

INSPECTION REPORT

THE RAWLETT SCHOOL

Tamworth

LEA area: Staffordshire

Unique Reference Number: 124435

Headteacher: Mr J W Brodie

Lead inspector: Dr D A W Biltcliffe

Dates of inspection: 22nd-25th March 2004

Inspection number: 259335

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1,175
School address:	Comberford Road Tamworth Staffordshire
Postcode:	B79 9AA
Telephone number:	01827-57178
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr J Buckingham
Dates of previous inspection:	16 th -20 th March 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

This comprehensive school is larger than average and educates about 608 boys and 567 girls aged 11-18 (including a sixth form of around 142). Pupils' social and economic background is above average overall. Their overall attainment on entry at 11 varies a little annually, but has risen strongly over the last four years: it was broadly average up to 2001, but has been above average in the last two years. Ninety-seven per cent of pupils are white; the remaining small minority come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs (SEN) is slightly above the national norm; the proportion with official SEN statements is almost double the national average. Just two pupils are at an early stage of learning English. In 2002-2003, about four per cent of pupils joined or left the school other than at the usual time at the beginning or end of the school year. The school gained a Schools Achievement Award in 2003 from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES).

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1025	Dr D A W Biltcliffe	Lead inspector	
9034	Mrs J W Biltcliffe	Lay inspector	
13452	Mr H Meggitt	Lay inspector	
11479	Mr J A Paine	Team inspector	English; Drama
30576	Mr P Bannon	Team inspector	Mathematics
4607	Dr D E Ward	Team inspector	Science (incl. biology)
11190	Dr W M Burke	Team inspector	Art; Design and technology
12470	Mr B M Greasley	Team inspector	Geography
8873	Ms C Evers	Team inspector	Citizenship; History
2048	Mr R D Masterton	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT); Physics
4829	Mr I H C Waters	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
30128	Ms S Stanley	Team inspector	Music
13217	Mr M D Butterworth	Team inspector	Physical education; Special educational needs
10448	Mr M F Elson	Team inspector	Religious education
1819	Mr R H Crowther	Team inspector	Business education; Psychology; Sociology

The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

This larger than average Staffordshire school of some 1,175 boys and girls (including 142 in the sixth form) was inspected on 22nd - 25th March 2004 by an inspection team led by Dr D A W Biltcliffe.

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is an effective school in most of what it does. Most pupils attend well and make satisfactory progress. By the end of Year 11, pupils' overall attainment is broadly average and is a reasonable achievement. The school's teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. They can be better. The sixth form is strong. Most pupils show positive attitudes to school and behave well. Senior management is well organised. A few aspects of school life need to be better to realise the school's full potential. On its well below average income and expenditure, the school gives satisfactory value for money in Years 7-11 and good value in the sixth form.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Most pupils make satisfactory progress over Years 7-11.
- The sixth form is a strength. Most students do well – and especially so in English, art, geography, history and textiles.
- By the end of Year 11, attainment is well above average in art and geography.
- It is below average in science, French and religious education (RE).
- Teaching is good in geography, in information and communication technology (ICT) and in the sixth form. It is very good in art and history.
- Teaching requires further improvement – especially in Years 7-9 and in music.
- Statutory requirements are not met for collective worship, music and sixth-form RE.
- The headteacher offers very good leadership.
- Management is satisfactory overall and good in the sixth form.

Since its last inspection in 1998, the school has made satisfactory progress overall. It has, for example, sustained GCSE results at the average level they were previously, but they could be higher. Most pupils achieve satisfactorily. Standards have risen to a good level in the sixth form. There is more good, but also a little more unsatisfactory, teaching than six years ago. Attendance is satisfactory. Leadership and management have improved to a good level.

The school has made satisfactory improvement in most of the main weaknesses identified in 1998. The quality of leadership is now much clearer and well focused on standards. Much investment and improved specialist teaching are raising standards in ICT, but there is not enough use of ICT across other subjects. The management of provision for pupils with special educational needs remains unsatisfactory overall. The curriculum has been suitably reorganised: statutory requirements are now met except for music and sixth-form RE. The assessment of pupils' work is done better and is now reasonable. Pastoral care is sound. A few health and safety matters (different ones from those in 1998) require attention. Spiritual development remains unsatisfactory. Not enough progress has been made on providing a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*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.*

Pupils' overall achievement is satisfactory. In 2003, pupils' overall level of attainment was average by the end of Year 9 (and much better in science than previously). This was a satisfactory achievement overall, taking into account pupils' average standard on entry in Year 7. Pupils' GCSE performance in 2003 was average. This was a fair achievement, but also indicated some slippage

from Year 9's performance two years earlier: more rigorous monitoring of school performance is required over Years 7-11. The current standard of work by the end of Year 11 is average overall. It is above average in music, well above average in art and geography, but below average in science, French and RE. Most pupils achieve satisfactorily. Some pupils do not put in enough attendance, effort or concentration. These weaknesses – and staffing problems – lower the overall picture.

Pupils' personal qualities are developed satisfactorily. Their moral and social development are promoted well. Appreciation of cultural traditions is satisfactory, but spiritual growth unsatisfactory. Relationships are good: most pupils show positive attitudes to the school and to one another, and behave reasonably. Attitudes need, however, to be better: they were not good enough in one in every six lessons in Years 7-9. Attendance is satisfactory. Punctuality is good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of pupils' education is satisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory overall and in most subjects. The majority of it is thorough, well organised and interesting. It is good throughout ICT and very good in art and history. It is unsatisfactory in music in Years 7-9. Half the teaching seen in Years 7-9 was good or very good, but one in five lessons was unsatisfactory (one third of it from temporary staff). Most pupils show interest, work conscientiously and want to do well.

The curriculum is generally broad, balanced and well planned. A good range of options is available in Years 10-11 as well as in the sixth form. There are deficiencies in special educational needs provision, collective worship, music and sixth-form RE. The combination of high teaching staff absence and insufficient technical and support staff lowers pupils' achievement. Induction for new pupils is usually very successful. Hygiene is not good enough in food studies. Pastoral care arrangements are satisfactory.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school's **leadership and management are good overall.** The school is well organised and run. Since 2000, the headteacher's very good leadership has given a clear, revitalised direction to the school. Management is sound overall. It requires, however, a renewed focus on weaknesses in teaching, learning and achievement. Governors are knowledgeable on most aspects of school life and give thoughtful guidance. They need closer checks on meeting statutory requirements. Documentary backup for policies is extensive.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Those parents whose views are known believe that the school does most things reasonably well. Their strongest commendation is for the school's expectations of high effort and achievement. The vast majority feel their children make good progress. Ratings for most issues are, however, a little lower than usual: just seven out of ten parents, for example, feel that teaching is good. Home-school contacts and pupils' behaviour are given low ratings. The school's own analysis of pupils' views suggests that pupils think favourably of the school's work. Behaviour and bullying are of concern to some pupils. Inspectors support the overall tone of these views – sound, but can do still better. On behaviour and bullying, pupils are confident of receiving ready support and speedy action. The school is popular overall with parents. Most pupils and students like school.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- raise the quality of teaching and learning to (at least) a good overall level in Years 7-11;
- move pupils' overall level of achievement from a satisfactory to a good standard;
- improve the attitudes, behaviour and classroom concentration of pupils in a minority of lessons;
- improve the unsatisfactory provision in citizenship and music;

- enhance the spiritual development of pupils consistently across all aspects of school life;
 - increase ICT usage across the curriculum and improve special educational needs management;
 - focus the efforts of senior management on securing quickly the necessary improvement in the above aspects of school life;
- and, to meet statutory requirements, provide:
- a daily act of collective worship for all pupils;
 - adequate use of ICT in music in Years 7-11; and
 - sufficient time for RE in the sixth form.

THE SIXTH FORM AT THE RAWLETT SCHOOL, TAMWORTH

An extensive range of GCE AS-level, A-level and vocational courses is offered on the school's site and, through a consortium, at three other schools and a further education college in the area.

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of sixth-form provision is good. In 2003, GCE A-level grade quality was average. Both the pass rate and students' total "points scores" were, however, well above average. Students achieve well overall. Provision is good in mathematics, biology, ICT, psychology and business studies. It is very good in English, art, geography and history. In the other major subjects inspected, it was satisfactory. Most students act maturely and work hard. Teaching is good and students learn conscientiously. The sixth form is managed well. It is fully cost effective. The consortium arrangements work well for students. They are very pleased with most aspects of sixth-form provision.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- GCE A-level results were good in 2003. Most sixth formers achieved well.
- About one third could have done better in 2003 in history and modern foreign languages.
- In the 12 main subjects inspected, provision is very good in English, art, geography and history.
- Provision is only satisfactory in physics, French and sociology.
- Teaching was good (or better) in seven out of every ten lessons. None was unsatisfactory.
- Learning and recreational facilities are good, especially in the new sixth-form block.
- Students have a wide range of subjects on offer within the school and the consortium.
- Sixth-form leadership and management are good – committed, imaginative and effective.
- The sixth form provides a good role model for the rest of the school.

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	English literature is very good. Achievement in examinations and classwork is high, as a result of careful planning and fine, rigorous teaching. Provision in French is satisfactory . Achievement in the 2003 A2-level examination was satisfactory. Good teaching captures students' interest.
Mathematics	Good provision in mathematics . Teaching, leadership and management are imaginative and effective. Half the students gained the top A grade in 2003.
Science	Provision in biology is good . Good teaching, thorough planning, hard work, close monitoring and encouragement are the ingredients of success here. Provision in physics is satisfactory . Satisfactory teaching and learning result in students achieving reasonable success. No girls take the subject.
Information & communication technology (ICT)	Provision in ICT is good . Teaching, learning and achievement are all good. Very good course management ensure that students make rapid progress.

Humanities	<p>Geography is very good. The work standard is well above average. Students achieve well through effective teaching and thorough assessment.</p> <p>Provision in history is very good as a result of very good teaching. Major pluses are investigations, discussion and thorough marking. ICT use is light.</p> <p>Psychology is good. Results in this expanding subject are improving as a result of systematic teaching and assessment. More discussion is needed.</p> <p>Provision in sociology is satisfactory. Attainment is average. Some teaching is lively, but assessment requires improvement.</p>
Visual and performing arts and media	Art is very good. The standard of work is well above average. Very good teaching gets the best out of students, some of whom are orally diffident.
Business	Business studies is good. Good teaching, very good management and thorough, constructive assessment help students to do well.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

The school encourages high aspirations in students and gives them a good start in life, preparing them well for employment or higher education. Tutors know the members of their forms well. Students have continued to receive well-considered and informed support, advice and guidance, despite changes in the leadership and management of the sixth form.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

These aspects are good overall and in most subjects. Departmental leadership is very good in art, geography, history, ICT and business studies. Sixth-form provision runs effectively and smoothly. Students' progress is monitored carefully. Sixth-form attendance figures are not collated, a big weakness. The costs of running the sixth form are meticulously analysed: this analysis shows that the sixth form is fully cost effective.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students view very favourably the school's academic provision, especially the quality of teaching they receive and the academic help and support they are given in their subjects. Guidance on subject choice and future careers, and a ready adult ear for personal problems, are, however, given low ratings. Enrichment activities are felt by about a third to be thin. Inspectors agree that the quality of teaching and academic support are strong features of sixth-form life. Guidance both from school staff and the Connexions service, as well as enrichment activities, are judged by inspectors to be good and typical of good quality provision in other schools. The felt weakness in personal counselling coincides with changeovers in sixth-form leadership and requires detailed in-school investigation. Overall, however, virtually all students say that they enjoy – and benefit from – being a sixth former at the school.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Pupils' standard of attainment is, overall, in line with that expected nationally by the end of both Year 9 and Year 11. This is a satisfactory achievement, bearing in mind pupils' average standard on entry to the school. In 2003, pupils' level of attainment was average in both the Year 9 national tests and GCSE examinations. The Year 9 result was a sound achievement. The GCSE results were broadly reasonable, but showed a little slippage from Year 9. Results in GCSE are similar to what they were at the last inspection. Students' overall standard in GCE Advanced (A) level examinations in Year 13 in 2003 was, on most measures, above average and a good achievement.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- External test and examination results are average overall.
- Pupils' progress and achievement are satisfactory overall. They could be higher.
- Pupils tended to do better in GCSE in English and geography, and worse in mathematics, science and French.
- Results at A-level were generally good. Students did especially well in English, art, geography and textiles.
- Attainment by the end of Year 11 is well above average in art and geography.
- It is below average in science, French, music and religious education (RE).

