and quality of accommodation and resources are also good.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school's leadership and management are good overall. Leadership is good, both in the main school and the sixth form. The headteacher is providing clear direction for the improvements he is demanding, supported by senior management and other key staff. Management is satisfactory overall, but some middle managers need more support to develop their roles. The governors' role is carried out well; most are new but they know the school well and are clear about what needs to be done and how to achieve it.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The main concerns of the parents who returned the questionnaires and the few who attended the meeting were behaviour and homework. Most concerns about the homework were valid; it is not used well or set regularly. Pupils shared the views on poor behaviour. Both the pupils and parents agreed that behaviour had improved and were supportive of the headteacher's drive to pull the school around from a very difficult situation last year. The new initiatives were seen to be making a difference and individual examples of poor behaviour and bullying were discussed at length. During the visit the school was orderly and calm, even in the unsupervised areas. The school has made great improvements, but is aware that more work needs to be done.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The school has many strengths and is making rapid improvement. The most important thing the school needs to do is to raise standards of attainment by:

- Addressing the inconsistencies across the school in management, teaching and the expectations of pupils' behaviour by sharing the existing good practice.
- Improving the provision for pupils with additional educational needs at all levels of responsibility.
- Improving the accuracy and use of assessment, including marking and reporting.
- Providing an appropriate course for citizenship.
- Ensuring that all the statutory requirements for ICT are met.

THE SIXTH FORM AT THE TOWERS SCHOOL

This sixth form of 142 students is not typical in that it is inclusive; all students are welcome from the statemented to those studying several A levels. A wide range of AS level and vocational courses is offered, together with some A-levels and retakes of GCSE mathematics and English.

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness is the sixth form is **good**. Most students are able to achieve their potential through the commitment and support of the head of sixth form and other staff. The vocational programme is a strength and standards are in line with the national picture, despite the students' lack of previous success. Many combine them with AS level courses and some go on to A levels, but grades are very low. Teaching is good overall, but it

has been inconsistent, with many staff changes which have led directly to some poor results. This situation is now more stable. Finances are monitored closely and the sixth form provides **satisfactory value for money**.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Close pastoral and academic support. Students have access to expert and up-to-date advice on their individual monitoring programmes. The teachers know them well.
- The raising of self-esteem and expectations of those students who do not have a history of success.
- Good results based on the students' previous attainment in some examinations, especially in the vocational courses, but some staffing problems in the past have held down results in several AS/A level courses.
- Appropriate courses for the profile of the students wishing to stay on into the sixth form, developed to bridge the 14-19 year old curriculum in consultation with students and parents.
- A lack of key skills courses; many students are weak in numeracy and literacy and there is no central provision to improve them. This limits their attainment in several subjects.
- Good extra-curricular provision and involvement of the sixth form in the main school to set an example.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Provision in English and media studies is good . Teachers know their subjects well and provide good support for the students, who are well motivated. Very few have taken the subjects in the past, but there is a significant increase for this year. Their standards so far are satisfactory. Students retaking GCSE courses are making satisfactory progress. Provision in French is satisfactory , both teaching and the students' achievement are good, but standards are still very low and there are very few students. Most start with low grades from their GCSE courses.
Mathematics	Provision in mathematics is good . A new AS level course has just started, with four students and 20 more are retaking their GCSE to improve their grades. All are making good progress, but standards are still below the national average.
Science	Provision in human biology, the only science offered, is good . There is high expectation and challenge and a good level of support. Students are very positive. Their attainment is satisfactory on the AS level course.
Information and communication technology	Provision for ICT across the curriculum is satisfactory . The standards in the vocational A-level and European Computer Driving Licence are good and they are taught well.
Humanities	Provision in both geography and history is good . Very few students take either subject, but the teaching is good and standards in geography are satisfactory. In history they have been very poor, but new staff have changed this and present standards are still low but are improving. Provision for sociology is satisfactory . It is a new subject, but there is good planning and students are progressing well. Provision for religious education is satisfactory , in that planning is in hand to provide all students with their entitlement over the year.
Visual and performing arts and media	Provision for art and design is good . Standards are good, as is teaching and students are developing maturity and confidence.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Provision for physical education is good . Teaching is good and pupils progress well, although their results are still below the national average. Provision for dance is good . New students are progressing quickly through expert, focused

teaching and very good application and enthusiasm.

Business

The provision for business education is **satisfactory**. There is commitment and enthusiasm from both teachers and students. Achievement is good and standards have been similar to the national average.

Health and social care

Provision for health and social care is **good**. Teaching is good, and standards around average on both the intermediate and advanced courses, which represents a good achievement. There are good links with the CACHE child care course which is a very strong feature.

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

Students have good advice about courses to follow and how to study independently. Academic performance is monitored well. There are close links between the pastoral staff and the subject tutors and students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. There are regular reviews, consultations and discussions, resulting in a low drop out rate from courses. Careers advice is well organised, as is advice on applying to higher education. The support for students encourages them to aspire to go to a range of university and other higher level courses.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The leadership of the sixth form is good and it is managed well. The facilities have been developed effectively to provide very good provision for the students and several students are now joining from other schools. The basis of the support is a close knowledge of each student, and the provision of an individual course tailored to their needs. Very few are traditional sixth form students and the ethos established is one of order, study and achievement, allowing all to develop their talents and ambition.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form students interviewed were very supportive of what the school does for them, enjoyed their studies and felt they were given a lot of useful information and advice. They were surprised at the concerns raised in the questionnaire about the suitability of courses and how well students got on together, as they felt these were actually two of the strengths. The inspection team agreed with them on this and noted the small number of the questionnaires returned.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

Standards achieved by pupils in subjects and courses

The school's results and achievements

Standards are overall **below** the national average. Achievement is, however, **satisfactory** overall. Pupils are reaching their potential by the age of 14, judged by their low attainment when they enter the school and make satisfactory progress on their GCSE courses, although their standards are still low. Girls are generally doing better than boys. The overall standards seen in class are not reflected in the examination results, which remain poor, and some pupils were very disrupted by the situation in the school and did not complete their courses. Pupils with special educational needs do not achieve as well as they should. Sixth form students achieve well, particularly in their vocational courses, where results are around the national average, but the low numbers in many groups make national comparisons insecure.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' overall achievement is satisfactory, particularly in English up to 14 and through all years in art and design, music and physical education, improving their standards more than would be expected from their previous attainment.
- Pupils with special educational needs do not have enough focused support to enable them to progress satisfactorily.
- Overall results in national tests and examinations are well below national averages. They have remained disappointingly low despite the action taken over the past year. There is inevitably a delay between improvements in teaching and learning and an improvement in pupils' results. But the school had hoped to see better results in 2003.
- Progress made by the few pupils whose home language is not English was excellent.
- Pupils' competence in the basic skills such as numeracy is weak, and this occasionally limits their progress in other subjects.
- Competency in English and literacy skills are, however, satisfactory and this is helping to bring about improvement.

Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2002

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	19.1 (21.8)	49.9 (48.4)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	83.4 (91.2)	90.9 (90.9)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	94 (97)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	24.6 (29.4)	39.8 (39)

There were 199 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

Commentary

1. Standards on entry to the school are low. The primary school test results of new pupils in 2002 indicated that their attainment was below the national average in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The number of pupils who enter with reading ages below 11 is significant. There are no high attainers; they have been selected to go to the grammar schools. This picture is similar for all years currently in the school, including the present Year 7.

2. In the National Curriculum tests for 14 year olds in 2002, the overall performance of pupils in these core subjects was below the national average. However, compared with schools having a similar intake at age 11 their attainment was above average, although there are no direct comparisons with secondary modern schools. English was the only core subject where girls' attainment was higher than boys' and this has been a feature of the last three years. Results have stayed the same over the last five years, broadly in line with the national trend. While the trend of results in mathematics has been very low, results in English and science have been improving.
3. The new value-added measure, which indicates the progress made by pupils from the end of Year 6 to the end of Year 9 based on their average point scores, suggests that progress has been in line with schools nationally and has been better than that of pupils in similar schools.
4. The percentage of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades in the examinations for 16 year olds in 2002, was well below the national average and low in comparison with schools in a similar context, although again there are no direct comparisons for secondary modern schools. The percentage gaining five or more pass grades, A*-G, fell to well below the national average and it was also below average for schools with similar prior attainment in Year 9. This was at a time when the school was going through a very difficult patch and many pupils just dropped out of the system, not completing work. The trend was downwards and it is clearly taking a long time to pick it up again. The school is disappointed that the 2003 results showed little improvement, but inspection evidence indicates that standards in class have improved. In 2002 and 2003 the school met its target for the percentage of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades.
5. Standards of work seen in lessons, during the inspection and in the analysis of pupils' written work, indicate that most pupils are achieving satisfactorily, compared to what might be expected, given their low standards when they come to the school. This is inconsistent between subjects and across years. The strength is the progress being made in the new vocational courses, such as the CACHE child care course. The concern is the achievement of the pupils with additional educational needs, who can struggle in class without clearly focused support. In some subjects, pupils lack skills in preparing for and meeting exam requirements and in meeting deadlines for submitting completed coursework. Middle managers need to support the new and unqualified teachers, who, although expert in their subject, are not yet experienced in preparing pupils for examinations, or clear about the standards expected in particular classes.
6. There is some variation in the achievement of boys and girls. Written work of girls is often more carefully produced, whereas the work of some boys tends to be short and often unfinished. The analysis by the school of its examination data is not sufficiently detailed to show in which subjects or groups the main variation in performance between boys and girls is found. The new whole school policy on mixed gender groups and pairs for seating and group work is giving pupils access to a greater range of learning and recording styles.
7. Observations of lessons and reviews of work indicate that pupils are reaching national levels at the age of 14 in English, mathematics, art and design and physical education, which shows good achievement from a low start. Their literary and numerical skills are adequate for them to progress. By the age of 16, the standards of attainment observed are still low. They are achieving comparatively well in art and design, design and technology and PE, but girls are doing better than boys in almost all subjects. Although pupils' literary skills are satisfactory, their numerical skills are weak and holding them back in several subjects. Resources for ICT in the school have recently been extended and are now good, but pupils' competence in

information and communication technology is as yet insufficient to help them to make progress in all subjects.

8. Pupils with additional educational needs (SEN) are overall not achieving appropriately or making satisfactory progress in lessons. They do make satisfactory progress when teachers and learning support assistants help them to develop and practise skills and to concentrate and behave well. In lessons where this support is not provided, pupils do not achieve as well as they could. Too often, they are unable to complete the work they are given or contribute effectively to lessons.
9. There are five pupils whose home language is not English; their progress is excellent overall. The achievement of gifted and talented pupils is difficult to measure as the school identifies them in terms of its intake, which is "creamed off" by the grammar schools. Most such pupils are identified and recognised in class, but their progress is similar to that of other pupils.

Sixth form

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The sixth form students are achieving well compared to predictions based on their GCSE grades.
- The results of examinations are still low overall compared to national averages for all sixth forms, but the results from vocational courses are in line with the national figures.
- Standards seen in class, in folders and on display indicate attainment in line with the national picture.
- There is a low drop out rate from the two year courses.
- The competence of pupils in mathematics is insufficient to make progress in all subjects.

Standards in GCE A/AS level and VCE examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2002

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	93.8	90.3
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	14.2	35.5
Average point score per pupil	12.4	17.5

There were 63 pupils in the year group.

10. In the 2002 examinations, Year 13 students attained overall results which were well below average for those students taking A level GCE courses, but were average when advanced vocational results are included.
11. The school's analysis of the Year 13 results over the past three years shows that students achieve well compared with other similar schools in the area although it is within a county system of selective education. The school operates an open access policy which welcomes students with a wide range of abilities and learning needs, some of whom need to retake GCSE examinations, some from other schools and others who are tempted by the high employment in the area to leave after one year, having completed an AS course.
12. Not all post 16 courses were inspected. In the sixth form work seen during the inspection, standards overall are average and achievement is good. Standards are above average in geography and health and social care and well above average in ICT. Standards are average in English, mathematics, biology, art and design and below average in design and technology, history and modern foreign languages. Compared with their prior attainment in GCSE,

achievement is good in English, biology, art and design, geography and very good in dance, ICT and health and social care. Improving standards reflect the good teaching and learning in sixth form lessons and the good attitudes with which most students approach their learning. Achievement is unsatisfactory in design and technology.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are **satisfactory** in the main school. They are **good** in the sixth form. Attendance is now **satisfactory**, but punctuality of some pupils is not.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour have improved greatly since the current headteacher arrived and are now good.
- The school is successfully developing pupils' self-esteem and a sense of their school community.
- Attendance has improved over the last year and is now satisfactory.
- The punctuality of some pupils is unsatisfactory; time is lost moving to lessons.
- Parents and pupils are concerned about bullying, although appropriate action is taken and the situation has improved.
- Pupils' personal development is satisfactory, although multicultural development is relatively weak.