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	33.3 (33.7)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	35.5 (34.7)	35.4 (34.7)
science	34.8 (32.7)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 201 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for 2002.

Commentary

1. Pupils' standards on entry in Year 7 have shown a mixed picture over the last few years. Intake standards are, however, rising. The proportion of pupils reaching at least the basic Level 4 standard in the Year 6 national tests in their primary schools has always been at least average since the last inspection in 1998. The proportion reaching the higher Level 5 was, however, below average in the 1998-2000 period, average in 2001 and 2002, and above average in 2003.

2. In 2003, the overall standard reached in the Year 9 national tests was average overall. The proportions of pupils who reached either Level 5 or the higher Level 6 were average in English and mathematics, but above average in science. Over the last four years, the proportion of pupils attaining at least Level 6 has held steady in mathematics, but declined in English. In science over the same period, it lagged significantly behind the other two subjects until a substantial rise in 2003 – the result of a well-planned, intensive effort to raise standards.

3. When these 2003 Year 9 results are compared with those in schools which have a similar economic background (as measured by the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals), pupils in this school performed below the group average. A comparison of the results with the standards pupils had on entry to the school, however, indicates that most pupils made sound progress. Since 1998, the school's results have not quite kept pace with the rise in results nationally. Girls tend

to be ahead of boys in English by the end of Year 9, but the gap between the sexes is generally smaller in this school than it is nationally. Girls and boys do equally well in mathematics and about the same in science.

4. By the end of Year 9, the overall level of attainment is average in most subjects, including the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. It is above average in art and history, but below average in information and communication technology (ICT) and music. Pupils' progress and achievement in their studies over Years 7-9 are satisfactory overall. They make good progress and achieve well in design and technology and in history and do very well in art. Achievement in music is unsatisfactory.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	50 (53)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	91 (97)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	95 (100)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	34.4 (37.3)	34.7 (34.7)

There were 205 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for 2002.

5. In the GCSE examinations of 2003, pupils' overall attainment was in line with the national average. Over the six years since the last inspection, GCSE results have varied a little, but remained static overall. These results, although indicating a little slippage over Years 10 and 11, represent a broadly satisfactory overall achievement.

6. In the core subjects, pupils' attainment of a grade in the range A*-C in GCSE in 2003 was average in English and mathematics. It was below average and unsatisfactory, however, in science – and well adrift of the other two subjects. No girl, for example, gained either of the highest A* or A grades in double-award science. The proportion of pupils gaining at least grade C in all of English, mathematics and science (31 per cent) was below the national average of 38 per cent.

7. When pupils' performances in all the subjects they take in GCSE are compared with one another, pupils have tended to do better in the last two years in English and geography than in most of their other subjects. They have tended to do worse in mathematics, science and French. No pupil achieved the highest A* grade in 2003 in German, physical education (PE) or drama. No boy did so in art, design and technology or history, and no girl in science, music or business education.

8. When the school's results at GCSE are compared with those in schools with a similar "free school meals" background, this school's performance was worse than most others in the group in 2001-2003. By the same measure, pupils' overall performance in 2003 was below the group average in English and mathematics and in the lowest five per cent of the group nationally in science. On entry in Year 7, however, these pupils' overall results were similarly well below the national pattern for their free school meals category.

9. Girls achieved a much greater proportion of the higher (A*-C) grades in GCSE than boys in 2003 – three out of five girls did so, compared with two out of five boys. The overall gap between the sexes was much larger in both 2001 and 2003 than it was nationally – although 53 per cent of both boys and girls gained at least five A*-C grades in 2002. In 2003, girls did much better than boys in English: 67 per cent of the girls, compared with 43 per cent of the boys, for instance, gained a higher grade. Girls performed better than boys, too, in both mathematics and science.

10. Taking into account the standard they reached in the national tests two years earlier, most pupils made broadly satisfactory progress in their studies during Years 10-11, but it could have been greater overall. The school fell short of the reasonable GCSE targets it set for itself in the 2003

examinations. Overall attainment has been held back a little by major staffing difficulties and by the unsatisfactory attendance and lack of effort of some pupils.

11. By the end of Year 11, the proportion of pupils reaching the nationally expected standards in subjects is average overall. The proportion is, however, above average in music, well above average in art and geography, but below average in science, French and RE. Pupils with special educational needs (and especially where they have enough in-class help) make satisfactory progress. The most able generally make satisfactory progress in this school. The majority of these pupils do well in design and technology, geography and history. They do very well in art. Their progress is not good enough in mathematics and science.

12. Pupils' level of achievement was satisfactory overall during the inspection, but it can – and needs to – be better. In one third of the lessons observed, pupils achieved well (and occasionally very well indeed). Their achievement was satisfactory in a further two-fifths of lessons in Years 7-9 and around half the lessons seen in Years 10-11. Achievement was, however, not as good as it should be in a quarter of the lessons seen in Years 7-9 and around one in eight lessons in Years 10-11.

13. Teaching quality is the main factor in pupils' achievement. Pupils do well when teachers give interesting, intellectually stimulating lessons that require thoughtful effort and when good behaviour is secured. They do not make the progress they should when talkative or (occasionally) disruptive pupils slow things down, when lessons are dull and slow, or when pupils do not have sufficient chance to discuss issues and think things through for themselves. Difficulties in the recruitment and retention of suitable teaching staff to cover illness and maternity leave have resulted in significant discontinuity in pupils' education in many subjects, particularly in Years 7-11.

14. Across the school, pupils' standard of literacy is average overall. It is above average in geography and history – good models of concerted effort and achievement for other departments. Most pupils read at least fairly fluently and accurately. Few have any difficulty in coping with the textual material they face. Most pupils speak audibly and clearly. Class discussion – and especially rigorous, extended debate – is not as widespread as it needs to be. It is a weak feature of design and technology. Listening is generally average, although a significant minority of pupils do not listen carefully. Because of teachers' insistence and stimulus, pupils generally listen with concentration in science, art, history, PE and (especially) in history. Writing is average overall. It is a generally strong feature of English, art, geography and history.

15. Numeracy is average overall. Pupils generally handle numbers and mental arithmetic competently. Graph work is a strength. Attainment in ICT is average by the end of Year 11. It is strongest in the specialist-taught lessons. Most pupils capably use a wide range of ICT applications, both in and out of school, but the frequency of school use is less than normally seen.

Sixth form

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	92 (94)	92 (90)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	33 (31)	36 (36)
Average point score per pupil	303 (301)	234 (255)

There were 69 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for 2002.

16. The GCE Advanced (A) level results in 2003 were well above average for total points scored per student and a good overall achievement. The results were typical of the national picture for the average points that pupils gained per subject and for the quality of grades obtained. The pass rate was slightly higher than usual. The largest entry is for general studies, which is taken by virtually all students. The results for this subject are usually fairly similar to those that students obtain in their other

subjects. This “fourth” A-level boosts students’ overall points scores to a position where they have been well above average in the last two years.

17. Taking into account the quality of grades that they gained in GCSE examinations two years earlier, most students make good progress in their studies to A2-level. On the subject grades that could be directly compared, students made good (or better) progress in three-fifths of their subjects, satisfactory progress in over one quarter, but unsatisfactory progress in around one in seven subject entries. A very high proportion of students made at least good progress in English, art, textiles and business education. All did so in geography – a first-rate subject performance. In contrast, around one third of students made unsatisfactory progress in history and modern foreign languages.

18. The GCE Advanced Supplementary (AS) level results were below average in 2003 for the pass rate and quality of grades. All students passed, however, in English literature, geography, French, business studies and textiles. Pass rates were below 70 per cent in mathematics, chemistry, music, sociology and general studies.

19. The standard of sixth-form work seen during the inspection was average overall. It was above average in English and in design and technology, and well above average in art and geography. Overall, students achieve well during their time in the sixth form.

20. Of the three-quarters of students who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire, nearly all felt that they could do well in their sixth-form studies because teachers are knowledgeable and accessible, teach well and provide many opportunities for independent study. Students are generally very satisfied with their courses and life in the sixth. Only a few students “drop out” of courses in the school.

21. Students are above average overall in literacy and average in their use of numeracy and ICT applications. Most competently and quickly analyse written material. Note-taking is generally well done. Oral work is reasonable overall, but (as in the rest of the school) extended discussions, debates and presentations are not as frequent as they could be. Overall, however, the climate for learning in the sixth form is good and students make good progress in most subjects.

Pupils’ attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attendance is satisfactory and punctuality good. Attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory in Years 7-11 and good in the sixth form. Relationships are good. The school is good at enabling pupils to distinguish right from wrong and to accept the responsibilities of living together in a community. Provision for pupils’ spiritual development is unsatisfactory. The school is good at helping students in the sixth form to grow into mature, young adults.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school successfully promotes good relationships.
- Bullying and other forms of harassment are rare.
- Pupils show a good interest and involvement in the life and purpose of the school.
- The attitudes and behaviour of students in the sixth form are good.
- In Years 7-9, attitudes were unsatisfactory in 17 per cent of the lessons seen.
- The school does not do enough to develop pupils’ self-knowledge and spiritual awareness.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year, 2002-2003 (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	7.1	School data	1.6
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

Commentary

22. Pupils' attendance is satisfactory overall and broadly in line with the pattern nationally. In the 2002-2003 academic year, it was 91.3 per cent. This was lower than the 92.4 per cent at the last inspection, but noticeably better than the 89 per cent achieved in two of the intervening years. The weakest level of attendance is in Years 10 and 11 at just over 89 per cent. In the first half of the current academic year, attendance is running at the satisfactory level of 91.6 per cent. Punctuality for school and (usually) for lessons is good.

23. Since the last inspection, the school has worked hard to secure good attendance. Its attendance policy and its administrative and monitoring systems are thorough and detailed. It has also taken solid steps to increase the level of attendance – as, for example, through a first-day telephone call home for absentees and, as a last step, resorting, through its education welfare service, to legal enforcement. Truancy is only an occasional problem for the school.

24. In response to the school's own questionnaire, the strongest view held by pupils and students in every year group was that teachers expected them to work hard and do their best at school. This is an encouraging response to the school's desire to create for pupils a positive learning culture. The school has put a strong emphasis on ensuring that pupils understand that they are at school to learn. It has introduced a systematic gradation of credits and sanctions to encourage good attitudes and behaviour. Pupils have reacted well to this and show a positive interest in the life of the school and in the activities it provides. Another favourable consequence is that the school is now good at enabling pupils to be enterprising and to take responsibility.