There has been a good improvement in attendance at the school over the last year. For a number of years, attendance levels had been consistently below the national figures, but now they are in line with them. There are two main reasons for this:

- Firstly, the school has sharpened up its systems for checking up on attendance, so that absentees are pursued more quickly and more strenuously.
- Secondly, what the school has to offer through its curriculum is now more appealing to pupils, so that they are less likely to want to stay away.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	9.4	School data	0.4
National data	7.8	National data	1.2

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

- The current headteacher has high expectations for behaviour and this is reflected in the high level of temporary exclusions over the last year as his standards have been established in the school. These have now reduced as the message has got through.
- Too many pupils are late for school and for some lessons. Some pupils who arrive at the site on time linger outside. Many dawdle as they make their way around the site between lessons and this wastes too much valuable teaching time as lessons have to start late or are interrupted by latecomers. Fifty-minute lessons are very tight for practical subjects and this lateness reduces the time available even further.

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
No ethnic group recorded

Exclusions in the last school year

No. of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
501	0	0

White – British	529	167	0
White – any other White background	20	1	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	12	6	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	10	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	1	1	0
Black or Black British – African	2	0	0
Chinese	2	0	0
Any other ethnic group	10	0	0

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

15. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in class are overall good, but vary greatly, depending on who is in the group, how well the teacher manages them and what support is available for pupils who need extra help. Pupils say that behaviour is better in the top groups and this is often the case. In exam classes with specialist teachers and motivated pupils, attitudes and behaviour are often excellent. The opposite is occasionally found in some lower ability sets dominated by boys. In mixed ability groups, behaviour is usually satisfactory or good, although one or two pupils can sometimes take up a disproportionate amount of the teacher's attention. Around the school, pupils show that they know the basics of good social skills, for example holding doors or standing aside for others, but both boys and girls are sometimes rough in their interactions with one another. Staff have said that "two years ago the pupils ran the school", but this is certainly no longer true.
16. As the school works to promote a sense of loyalty and pride amongst its pupils, so it successfully fosters an awareness of their own worth and of their role in the school community. Pupils say that they feel trusted and ready to take on responsibility and those that do so take their duties seriously, for example as peer mentors or as representatives on the school council.
17. Through the inspection questionnaires, a number of parents and pupils have expressed concerns about bullying. Pupils say that this happens around the site and in areas of the school where there are no adults about, such as the pupils' toilets. The school is aware of concerns and takes them seriously and most pupils and parents acknowledge that the school does its best to deal with problems when it becomes aware of them. In an effort to encourage pupils to report issues, the school has recently introduced a 'bully box', where pupils can leave details of incidents anonymously.
18. Pupils' multicultural awareness is not satisfactorily developed by the school beyond RE lessons. They are not given enough opportunities to find out about other cultures in modern multi-ethnic Britain, either through the curriculum or through the everyday life of the school. There are very few pupils from ethnic minorities and all are fully integrated into school life. When pupils learn about other faiths, they show that they can be respectful, interested and tolerant.

The sixth form

19. Students have good attitudes in the sixth form. They attend regularly and are punctual, having most of their lessons in the sixth form centre. The atmosphere in the centre is mature and studious, most of the

time and students appreciate the recent improvements in behaviour and attitude in the main school. They take part in many social and extra-curricular events, some for the younger pupils, have a buddy system to welcome new pupils and are involved in the school council. Their role in the school is important as a focus for continuing studies.

20. The use of independent study has been promoted well and most students manage their own learning programme efficiently.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is **satisfactory** overall. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, as are attitudes and behaviour. The curriculum is satisfactory, with some weaknesses. The care, guidance and support provided for pupils is satisfactory, although there are concerns about provision for pupils with additional educational needs (SEN).

Teaching and Learning

The quality of teaching and learning are **satisfactory**, both in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 to 11. They are better than they were at the last inspection and much better than during the follow up visit a year later. There are nine new teachers who started just before the inspection visit and 16 unqualified teachers. They are nearly all specialists, but as new teachers they are not necessarily expert in preparing pupils for external examinations. The use of assessment to improve pupils' work is unsatisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Many teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and intellectual effort, good subject knowledge and use effective strategies to support learning.
- Expectations of the pupils are inconsistent, both of behaviour and standards.
- Good teaching challenges the pupils to think for themselves and develops their study skills; where it is less challenging pupils are passive and rely too heavily on teachers.
- The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is unsatisfactory; teachers do not have enough information to help them to improve.
- The work of a few teachers is undermined by poor behaviour of some pupils and little or no progress is made in these lessons; poor presentation and slow delivery can result in a lack of interest and engagement by these pupils.
- Assessments do not always help pupils understand what is needed; they do not always identify what pupils can do and what they need to do to improve further.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 169 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2 (1.2%)	25 (15%)	59 (35%)	67 (40%)	15 (8.8%)	1 (0.6%)	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.

Commentary

21. The overall quality of teaching in the school is **satisfactory**. It has improved since the last inspection where teaching was unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9, reflecting the attention given to its improvement. The quality of learning is also **satisfactory**, helped by the improved attitudes and behaviour shown by the pupils. Both these judgements are a big improvement on the follow up visit by Ofsted a year after the original inspection, when both teaching and learning had declined considerably.

22. Many teachers are new or unqualified, but the school is fully staffed, mostly with specialists. Some teachers do, however have to work in different departments and in areas where they are not specialists. Most are doing a very good job of this. Where problems arise there is no specific pattern; some classes can behave very well, being receptive to teaching and then later in the day be almost unteachable, taxing the most experienced staff.
23. Where teaching is good, very good and excellent, lessons are well planned and move at a sprightly pace, engaging and challenging the pupils, for example a French lesson where the use of the target language was very effective and the atmosphere was one of listening silence. Planning and strategies help pupils to develop skills such as self-expression as in religious education and history lessons and a lively physical education session encouraged game skills and involved non-participants in the role of umpires. In an art and design class the teacher's guidance on the use of charcoal and scale of drawing was concise; pupils sustained interest and creative effort with timely advice and encouragement to reflect and evaluate their work. Good use of questioning in a science class on photosynthesis challenged pupils' understanding and they responded positively. In good lessons marking is linked to what pupils can do and what they need to do to improve. A major reason for good achievement since entry is that the most effective teachers have high expectations of what they should be able to do and of their behaviour.
24. In contrast, where teaching is unsatisfactory, expectations of behaviour and standards are low, subject matter is presented poorly and the pace of the lesson slows through repeated efforts to gain control of the pupils. Bad behaviour can undermine the authority of some less experienced teachers so that little learning takes place. In an ICT lesson the practical activity of accessing websites lacked stimulus and pupils became distracted very early in the lesson having difficulty logging on. In geography and mathematics the learning process was occasionally impeded by the unacceptable behaviour of a few pupils. A key factor in lessons that were no more than satisfactory was that the teaching was not imaginative, but was boring the pupils. Although all teachers seek to interest pupils and many tasks are demanding, they sometimes lack variety. Pupils are kept fully occupied but tasks are similar in type, demanding the same sort of learning skills, even though the work in the different tasks does move them forward. Homework is not used effectively to reinforce and extend learning because it is not linked to specific learning outcomes, is not always completed and some marking does not tell the pupils how they can improve.
25. The assessment systems in place are unsatisfactory, they do not help teachers ensure that pupils' work is targeted to their needs and this limits their learning. Apart from subjects such as English, ICT, PE and French where there are good examples of individual monitoring of pupil performance, marking is inconsistent and assessment is not securely linked to National Curriculum levels and, in the case of RE, to examination requirements.
26. Teachers overall enjoy good relationships with pupils and most lessons are conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect. The National Key Stage 3 Strategy, which structures teaching, has been successfully introduced. When applied, teachers usually tell pupils exactly what they are trying to learn to do and the pupils work purposefully.
27. Overall, teaching is satisfactory for those identified as being gifted or talented, but it is unsatisfactory for pupils who have additional educational needs. Learning is satisfactory when well informed learning support assistants work with pupils individually in mainstream classes. However, records of individual sessions do not provide enough information to help identify what the pupil needs to learn next or to measure progress accurately over time. Adults who support the pupils do not write down enough about the amount of help they have provided or whether the pupil understood. As a result, the subject teacher is unable to tell from finished work how much was completed or achieved independently.
28. Individual education plans (IEPs) are in place for all pupils who have additional needs, but they are unsatisfactory because the targets they contain are too broad and frequently inappropriate. Many subject teachers are unaware of the content of individual education plans and those that are make inconsistent use of them. Subject teachers do not refer to the targets sufficiently when they prepare work for the class and they do not adapt their teaching methods. In general the work that teachers provide does not

enable pupils with additional educational needs to make enough progress. When pupils do not have the support of a learning support assistant, they do not learn as well as they could and their progress is often unsatisfactory.

29. The teaching of pupils who are withdrawn from mainstream classes for extra support is insufficiently targeted and flexible to meet their needs. Insufficient information about the support provided is made available to subject teachers. There is insufficient use of information and communication technology in meeting the needs of these pupils.
30. The statutory procedures for pupils with statements of special educational needs are carried out, although the evidence on which their targets are reviewed and set is not secure enough. The targets set in pupils' IEPs are not sufficiently specific or measurable and frequently cannot be achieved in a short enough time. They do not provide teachers with enough information. For example, to "take care of presentation and write neatly" is an appropriate target in the longer term but it does not tell the teacher what the pupil needs to learn now. Because the targets are so broad, it is difficult for the additional needs department to measure how much progress a pupil has made over time or to judge if enough progress has been made. This was identified as an area for development at the time of the last inspection. Although the special needs department has done a considerable amount of work to improve the quality of pupils' individual education plans, they remain unsatisfactory.

The sixth form

31. Teaching is **good** overall in the sixth form, as it was at the time of the last inspection. Teaching in around two thirds of the lessons was good and better. Learning is also **good**. Students are encouraged to work independently and develop their ideas. Target setting is used well, based on previous performance and the students are involved fully in the process. The examination specifications are looked at carefully in the most effective subjects and the grade criteria explained and discussed so that students know what they need to do to improve. The monitoring reports on each student are detailed and helpful.
32. The teachers work with a wide range of abilities and previous attainment and they cope well with these mixed ability classes. They build up the confidence and aspirations of many students who have not achieved high grades at GCSE. The key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT are not taught separately and the expectation is that they will be covered in each subject. This is not always the case and some pupils have weaknesses in these areas that are holding them back.
33. Vocational training and work placements for the teachers taking advanced vocational courses (AVCEs) and other courses have widened their knowledge of how pupils can succeed. The support for new teachers is satisfactory; there is a good induction to the school, especially for the unqualified teachers. However, some need more support from their managers to help them deal with the wide range of examinations and courses being followed, as they have had little or no experience of preparing students for them.

The curriculum

The broad range of curriculum opportunities is **satisfactory** overall, but there are some weaknesses. The curriculum is **good** in the sixth form. The opportunities for curriculum enrichment are **good**. The quantity and quality of accommodation and resources are **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 and 10 to 11 has been reviewed and extended to provide additional learning opportunities for the pupils including vocational alternatives and an emphasis on the arts.
- Provision for citizenship in all years does not meet statutory requirements.
- The curriculum for pupils with additional educational needs (SEN) is unsatisfactory. It is not being adapted sufficiently by subject teachers for these pupils.
- The out of school activities are extensive particularly in sport, subject based study support and Easter revision classes.

- The curriculum is both innovative and flexible, particularly in the sixth form, and provides good progression to the next stage of learning.
- Information and communication technology learning opportunities are inconsistent across the school, particularly in mathematics and technology.