25. In all years, the highest level of concern expressed in responses to the questionnaire was about bullying and other forms of harassment. In conversation with pupils, however, inspectors found that pupils know what the procedures are for seeking assistance and who to go to. Pupils believe that the school deals effectively with all forms of harassment. The school gives particular attention to racist incidents, which are separately recorded. Around the school, most pupils show respect for one another and their teachers. Relationships are good.

26. Attitudes and behaviour in lessons, and around the school generally, are satisfactory overall. The school uses its code of conduct and systematic celebration of success to motivate pupils. Expectations for pupils' behaviour are high and the school stimulates in pupils a desire to learn. Teachers work hard to develop pupils' self-esteem and confidence.

27. In most lessons, teachers are successful. They engender satisfactory attitudes to learning and insist on appropriate standards of behaviour. Most pupils show a ready response and are willing to learn. In such lessons, pupils fulfil their potential. In most lessons observed, teachers secured sufficient cooperation from pupils to enable them to make at least satisfactory progress in their learning. In around one in every six lessons, however, in Years 7-9, pupils show some unwillingness to learn and a lack of respect for their teachers. This kind of attitude slows down the pace of teaching and learning and impedes the school's attempt to raise the level of pupils' achievement.

28. The school has clear procedures for responding to serious misbehaviour. It keeps a full record of all fixed-term exclusions, as required, and works to ensure that pupils reintegrate as soon as possible. It does not, however, systematically analyse the reasons for exclusion as a guide to the effectiveness of its policies. The number of permanent exclusions is very low. Last academic year, there were none.

29. Pupils assemble in year groups once each week. The quality of input to assemblies is good overall. During the week of inspection, pupils listened attentively to the story of the novel, *Lord of the Flies*. At the end, they had the opportunity for a few moments of silent reflection. Music or other aids to spirituality did not feature. The sixth-form assembly was inspiring. On other days of the week, pupils have a Thought for the Day, but tutors' use of it generally makes little impact on pupils.

The school still does not fulfil its statutory obligation to provide pupils with the opportunity to engage daily in an act of collective worship.

30. Around the school, outside of lessons, pupils generally behave in an acceptable way. In narrow corridors, most pupils proceed with consideration for other people. Many, however, disregard the one-way directions and seem unaware of whether the rule is to keep to the left or the right. At midday, the arrangements for pupils to have a meal together are satisfactory, but at the end they leave the floor strewn with the remains of food and discarded drinks bottles. An important opportunity for pupils to develop social responsibility is thereby lost.

31. The school's provision for pupils' personal development is satisfactory. In many subjects, however, departmental documentation and schemes of work give teachers little guidance as to how they may contribute to different aspects of pupils' personal growth. Some subjects, such as art and history, contribute well to pupils' self-knowledge and spiritual awareness. Most subjects, however, do not do enough to develop pupils' capacity for reflection and awareness of themselves.

32. Provision for pupils' moral and social development is good overall. Pupils generally respect the feelings, values and beliefs of others. They know the principles that distinguish right from wrong and most apply them to themselves. The school engenders in pupils an acceptance of their responsibilities as members of the school community.

33. Provision for pupils' cultural development is satisfactory. Art is very good at giving pupils an appreciation of the richness and diversity of cultures. History and modern foreign languages introduce pupils well to different cultural traditions. Other subjects make a generally satisfactory contribution. As at the time of the last inspection, however, pupils lack sufficient opportunities to prepare for life in the ethnic and cultural diversity of contemporary Britain.

Sixth form

34. The overall attendance of students in the sixth form is unknown. This is because the school does not keep overall records of attendance – only the attendance of students for individual lessons. This position is unsatisfactory and requires urgent improvement. At the present time, the school cannot identify attendance patterns or trends, nor can it judge where its successes and weaknesses on attendance matters lie.

35. Some sixth-form attendance is very poor – as, for example, only two pupils out of 15 attending two consecutive weeks for a Year 13 general studies class. The school has a reasonable system for students themselves to certify their arrival or departure at Reception. This system of registration complements a formal morning registration for all students on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. The school generally adopts a sensible balance between reasonable record-keeping and allowing students to show suitable responsibility and maturity. It has plans for a computerised system of registration for sixth formers from September 2004. An accurate collation of attendance information is urgently required.

36. Attitudes and behaviour are good. In lessons, students work hard. They behave responsibly and show appropriate, and sometimes high, levels of aspiration. The school provides lessons in personal and social education and in RE, and the school's ethos affirms and assists students' aspirations. The school has also increased the opportunities for students to participate in school life, particularly through giving support to younger pupils. In discussion with inspectors, although they had no solution, students did indicate some frustration at the recent rapid turnover of senior staff in the sixth form. The school is rightly proud of its sixth-form students. They are good examples of success for younger pupils.

Ethnic background of pupils**Exclusions in the last school year**

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No. of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1127	86	0
White – Irish	1	0	0
White – any other White background	5	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	4	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	3	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	5	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	3	0	0
Black or Black British – African	0	0	0
Chinese	4	0	0
Any other ethnic group	0	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	18	0	0

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**Teaching and learning**

The quality of teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. They are good in the sixth form. There is both more good and more unsatisfactory teaching than at the last inspection. Teaching is at least satisfactory in nine out of every 10 lessons. Most pupils learn soundly as a result of teaching usually being thorough, well-planned and often interesting. In a minority of cases, pupils do not learn well enough, because teaching is too slow and permissive.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- In the sixth form, teaching is good. As a result, students generally make good progress.
- In Years 7-9, one in five lessons was unsatisfactorily taught – a major focus for improvement.
- Half the teaching in Years 7-11 was good (or better) – a proportion that needs increasing.
- Teaching is good overall throughout ICT and very good in art and history.
- It is unsatisfactory in music in Years 7-9.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 199 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
4 (2%)	28 (14%)	79 (40%)	68 (34%)	18 (9%)	2 (1%)	0 (0%)

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; the figures in brackets show percentages.

Commentary

37. The quality of teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 7-11, good in the sixth form and satisfactory overall. Teaching is satisfactory or better in nine out of every 10 lessons. Since the last inspection, there has been an increase in both the amount of good and unsatisfactory teaching. In 1998, 95 per cent of the teaching was satisfactory or better. Now 10 per cent of teaching falls below a satisfactory standard. Only 46 per cent of teaching was good (or better) at the last inspection, but that proportion has now increased to 54 per cent. The proportion of very good (or better) teaching has increased from 11 to 16 per cent.

38. Teaching is satisfactory overall, but needs to be better: too much is just satisfactory or even unsatisfactory and not enough is first rate. The school has undertaken training to improve its teaching performance. This has fed through into more teaching than before being good or very good. It has not made sufficient inroads into weak teaching. Part of the school's handicap has been, despite its attractive location, the difficulty of securing and retaining sufficient staff of high quality to replace permanent staff on sick or maternity leave (30 absences for at least a week in the last six months). The resulting high number of staff changes has lowered the overall standard of teaching that pupils receive and require, and accounts for some of the unsatisfactory learning seen during the inspection.

39. Most teachers have good command of their subjects. They choose topics with care. Their knowledge gives them the confidence and authority to explain the significance of work carefully and to sequence learning steps appropriately. In a few cases, those teachers who are non-specialists or do not normally take the class do not always help pupils enough to see the full significance of what they are learning. The strongest subject background is in art and history. It is satisfactory in mathematics, citizenship and modern foreign languages. It has some significant weaknesses in English and music in Years 7-9 and in RE throughout Years 7-11.

40. Most lessons are planned with care. In the best lessons (as usually in art, geography, history and ICT), lesson aims and objectives are clearly explained and written up or projected onto a whiteboard. Technical terms are examined carefully. The shape of lessons is outlined to pupils and clear timescales are set for activities. Both teachers and pupils understand clearly what is to be learned and why. Emphasis is placed on interesting and appropriately varied activities and ways of learning, so that pupils understand and remember the key points of topics. Enough time is left for a reinforcement and review by pupils of what they have learned in the hour lessons.

41. In such thoughtful, well-structured lessons, pupils concentrate well, behave themselves and make solid progress. They respect their teachers' efforts, are polite and are firmly focused on the tasks in hand. In a minority of lessons, aims are unclear, shared with pupils vaguely and do not gain the commitment of pupils. The most common structural weakness to these lessons is that they do not identify precisely what is to be learned and, at the end, what has been understood.

42. There are two things above all that separate the successful from the inadequate lessons – intellectual challenge (or the lack of it) and the management of pupils in class. In a fair proportion of lessons, work is intellectually demanding. Pupils are given careful support, but they have to think things through for themselves. Teachers introduce topics briskly and interestingly, but do not give all the answers and do not automatically accept pupils' first replies. They open the pathways, but work closely with pupils towards robust solutions. Their questions and the tasks set build carefully on what pupils already know, but rapidly extend the boundaries of pupils' knowledge and understanding. "Why?" and "how do you know?" are frequently asked questions. Praise is given generously, but only for work that merits it. A lot of ground is covered in the time available and both teachers and pupils enjoy the satisfaction of a job well done.

43. Weak lessons (and some of those that are broadly satisfactory) plod steadily along, but there is little to arouse the intellect or excite the imagination. Pupils have little opportunity to express their points of view. Where comments are made, they are often brief, disjointed, superficial or imprecise. Pupils are not expected to explain their reasoning or evidence and are often content to be heavily

reliant on just what the teacher provides. Minds are underworked. Idleness is a big temptation, to which some pupils readily succumb.

44. The management of pupils' learning attitudes and behaviour vary widely. In most cases, teachers have a purposeful, good-humoured, but appropriately firm hold on their classes. In the best cases, warm relationships and impressive rapport result in pupils concentrating hard and thoroughly enjoying their work. In a significant minority of lessons, some pupils readily drift off their tasks, are easily distracted, chatter, call out, fuss or fidget. These things usually happen where teaching is too easy-going, unclear or limp.

45. A suitably wide range of teaching methods is used by most teachers. Much training has been undertaken on implementing well-structured lessons, but far from all lessons adopt the basic guidance adequately. Good lessons often have a suitable mixture of whole-class explanation and review linked to rigorous individual, paired or group work and conclude with brisk, thorough reviews. Unsatisfactory lessons have too much teacher talk, insufficient variety and little activity required of pupils. Homework was usually set reasonably during the inspection, but some *Student Planners* show considerable gaps.

46. The assessment of pupils' work and progress is satisfactory overall across their time in school. Assessment is also at least satisfactory in nearly all subjects. In music, it is not always accurate and pupils have only a vague idea of their attainment levels and progress. In citizenship, assessment is limited up to Year 9, but satisfactory by the end of Year 11. Assessment is good in English, art, history, ICT, modern foreign languages, PE and business education. It is very good in geography, where very clear criteria are used to help pupils to know how to assess their work and how to improve. Marking is almost always done regularly and accurately across the school. The school has made significant progress in the use of assessment since the last inspection.

47. Teaching is satisfactory overall in most subjects and year groups. It is good in Years 7-9 in design and technology and in PE, in Years 10-11 in geography, and throughout Years 7-11 in ICT. It is very good in drama in Years 7-9 and in both art and history in Years 7-11. It is unsatisfactory overall in music in Years 7-9. In all other National Curriculum subjects and in year groups other than those mentioned above, teaching is satisfactory.

Sixth form

48. Fifty-one sixth-form lessons were inspected. The quality of teaching is good overall. It was at least satisfactory in all the lessons inspected. It was good or better in seven out of every ten lessons – good in nearly three-fifths of them and very good in the rest. One lesson in art was outstanding. The quality of teaching is very similar in Years 12 and 13. It is very good in art and history, and generally good in other subjects.

49. Most aspects of sixth-form teaching are strong. Teachers know their subjects well and plan carefully. They generally establish encouraging, productive relationships with their students. They have sound knowledge of the examination system and guide students towards thoughtfully set targets. It is usual for students to be encouraged to explore issues in depth and to read widely. There is scope for still more rigorous, frequent and extensive class discussion, especially in the third of lessons where teaching was of a lower, though satisfactory, quality.

50. Assessment is consistently well used in almost all subjects to feed back promptly to students. It is good in mathematics, art, ICT, modern foreign languages and business education. It is very good in English and history and usually excellent in geography; here, students are guided by very specific criteria for judging the quality of their work. In sociology, however, marking is occasionally lax and not always helpful in directing students how to improve. The school reviews students' progress well.

51. The pre-inspection questionnaire, completed by around three-quarters of students, gives a favourable view of sixth-form teaching. Teachers are regarded as expert, helpful practitioners, giving encouragement and ready assistance with any academic problems. Independent study and research are noted as prominent ways of learning. Helpful assessment and suitable homework are rated well. Indications are that some lack of continuity in tutorial support lies behind the concern of a third of students about ready access to personal support.

The curriculum

As a result of thoughtful planning and in partnership with a consortium of schools and the local college of further education, the school provides a curriculum that mostly meets pupils' needs. Sixth-form choice is wide and there are good enrichment opportunities. Effective support is provided in Years 7-11 for pupils' choice of future education or employment. The arrangements to support pupils with special educational needs are unsatisfactory. The relatively high incidence of long-term staff absence, recruitment difficulties and insufficient technicians and support staff, are holding back standards.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum is broad and balanced. It provides good opportunities for most pupils.
- Careful planning ensures wide sixth-form choice.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is unsatisfactory overall.
- Staffing difficulties and insufficient support staff and technicians affect curricular standards.
- A daily act of collective worship is not provided for pupils.
- The statutory requirements to use ICT in music and to teach RE in the sixth form are not met.

Commentary

52. In Years 7-9, the breadth and balance of the curriculum are good. All subjects of the National Curriculum are taught, as well as RE, drama, and personal, social and health education (PSHE). All pupils study French. Over half also study German in Years 7 and 8, but to do so they lose one period each of drama and ICT.

53. In Years 10-11, a good range of subjects is offered. Pupils study the core subjects of English, mathematics and either double-award or single-award science, in addition to GCSE short-course RE, citizenship, ICT, PE and PSHE. They choose additional subjects from a wide range of GCSE courses and General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) ICT. In partnership with the local college of further education, the school has arranged for pupils who may find the full range of GCSE courses difficult to have the opportunity to study such vocational subjects as hairdressing, catering and engineering.

54. The school meets statutory requirements in all subjects except music. Not enough equipment is available to meet the requirement to use ICT in music to create and modify sounds. The requirement for all pupils in Years 7-11 to experience a daily act of collective worship is not met. The length of the school day is in line with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) guidelines. The allocation of time to subjects is mostly appropriate. These changes represent a significant improvement since the time of the last inspection.

55. The PSHE programme includes appropriate education about sex and relationships, careers and the harmful effects of drug misuse. The course is organised by the head of each year group and taught by form tutors. There is no overall coordinator and no formal, systematic monitoring of the quality of the teaching or pupils' progress is undertaken. During the inspection, however, these aspects were judged to be satisfactory.

56. All pupils have the opportunity to experience all subjects of the curriculum. In English, mathematics, science, modern foreign languages and design and technology, pupils are grouped in

classes that are organised on the basis of their prior attainment. In other subjects, they are taught in mixed-ability groups. The method of grouping is decided by each faculty. This arrangement is broadly successful, as teachers usually match work well to the differing needs of pupils. It is ineffective in music because of poor planning. The school works closely with outside agencies to make sensible provision for pupils for whom the full range of courses is not judged to be appropriate.

57. The quality of provision to prepare pupils for the next stage of education or employment is good. A policy, with clear aims, enables the coordinator to provide an appropriate programme of study, which is taught within PSHE by form tutors. The course is suitably enhanced by an Industry Day, visits by lively theatre groups (whose performances are based on work-related issues) and a well-planned Careers Convention for Year 11. Pupils have good access to a well-stocked and well-organised careers library, attended by a member of staff each lunchtime. All pupils participate in a successful programme of work experience for two weeks in Year 10. The majority of placements are arranged by pupils themselves. They complete a diary whilst on their placement and are visited by a member of staff.

58. Provision in special educational needs (SEN) is unsatisfactory overall. The SEN team consists of a coordinator, three part-time teachers and five learning support assistants. There is also a full-time Social Inclusion teacher. A weekly team meeting facilitates discussion of current issues, but is not used effectively to identify precisely where individual attention is most needed. Pupils' progress and achievement - apart from those with literacy support in Year 7, those pupils with statements and those supported by the Social Inclusion teacher - are not monitored or recorded. Parents and pupils are insufficiently involved in setting and reviewing targets for learning and behaviour.

59. The English department, in two half-hour sessions each week, teaches the units for literacy support recommended in the National Strategy. In mathematics, three teachers provide 15 minutes of weekly support to pupils who need it. Pupils make satisfactory progress under both of these schemes. Support, when it is available, is very well provided by the special educational needs teachers and learning assistants. Lessons in a variety of subjects were, however, seen where support was needed, but not provided. This creates difficulties for teachers and pupils alike.

60. In English, mathematics, geography and history, learning support is well deployed. Pupils interviewed during the inspection spoke well of the assistance they received in these subjects and about improvements it has made to their competence and confidence. Working individually, special educational needs teachers and learning support assistants provide very good support, but their work is insufficiently coordinated. There is no recording of pupils' reading, spelling or mathematical performances as they progress through the school. Some details of pupils' needs are available to teachers, but some (and, in particular, supply teachers) are often unaware of pupils' needs.

61. The curriculum is reviewed regularly by well-informed governors, senior managers and other staff. Planning is effectively underpinned by a well-considered curriculum policy. A close relationship with the local further education college has resulted in the continuing development of vocationally orientated courses in Years 10 and 11. Most subject schemes of work are planned carefully and are of good quality. Those in science, art, design and technology, and ICT are very good. The scheme of work for music is unsatisfactory, as it does not prescribe enough opportunity for practical work.

62. A satisfactory range of extra-curricular opportunities enhances the curriculum. Approximately half the school's subjects offer support outside school hours, mainly with revision and coursework. Pupils participate fully in activities – such as residential visits to France and Germany, trips to theatres, factories and art galleries, and field visits to castles, the countryside and local towns. Musical activities are, however, limited. A good proportion of pupils participate in sports activities, competing in sports for their House and in inter-school fixtures. They are enthusiastically supported by the whole-hearted commitment of members of staff.

63. The school has a full complement of suitably qualified staff. There is, however, a relatively high incidence of long-term absence. Despite the school's best efforts to minimise the effects of this, it inevitably causes some disruption and lack of continuity for pupils. The quality of provision and standards have been affected in a significant number of subjects, including English, mathematics, science, geography, French, music, RE and drama. Insufficient technical support is available in science, art, and design and technology. There are not enough classroom assistants to fully support pupils with special educational needs.

64. Accommodation is satisfactory overall. The school has effectively minimised the effects of the narrow corridors with a one-way system. The allocation of too few specialist rooms for teaching English, mathematics and French results in their being taught in classrooms some distance from their main bases. This places an additional strain on staff, who are required to move equipment and materials to teach in non-specialist rooms. Design and technology workshops are cramped and present a potential danger when major equipment is being used. Accommodation for music and drama is poorly equipped. The room allocated to support pupils with special educational needs is too small and does not allow pupils to participate in a full range of activities. Insufficient storage space is available for art.

65. The school's learning resources are sufficient and generally of good quality in most subjects. There are, however, significant shortages of textbooks for modern foreign languages and music and of dictionaries for English teaching. The number of computers has improved since the time of the last inspection; the school network, however, extends only to about half of the school subjects. Computers are mostly located in ICT specialist rooms. Most other subjects have none, thereby limiting ready access to computers and the range of activities that can be attempted. The refurbished resource centre is pleasantly furnished and very well organised: the provision of books and materials varies from very good for history to thin for ICT.

Sixth Form

66. In partnership with a consortium of other schools and the local college of further education, the school provides students with access to a wide range of courses. Students may choose from a list of up to 19 GCE AS- and A2-level subjects provided directly by the school and a further eight courses available within the consortium. Two subjects under this partnership arrangement are taught at the school, but mostly take place after school hours. All students have equal access to the curriculum offered. These arrangements are proving successful. Pupils study a short RE module, but this is insufficient to meet the statutory requirement to teach the programme of study specified in the local agreed syllabus to all students.

67. Enrichment provision is good. All students are taught general studies and PSHE, which includes study skills, guidance for future employment or education and general topics. In addition, students choose from a wide range of short courses that includes first aid, Community Sports Leader Award, self-defence and Young Enterprise. The curriculum is further enhanced by a wide range of extra-curricular activities. These include visits to France and Germany, trips to London theatres and art galleries, fund-raising, acting in school as prefects, and supporting tutor-group and House activities.

68. An appropriate programme is provided to prepare students for entrance to higher education and the world of work. Visiting speakers and visits to universities enhance the information received during the PSHE programme. Well-considered, informed guidance is provided by form tutors and members of the sixth-form senior staff. Good advice for those wishing to enter employment, coordinated with the Connexions service and including workshop events, has recently been reviewed and strengthened. A regularly updated school careers library, with computer programs, is readily accessible and a further information point is being established in the sixth-form centre.

69. The quality of accommodation provided in the recently opened sixth-form centre is good. There is adequate space for private study. When groups are large (as, for example, in English),

some rooms become cramped, restricting the range of activities that can be attempted. There is a full complement of appropriately qualified staff. Learning resources are sufficient and generally of good quality.

Care, guidance and support

The school makes satisfactory provision for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety. Support, advice and personal guidance for pupils are good. They are satisfactory for students in the sixth form. The school is good at seeking, valuing and acting on pupils' views. Arrangements for the induction of pupils into Year 7 are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Arrangements for induction into Year 7 are very successful.
- The school has good procedures for child protection.
- In food technology, teachers and pupils fail to observe important principles of hygiene.

Commentary

70. At the time of the last inspection, provision for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety was unsatisfactory and became a key issue for action in the inspection report. Procedures for child protection, for example, were not fully in place. The school responded quickly to this weakness and now fully meets the requirements of the local Area Child Protection Committee. The designated person and her deputy have both received the necessary training.

71. In the event of accidents or incidents of a medical nature, pupils have the services of two support staff responsible for first aid, as well as many other trained staff. A very thorough record is kept of incidents and parents are notified, as appropriate.

72. At the time of the last inspection, the school had not addressed two serious health and safety issues from the previous report. One was the regular testing of electrical equipment and the other was risk assessment in PE. These matters have now been put right. The expected arrangements for health and safety are effective in nearly all aspects of school life. This includes procedures for ensuring safety when pupils are in the care of teachers off the school site.

73. The cause for concern is in the design and technology area, principally in food. When handling food, teachers and pupils fail to observe important principles of hygiene. For example, they put meat products on the same surfaces as other food. Cookers are not kept clean and baking sheets have remains of food on them from previous use. In cupboards, in which equipment is stored, the shelves are not clean. Not only are pupils at risk, they are also learning bad practice.