Commentary

34. The overall quality and range of the curriculum have greatly improved since the last inspection when they were judged unsatisfactory. New arrangements have been made from September which have further developed the provision, but more work is needed.
35. In Years 7 to 9 a banding system allows for each area to determine their own arrangements and this works well. Dance, music and drama are now part of a performing arts faculty and this has developed the aesthetic curriculum effectively. Some pupils in Years 7 and 8 have additional literacy and numeracy, in place of some Spanish; however arrangements are not yet in place to ensure that their studies in the language progress effectively.
36. In Year 10 all pupils are starting to study a double ICT award or an intermediate GNVQ. Some pupils have the opportunity to study a quadruple vocational science award. Overall the Year 10 curriculum offers a wide choice to the pupils. The new curriculum in Year 11 enables pupils to take a short course in PE, RE and ICT and to upgrade one of them into a full GCSE. The child care option, CACHE, links well with the sixth form NNEB course. There is now a comprehensive range of vocational opportunities for pupils in Years 10 and 11. A strong feature of the curriculum is its flexibility to meet the different needs of each new cohort of pupils.
37. However the curriculum for pupils with additional educational needs (SEN) is unsatisfactory. It is not being adapted sufficiently by subject teachers for these pupils. The additional educational needs department checks the reading and spelling skills of all pupils when they start school in Year 7. The information from a series of standardised tests is used appropriately to provide additional support for lower attaining pupils in the English and additional educational needs departments. There has not yet been a rigorous review of the impact on pupils' progress of this provision.
38. Provision for learning outside the classroom is good. One of the strongest features is the provision for sport. The range of activities is very good with over one fifth of pupils regularly taking part in organised events. Another strong feature is the out of hours study support offered by most departments to strengthen learning skills. This is augmented by summer schools and Easter revision classes for which there was a good take up in 2003. Several departments have lively lunchtime clubs to foster interest and enthusiasm in their subject.
39. Resources have improved in most departments, particularly with greater access to ICT hardware and software. The range of books, videos and other materials is much wider now and this has improved the range of learning strategies available. The new headteacher has emphasised the need to raise the image of the school and has created a very professional looking reception area. Similarly accommodation for most curriculum areas has improved. The most recent changes have enabled history, RE and business education to move into good refurbished accommodation. The Learning Support Unit, known as 'The Learning Zone' in the school provides a sanctuary for a very small number of pupils who are failing to cope with school generally and mainstream classes in particular. Some issues remain, including the improvement of ventilation in some ICT rooms and the refurbishment of science laboratories and design and technology rooms. Overall, however the environment is good and supports effective learning.

The sixth form

40. The curriculum in the sixth form is **good**. The school offers up to 30 courses of A/AS level GCEs and vocational certificates in education at intermediate and advanced level. There are also retake GCSEs in English and mathematics for those who want to improve their grades. This has been developed through an open choice, finding the right courses for the particular students who want to stay on, rather than forcing them into traditional courses where they might fail. The 14-19 curriculum has been thought through to

provide good bridges between the two stages. An example is the CACHE course for child care which starts with 15 year olds, but can be carried through to 18. Numbers on courses vary, but small groups are balanced by larger ones. Some courses, such as mathematics and history are being run to encourage Year 11 pupils to consider them and provide specific qualifications for a few pupils who want to apply to university.

41. The weakness is in the key skills of numeracy and literacy, which are not being taught separately; many students need these to improve their standards. The ASDAN courses provide skills for a few, but these are insufficient at the moment. The statutory provision for RE is covered in theory; the intention is to use conferences and blocks of lessons later in the year, but the plans are still provisional. Enrichment activities are provided and are overall good, as are the careers events and work related experiences, both of which are valuable in extending the students' opportunities and aspirations.

Care, guidance and support

Care, welfare and health and safety are **satisfactory**. Support for pupils and their involvement in activities are currently **satisfactory** and some good developments are in hand. Support and involvement are **good** in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The student desk provides good daily support for pupils.
- The learning mentors' role is already proving helpful for identified individuals.
- Sixth form staff support the students well.
- The school council is developing into a good forum for consulting pupils.
- Levels of supervision around the very extensive site at break and lunchtime are low.

Commentary

42. The school has some good systems to support pupils, which go beyond the usual framework for pastoral care and free up academic staff to focus on teaching. The student desk is a good example of this, providing practical help to all pupils with the sort of problems that can make life difficult, such as a lost pencil case or a cut knee. Pupils recognise the student desk as the place to turn to when they need help and the staff there deal with them sympathetically. The learning mentors, meanwhile, provide support for selected individuals who need help to overcome barriers to learning. Although their role is very new, staff and pupils say their work is already making a difference, both to the attitudes of individuals and to the atmosphere in classes.
43. The school council offers pupils a good channel for communication with senior staff, although the size of the gathering can be a bit daunting for some of the participants. Representatives have the opportunity to put the views of their tutor groups to the headteacher, who is ready to listen and to respond and to explain the school's point of view. One good example of the school valuing the opinions of pupils and acting on their ideas is the current concern over the availability of drinking water. After hearing what pupils have to say, the headteacher has arranged for water fountains to be installed and pupils are charged with the responsibility of making sure they stay in good condition. Pupils generally support the headteacher and what he is trying to achieve, and this is because he takes the trouble to tell them what he is doing and why. Although not all agree with the new uniform or the boy-girl seating plan, for example, most acknowledge that they understand the reasoning behind these decisions and feel that they are having an impact on pupils' attitudes and behaviour.
44. Although parents were concerned about behaviour, during the inspection visit there was a very calm and orderly atmosphere. Levels of supervision around the very extensive site at break and lunchtime are low. Although the school operates duty rotas for staff each day, the size and intricacies of the site mean that pupils are very often to be found in areas where there is no adult patrolling and that it is often difficult to find an adult around the site quickly. This point was also raised in the HMI report two years ago.

The sixth form

45. Sixth form students enjoy particularly **good** support in their study from their tutors and their teachers. During the inspection, for example, the new Year 12 students were receiving good quality advice on study skills and time management through their PSHE sessions. As a result, they were gaining confidence and learning to cope with the increased independence and choice open to them. Good quality documentation is also available to them. The sixth form procedures booklet is very helpful for reference, while the monitoring progress folder is a useful tool for self-evaluation.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has **satisfactory** links with parents and some good new initiatives are underway. Links with other schools, colleges and the community are also **satisfactory**. Provision for the community is developing well and is currently **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Initiatives such as target setting help to involve parents with their children's learning.
- Good channels for communication with parents are being established.
- Some good quality information is available for parents.
- Reports to parents on their children's progress are unsatisfactory.
- There are exciting new developments in community provision such as the "*Learndirect*" scheme.

Commentary

46. The school has been working hard to improve links with parents and most recognise this. Target setting days, for example, are valued as an opportunity to review how well pupils are getting on. However, the fact that the targets are agreed with form tutors rather than subject teachers means that they are not always as sharply focused on appropriate academic improvement as they might be. Good channels for consulting and communicating with parents have been established through the relaunch of the Parents Teachers and Friends Association and through the headteacher's weekly surgeries. In these ways both general and specific views from parents can be sought and heard. School newsletters are well used to celebrate success and announce developments so that parents can feel part of the school community.
47. Reports to parents on their children's progress are unsatisfactory, although parents approved of them in the questionnaire and meeting. Comments even in the core subjects of maths and English focus too much on pupils' attitudes to their work; they do not make clear how well the pupils are doing or how much progress they have made in the subject. The school's grading system is complex. Targets for improvement are often vague or concentrate on general study skills rather than the subject in question. Sometimes the school does not meet the requirement to report on progress in every subject studied that year. Some subject sheets tell parents that it is not possible to comment because of staff absences or shortages; this is not acceptable and several parents complained about it.
48. The school is determined to be recognised as a focal point in the community and the development of its conference suite is an exciting example of this. The "*Learndirect*" scheme to be run there is an ICT based programme which will provide adults with marketable life skills. Revenue generated from rental of the facilities will provide a welcome boost to the school's income.
49. Links with parents of pupils with additional educational needs are good. There are effective mechanisms for the transfer of pupils with statements of special educational needs from their primary schools. The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator and the Inclusion Manager become aware of additional educational issues prior to pupils joining the school. Parents are fully involved at formal review stages for pupils with learning and other difficulties.

50. Good links are maintained with the external agencies that support pupils with learning and other difficulties. They appreciate the open lines of communication with the school and the single point of contact with the Inclusion Manager. External resources to assist inclusion are part funded by the school, for example the Ashford '*Threshold Project*'. The school needs to be more confident that all pupils gain sufficient benefit from access to this additional resource.

The sixth form

51. There are **good** links between the sixth form and the main school; the students are involved in many activities such as arts productions, the school council and as buddies with younger children. The links with other Kent schools and with further and higher education institutions are also encouraged through university visits and sharing of information.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership is **good**; the headteacher is providing clear direction for the improvements he is demanding, supported by senior management and other key staff. It is also **good** in the sixth form. Management is **satisfactory** overall, but some middle managers need more support to develop their roles. The governors' role is carried out well and governance is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The vision, drive and professional commitment of the headteacher are moving the school on from its previously unsatisfactory situation.
- The corporate support and commitment of senior managers and other key staff are helping to put this vision into place.
- The tenacity of school leadership in ensuring that educational priorities are supported through the school's financial planning despite a deficit budget.
- The evolving role of the governing body in its supportive strategies to shape the ethos and educational direction of the school.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance data are unsatisfactory, departments do not clearly identify their strengths and weaknesses, or take the appropriate action to secure improvements in standards.
- The monitoring of staff performance is good.
- The school's contribution to initial teacher training is good, and new and unqualified teachers are supported well.
- There are inadequacies of staffing and learning resources in some areas of the school and they have a negative effect upon educational standards.
- The provision of training and professional development for key staff, especially middle managers, needs to be improved. Some are not clear of their role.
- Some vital senior management time is wasted on daily administrative chores.

Commentary

52. The school is led very effectively by the headteacher. He has a high profile around the school. He came to the school at a very difficult time, when the consensus was that it was failing. He has addressed the problems with vision and enthusiasm. There have been ongoing difficulties of rationalising the historical financial deficit and managing significant staff changes, with a resultant drop in morale and pupils' behaviour. A number of changes have been recently introduced, to extend the curriculum, to offer further support to the pastoral structures and tighter financial control. Since the last inspection, there is now a greater consistency of operations, with the school developing a more corporate image, including the introduction of a new school uniform, a house system and greater collaboration with other institutions across the community. The school has now addressed many of the critical issues identified in the last inspection report and other review visits, with new control mechanisms introduced. This has moved the school from an institution where 'the pupils were in control', to one where the teachers clearly are. Clear

lines of staff management are being introduced and implemented. There is still some way to go before these planned initiatives take full effect and have a positive impact on standards across the school.

53. The new senior management team have clearly defined areas of responsibility, including line management duties. All have been given challenging targets by the governing body for the current academic year in order to reinforce improvement strategies. However, given the many priorities that the school has identified, a disproportionate amount of senior management time and energy is still deployed in day-to-day management such as arranging cover for absent teachers, rather than addressing the school's vision of the future through its strategic planning.
54. The governing body, ably advised by the headteacher, has worked together to introduce the new philosophy and support the proposed initiatives. The historical problems of the budget have been diligently worked on, with an agreement reached with the Local Education Authority regarding a three year strategy to reduce and remove the deficit. The most recent auditor's report gives the school a satisfactory rating regarding its financial management, reporting that the headteacher and governors have adequate information to ensure that finances are kept in good order and that costs are easily determined. The governing body monitor expenditure closely, closely aligning its objectives to the school development and improvement plans.
55. The school has incorporated the principles of best value into its financial management practices. The headteacher, supported by the school finance officer, is actively engaged with comparative exercises with other local schools, as well as those across Kent. Initiatives to access extra funding have been successful, for example the Leadership Incentive Grant and Excellence in Clusters initiative. No other major concerns were identified by the authorities and the unit costs regarding pupils and staffing are in line with similar schools. Overall the school provides satisfactory value for money.
56. The middle management has also undergone change, with a number of new staff in post from September 2003. Most department and pastoral managers are working hard alongside senior managers to improve school performance at all levels. However, these efforts are not consistent across the school partly because of high staff turn-over and the need to rationalise change within a short time frame. The middle managers are the key to moving forward on the school's priorities. They need support and training to enable them to fulfil this role.
57. The headteacher and other senior staff are generally of one mind in their commitment to the principle of inclusion. They see the principle that teaching should take account of pupils' different capabilities and learning styles as having general application and value. This is a big change from the previous system which was one of exclusion, "problem" pupils being sent to the support unit. Not all staff are comfortable with this. Despite these recent improvements, the school has not yet established the culture, practice, management and deployment of resources to ensure that all pupils' needs are met. The roles and responsibilities associated with the school's support for pupils with additional needs are unclear to many staff and the communication of information about these pupils is poor. A systematic review of provision for them is currently underway. This has already led to the redeployment of learning support assistants to subject departments but the supervision of their work is as yet inadequate.