74. Through the tutorial system, every pupil has a continuing, trusting relationship with at least one teacher in the school. On most days, tutors spend the first 15 minutes with their groups. Most pupils say that they have a sympathetic adult in the school that they can talk to, if they have a problem. As well as belonging to their tutor group and year, pupils also belong to one of four Houses. The vertical house groupings extend contacts between older and younger pupils and provide additional opportunities for shared activities.

75. Most parents say that the induction of new pupils in Year 7 is one of the best aspects of the school, although the magnitude of the change occasionally proves difficult. The school rightly identifies links with primary schools as an effective way of addressing the concerns and needs of new pupils. New pupils come to the school at the end of Year 6 for a three-day programme of activities in the school. 'Transition' units of work are in place in English and mathematics and other subjects are about to follow. These induction arrangements are very good.

76. Since the last inspection, the school has involved pupils more, seeking and valuing their views through their representatives on the school council. Each year group elects two representatives to the school council, which has had a major impact in various ways. The school's management took advice from the council when "positive learning" and the new school uniform were introduced. It also involves pupils in the selection of new teachers: pupils interview candidates and give their views to the appointing panel. The school had no representative pupil council at the time of the last inspection: these developments are a valuable innovation and improvement.

Sixth form

77. The school engenders appropriately high aspirations in students and enables them to pursue suitable opportunities for the future. Tutors continue from Year 11 to Year 12 and this ensures that they know the members of their form well. Although discontinuity in the leadership of the sixth form has had some degree of negative impact, students have continued to receive the support, advice and guidance they need.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Parents hold a generally favourable view of the school. Most are pleased with the progress their children make. They support the high expectations held by staff. There are, however, concerns about interruptions in learning through the absence of permanent teachers. The induction arrangements for primary pupils are strong. Links with other schools and colleges are good. Both pupils and sixth-form students feel it is a good school to attend.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The transfer arrangements for pupils from primary to secondary education are generally strong.
- The management and use of the school's leisure centre by the community is good.
- Useful links are forged with other schools and colleges for pupils' benefit.
- The contribution of parents to their children's learning requires further development.
- The involvement of the parents of children with special educational needs is not extensive enough.

Commentary

78. The school's links with parents are satisfactory overall. The pre-inspection questionnaire for parents and carers indicates that they are pleased with the progress made by their children. They feel that staff expect pupils to work hard and achieve their best. The school is regarded favourably by most parents: applications for entry are greater than the number of places available. There is a good range of information provided to parents about the school, its activities and the achievements of their children. The regular newsletter carries interesting information about many aspects of school life.

79. Some parents who returned the questionnaire or attended the Parents' Meeting felt that the school's links with parents and the information provided about their children's progress were broadly satisfactory, but could be improved. This view is well founded. The curricular information provided for Years 10-11 is good, for example, but is thin for Years 7-9. The school has itself recognised that its links with parents can be enhanced. It has accordingly included this aspect for attention in its development plan.

80. Written reports to parents are satisfactory. They are consistent in content and contain useful background information on subject matter. They generally give sufficient information on pupils' attitudes and effort, but too little precise information on attainment and achievement. Parents of children with special educational needs are invited to the annual review meetings. There is, however, insufficient effort made to try to ensure that all parents attend these meetings or, in other ways, become fully involved in their children's educational plans and progress.

81. The school holds an appropriate range of parents' evenings for all year groups. Teachers are also available at other times to discuss specific issues or concerns. The school's consultation with parents led, for instance, to changing the school uniform. Its recent survey of parents' views, using the Ofsted format, has produced useful findings to confirm its policies or secure improvement. Complaints are taken seriously and dealt with satisfactorily and promptly. There is some inconsistency in the use and scrutiny of the *Student Planner* by both tutors and parents. The benefits of expanding home-school links and in monitoring homework are not fully realised. The Parent-Teachers Association is active and makes a valuable contribution to school events and funds.

82. A particular strength of the school is its close links with contributory primary schools. Staff from the school visit all the relevant primary schools. Great care is taken of personal factors in the composition of both tutor and teaching groups. Parents and pupils are invited to visit the school for "taster" days during the summer term prior to the change of schools. The introduction of Transition Units in English and mathematics is a success. In addition, the *Junior Sports Leadership Award* has proved to be a popular scheme that has also fostered close links with contributory primary schools.

83. The school recognises and values the important role it plays in the local community. It has developed a good relationship with the local Connexions service, which provides valuable assistance to pupils and students. A wide range of visitors from other organisations and agencies within the community comes to the school and makes a valuable contribution to pupils' learning, particularly in the citizenship programme.

84. Since taking responsibility for the management of the on-site leisure facilities, the school has organised and promoted a successful programme of activities. Many adult groups and clubs from the community use the facilities. The centre also offers holiday play schemes for children up to 15 years of age. The drama facilities, too, are used by the wider, local community.

85. Links with other schools and colleges are good, helping to strengthen the school's curriculum in Years 10 and 11, as well as in the sixth form. The school makes good use of these opportunities and plans to expand these further in the future.

Sixth Form

86. The return rate of the pre-inspection questionnaire from students was at the good level of 73 per cent. Students view favourably the school's teaching and overall academic provision. Whilst a large majority enjoy being a student in the sixth form, around half expressed a degree of dissatisfaction with the level of advice they received from the school in choosing their A-level courses and guidance on future careers. They also feel that the range of enrichment courses and extra-curricular activities available could be wider and many felt unhappy with the level of pastoral support. Inspection evidence indicates that the level of guidance and enrichment activities available is in line with that usually found in schools.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership, at different levels of the school, is good. Management is satisfactory overall, and good in the sixth form. As a result, the school has improved satisfactorily since the previous inspection. The headteacher is a very good leader. The senior management team is sound and middle management effective. The governing body is satisfactory: it supports and knows the school well. Its role has improved since the previous inspection.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher's leadership is very good. He has been the major force for improvement since the previous inspection.
- The governing body provides strong support and thoughtful guidance for the school.
- Middle management is effective: the school runs efficiently.
- Improvement planning is not focused sharply enough on raising the standard of teaching, learning and pupils' achievement.
- Management lacks a comprehensive information system to evaluate its performance fully.
- Statutory requirements are not met for collective worship, ICT in music and sixth-form RE.

Commentary

87. The school has clearly stated aims and objectives that are translated into action satisfactorily. Most pupils not only achieve reasonably in their academic work, but also develop and mature well as individuals. The school has improved satisfactorily overall since the time of the last inspection – and substantially in the quality of its leadership and direction. This is largely due to the vision and dedication of the headteacher, assisted by hard-working senior managers.

88. The headteacher is a very good leader. He has a very clear, deeply-held vision for the development of the school. He is respected and valued, both in the school and in the community, for what he has achieved since 2000 and for his commitment and hard work. He has successfully motivated staff to accept the changes that were needed following the previous inspection. In almost all areas, these changes have been implemented steadily and firmly. Members of the senior management team support the headteacher well. They work hard, but do not always achieve a strong enough collective impact. Partly as a result, there is variation in the implementation of whole-school policies. This can be seen, for instance, in the inconsistent use of the national strategy for improving teaching and learning in Years 7-9.

89. The school has a strong team of middle managers who play a vital part in the improvement of the school. Their quality ranges from very good to unsatisfactory, and is good overall. There is very strong, effective leadership and management in art, geography, history and ICT. Leadership is very good in design and technology. In music and for pupils with special educational needs, both these aspects are unsatisfactory. In RE, leadership is good and management satisfactory. Leadership is satisfactory in citizenship. In all other subjects and aspects of school life, both leadership and management are good. The school runs efficiently on a day-to-day basis.

90. The part played by the governing body in supporting and challenging the school has improved considerably since the previous inspection. The chair of governors provides strong leadership for the governing body. There are clear links with subject departments: as a result, governors offer knowledgeable support and analysis of performance.

91. Although satisfactory progress has been made in dealing with most of the key issues from the previous inspection, the governing body does not fulfill its statutory duty to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. It has, however, investigated carefully methods other than assemblies through which this provision might be achieved and put into operation a "Thought for the Day" to be used by form tutors. The implementation of the policy, however, falls short of intention. The requirement for the use of ICT in music is not met, because there is not enough suitable ICT equipment within the department. Despite its many good aspects, the governing body's performance is satisfactory overall because of the deficiencies above.

92. The school has a wide range of appropriate data by which to gauge pupils' progress. Its systems are much improved since 1998. It uses these sets of data soundly to assess individual pupils' progress and to set academic targets. It does not, however, evaluate accurately enough how well pupils achieve over the whole of their time in school or how well the whole school is performing

in all aspects of its work. This is an important next step, in order to achieve a precise understanding of what works well or is weak, and why.

93. The school has had considerable difficulties in ensuring stability in staffing. This is because of staff absences through, for example, long-term illness, maternity leave and resignations. Despite considerable efforts (including recruiting from abroad), it has been unable to find sufficient supply, temporary or permanent teachers of the quality it desires. This instability in staffing has limited pupils' achievement in many subjects – as, for instance, in English, mathematics, science, geography, music, drama and sociology. Its impact on their children's education is also (rightly) a matter of concern to many parents. The school's scope for a financial focus on the problem is limited by a low income that is over £700 per pupil below the national average.

94. The school's performance management scheme now meets requirements. The staff training scheme is well organised, an improvement since the previous inspection. There have been good opportunities for staff to take part in training. The impact of this training has not, however, been consistent. As a result, although much teaching is good, there is still too much that is unsatisfactory. The induction scheme for newly qualified teachers is very good.

95. The school's income and expenditure are well below average. Financial planning is good. Spending is clearly linked to the school's priorities. Financial management and administration are very efficiently organised by the finance administrator. Administration is very good. The school considers best value carefully and thoroughly in all its spending. Bearing in mind its well below average income and its satisfactory impact in raising pupils' attainment, achievement and personal development, the school gives satisfactory value for money.

Sixth form

96. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Students' performance is monitored carefully. Departmental leadership and management at sixth-form level are good overall and in most subjects. They are very good in art, geography, history, ICT and business education, but unsatisfactory in sociology.

97. Most aspects of sixth-form life run effectively and smoothly, despite several changes in sixth-form management in the current academic year. The school tracks the attendance of individual students well. It does not, however, keep any overall attendance figures for the sixth form, an important omission. The governing body has not ensured that sufficient RE is taught to meet the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus.

98. The costs of the sixth form are analysed meticulously. They are broadly similar to the income the sixth form brings into the school. Detailed costs are kept up-to-date by the very efficient financial administrator. The school considers carefully the educational justification for continuing to run groups that may not be financially viable. The sixth form is fully cost effective.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,255,622	Balance from previous year	-71,038
Total expenditure	3,314,703	Balance carried forward to the next	-59,081
Expenditure per pupil	2,785		

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

- The leadership and management of the subject are good.
- Thorough assessment procedures help pupils to know clearly how to improve their work.
- Teachers have great enthusiasm for the subject.
- All teaching in Years 7-11 needs to reach at least a satisfactory level.
- There is insufficient use of ICT in lessons.
- The achievement of boys is not high enough.

Commentary

99. National test results were average at the end of Year 9 in 2003. This represented a satisfactory achievement, although the proportion of pupils achieving the higher Level 6 has declined in each of the last four years. By the end of Year 11, pupils' overall standard of work is also average. In the GCSE examination in 2003, results were in line with the national average. This was a satisfactory achievement, although the performance of boys is much lower than that of girls. In GCSE, pupils tend to do better in English than in most of their other subjects.

100. By the end of Year 9, the standard of work is broadly average, representing satisfactory progress from the time that pupils entered the school in Year 7. The majority of pupils read aloud accurately, confidently and with expression. The reading of lower-attaining pupils is improved by their ready use of phonic knowledge to confirm the sounds within words. Whilst most pupils skim and scan texts to retrieve information satisfactorily, a significant proportion of them do not find it easy to deduce and make inferences from what they read. Pupils readily plan, organise and draft their written work, using a variety of sentence structures and a range of connective words. Speaking and listening are average overall.

101. In a Year 7 class, studying the use of trailers for films, pupils' achievement and standard of work were enhanced by the carefully planned "learning steps" in the lesson. The teacher's lively manner and the use of short, timed tasks enabled pupils to build up securely their knowledge about the effectiveness of trailers. Pupils' understanding was consolidated by their identifying how trailers make people want to watch films. Differentiated material, at three levels, helped all pupils to make good progress in the lesson.

102. In another Year 7 class, some pupils deepened their skill in descriptive writing by working in groups of three to draft a whole-class story. The roles of writer, illustrator and "mediator" were decided within each group, but insufficient discussion took place at the beginning to ensure that all pupils fully understood what they had to do. Although some writers drafted well-crafted sections of the story, the achievement of the majority of pupils, who had no opportunity to improve their own writing skills in the lesson, was unsatisfactory.

103. A Year 9 class quickly checked out their understanding of the term "assertion" before referring closely to the features of a newspaper article, *Accidents Should Happen*. For homework, the pupils had annotated the article, noting how writers use persuasive techniques in arguments. Quick, probing questions by the teacher thoroughly checked pupils' understanding. In small groups,

pupils then identified linking points in the article, before quickly sharing their insights with the whole class to ensure that all pupils deepened their learning. Learning was sound, but few pupils made sustained points in discussion.

104. By the end of Year 11, the standard of pupils' work is average; pupils make satisfactory progress from the end of Year 9. The written work of higher-attaining pupils is carefully crafted and well organised: they succinctly argue a point of view and refer to appropriate textual evidence. All pupils incorporate a range of sentence structures and connectives, but higher-attaining pupils generally have more sophisticated styles of writing.

105. A Year 10 class, for example, analysing persuasive texts, revised their knowledge of audience, purpose and type of text before the teacher asked them to consider key features in advertisements. The teacher's careful lesson structure and enthusiasm ensured that pupils' thinking was continually extended. This was particularly evident in a tightly timed task that required pupils to work quickly to note ten features in an advertisement. All pupils made sound progress.

106. In a Year 11 class studying persuasive language and techniques, the teacher quickly checked out what techniques the pupils noticed. Their responses were brief, despite the prompting of the teacher. To deepen pupils' perceptions, a video-clip of *Only Fools and Horses* provided an amusing stimulus to help pupils to reflect on the persuasive techniques used by 'Del Boy'. Despite the enthusiastic and supportive style of the teacher, pupils' oral answers were few and brief. In a later exercise, working in pairs, pupils analysed an extract of text and wrote down their responses much more successfully.

107. Teaching ranges from very good to unsatisfactory and is satisfactory overall across Years 7-11. The quality of learning in Years 7-9 was particularly affected by the weaker teaching of supply teachers. Permanent staff plan lessons in detail and ensure that there are clear learning objectives. In the best lessons, learning steps are well identified for pupils. Although most lessons in Years 7-9 incorporate the guidance from the national Key Stage 3 Strategy, starter activities and plenaries are often not sharp enough. Similarly, insufficient use is made of guided and modelled activities. Teachers too readily intervene to offer explanations rather than giving pupils thinking time before answering.

108. Opportunities to enhance learning in lessons through the use of ICT are severely restricted by the lack of computers in classrooms. Although resources for learning are generally adequate, insufficient dictionaries and thesauruses limit essential vocabulary work. Homework is used regularly to extend pupils' learning.

109. The leadership and management of the department are good. The head of faculty has a clear sense of purpose and knows what needs to be done to move the department forward. This view is shared by her colleagues. Very good use is made of assessment data to monitor pupils' attainment and progress throughout the school. Schemes of work are up to date. Links between English and drama are limited. Opportunities for pupils to widen their cultural awareness through extra-curricular activities are satisfactory. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

110. The school has a good cross-curricular policy for literacy. The strong coordinator recognises that more effective monitoring needs to take place to continue to improve the quality of literacy in all subjects.

111. The standard of literacy in all subjects is average overall. The quality of pupils' writing is generally average, but is above average in art, geography and history. Some of the good features of writing in history, for example, are the consistent use of "writing frames" and many opportunities for pupils to write at length. Laminated sheets on pupils' desks in geography and history provide a

glossary of specific words for topics; pupils are not allowed to use such imprecise or “pollution” words as “near” in place of actual distances.

112. Standards of reading are average overall. They are above average in geography, history, ICT and in much vocational work. In these subjects particularly, pupils read aloud accurately, fluently and with expression. The quality of pupils’ speaking and listening is average. Clarity and audibility, when pupils are speaking, are generally good in geography, history, PE and vocational education. The quality of sustained discussions is good in geography and history, but below average in design and technology.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management of the department are good.
- The quality of teaching is inconsistent in French (although satisfactory overall) in Years 7-9.
- Assessment is used well to track pupils’ progress.
- Evaluation at the end of lessons does not always focus sharply on what pupils have learned.

Commentary

113. The proportion of pupils attaining grades in the range A*-C in the GCSE examination in French in 2003 was below average. In German, it was just above average. In French, the difference between the performance of boys and girls was higher than that seen nationally. The trend over the last three years has been for an increase in the number of higher and average-attaining pupils opting for German instead of French. This trend is reflected in the declining results in French over the same period. A much higher proportion of pupils than that seen nationally, however, is entered every year for a modern foreign language examination.

114. By the end of Year 9, pupils’ overall level of attainment in French is average. German is the second language, taken by the two top sets in each half-year group, and started in Year 8. Pupils’ achievement in each language is satisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. Over time, pupils acquire a sound knowledge of vocabulary and relevant grammatical constructions. Understanding of the foreign language in class is satisfactory, because teachers generally use it to set tasks and to question pupils. Pupils extract information from conversations on cassette satisfactorily.

115. A French class in Year 7, for example, showed good understanding of clock times in a starter activity. Pupils’ pronunciation in oral work is satisfactory. In a lesson in Year 9, higher-attaining pupils spoke confidently in French, using a complete sentence in the past tense. Pupils write at an appropriate level. By Year 9, pupils are familiar with the use of the past tense in French and German. In German, pupils use the dative case correctly for transport and directions, and learn the rule of time, manner and place. Higher-attaining pupils in French in Years 8 and 9 have learned the immediate future tense.

116. By the end of Year 11, pupils’ overall level of attainment is below average in French and average in German. Pupils’ achievement is satisfactory overall. Over time, pupils learn the relevant vocabulary and constructions. Pupils in French in Year 11, for example, recognised definitions of healthy and unhealthy eating, and in German, pupils spoke quite confidently about ailments. The use of three tenses (past, present and future) is stressed in both languages. Pupils use them with varying degrees of accuracy in their written work. Oral preparation for GCSE is well supported by written answers to questions.

117. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Three lessons in French in Years 7-9 were unsatisfactory: pupils behaved badly in one of the lessons and in another, because the teacher failed to capture their interest, they drifted off task. The quality of teaching in those lessons was out of step with the better quality seen across the department. Teachers' subject knowledge is sound. Teachers generally use the foreign language satisfactorily in class to challenge and extend pupils.

118. Teachers plan their lessons to include a suitable variety of activities and skills. Most lessons include a starter activity, which helps pupils to revise vocabulary, constructions or other work from previous topics. Pupils have a clear idea in every lesson about what they have to learn. Evaluations at the end of many lessons do not, however, focus sufficiently on what pupils have learned and retained.

119. In some lessons, teachers' expectations of what pupils can do are not high enough: there is insufficient challenge, particularly in speaking and reading aloud, to encourage pupils to take an active part in classwork. Pupils themselves are sometimes reluctant to take an active role in class. Resources are used well – particularly worksheets to enhance lessons. The use of time varies: sometimes, not enough time is left at the end for a proper evaluation or the lesson finishes too early. Homework is used well to extend classwork. Marking is generally satisfactory and regular, but quite often, pupils are not required to correct their work or comply with previous comments. Teachers' expectations of the presentation of written work are sometimes not high enough.

120. Departmental leadership and management are good. Assessment is used well to monitor pupils' progress and to provide them with targets. Pupils also have good opportunities to assess their own work and performance. Modern foreign language topics are now available for pupils to study on the school's Intranet. The department contributes well to pupils' cultural development. Pupils wrote very enthusiastically in their diaries, for instance, about a recent visit to Berlin. There are insufficient rooms to meet the needs of the timetable: teachers sometimes have to move books and overhead projectors a considerable distance. There are insufficient textbooks. Improvement since the previous inspection is broadly satisfactory.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching methods are sound and becoming increasingly imaginative.
- Staffing problems cause some underachievement.
- Good management has maintained adequate progress in difficult circumstances.
- Pupils receive insufficient experience of ICT to help them to learn.

Commentary

121. The Year 9 national test results were average in both 2002 and 2003. They represent satisfactory achievement for most pupils except the most able. In 2003, GCSE results were in line with the national pattern. They showed satisfactory achievement from primary school and from results at the end of Year 9, continuing the trend of satisfactory achievement over recent years. In 2003, however, the most able pupils performed well, compared to their results in most of their other subjects.

122. Standards in the current Year 9 reflect recent national test results. However, whilst the attainment of the year group as a whole is broadly average, the most gifted pupils are not as far advanced as they should be. Some pupils made little progress last year because of unsatisfactory teaching. Whilst current teaching is often imaginative – as, for example, showing transformations of shapes by computer use – a minority of gifted pupils still lack the desire to achieve highly and are more inattentive than they should be. In contrast, pupils with special educational needs achieve at

least satisfactorily, because the groups are small. A good example was when pupils learned very well about rotations, using shapes drawn on tracing paper and a pencil to act as a pivot.

123. Standards in the current Year 11 are satisfactory for most pupils. However, whilst pupils of just above average ability know more about the volumes of cylinders than usual, the most gifted pupils and others of well above average potential do not know as much about trigonometry as they should. Pupils with behavioural and learning difficulties show a commendable knowledge of fraction and percentage equivalences, as a result of receiving good levels of individual attention from teachers and teaching assistants.

124. Teaching ranges from very good to occasionally unsatisfactory, but is satisfactory overall. It is more consistently satisfactory now than recently. It is often good (or very good), especially where teachers focus clearly on what pupils will do and what they will learn. In one very good lesson in Year 7, for example, the least able pupils made rapid progress towards finding a method of deciding how many different ways three crosses next to each other in a line could be placed on a 10 by 10 grid. The teacher engaged the pupils by starting with a game of noughts and crosses between pairs of pupils, followed by practising the main task on smaller grids. Pupils were told the objectives clearly and asked to forecast results.

125. Teaching is not, however, always so imaginative. Learning is never better than satisfactory when teachers talk for too long and do not actively involve pupils. Currently, pupils do not use computers to help make ideas more intelligible or to receive instant feedback – such as when estimating angles. In one lesson on types of averages, there was too much information for pupils to digest. Many responded by fidgeting and some made requests to leave the room. Most teachers are now bringing about better attitudes to work and learning by making a wider use of resources and allowing pupils to investigate ideas for themselves.