The sixth form

58. Leadership and management of the sixth form are **good**. There are good links with the leadership team and the governors. The head of the sixth form, his deputy and tutors know the students well. They have developed a very good system of support to help all students, including those who would not normally have followed a sixth form course, to succeed and to extend their ambitions. Assessment is very thorough and individual targets are set effectively. The self-evaluation process used to evaluate the effectiveness of the sixth form is very strong, with a clear identification of strengths and weaknesses and clear targets for improvement. The value for money has been calculated in detail and it is good. There is, as yet, not enough direct monitoring by the governors, the leadership team, or the head of subjects, although the sixth form is managed efficiently.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	3,347,306
Total expenditure	3,537,020
Expenditure per pupil	3,116

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	107,048(def)
Balance carried forward to the next	296,762(def)

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

- Most pupils make good progress by the end of Year 9.
- The department is well led and its work is well organised.
- Teaching rooms are neat and attractively presented, with a good range of resources.
- In some classes, poor behaviour limits effective learning.
- Boys do less well in GCSE exams than could be expected.
- There could be more emphasis on pupils' own initiative and independent learning.

Commentary

59. Year 9 test results in 2002 were in line with the national average and well above average for similar schools. They improved consistently over the previous three years. This represents good progress for most pupils, since standards are below average when they join the school. Pupils did significantly better in English than in mathematics or science. However, the 2003 results were much lower. This was the first year of a new test format, which may have led to some variation in marking standards or in pupils' ability to deal with test requirements. Work seen during the inspection, which was not done under test conditions, confirms that achievement is good by the end of Year 9.
60. GCSE English results in 2002 were below the national average, however, and the 2003 results showed little improvement. English literature results were better, but still below average. About three quarters of pupils are entered for this examination. GCSE coursework essays show that pupils can produce work of a higher standard when more time is allowed to complete it and to revise efforts. Taking this into account, achievement by the end of Year 11 is satisfactory overall, although better for girls than boys. National figures and standards reached earlier in the school, indicate that more could be expected of boys at this level.
61. In Years 7 to 9, overall standards are satisfactory. Discussions are usually teacher led, but most pupils are willing to make a constructive contribution when called upon. Speaking skills are satisfactory, but there are few chances to take part in paired or small group discussions, to develop ideas. In a minority of lessons, pupils do not listen well either to teachers or their peers. In these cases, low-level chatter or pupils speaking across each other clearly limit the learning possible. Reading is also satisfactory. The great majority of pupils are independent readers by the end of Year 9. Pupils, including those in lower attaining groups, make a conscientious effort to write fully and develop essays in detail. Most take care to present their written work neatly and carefully. But, for middle and lower attaining pupils, errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation remain a significant problem.
62. In Years 10 and 11, standards are satisfactory overall and relevant skills are consolidated and developed satisfactorily. Many pupils across the ability range lack the confidence to put forward ideas and justify opinions effectively. Written work is often good, particularly personal and imaginative essays. Higher attaining pupils write intelligently about literature they have studied. Essays are usually developed in sufficient depth, with good use of textual detail to substantiate arguments. Most pupils take care to present work neatly and carefully, especially GCSE coursework. There are many examples of word-processed and desktop published work, which show that new technologies are used well to aid work in the subject. In two ICT lessons in English in Years 10 and 11 achievement was good. Pupils were able to use Internet access thoughtfully to research ideas and develop relevant skills.

63. The school has just started to introduce drama as part of performing arts provision in Years 7 to 9. The aims are to raise confidence and allow pupils to express themselves and develop more positive attitudes. This is building on the drama GCSE course which is taught well, but pupils have had poor experiences with many different teachers and their attitudes, expectations of performance and general enthusiasm are still low. The new staff are working hard to motivate them, but standards are still low.
64. Teaching is good. Teachers manage pupils well in most classes and constructive relationships are forged. Lessons are well planned and clear objectives are shared with pupils. Pupils' progress is monitored closely, based on a thorough assessment of written work. Targets for improvement are set for individual pupils. Teachers are also prepared to give additional personal help and guidance where it is needed in study support and booster classes. In a minority of less effective lessons, there are sometimes problems with the management of more challenging behaviour, which hindered progress for the rest of the class. In these cases, activities were not always best matched to the learning needs of pupils. Expectations of what could be achieved in these lessons were low. The timing and pace of some lessons were also not well judged. Either the deadlines for tasks set were not observed and minor activities were allowed to overrun, or too many activities were planned, so that effort was rushed and assimilation of ideas was limited. The end of the lesson often suffered and there was insufficient time to reflect on key points and evaluate learning in final plenary sessions. Work is suitably adapted to the needs of different groups of pupils, however. Teaching assistants also provide effective support to pupils with special educational needs. They help the smooth running of the lesson and interact well with individual pupils. Teachers use class libraries to encourage wider reading. Written work is set and marked regularly, with appropriate opportunities for more extended writing.
65. Overall, pupils' learning is good. Most are conscientious and try hard to improve their work. However, there could be more emphasis on pupils' own initiative and ideas, to encourage more independent learning and personal response, particularly for higher attaining pupils.
66. Leadership and management of English in the school are good. Teachers follow thorough and well-planned schemes of work. There is an established programme of lesson observations and regular monitoring of work set. Staff work together well as a team to share and develop best practice. There has been a significant turnover of staff, however, with a number of new teachers joining the department at the beginning of this term. Several are in their first weeks of teaching. They feel that they are well supported in the school. It will be important for this to continue and for appropriate training opportunities to be provided, if they are to make a fully effective contribution to raising standards further. Since the last inspection, standards of teaching and learning have been broadly maintained. Teaching rooms, in the new classroom block and resources are both significantly better and the overall improvement is satisfactory.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

67. The need to improve standards in literacy was identified as a key issue in the last inspection report. Progress has been satisfactory, but it remains high on the school's agenda. A number of initiatives have taken place in the interim period, which have created greater awareness of literacy issues. However, there is currently no structured co-ordination of efforts and therefore implementation of best practice is not fully consistent throughout the school. Whilst the senior management team monitor departmental strategies, there has been no systematic evaluation of the success of literacy work. Nevertheless, effective support for literacy skills is found in a range of subjects, including French, geography, history, science and English. Standards are satisfactory overall, but there is clearly much scope for further improvement, in particular in the technical accuracy of written work. Spelling mistakes are not monitored or corrected consistently in a number of subjects. Opportunities to develop speech beyond teacher led question and answer sessions are also limited.

68. Good practice includes imaginative displays of pupils' written work in classrooms, which serve to create a good literacy environment. Key words are also widely displayed. Teachers emphasise them at the beginning of most lessons, but their use is sometimes not effectively reinforced as the lesson continues. In geography, the use of word maps to extend pupils' knowledge of specialist vocabulary is very good, however. Reading skills are promoted through Internet research in a number of subjects, including design and technology (DT), English, RE and art. Pupils regularly write for different purposes and now have more opportunities to produce more extended writing in English, French, ICT and history. Note-making and report writing are required in most subjects. Worksheets in science also promote writing skills. English and the humanities subjects use writing frames to help pupils develop and structure written work effectively. Beyond lesson times, successful literacy summer schools have been held for the past two years, for selected new pupils. Additional support for the development of literacy skills for pupils with special educational needs is also provided.

Provision in modern languages is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The use of French and Spanish is good or better in about half the lessons and this leads to good teaching.
- The achievement of the 16 year olds is unsatisfactory.
- There is good pace and high expectations in the better lessons.
- The resources for the subject are good and interactive whiteboards are used well.
- Some of the weaker lessons have too slow a pace and pupils become bored.
- There is inadequate support for pupils with additional educational needs.
- Some of the marking is inadequate and reports too vague, failing to give enough information to pupils and parents.

Commentary

69. Standards by the age of 14 and 16 are below the national average. They are lower than those reported in the last inspection. Although there are signs of improvement in the GCSE results in 2003, they were well below the national average in 2002. Boys' standards are below the standards of girls, but in lessons this difference is not generally apparent. There is a very wide range of attainment, from a few above average to many well below. Most pupils are able to understand what they hear, but speaking skills are inconsistent; some are confident and try hard with the language, but many are not and their pronunciation is often inaccurate. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory by the age of 14, but is unsatisfactory in the case of 16 year-olds; they are not making sufficient progress to maintain their standards. In general pupils' writing is accurate, but it is not until Year 9 that there is much extended writing. There are some very good examples done on the computer. The pupils with AEN are not progressing as well as they should.
70. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, with some good, very good and excellent teaching especially in some of the lessons in Years 7 – 9. Features of the better lessons include:
- very good use of the foreign language by teachers and by pupils;
 - good planning, fast pace and high expectations;
 - good control of classes with very good behaviour as a result; and
 - very effective use of interactive whiteboards.

Features of the less successful lessons include:

- poor use of time;
 - a lack of different work for different pupils; and
 - attempts to ensure high standards of behaviour with only partial success.
71. In addition, in most classes the learning of pupils with additional educational needs is adversely affected by the lack of teaching assistants in the classroom. Most work is well marked with helpful comments, but there are also examples of work that is just ticked. Many reports give a helpful overview of the pupil's

course, standards reached and helpful targets; the unsatisfactory ones, however, give minimal information and vague targets.

72. The curriculum is satisfactory except with four classes in Years 7 and 8, where the time allocation of one lesson per week is inadequate. The head of department's decision to offer these classes Spanish instead of French is sound, but long-term planning for the development of Spanish has yet to be done. There is a new head of department, leadership and management are judged to be satisfactory as development plans have been clearly outlined in the three weeks she has been in post, but progress since the last inspection is unsatisfactory overall.

MATHEMATICS

The quality of provision is **satisfactory**.

Mains strengths and weaknesses

- There is an improvement in standards at the age of 14, especially at the higher levels.
- Departmental leadership is good.
- The mentoring and support training programme for staff are good.
- Achievement and standards at the age of 16 are unsatisfactory.
- National Curriculum requirements regarding the use of information and communication technology within mathematics are not fully met.
- The use of assessment data to promote learning is unsatisfactory.
- Not all teachers know how to deal with disaffected pupils.

Commentary

73. Overall, pupils' attainment by the age of 14 is satisfactory. Up to 2002 pupils' attainment was unsatisfactory, with standards below national averages and below those of similar schools. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003 show substantial improvement, notably at Levels 5 and above and with no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls. The pupils are therefore now achieving satisfactory standards given their low attainment when they come to the school.
74. Standards are below the national averages by the age of 16. GCSE results in 2003 were below those of 2002, which were themselves well below national averages and the pupils' overall achievement is unsatisfactory. There has been no significant change in attainment since the last inspection and pupils have tended to gain lower grades in mathematics than in their other subjects.
75. Many pupils on entering the school have poor numerical skills and much attention is given to raising these. Early work in Year 7 consolidates number operations, proceeding through multiplication processes, decimals and understanding sequences. Higher-attainers develop this naturally to algebraic form. Lower-attaining pupils receive concentrated help and in all classes warm-ups often relate to number. The poor memory of some pupils limits their progress and their lack of confidence in tables is serious. Towards the end of Year 9 higher-attainers can calculate volumes of solids, do simple trigonometry and perform statistical calculations. Many pupils have been too reliant on the use of calculators, and the school is actively seeking to overcome this.
76. Inspection evidence indicates improvements, through changes in staff, strong leadership and the beneficial effects of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy for mathematics. Most teaching is now at least satisfactory and good teaching with pace, purpose and enthusiasm was seen in most year groups – but not in all lessons. With skilled teachers pupils learn well. Lesson planning is good, but the application of the schemes of work is not flexible enough– one pupil with a correct answer does not mean all have understood. Achievement is held back when classes move on to new topics before all pupils are ready. Learning is satisfactory overall; the pupils are studying well. Marking is often not rigorous enough and

there is not enough guidance on how pupils can improve. Pupils do not always re-do incorrect work, or finish incomplete tasks.