126. Leadership and management are good. The head of faculty has been in post for only a year and a half. He has rightly identified more adventurous learning, including the use of ICT, as a priority. He sets a good example with his own imaginative teaching. He has supported colleagues well and maintained morale, when teachers have been absent or teaching has been unsatisfactory. Results are tracked to decide on how to improve and suitable action is taken. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. Whilst the rooms are grouped together, they are insufficient for the number of teachers. Lessons are too often in distant rooms and teachers have to transport equipment around the school.

127. From September, the faculty should be fully staffed. There has been satisfactory improvement since the difficulties at the previous inspection, when there was little monitoring and both leadership and management were lacking. Through departmental good leadership and the support of the very able second in department, improvements to teaching and learning – and consequently standards – promise to be made at a faster pace.

Mathematics across the curriculum

128. Numeracy standards are average in almost all subjects. They are impressively above average in ICT, where pupils use formulae and draw and interpret graphs very effectively. Graph work is a strong feature in geography where pupils in Years 10-11 use scatter graphs to make links between two sets of data. Only in science (where there is occasional poor labelling of axes) and in music (where pupils in Year 9 show fewer numeracy skills than expected) do standards adversely affect progress. In history, there is more use of mathematics than is usually seen, although this often involves basic number work. Pupils in business education make suitable use of financial data and, as in other subjects, are at ease with graphs.

129. Mathematics across the curriculum is a high priority in the school. A working group, including teachers from most subjects, meets regularly to discuss the use of mathematics across the school.

There has been suitable training for all teachers and “focus weeks” are held to highlight particular areas of mathematics. Sound efforts are made to track how well numeracy is implemented.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There has recently been a significant improvement in attainment in Years 7-9.
- GCSE results were unsatisfactory in 2003.
- Boys’ overall attainment lags behind that of the girls, but girls do not generally gain high grades.
- There is little use of ICT across the department.
- Teachers use modelling and poster activities to motivate pupils well.

Commentary

130. In the Year 9 national tests in 2003, pupils’ overall attainment was above average. This result represented a good improvement over those of the last few years. The result was below those of many similar schools, but represents a sound performance from pupils’ entry standard in Year 7. In contrast, the 2003 GCSE results were below the national average and well below those of nearly all similar schools. The proportion of pupils gaining the highest A* or A grades was very low. The results represented an unsatisfactory performance. The department is aware of these deficiencies and is taking active steps to improve GCSE standards.

131. By the end of Year 9, standards are average and improving. They are now in line with the national picture. The improved standards in Years 7-9 stem from thorough staff training and evaluation of performance. A feature of the department is the large amount of practical work offered to pupils. This “hands-on” approach, coupled with active teaching methods and a high level of pupil participation, results in pupils making good progress. In some other lessons, with duller approaches, progress is just satisfactory at best.

132. Pupils readily acquire new practical skills. This was seen, for example, in a Year 7 lesson, when pupils were refreshing their knowledge on electricity and checking how cells could be joined together to make batteries. As a result of the teacher encouraging pupils to share their knowledge in discussion, many pupils brought additional dimensions to the lesson – such as the difference in electrical voltages across the world. In a Year 9 lesson, pupils explained succinctly the differences between voltages and power.

133. Only in a minority of lessons is there an emphasis on the correct use of scientific and technical words or their spelling. Most teachers write such words on the board prior to the lesson, but few refer to them subsequently. Exercise books contain little evidence of extended writing, although in lessons brainstorming, “mind-maps” and summary posters are often well used. Formulae requiring numerical manipulation were restricted to higher sets in the lessons seen. Graph work often lacks precision: axes, for example, often go unlabelled.

134. By the end of Year 11, the overall standard of work is below average and represents some underachievement. This is partly because pupils in mid-range sets in Years 10 and 11 are very easily satisfied. One Year 11 mid-range class, for instance, showed little urgency in completing classwork (mostly revision), even though GCSE examinations are imminent.

135. Pupils with special educational needs generally make satisfactory progress, when they are assigned to small sets. In Year 7, they are taught in larger, mixed-ability classes, when additional learning support is seldom available. Their development is, in consequence, usually restricted, although in one Year 7 class (being led by a trainee teacher), three boys received well-targeted

support from their usual teacher. This resulted in good progress for these pupils, because they were then able to complete the work set.

136. Teaching is satisfactory overall throughout Years 7-11. Pupils' learning follows a similar pattern. Three lessons were judged to be unsatisfactory, mainly because the teachers failed to engage pupils' interest, commitment and active participation in work. In these lessons, pupils tended to seek attention and deflect the teachers' normal flow. The progress of some pupils in these lessons was minimal and many did not have their exercise books with them. Only one lesson was seen that had any use of computers or the Internet. There was little pupils' work on display that had been word-processed.

137. Most (but not all) teachers have adopted the national science teaching strategy for classes in Years 7-9. Where active methods of learning are used, pupils are interested and well motivated. When one Year 7 class, for example, was given the opportunity to use drama methods to explain the differences between living and non-living things, several pupils opted to sing and/or use dance techniques. One boy even gave a very polished soprano solo and received spontaneous applause from the class. These kind of activities result in a stimulating environment for learning. When pupils are restricted to a repetitive diet of worksheets and teacher-dominant sessions, some mid-ability pupils (mainly boys) become restless, chatter and then demand a disproportionate amount of the teachers' attention. The main purpose of the lesson becomes diluted by repeated requests by the teacher to stop talking and to return to the task in hand.

138. The leadership and management of the department are now good. The head of department was appointed since the last inspection. The department has clearly identified its priorities, building on its strengths. Seven of the ten staff have been appointed in the last two and a half years. A successful team is beginning to emerge. Supply and newly qualified teachers rate the comprehensive schemes of work as good. Assessment procedures are being steadily developed. Monitoring and tracking are beginning to take place. There is scope to involve pupils more in the setting of goals and targets to raise their attainment. A number of Year 11 pupils attend an after-school, booster class.

139. The school enters two in every five pupils only for single-award rather than for double-award GCSE science – this is over twice the national figure and requires review. The department has many useful wall displays, based around simple models that mimic industrial processes and living systems. Pupils enjoy their creative experiences, as typified in a Year 8 lesson by the construction of 30-mm high viruses called "Freda". This practice has been recognised by the local educational authority as worthy of wider dissemination. This development is largely in the hands of less experienced staff and is a feature of the way that talent is recognised and developed within the department.

140. The long-term absence of one technician puts additional pressure on the others, who still provide an efficient and effective service. Since the last inspection, improvement has started only in the last two academic years, following the appointment of a new head of department.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Curricular provision has improved significantly and standards are rising.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Teaching is innovative: pupils learn and achieve well overall.
- Restricted teaching time in Years 8 and 9 has limited past achievement.
- Network limitations and resource shortages greatly restrict the use of ICT across the curriculum.

Commentary

141. Pupils' overall attainment in Year 9 is currently below average. The main reason for this level is that these pupils have not experienced all the significant improvements in curricular provision and teaching time that the school has recently introduced in Years 7-9. Additionally, those pupils who currently study two modern foreign languages have been taught ICT for a much reduced amount of time: this has limited the standards they could reach. Teacher assessments show that less than two-fifths of pupils currently in Year 10 reached the basic Level 5 last year. Current standards in Years 7 and 8 show that rapid improvement is under way.

142. Pupils in Years 10 and 11, studying for external examinations in ICT, now reach average standards, even though their previous teaching was limited. In 2003, 93 per cent of those pupils who followed the GNVQ ICT (Intermediate) Full Award gained the equivalent of four GCSEs in the range A*-C. Of those pupils who undertook the GNVQ ICT (Intermediate) Part 1 course, 47 per cent gained the equivalent of two GCSEs with good grades. Overall, just over half the pupils studying ICT as an optional subject gained awards equivalent to grade C or better. The performance of other pupils who attempted ICT Key Skills was very weak, but only a very limited amount of teaching time had been provided to prepare them for this award.

143. By the end of Year 9, pupils operate computers competently and have a growing understanding and knowledge of the way they are used. They master simulations and models and their applications. Pupils can use a spreadsheet to make amendments to simple mathematical models of financial activities – such as investigating the most advantageous telephone tariffs, using the Internet to find the information they need. Currently, they do not reach such higher levels of understanding as making predictions, varying rules and assessing validity. Their achievement is satisfactory, given the amount of teaching they have received. Pupils make at least satisfactory (and usually good) progress in lessons, a further indication that achievement is rising in Years 7-9.

144. Pupils in Year 11 who have chosen ICT as an optional subject make rapid progress and achieve well. Those pupils studying for the GNVQ (Intermediate) Full Award learn quickly: guided by the clear course objectives, they produce impressive portfolios of work. The standard of their work rises quickly. Year 11 pupils in one class, for example, readily understood the concepts behind "bit map", as opposed to "vector graphics", and used both techniques in their own projects. They used a range of formats for communication (as, for instance, word processing, presentations and websites) and constructed a range of models, using spreadsheets. These pupils rapidly make up the ground they did not cover earlier on in the school.

145. Other pupils in Years 10 and 11, studying the subject for just one hour per week, also make good progress in such activities as designing web-pages, often on subjects linked to their other areas of study. Their overall achievement is lower, owing to their more limited experience. It is, however, at least satisfactory and often good.

146. The teaching of ICT in Years 7-9 is good overall and a strength of the department. It is characterised by the enthusiastic incorporation of methods from the national ICT strategy, in-depth planning, enthusiastic innovation and intranet support. As a result, pupils respond well to their teachers and learn well. They are enthusiastic, work hard, enjoy their lessons and derive satisfaction from their success. They take pride in describing what they can do. Almost all pupils know how to work a computer competently.

147. In Years 10 and 11, teaching continues to be good. There is significant innovation in the units of work that are linked to topics in other subjects. The school's intranet, offering immediate access to learning resources used in class, is a substantial reservoir of learning. As a consequence, pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve well.

148. The leadership and management of ICT are very good. A very clear vision of high standards is communicated to all staff through high quality planning. Day-to-day management is efficient.

There are good systems for recording and monitoring the progress and standards of pupils' work, with appropriate use of targets for individual pupils.

149. Flexible, ingenious organisation of the curriculum has brought about significant improvement in the school's ICT provision that now complies with statutory requirements. Members of staff, with diverse backgrounds, have secured rapid improvement in the curriculum and ICT infrastructure. Staff readily experiment with new technology to improve their teaching. The school makes extensive use of its broadband Internet connection, suitably filtered to protect pupils. Governors have decided to provide, from September 2004, the same amount of study time for all pupils, thus removing the restricted time allocation for those pupils studying two modern foreign languages.

150. Improvement in ICT provision since the previous inspection is good. Standards for pupils in Years 7-9 are rapidly improving. The overall standard of work of pupils in Years 10 and 11 is also improving and is now average. Pupils' achievement is much better: they now make faster progress. The standard of teaching has improved. The additional ICT resources in school include more computers, some networking, Internet access and the school's intranet.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

151. Provision of ICT across the curriculum is currently unsatisfactory. The use of ICT in other subjects of the curriculum is, however, growing. There are examples of good practice, particularly in using the Internet for research in such subjects as science and history. One science lesson observed had relocated to a computer suite, so that pupils could research information on fossils. The use of computer suites is well established: teachers are supported by specialist teaching staff and technicians. Specialised applications are used by some departments – as, for example, computer-aided design (CAD) within design and technology.