77. Standards are improving in Years 7 to 9, especially for higher-attainers. In Years 10 to 11 this is less so, partly because the basics are not secure. The provision of only three periods per week for mathematics in Year 10 is inadequate and limits what they can do. Insufficient use is made of information and communication technology, so much so that National Curriculum requirements are not being met fully. Some encouraging coursework was seen from pupils of varying abilities, but many exercise books have untidy and unstructured work and homework assignments of poor quality.
78. Support for pupils with additional educational needs is inconsistent. Where effective support is provided these pupils achieve well. Other staff are not so confident in dealing with varying individual learning needs, nor with disaffected pupils.
79. Departmental leadership and management are good, and specialist maths teachers have been appointed over the past two years. However half of the full-time staff in the department are unqualified or on graduate training programmes. They receive good support and there is drive and a determination to push up standards. Documentation and procedures have greatly improved; records are now good, with much invaluable data. Staff need to evaluate the data provided better to promote teaching and learning. The use of assessment data, the marking and reports are unsatisfactory; the reports lack detail about what the pupils can actually do or not do. More specific and achievable targets need to be set. Accommodation and resources are good. Displays are also good but they contain little work produced by the pupils. Indications are that the department is improving and moving forward positively.

Numeracy across the school

80. Numeracy across the school is unsatisfactory overall. A cross-curricular numeracy strategy has recently been introduced, following discussions between a team of staff. It is not yet bedded down and in many subjects opportunities are missed to use numeracy effectively. In design and technology or in science, where numeric techniques are more specifically required, they are often undemanding. Work involving graphs is better, especially in geography, where pupils can use line, bar and pie graphs and are also encouraged to interpret them – an important aspect omitted elsewhere.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to explain scientific ideas clearly.
- Assessment does not give teachers and pupils enough information about what is needed to improve.
- Pupils' written work, including the use of homework, fails to provide a good basis for future learning.
- Pupils need more help and encouragement to think for themselves.
- Curriculum planning is good.

Commentary

81. Standards in 2002 were low by the end of Year 9 when compared to the national average, but the pupils' achievement, based on their previous attainment, was satisfactory. Pupils make satisfactory links between observations and scientific theories and recognise the need for fair tests. However, many pupils do not think for themselves enough and are too dependent on teachers.

82. By the age of 16 pupils' achievement is still satisfactory. Most pupils have improved their understanding and use of scientific concepts, but their standards are still low compared to the national average, many having poor recall of earlier work. This often results from past deficiencies in teaching. This is now being addressed with the appointment of better qualified and experienced staff. However there is still some underachievement in Years 8-11, particularly among boys. Many pupils in Year 7 are making good progress. When the pupils identified as being gifted and talented are offered challenging tasks, they make good progress. The targeted support for many pupils with additional educational needs is inadequate.
83. Teaching is satisfactory because lessons are structured well and scientific ideas are developed in ways that encourage pupils to learn. In Years 7-9, the National Key Stage 3 Strategy is beginning to have an impact on standards, but some teachers are uncomfortable with the changes. They are too concerned with completing the work in lessons and fail to modify their approach sufficiently to address individual needs. This results in some pupils losing interest. Teachers' strategies for assessing how well pupils are doing in lessons are insufficient. In Years 10 and 11, teachers provide good coverage of syllabus requirements but some coursework is unsatisfactory. Pupils need more help with written work and the taking of notes. Presentation is often poor and the content is sometimes incorrect and incomplete. The quality of teachers' marking is variable. The best examples provide pupils with clear pointers for how to improve as well as checking and correcting the work. Homework is unsatisfactory because it often fails to provide a suitable means of promoting learning. ICT is used well in some lessons, but facilities for remote sensing and data logging are inadequate.
84. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The strategies for improving learning and achievement are however still weak. Curriculum development and planning are good. The introduction of a vocational science course in Year 10 is having positive effects on pupils' learning and attitudes. However, the arrangements for double science classes are unsatisfactory, since achievement is too wide-ranging. Technician time is insufficient and this causes problems for teachers in managing practical work. Overall there has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. After a difficult period caused by staff shortages, teaching now promotes higher expectations and lessons are better structured.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Significant investment in computer hardware and software across the school provides pupils with very good access.
- Teachers' knowledge and assessment of pupils whilst they work help pupils make progress.
- The use of assessment data is not sufficiently developed to inform teaching and improve learning for pupils of all abilities.
- Standards at the end of Year 9 and year 11 are below national averages in 2002 because of lack of continuity in previous teaching.
- Non-specialist teachers lack formal opportunities to share and develop good practice.

Commentary

85. Standards by the age of 14 and 16 are below the national average. Teacher assessment of ICT at the end of Year 9 was generous, as pupils did not cover all the areas they should have in 2002-2003 and pupils have experienced a lack of continuity of teaching. These factors have had a negative impact on standards. In 2002 results in the GCSE were well below average, with girls performing better than boys. This is similar to the situation reported in the last inspection.

Unconfirmed GCSE and GNVQ results for 2003 show that overall, standards are improving. The curriculum is undergoing change and the GCSE short course and the applied vocational GCSE in ICT are now offered as option choices.

86. Achievement in lessons is satisfactory. In Years 7 and 9 the majority of pupils enjoy using ICT and have positive attitudes. In Year 8, pupils respond better where there are a number of small activities to keep them fully engaged. In Year 7 pupils build on previously learned skills of presentation of information and in some classes pupils understand how the use of images can improve the clarity of a message for an audience. In Years 8 and 9, mid- and higher-achieving pupils develop an awareness of the difference between fact and opinion, and discriminate well between accuracy and reliability of information found on the Internet. Pupils with additional educational needs achieve satisfactorily when extra learning support is available, which is not always the case. Overall, pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve as expected, considering their previous attainment. Lower achieving pupils benefit from extra lessons and individual support from their teacher and make good progress in choosing digital equipment for different user groups. In Years 10 and 11 pupils of all abilities are willing to develop their work in order to raise standards.
87. Overall teaching is satisfactory. In all years, pupils' practical skills are monitored well in lessons by their teachers who, as a consequence, make use of their strong knowledge of ICT to provide extra guidance for improvement. In classes, particularly in Years 7-9, where there is a wide range of ability, teaching resources are not differentiated sufficiently well to meet the needs of students with additional educational needs and there is a lack of challenge to ensure that some of the more able pupils can build on their previous skills and knowledge. However, the more able pupils in Year 10, with extra challenge, develop and present their business documents independently and progress is good. The skill based approach in some Year 10 lessons ensures that all pupils reach a basic standard from which they can make progress. The use of assessment data is not yet fully developed and pupils do not have predicted target grades. Some are encouraged to set personal work targets but this strategy is not used across the whole department nor is it monitored sufficiently well to ensure that pupils review their working practice and make improvement.
88. The recently appointed head of department has a clear vision for e-learning and the use of computers to improve standards and leadership and management are satisfactory. The scheme of work for Years 7-9 lacks sufficient opportunity for pupils to develop skill in data handling. Access to the required range of software is increasing and teaching activities are under review to develop differentiated resources for pupils of all abilities. There are a number of non-specialist but experienced teachers in the department, they are committed to success for their pupils, but lack formal opportunities to share and develop teaching practice with other members of the department. The number of computers is above average and provision is very good, but the lack of ventilation in the main ICT rooms leads to an overheated work environment.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

The use of ICT in subjects across the curriculum is unsatisfactory. A significant majority of teachers have completed NOF ICT training but ICT is not yet fully integrated into all schemes of work. A teaching assistant has recently been appointed to provide guidance to staff in the use of ICT to support teaching and learning but this has yet to have an impact. ICT is used well to support learning in history, geography, English, French, and in design and technology in Years 7 to 9. ICT is under-developed in science, mathematics, art and design, design and technology in Years 10 and 11 and for pupils with additional educational needs. There is good support from the network manager and technician for the installation and maintenance of equipment. Interactive whiteboards are installed, but they are not used fully in all subjects.

HUMANITIES

Geography

The provision for geography is **satisfactory**, with some good features.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan well.
- Fieldwork is very relevant and supportive to learning.
- Good use is made of ICT in enhancing learning and reinforcing learning skills.
- Inconsistencies exist in the application of assessment data to furthering teaching and learning strategies.
- Standards overall at the ages of 14 and 16 are still below the national average.

Commentary

89. At the age of 14 in 2002 standards were largely unsatisfactory when set against national norms. An improving percentage of pupils attained Level 5 and above in 2003 and the lesson observations and the scrutiny of pupils' work confirmed this trend. Results in the 2002 GCSE examinations were disappointing overall. Standards of 16 year olds were well below the national average, as they were at the time of the last inspection. Results declined in 2003, 15.6 per cent gaining A* – C grades and 88.9 per cent A* - G in 2003 (against 20 per cent and 91 per cent in 2002).
90. Achievement was overall satisfactory, given pupils' low attainment in geography on entry to the school.
- Pupils in Year 9 are able to understand and appreciate the principal factors of location and grasp the physical and human concepts of their studies, often applying newly acquired knowledge well to specific case studies.
 - The majority of pupils work hard with good presentational skills exhibited in both map work and written exercises.
 - Pupils in all years use information and communication technology to increase understanding and to apply knowledge to geographical issues. Fourteen year old pupils use ICT to produce brochures and information sheets, whilst 16 year olds develop decision making exercises about the location of industry.
 - The progress and achievement of some boys are restricted by attitudes and behaviour being occasionally less than satisfactory.
91. Pupils are well taught, with teaching staff demonstrating good subject knowledge and an awareness of individual pupil needs, creating good teaching and learning environments in the classrooms. Learning objectives are often shared with pupils. The quality of teaching is good ; just one poor lesson was observed where pupils' attitudes and behaviour seriously impeded learning. The use of ICT principles, especially in Year 8 and Year 11 contribute to pupils' understanding and to levels of achievement. Literacy initiatives and the encouragement of good graphical skills also make their mark in the classrooms, particularly the use of geography specific vocabulary via 'word mats' and wall displays.
92. Pupils' work is well marked, in line with school and departmental guidelines; however, although considerable attention is given to assessment procedures and target setting, not enough use is made of the data collected to plan future work.
93. Leadership across the department is clear and positive and the teaching and learning are well managed. The generally good standards of teaching are not fully matched by standards and outcomes as perceived against national norms. There is a need to focus on extending the steady progress being made at classroom level, via relevant strategies that seek to address the needs of all pupils. Resources are generally satisfactory and are well managed by highly committed staff.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The department is developing strongly as a result of very good leadership and management.
- Attitudes and relationships are very good and in some classes enthusiasm and involvement are very high.
- Teaching is good in Years 10 and 11 and supports a wide range of effective learning strategies.
- The good use of information and communication technology supports the development of good research skills.
- The analysis of data is not consistently applied to support the raising of pupils' attainment.
- In Years 7 to 9 there is an unsatisfactory match of teachers to meet the needs of the subject and this is having an adverse impact upon the teaching and learning.

Commentary

94. Standards at the end of Year 9, judged by teacher assessment, work seen and pupils' responses, are below the national average. Overall the achievement of pupils is satisfactory. By the end of Year 9 pupils develop a broad range of historical skills, including the interpretation of primary and secondary data, timelines and causation.
95. GCSE results in 2002 were well below the national average. The lack of qualified and settled staff in the department for two years may have had an adverse impact on the pupils' standards. In 2003 grades improved overall with more stable staffing. This improvement is continuing, particularly in Years 10 and 11, where although attainment is still below the national average, the achievement of the pupils is now satisfactory. By the end of Year 11, pupils have developed a sound understanding of medicine through time and have developed good research skills which are used effectively in the writing of the Dover Castle project. Pupils are able to use ICT well to extend their knowledge and understanding. There is a comprehensive range of classroom activities from Year 7 that enable the pupils to develop an effective understanding of a wide range of historical sources.
96. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. However in Years 10 and 11 teaching is good with much being very good. The very good practice encourages pupils to learn very well in groups, pairs and individually. In these lessons pupils' involvement is very high and they respond well to challenging learning activities. The teachers' expectations are high and the pupils respond very well. There are other lessons where the teaching methodology leads to a lack of pace and challenge and pupils do not work to their full capabilities. These lessons are taught, in the main, by non-specialist staff teaching a few lessons a week. In the best lessons, the enthusiasm of the pupils for learning is very good, there is an excitement in the classroom that is infectious and both the pace and the variety of learning activities are very impressive. Further planned monitoring of teaching would enable this very good practice to be shared with all staff and for the learning of all pupils to be strengthened. Effective question and answer sessions and imaginative paired and group work are strong in the upper years.
97. Improvement since the last inspection is good. The department under very able leadership has, in the last year, reviewed the schemes of work and extended the range of learning resources particularly the range of ICT resources used. Standards are improving strongly in Years 10 and 11, although this improvement has yet to be seen in all classes in Years 7 to 9. This is a rapidly improving department with a strong focus on developing the pupils' learning activities.

Religious Education

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good questioning extends pupils' learning and pupils' contributions are valued.
- New accommodation and specialist teachers promote positive attitudes.
- In lessons and when tasks are set it is not clear what learning outcomes are expected.
- Planning and assessment do not provide for progression between Years 7 and 9 and 10 and 11.

Commentary

98. Standards in work seen at the end of Year 9 are below average, but the pupils' overall achievement is satisfactory, given their attainment on entry to the school. The pupils' understanding of different religions and what they share has improved, although their knowledge of distinctive features of religions is not secure and is not checked regularly enough. Higher attaining pupils enter the school well informed about a number of religions and have not achieved as much as they could by Year 9. Their ability to realise how views and practices can differ within each religion has not been sufficiently developed. They lack understanding of how different interpretations of traditions are linked to religions changing over time and lack skills to identify the range of sources believers can draw on when discussing issues and lifestyles which challenge religions today.
99. Results in the 2002 GCSE short course taken by all pupils were well below average, and very low in 2003. These reflect frequent changes of staff, one period a week, non-specialist teachers and low status. Recent improvements in all these areas have not had time to affect Year 11 pupils but standards in work seen in Year 10 are now average. By the end of Year 11 standards in work seen are below average. Pupils have accurate insight into the lives of believers, linking beliefs to values appropriately, with some awareness of different attitudes within Christianity to moral issues. Lack of consistent teaching has led to underachievement. Although pupils show they have strong personal views on moral issues, few can give reasons or arguments for their case, compare these with alternative viewpoints from religions or their peers, or relate them to different circumstances. In all years pupils' writing mainly records information in short pieces of work, showing lack of skills to use paragraphs and layout to organise explanation and argument required for higher standards. In all years the achievement of pupils with additional educational needs is unsatisfactory.
100. Overall teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 are good, an improvement from the last inspection when teaching was unsatisfactory. Very good questioning extends pupils' learning, engages and encourages pupils to identify what they need to understand and values pupils' contributions. New accommodation provides a stimulating learning environment and specialist teachers with a good command of the subject promote positive attitudes, which were poor in the last inspection. When tasks are set it is not clear what learning outcomes are expected for pupils to demonstrate low, average or high attainment. Planning and assessment do not identify progression between Years 7 and 9 and 10 and 11, to ensure pupils improve their skills to investigate and explain different beliefs and lifestyles. Teaching is satisfactory in Years 10 to 11, but examination requirements are not shared with pupils to show them how to improve. Where teaching is weak across the school, the teacher does not give due attention to the needs of different pupils. Some pupils could be investigating more demanding resources. Where learning was unsatisfactory, poor behaviour of an individual or group was not dealt with promptly and time and effort was spent on managing behaviour rather than learning. The additional educational needs of some pupils were not catered for effectively, so work was not matched to need and there were low expectations.
101. A clear vision and teamwork have been promoted by the head of humanities, who has managed the subject satisfactorily in an acting capacity, helping new teachers take advantage of the improvements put in place since the last inspection by a supportive senior management. The subject has increased time in Years 10 and 11, but does not have parity with the other humanities.

TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve particularly well in food and textiles; and they achieve well in graphics products.
- Pupils are often enthusiastic and enjoy lessons.
- Teaching and learning are good in food and textiles.
- Pupils' achievement in resistant materials and electronics and at post 16 is weaker.
- There is inconsistent teaching and learning and monitoring of provision.
- Assessment to support learning is not used effectively.

Commentary

102. By the age of 14, both standards and achievement are unsatisfactory. However, results in the GCSE courses in food and graphic products are good and the pupils' standards and achievement overall is satisfactory. Pupils achieve particularly well in food, textiles and graphics products. GCSE results are unsatisfactory in resistant materials and electronics.
103. Year 9 pupils address design issues well when making products. They analyse and evaluate their own and other peoples' products in detail. They plan carefully and achieve high levels of accuracy when using tools and equipment in food and textiles. Pupils are beginning to do this in other lessons too, for example, in resistant materials when making wind chimes. Pupils draw in three dimensions accurately in graphics and experiment with cams for wooden toys. However, in resistant materials and electronics particularly, pupils have insufficient knowledge to adapt their work as it develops and they have insufficient skill when using equipment and materials. Not all SEN pupils are sufficiently well supported to achieve satisfactorily.
104. More able Year 11 pupils, particularly in food, competently work through a design brief. They explore and evaluate issues very carefully as they emerge. Most of them are well engaged in their own learning. However, there is a core of pupils in electronics, graphics and resistant materials who are clearly unmotivated by the lessons and make little effort to improve their work. Overall, girls work more carefully than boys.
105. Teaching and learning overall are satisfactory. In good lessons, teachers have clear systems for supporting pupils' learning and for classroom routines. In the best lessons, teachers have an accurate picture of individual pupils' progress and how each might be extended and developed. In the good lessons pupils work hard and feel responsible for their work. They work thoughtfully and accurately. Technician support is excellent in food and textiles. In a few lessons, the pace is comfortable because the teacher does not ensure that pupils complete all their work or that they are fully occupied throughout the lesson. Overall, pupils enjoy their lessons.
106. Over the previous two years, pupils have not been always been taught by permanent, specialist teachers in resistant materials and electronics. The department is now fully staffed by a team of teachers with good subject knowledge. Nevertheless, there are negative attitudes towards the subject, particularly in resistant materials and electronics. There have been significant improvements since the last inspection. Leadership of the department has improved and is now satisfactory. The curriculum is relevant and meets statutory requirements. The accommodation and provision for ICT have improved, but there is no CAD/CAM, which is required in the National Curriculum. Areas for development relate to the use of assessment to improve learning, monitoring the department to ensure consistent practice and to promoting higher standards in resistant materials and electronics.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are improving and pupils do relatively well in this subject.

- Generally good teaching by well-qualified staff with a mix of experience.
- An ethos of success.
- An improved curriculum, in particular at Key Stage 3.
- ICT is not embedded in the art and design curriculum.
- The take-up and performance of boys and girls, in particular at Key Stage 4 varies a lot.
- The department retains the fine art orientation identified during the last inspection. The pupils should be developing good skills in each of art, craft and design.
- More attention needs to be dedicated to pupils' study of the work of artists, craftspeople and designers from different cultures.
- There is little teaching which reflects the industrial or commercial applications and contexts of art, craft and design.
- There are significant shortages in resources: ICT (computers and peripherals); books and large-scale visual stimulus (suitable for whole class teaching); and technical support.

Commentary

107. Standards by the age of 14 and 16 are satisfactory and GCSE results in 2002 were good. In 2003 the percentage of pupils who achieved the higher grades A* - C improved further with an increased number of pupils entered for the examination. The standards in art and design compare very well with other subjects in the school. This is a significant improvement on the last inspection when standards were judged to be falling rapidly. However, the standards achieved by girls of all ages are significantly better than those achieved by boys.
108. Pupils make good progress and achieve well as they move through the school. From a generally very low starting point when they join the school, pupils develop reasonable skills and confidence in the use of a variety of materials, tools and techniques. They make images and artefacts for different purposes. They also gain some knowledge of a limited range of predominantly Western European artistic styles and traditions. Drawing skills are developed further when pupils go on to evolve compositions and designs in painting, printmaking and a limited range of three dimensional work. Work seen during the inspection showed the majority of pupils at the end of Year 9 achieving satisfactory standards. By the end of Year 11 pupils have shown an increasing independence in the way they develop their ideas. They are also able to reflect upon the work of artists as sources of inspiration and aids to developing their own skills and techniques.
109. Teaching is too inconsistent but overall is good. Where the tasks set are well structured, challenging and thought provoking, pupils show pride in their work, for example in Year 7 in pupils' drawing of a still life group in the style of Morandi and in a Year 9 class in which the pupils produced small wire sculptures based on their study of Giacometti's work. The teachers believe that the pupils can and will succeed in art and design, even when they have had little success in other subjects. Teachers raise the pupils' expectations and encourage them to look beyond technical accomplishment towards the expression of feeling, meaning and values in art. Pupils generally know how well they are performing and what they must do to improve.
110. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Most of the weaknesses identified during the last inspection have been overcome and statutory requirements are now met. The overall leadership and management are satisfactory. There are still some resource issues to be overcome including improving pupils' access to information and communication technology.

Music

Provision for music is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Well-planned lessons and good classroom management ensure good learning opportunities.
- ICT resources support learning particularly music composition.
- Extra-curricular music and uptake of instrumental tuition is less than satisfactory.
- Low expectation and challenge hinder achievement.

Commentary

111. By the end of Year 9 in 2002, the teachers' assessments indicated that pupils' standards were below the national average. Present standards are about the same. Pupils can improvise repeated patterns and combine several layers of sound but many are unfamiliar with the layout of the keyboard and have an uncertain grasp of musical notation. Pupils are able to use musical terminology with understanding, for example, binary and ternary as applied to structure. Given the well below average levels of attainment on entry to the school this represents good achievement.
112. By the end of Year 11 the very small number who sat the examination achieved well, although their overall attainment was below the national average. Results in GCSE examinations are good compared to other subjects in the school. Recordings of performance and composition indicated a satisfactory level of attainment for the present Year 11 pupils. Most pupils are able to identify and explore the different processes and contexts of selected musical genre and styles. They are able to listen critically and refine their own work satisfactorily but fail to shape their performance with attention to dynamic and tempo.
113. Teaching is good overall. The teachers' knowledge is good, they plan lessons well and have good classroom management. Where teaching is good the pace is sprightly, expectation is high and pupils are challenged. Where teaching is less than good there is a readiness to congratulate achievement where it is not deserved. This low expectation and lack of challenge impedes pupils' progress because it fosters low self-esteem. Pupils work purposefully in lessons and respond well to their teachers. The pace of learning is usually brisk and learning objectives are met. The absence of sound recordings of pupils' work through Years 7 to 9 means that pupils cannot readily judge their own progress and teachers have no assessment evidence.
114. The department is well-managed and good schemes of work and lesson plans support teaching. However, leadership in terms of inspiration and vision is unsuccessful in enthusing and encouraging pupils to take up music either by learning a musical instrument, joining in musical activities such as choir and orchestra or taking the subject at GCSE level in significant numbers. Extra-curricular music and its contribution to the life of the school, is unsatisfactory. The new Performing Arts faculty is planned to be an important part of any strategies leading to improvement.
115. Satisfactory progress has been made since the last inspection particularly in better provision and standards in Years 7 to 9.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in physical education (PE) is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good, it is enthusiastic, knowledgeable and inclusive and ensures pupils achieve well in lessons.
- Teachers set and achieve high expectations in performance, behaviour and participation.
- Pupils have a positive attitude to PE and enjoy the challenging lessons.
- The many clubs and teams ensure all pupils have opportunities to develop their skills and talents.
- Pupils achieve very well in games and dance.
- There is currently inadequate curriculum time for Years 8 and 9.

- The relatively short lesson time does not always allow pupils to fully develop their skills and abilities.

Commentary

116. The majority of pupils in Year 9 are attaining at the level expected nationally with several very talented games players. Teacher assessments at the end of this period are above the national average and indicate that significant progress has been made across these years. GCSE results for 2003 show a significant improvement on the 2002 results of 20 per cent with over a third of pupils gaining grades A*- C, which is close to the average for similar schools. Several pupils are having their work remarked which may improve this figure further. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are performing at a level in their practical work which would be expected at this stage. Overall achievement is good, especially in games and dance.
117. Teaching and learning in all year groups are good and a major strength of the department, with experienced teachers sharing good practice with the rest of the close-knit department. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic and teach lessons which are well structured, use a variety of activities and are conducted at a lively pace. As a consequence, pupils have a positive attitude towards the subject, perform with precision and control and work hard at improving their skills.
118. Teaching overall is good. In all year groups there is a wide spectrum of attainment but teachers accommodate this through individual support, encouragement and differentiated activities and, as a consequence, all pupils regardless of ability, gender or background, feel valued for both effort and achievement. Whilst lesson planning is good, there are not enough clear, measurable and explicit lesson outcomes linked to simple, clearly defined teaching points. Pupils should also be given more opportunities for independent learning and to exercise responsibility in lessons, for example by leading the warm-up sessions.
119. There were no instances of unsatisfactory teaching observed during the inspection and the majority of lessons were good and better. In a very good Year 11 netball lesson, the teacher enthusiastically used a range of effective activities to develop pupils' umpiring skills. Pupils made significant progress in another very good lesson, a Year 8 dance class, where the teacher's challenging objective, linking sequences to tribal music, pushed pupils to their full capacity to produce very aesthetic group performances. Pupils in a good Year 9 football lesson were able to pass and cross the ball accurately and in a good Year 9 netball lesson the majority of pupils could use space on court very well, could pass and catch the ball with control and pivot correctly. In all lessons, teachers make supportive interventions, for example in dance and basketball lessons where teachers are able to demonstrate and inform pupils as to how to improve. There are further opportunities to be exploited in lessons and as part of the department's cross-curricular links, to develop explicit references to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
120. The department meets its statutory requirements but there is less time for PE in Years 8 and 9 and the relatively short lesson time does not always allow pupils to fully develop their skills and abilities. However, the very good range of extra-curricular activities, clubs and school teams provide additional opportunities for pupils to enjoy sport and these are further enhanced with the ever widening links with the local community and outside sports clubs. Accommodation and resources for sport at the school are very good although the lack of use of the swimming pool is unfortunate. Leadership and management are good. The head of department continues to raise the status and standards of physical education and has begun to develop within the department assessment procedures to record pupils' performance appropriately and to use this for lesson and curriculum planning. The department has made good progress since the last inspection.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Some topics of citizenship are taught in personal and social education.
- There is no co-ordinated strategy for subjects to deliver citizenship.
- Pupils' work is not collected, assessed and reported on.
- Legal requirements are not met for Years 7 to 11.

Commentary

121. Standards overall are unsatisfactory. Most pupils' knowledge and understanding are limited because, as yet, there is no clearly identified provision across all subjects of the curriculum. In lessons seen within the personal and social education programme in Years 10 and 11, Year 10 pupils gained good knowledge of laws and police powers relating to teenage drinking, including good research on the Internet by some pupils. There is a school council which gives pupils in all years the opportunity to vote on issues, although its size and structure limit participation. Planning in subjects does not include citizenship and personal and social education gives limited time to safety and environmental issues, the legal system, how courts work and political parties. Teaching and learning in the small sample of classes seen were good, but the previous work of pupils was not available during the inspection. Pupils generally are not aware of citizenship as part of the curriculum.

122. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. There has been liaison with the local authority and the school recognises its responsibility for developing this area as an explicit part of the curriculum. Legal requirements are not met in Years 7 to 11 for pupils to acquire the three required elements of citizenship.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 12 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002. The numbers on courses are low, so comparisons need to be made with care.

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	4	25	81.6	0	33.2	10	33.2
Art	8	100	90	0	42.7	50	39
PE	9	100	88.2	0	27.7	40	33.8
French	6	0	85.4	0	35.2	0	34.9
Geography	4	50	88.3	0	36.4	10	36.3
Electronics	6	50	N/A	0	N/A	20	N/A
Health and social care	1	100	N/A	0	N/A	60	N/A
History	4	25	91.8	0	37.2	5	37.8
Music	1	100	93.6	0	39.4	40	39

The national figures for AS levels are for Year 13 students who took them in 2001. Post 16 PANDA data.

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
Health and social care A2	2	100	N/A	0	N/A	60	N/A
Nursery nursing diploma	4	100	N/A	0	N/A	40	N/A
Business A2	12	100	96.4	25	32.8	61	76.5
ICT	4	100	89.1	25	22.4	65	64.1
Art	1	100	96.1	0	48.7	40	85.1
PE	8	100	95.4	0	29.5	85	73.2
Leisure and tourism	15	100	N/A	7	N/A	56	N/A
Design and technology	3	66	95.3	0	35.5	13	76.5
Music	1	100	97.7	0	41.8	60	82.2

Level 2 vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Nursery nursing certificate	7	71.4	N/A	0	N/A	71.4	N/A
Leisure and tourism VCE Y13	20	100	N/A	70	N/A	30	N/A
English language GCSE	5	80	N/A	80	N/A	0	N/A
Community sports leader	15	100	N/A	n/a	N/A	n/a	N/A
Expressive arts	15	93	N/A	13	N/A	80	N/A

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers know their subject well and are able to communicate their own interest in literature.
- They provide good support to students.
- Students are well motivated.
- Strategies to improve students' wider reading and background knowledge are not sufficiently developed.
- There are few opportunities to enrich the curriculum outside the classroom.

Commentary

123. In the past, only small numbers of students have opted to take the subject in the sixth form. There is, however, a significant increase in those beginning courses in the current Year 12, both for AS level English literature and a new Media studies course. The department now caters for some 50 students, including those retaking GCSE English. In 2002, there were only two candidates at A level. Both gained passes. There were no candidates in 2003. At AS level, after a gap in 2002, eight candidates took the examination in 2003. All but one were successful in gaining passes at grades A-E. The achievement of individual students is good. Most reach or exceed their target grades in examinations.

124. Standards of work seen during the inspection were satisfactory. Whilst students were still in the early weeks of their respective courses, they were able to make constructive contributions to class discussions on set plays by Shakespeare. Year 13 students showed a sound grasp of different interpretations of the character of Shylock in 'The Merchant of Venice'. Written work produced last year was also effective. The best coursework essays were mature and coherent, analysing in some depth character, theme and use of language in literature studied. Writing by higher attaining students, for example on the theme of love in 'Twelfth Night' and the role of women in Atwood's 'The Handmaid's Tale', was informed by a sensitive personal response and well supported by detailed textual reference. The work of lower attaining students showed less capacity to evaluate style and technique and was sometimes marred by poor expression of ideas. Work was well presented, with students making good use of skills in word processing.
125. Teaching is good. Lessons are characterised by positive working relationships between staff and students. Coursework is assessed promptly, with detailed written comments that evaluate work constructively against examination grade criteria. Teachers monitor students' progress carefully and are prepared to give additional personal help and guidance where it is needed. They know their subject well and are able to communicate their own interest in literature effectively. This clearly enhances students' response to the subject overall. Lessons are sometimes too teacher-directed. Teachers contributed most of the thinking, particularly if students found concepts difficult. As a result, a proportion of students remained passive for most of the time. There is not a wide enough range of teaching methods to create opportunities to involve all students.
126. Students have a positive attitude to their work and are well motivated at the beginning of their courses. Their knowledge of the context of works studied and of literary concepts, is limited, however. Teachers do much to encourage them to develop independent learning skills, through wider reading, note making and research. More generally, teachers acknowledge the need to widen students' horizons through external visits, study days and theatre trips.
127. Leadership and management of English in the sixth form are good. Planning for the subject is thorough. Teachers collaborate closely to share good practice and are committed to continuing improvement. In particular, importance is attached to keeping up to date with changes in examination requirements at this level. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Standards of attainment have been maintained. Provision this year is significantly expanded with the introduction of a new AS level course.

French

Provision in French is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good.
- Achievement of students is good.
- Standards are well below average.
- Access to Internet resources is good, but the stock of books and newspapers in the library is poor.

Commentary

128. The AS level course is now only in its second year. Students enter with low grades in their GCSEs, but make rapid progress. Standards last year were well below the national average with no passes. Standards observed during the inspection were below the national average. Students are able to understand a written text and discuss it, but their fluency and range of expression are both still limited. Standards in writing at the end of Year 12 were below average. The present group is enthusiastic and eager to learn and their achievement in the first three weeks is good. Teaching is good with the lesson conducted mainly in French. Resources are satisfactory with easy access to the Internet in the library. This opens up a wide range of good, up-to-date ideas and information and makes up for the library's lack of books and

French language newspapers and magazines. Leadership and management of the subject in the sixth form is satisfactory.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A new AS course has been introduced and is progressing well.
- A GCSE retake course is also now offered to enable students to improve previous grades.

Commentary

129. An AS course has been introduced this term, based on the options students wished to follow. Although less than a month into the course, the four students show good interest and are receiving very good tuition. Their algebraic skills are being enhanced and they show competence in manipulating equations and in probability applications of permutations and combinations.
130. A GCSE course has also been introduced, with around 20 Year 12 students attending. They gained grades ranging from D to G last year and appreciate the opportunity to try to enhance their standard. They are making good progress.
131. Both courses are taught well by experienced teachers. Assignments are effectively marked and good standards are being achieved. The leadership and management are good.

Mathematics across the curriculum

132. Mathematics is not being offered as a key skills course. The mathematical abilities of many students are weak because of their previous experiences and this is limiting attainment in other areas of their studies, particularly in the sciences.

Science

The provision in human biology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching provides high levels of expectation and challenge.
- There is very good support and encouragement for individual students.
- Students have very positive attitudes.
- There is a lack of essential up-to-date equipment.
- There is too little reference material available for research purposes.

Commentary

133. The school has offered the GCE advanced level biology course for some years, but not at the time of the last inspection. Numbers taking the subject have remained low and no students have progressed beyond AS Level. From this September, students have been able to follow the human biology option. This has extended the range of science courses available and has proved popular with students.
134. In 2002 one of the three students entered for the GCE AS examinations attained an A-E grade; in 2003, two of the five students entered did so. The four female students following the course are working well on their AS level work. They are gaining confidence in undertaking more

advanced studies and are developing good independent learning skills. They all display a very good attitude and work productively. Their learning in lessons is of a good standard as a result of perceptive and very knowledgeable teaching.

135. At this early stage in the course, their work is in line with that of other students nationally. They are building successfully on their previous GCSE studies and are beginning to understand and recognise the more detailed structures and functions of cell components. While the students sometimes require prompting from the teacher, their recall of earlier work is satisfactory. The entry requirements for the subject are lower than in most schools and as a result students' achievement is good when their results in the GCSE examinations are taken into account.
136. Teaching is good. The work is well organised and provides very high levels of expectation and challenge. While the teacher makes real demands on the students' understanding, this is done in a supportive and encouraging way and they learn well. The teacher interacts very effectively with the students and is fully aware of how each of them is doing. Guidance is given on self-study skills and students are encouraged to learn independently and they receive good help from the teacher in organising their work programmes. Students make good use of ICT in researching and presenting biological information, however, they have too little access to reference books and support material. A shortage of up-to-date equipment such as microscopes prevents students from having effective access to some of the biological techniques required at this level.
137. Leadership and management are good. Work in the subject is well planned. The co-ordinator has a good knowledge and understanding of the course requirements and evaluates effectively the quality of provision made for the subject.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum is **satisfactory**. Opportunities to use ICT in the sixth form are good. Students have good access to computers in many of their lessons and during study periods. The ICT curriculum is also good, it includes the vocational A-level in information and communication technology and there is a short course available to all students leading to the European Computer Driving Licence. In the AVCE course, students are highly motivated and benefit from very good teaching support to disassemble and rebuild a computer in a workshop situation. Results are consistently above the national average. ICT is used well to research the Internet, and to enhance the presentation of coursework, for example in Leisure and Tourism and in the childcare CACHE course.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography in the sixth form is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and experience; lessons have a clearly planned structure, including the sharing of learning objectives with the students.
- There is relevant, supportive fieldwork.
- There is good use of ICT by staff and students.

Commentary

138. Although results in 2003 in AS and A-level examinations were low compared to the national picture, they are satisfactory compared with similar schools; AS level candidates gaining B, D and U grades; at A-level all three candidates attained passes at C, D and E grades.
139. Good teaching is a strong feature of the department, fully engaging the few students studying the subject, bringing out the best of responses in terms of both conceptual understanding and subject knowledge. It is very challenging, yet informative. The A2 candidate is well motivated through good teacher support and encouragement, and standards achieved are consistent with a high GCE grade. The AS student attends some A2 lessons as she will be retaking the units to improve her grades; satisfactory levels of achievement are maintained. The A2 student's written and practical work in both human and physical facets of the course are generally of a high standard; her achievement levels are advanced with well chosen resource materials, supportive ICT work and a clear expectation that students have to contribute to their own learning process. The student is currently working on an ICT project, on plate tectonics, as a revision tool.
140. Students actively engage in relevant fieldwork in the south of England and in the Isle of Arran in Scotland. These studies have positively developed geographical skills and awareness, particularly of the physical environment. This is a major strength of the teaching and learning environment created by the department. Resources are sufficiently balanced to cater for and to provide good support for advanced learning. Leadership in the post 16 area is good, with the personal strengths of two staff used well in directing the study programmes.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The take up of AS history has been improved by very good leadership and management.
- The students have good attitudes and a high commitment towards their studies.
- There is a strong emphasis on developing good independent study skills through the extensive use of information and communication technology.
- A more systematic assessment strategy is necessary to develop more effective target setting for the students.

Commentary

141. In recent years the standard of entry of the students to the A-level course was low, and the small numbers of students make national comparisons difficult. Both in 2002 and 2003 the standards reached in A-level were very poor. The difficulty in securing regular and specialist staff may have had a serious adverse impact on the students' learning. From the work and lessons seen there is now a marked improvement on previous standards and attainment is now satisfactory. The take up has greatly improved and this indicates that the subject is now much more popular. Achievement is now satisfactory.
142. Students learn well because the teaching is good. The lessons have pace, challenge and students are involved fully. Teacher expectations are high and students develop both their confidence and their performance as a result of emphasis upon group work and personal research. Progress is good and the students are developing a good understanding of the social and economic changes in early twentieth century America. In one lesson students gave effective group presentations of their research into the failures of the post-unification Liberal Italian governments. These presentations led to thoughtful and thorough discussions amongst the students that were well supported by the teacher. In another lesson, good use was made of the Internet to research the different social conditions that American women faced in the early twentieth century. Students work well on their own, maintaining good pace and focus. The use of target setting and assessed assignments is underdeveloped in helping their understanding of how to improve their work.

143. The A-level syllabus has been completely reviewed and changed in the last year; it now matches the needs of the current students more closely. This has led to a much higher student take up. The students are very positive about the recent changes and their commitment to history is very strong. The recent improvements are the result of very effective leadership and management within the department. There is now good progression from Year 11 and the course builds effectively upon historical skills and understanding previously developed.

Sociology

Provision in sociology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Secure subject knowledge and planning provide good learning opportunities.
- Enthusiastic delivery is coupled with challenge and high expectations.
- Resources need to be expanded further to meet the needs of the syllabus.

Commentary

145. Sociology A Level is a new subject in the school. There is no data on levels of attainment or achievement.
146. Teachers are knowledgeable and they plan lessons well. Where teaching is good there is a sprightly pace with good use of time. The teachers' expectations are high and students are challenged through effective questioning to make intellectual efforts. On one occasion the task was not understood by the pupils and this led to confusion. Too much new information in one session led to pupils losing interest in the lesson. Key words and concepts are clearly explained and reinforced.
147. Pupils are enthusiastic in class and work purposefully. They are able to discuss and put forward opinions with growing confidence. Pupils are well matched to the course in terms of writing and study skills. All have A*-C in English at GCSE.
148. Leadership and management are satisfactory with planning and assessment procedures in place. There is a clear vision and commitment to the highest standards. Departmental resources are satisfactory at this stage but more work is needed to meet the demands of the syllabus.

Religious Education

There was not enough evidence to make a judgement about provision in Religious Education in the sixth form. Two sixth form day conferences are in the school calendar and advantage has been taken previously of opportunities to invite local and other visitors who raise spiritual and religious issues. No student work was available to be seen, but current arrangements are an improvement on the last inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students produce consistently good results and achievements which show a high level of creativity.
- Teachers' knowledge, understanding and skills are very competent.
- There is a dedicated sixth form teaching space in which they can leave work in progress.
- The well-organised artist in residence scheme extends students' awareness of the subject.
- Learning opportunities outside school are used effectively.
- There are significant shortages in resources in ICT and books.

- Students have had little prior experience of some relevant areas of study.

Commentary

149. Standards are good in the sixth form. Both A and AS examination results are satisfactory. There is a high level of visual research and investigation. The degree of maturity the students develop gives them the confidence to respond positively and creatively to opportunities for exploration and experimentation and the ability to understand and work with concepts of art – often quite abstract in nature.
150. Year 12 and Year 13 students demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of different artists particularly where the comparative approaches used at GCSE have been applied to contrasting historical and contemporary work. For example, a student showed good analytical skills in comparing the use of animals as subject matter in the work of William Stubbs and Damien Hurst. A high quality of observation is evident in student's recording of natural forms. Students show a willingness to explore a range of media although their confidence in three-dimensional concepts is limited by their prior experience of predominantly two-dimensional concepts. The positive impact of external course experiences on standards is evident, for example, life drawing provided through adult education classes.
151. Teaching is good. Reviews of the work of groups and individuals are managed sensitively, enabling students to gain a clear understanding about how to progress and how to analyse and evaluate the work of others. Staff are deployed effectively to enable students to benefit from different perspectives. Provision is further enhanced through students' access to the artist in residence whose workshop is adjacent to the dedicated sixth form studio. Students show strong commitment to the course and use the resources in school well, including contact with teachers, to organise their time productively.
152. Leadership and management are good. Provision for the subject was good during the last inspection and this remains the case.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical Education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good, it is enthusiastic and committed.
- Teacher-student relationships are excellent.
- Students' attitudes to the subject are positive and they are motivated to do well.
- Not enough student centred lesson activities are linked to explicit learning outcomes in theory lessons.

Commentary

153. Although the results of students studying the sports studies A level were below the national average for the higher grades, all pupils have managed to gain at least a pass grade over the last three years and achieve as well and sometimes better, than expected. The attainment of current pupils is at least in line with this trend. The good achievement of students is a result of good teaching by knowledgeable, enthusiastic and committed teachers and purposeful but friendly teacher-student relationships which promote a pleasant but purposeful environment for students to learn in. Students have the opportunity to participate in a range of sports and activities as part of their timetabled curriculum. Pupils also have the opportunity of extending their personal skills in Year 12 with the Community Sports Leaders Award.

154. Teachers assess student work thoroughly and examination students are aware of their progress and what they need to do to improve. The department is very well led and managed where staff are effectively managed and deployed and there are opportunities created for the sharing of good practice. The staff are experienced and work very well together as a team, setting high expectations of students and working hard to improve standards of attainment and participation for both examination and non-examination candidates. As in the main school, the departmental plan does not have explicit targets which relate to standards and the key activities which need to be undertaken to achieve those targets.
155. There has been good progress since the last inspection. Year 13 students are beginning to answer authoritatively in theory classes and show a basic understanding of terminology and the application of theory.
156. Teaching in the subject is good overall although there are not enough student centred activities in theory lessons to encourage greater participation, promote independent learning and allow teachers additional opportunities to check students' understanding. Learning outcomes are not always made explicit or an integral part of lesson planning. Where this happens, as in the very good Year 13 lesson on 'self-efficacy in sport', students are able to consolidate their understanding of the more difficult theory topics. Students' attitudes to the subject are very positive, behaviour is always good and they appreciate the time, commitment of and access to, PE staff. As a consequence, students learn well in and out of lessons.
157. Whilst participation in extra-curricular activities is not as extensive as in the main school, individual students have achieved success in a range of sports at county, national and international level with the recent notable success of one Year 13 pupil joining the England netball squad.

BUSINESS

Provision in business education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The commitment and enthusiasm of the acting head of department are developing the subject.
- The positive attitude of students and excellent teacher-student relationships.
- Support and guidance given to students are good.
- Medium and long term planning for the department is weak because of the head of department's absence.
- There are few student centred lesson activities linked to explicit learning outcomes.

Commentary

158. Students achieve well in this subject with all students in recent years gaining at least a pass grade. Four students achieved a B in the full A level in 2003 out of 18 entries. This is good achievement considering the prior attainment of students taking the subject. The attainment of current pupils is at least in line with this. The good achievement of students is a result of enthusiastic teaching by knowledgeable staff, particularly the current acting head of department, who is also able to use previous experiences to good effect in explaining business terminology and practice and consistently transmits an enthusiasm for the subject.
159. Teaching is satisfactory. Of the four lessons observed, one was good overall where the teacher provided knowledgeable and effective support to Year 12 students in a lesson on business functions. Students were able to research the topic to good effect and demonstrated a good understanding of how marketing and finance departments for example function in a business. In a Year 13 lesson on business accounts students were able to categorise assets and liabilities but were unsure about how these related to financial flows. The same Year 13 students worked collaboratively in groups on an exercise on the dynamics of leadership and teamwork and were able to draw out the important features of this important business topic. Teaching is not always linked to very explicit learning outcomes which can then be used to evaluate the effectiveness of lessons and as a check on student understanding.

160. Students' attitudes to the subject are very positive. They appreciate the commitment of and access to, the teaching staff and are motivated to do well. Students in Year 13 have a very clear idea of what their target grades are and what they need to do to achieve them. Assessment of portfolio work is consistent and accurate. Resources for the subject, particularly the extensive range of computers, are well used and valued by students. At the moment leadership and management are unsatisfactory and there is now an urgent need to resolve the issue of the head of department's absence to provide medium and long term planning for the subject.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Overall, the quality of provision in health and social care is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well on the intermediate course and they achieve well on the advanced course.
- The teaching is good and ensures that students know how to improve.
- There is a good range of relevant learning opportunities.

Commentary

161. Both the intermediate and advanced level courses recruit well and relatively few students drop out. Approximately half of the students on the advanced course have progressed from the intermediate course. Although there was only one distinction at intermediate level this year, the number of merits over the last four years is high and around the national average. Standards on both courses are improving. The standards of students' work seen during the inspection were generally about the national average. Given their low entry grades, students' performance represents very good achievement on the intermediate course and good achievement on the advanced course. The girls' results are better than the boys'; this reflects the fact that many more girls follow these courses.
162. The teaching and learning are good because the teaching engages and supports students well and enables them to become confident and successful learners. Teachers have a good understanding of the requirements of the course and use appropriate methods to help students to understand topics, for example, why people take risks with their health. The teacher has an excellent relationship with the students and has built a productive learning environment that reflects the values implicit in the caring services. Students contribute easily and effectively to discussions. They make good use of ICT to present their work and to find relevant information. They have good access to appropriate information sources. Students generally communicate well and have developed good study skills.
163. Students' understanding of physical, social, emotional and intellectual factors that impinge on health and social care are well developed on the intermediate course. Students on the advanced course are developing their critical awareness well through examining material from different sources and through class discussions.
164. Target setting is well established and, where possible, it is related to students' own behaviour. Students develop good skills of independence. Careful and regular evaluation and review of students' work are strong features of the course. Students know how to improve their work because teachers provide high levels of support and detailed feedback. The students are, therefore, clear about their strengths and weaknesses. Students of all abilities including those with SEN are grateful for the good quality of understanding of their needs and the support that

the teacher provides for them. Leadership and management are good and there is a commitment to reflection and continuous improvement at all levels.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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