152. There are, however, barriers to further improvement. There is no networking in most areas of the school. In most subjects, teachers and pupils cannot access the national grid for learning. There are insufficient computers in many subjects and insufficient networked computers in the library. There are shortages of equipment and software to support the teaching of music and to help pupils with special educational needs. There is no networked interactive whiteboard in any area of the school. Some shortages of consumable materials restrict the display of pupils' work. The school is close to reaching the government's target for the ratio of computers to pupils.

HUMANITIES

153. The main focus was on geography, history and RE, but two sociology lessons were also sampled. In the absence of the regular teacher, a good lesson, extending the learning from earlier lessons on the educational system, elicited a considered, articulate response from some of the Year 10 pupils. New concepts were introduced clearly, allowing a further exploration of the issue of equality of access to educational provision.

154. In the Year 11 lesson seen, the pupils (all girls) responded articulately and forcibly while revising work on families and their social context. They thoughtfully used their own experience as well as textual information. They engaged in written work more reluctantly, but quietly. Although the teacher allowed the discussion to flow more widely than the aims of the lesson required, pupils thereby gained greater understanding of the topic and learned about the party system in a representative democracy.

155. The small sample of written work available (not all of which was complete) showed some systematic, satisfactory work on research techniques and short notes or answers on the family, education and mass media. Feedback on the quality of this work was minimal. There was no evidence that notes were regularly checked or that work, other than tests, is marked.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment is well above average in Years 10-11. Pupils achieve well.
- Teaching is good and often very good in Years 10-11, with high expectations.
- Thorough assessment procedures clearly show pupils how to improve their work.
- The subject is very well led and managed.
- Staffing difficulties have led to less effective teaching in Years 7-9.
- Fieldwork in Years 7-9 is insufficient to provide a firm basis for GCSE coursework.

Commentary

156. Pupils' overall attainment by the end of Year 9 is average. When teachers assessed pupils' work in 2003 at the end of Year 9, their results also suggested that the overall standard was average. This represents a satisfactory achievement. By the end of Year 11, pupils' overall standard of work is well above average. In the GCSE examination of 2003, results were also well above average: a quarter of candidates gained the highest (A* or A) grades. Pupils gain better grades in this subject than in most of their other subjects. This represents good achievement.

157. By the end of Year 9, pupils have a sound understanding of the climate, vegetation and lives of the people in environments in different parts of the world. One group in Year 8, for example, discussed knowledgeably the way people exploit the natural resources of the equatorial rainforest in Brazil and the effects of this activity on the fragile ecosystem. Higher-attaining pupils have a detailed knowledge of the main features of landscapes (such as earthquakes and volcanoes) and of the appropriate geographical terms. Middle and lower-attaining pupils, in contrast, often produce work that lacks detail and their knowledge of terms is insecure. Pupils in Year 7 read maps well and understand the use of scale, direction, contours and symbols.

158. By the end of Year 11, pupils know where places are, what they are like and how and why they change. In Year 10, for instance, one group used their good knowledge of the growth of shanty towns in Rio de Janeiro to suggest appropriate ways in which such areas could be effectively improved, using the limited resources available. Pupils have a detailed knowledge of examples to illustrate such topics as the changes taking place in rural areas in the UK and the effects of global warming. They understand the use of hypotheses and the collection and analysis of data for their coursework enquiries. They structure their reports well, understand the limitations of the techniques they have used and draw sensible conclusions.

159. In Years 7-9, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. When good teaching gains their interest, they work hard and achieve well. Too often, however, teaching is mundane: a significant minority of pupils lose concentration and are not inspired to produce their best work. Progress in Years 10-11, in contrast, is swift. Lively teaching, using a variety of appropriate methods and purposeful activities, motivates pupils to work quickly, accurately and enthusiastically and to make good progress. As a result, they achieve well. Pupils with special educational needs are generally well supported by teachers, are fully involved in lessons and use materials that are carefully matched to their needs. They often reach their full potential: their achievement is in line with the rest of their year group.

160. The quality of teaching is satisfactory in Years 7-9, good (quite often very good) in Years 10-11, and good overall. Lessons are always carefully planned and structured, with a variety of activities and methods that includes paired and group work. The best lessons start promptly with a lively activity that quickly engages pupils' interest and establishes a busy working atmosphere. Teachers use their good command of the subject to lead discussions with well-directed, well-structured and incisive questioning. Resources such as photographs are fully exploited.

161. Teachers insist that pupils' answers are full and include the use of appropriate geographical terms. Expectations are high and relationships are very good, so that pupils work hard, behave well, cooperate effectively with one another and, as a result, make swift progress. Teachers ensure that pupils understand geographical terms. They use a variety of well-considered techniques to improve pupils' literacy.

162. In too many lessons in Years 7-9, however, teachers fail to engage pupils' interest. These lessons start slowly. Discussion is brief, questions are mundane, resources are not exploited fully and the pace of lessons is pedestrian. Expectations are low. As a result, a significant minority of pupils lose interest and concentration, work slowly and make slow progress.

163. Leadership of the subject is very good – knowledgeable, innovative, enthusiastic and displaying a clear vision and sense of purpose. The subject is very well managed. There are clear plans for the future, based on effective monitoring. The procedures for assessment are very thorough and provide pupils with a clear understanding of the progress they are making and how they can improve. Not enough opportunities for fieldwork, however, are provided in Years 7-9 to form a firm basis for GCSE coursework in Years 10-11. Despite the best efforts of the school and the department, the long-term absence of teachers and difficulties in recruitment have disrupted continuity and reduced the quality of provision in Years 7-9. The quality of the display work, which enhances the geographical environment in the two main classrooms used to teach the subject, is outstanding.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Most pupils show interest and enthusiasm in lessons and achieve well.
- The department is led and managed very well.
- Pupils do not use ICT sufficiently in class for research and the presentation of work.
- The arrangement whereby teachers share classes in Years 7-9 is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

164. By the end of Year 9, pupils' overall attainment is above average. This is also reflected in teachers' assessment of pupils' work in recent years. The standard of work seen during the inspection was above average and a significant minority of pupils reach the highest standards. Most pupils achieve well and make good progress. The highest-attaining pupils sometimes make very good progress, because teachers set appropriately demanding work. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well, because teachers provide suitable work and use support assistants effectively, when they are available.

165. Most pupils in Years 7-9 have good knowledge and understanding of the past. They recall well the work done in previous lessons, with the result that teachers can quickly move on to new work. Most see and understand well the reasons for past events. Pupils in Year 7, for instance, explained well the arguments of the claimants to the English throne in 1066. Pupils use a wide range of sources well to build up a picture of the past. High attainers evaluate well the reliability of sources. They write well at length. Although lower attainers use sources satisfactorily for information, they often fail to use the information to make valid deductions. Their written work lacks depth and detail. Teachers encourage pupils to give detailed replies: higher attainers answer very articulately.

166. The overall attainment of pupils at the end of Year 11 is average. Results in the GCSE examinations have improved over the past three years and in 2003 were average. Almost all pupils

who take the examination pass. In 2003, two-fifths of the girls who took the examination gained an A or A* grade. In contrast, less than one fifth of boys did so. This difference reflected the different capabilities of the pupils who opted for the course. The work seen during the inspection was average overall. High attainers reach well above average standards. The majority of pupils achieve well.

167. Most pupils in Years 10 and 11 have good knowledge and understanding of the topics they study. They make effective use of historical sources, successfully evaluating their reliability and usefulness. They explain clearly the reasons for events in the past. Higher attainers argue competently the relative importance of a range of factors – such as those leading to changes in medical techniques. The highest attainers write very well at length, producing essays in which points of view are backed up with valid evidence. In contrast, essays from lower attainers are largely narrative or descriptive.

168. The very good teaching is a strength of the department. It is characterised by considerable subject knowledge, very effective classroom management, high expectations of behaviour and hard work, and a brisk pace. Teachers use a range of short, motivating activities that interest pupils and keep them busy and actively involved in learning. The implementation of the national strategy to improve teaching and learning is very clearly evident in lessons. Teachers make effective use of a wide range of resources. Pupils' (usually) very good behaviour and positive attitudes to work are key reasons for their good achievement.

169. The department is led and managed very well. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection. There is a clear commitment to identifying ways to raise standards still further. The main history rooms are extremely stimulating places in which to learn. The high-quality, three-dimensional models made by pupils are a notable feature. The department makes a very good contribution to the development of pupils' literacy. Pupils do not, however, use ICT enough in class time for research or for the presentation of their work. This is largely because there are insufficient computers in the department for pupils' use. The arrangement by which some classes in Years 7-9 are shared between two teachers is not satisfactory, because it makes continuity difficult for both pupils and teachers.

Religious Education

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teacher acting as head of department provides good leadership.
- Teaching, learning and achievement are at least satisfactory in all years except Year 11.
- During Years 7-10, pupils make steady progress in all aspects of the subject.
- Not all teaching is based on sufficient subject knowledge.

Commentary

170. By the end of Year 9, pupils' work is at the standard expected in the agreed syllabus. Pupils describe soundly the distinctive beliefs and practices of Christianity and of the other religions they study. They understand religious meanings and motives and explain their response to situations that require the exercise of moral choice.

171. During Years 7-9, achievement is satisfactory. Pupils develop an appropriate understanding of, and respect for, other people's beliefs and values. They show an adequate awareness of questions about life and of how the answers lead to choices. Pupils make steady progress, not only in learning about religions, but also in learning about themselves from their study of religion.

172. In 2001, the school adopted the GCSE short course as its provision for pupils in Years 10 and 11. The school entered the whole of Year 11 for this examination for the first time in 2003. Results were below average. The overall standard attained by pupils in the present Year 11 is also below average.

173. In the unit on Buddhism, for example, pupils show elementary understanding of the fundamental ideas, but their explanations lack depth and development. In their study of moral issues from Christian perspectives, they respond with their own reasoning about the issues. Their reasoning, however, usually lacks the evidence and argument, drawn specifically from religion, that are necessary to reach the higher grades in the examination. Pupils' evaluative skills are underdeveloped.

174. In Years 10 and 11, achievement is unsatisfactory overall. In Year 10, when pupils study such issues as Christian perspectives on poverty, teaching, learning and achievement range from good to excellent. In Year 11, however, when pupils study Buddhism, these elements are much less successful. Pupils fail to gain the level of knowledge, skills and confidence that they need to realise their potential in the examination. As a result, progress in Year 11 lessons is slow and pupils' work is, in both quality and quantity, below what it should be.

175. Teaching and learning are at least satisfactory in all years except Year 11. Teachers plan their lessons well, with clear objectives. They are good at engaging pupils' attention and interest. Teachers and pupils make good use of time and teachers insist on high standards of behaviour. The content and approach of lessons is also good at promoting "inclusive" attitudes.

176. A lack of subject specialism, however, means that in some lessons the teacher has too little grasp of what pupils are trying to learn. One result is that pupils decide not to ask questions, because they believe that the teacher will not know the answer. The study of prayer in Christianity and Islam offers a further example. In considering the similarities and differences, pupils need to know about preparations for prayer and postures. They also need, however, to explore deeper questions, such as whether Christians and Muslims direct their prayers to the same deity. In some of the lessons observed, the teaching left pupils in uncertainty. Similarly, without the necessary subject knowledge, teachers' expectations – and, consequently, the challenge in lessons – are not high enough.

177. The best aspect of provision is the accommodation. Nearly all lessons take place in two very good specialist rooms. Resources, however, are unsatisfactory. There are sufficient textbooks, but up-to-date visual material (such as videorecordings and posters) is lacking. Additionally, although the school knows of the acting head of department's expertise in the use of ICT, the department lacks the necessary equipment.

178. The match of teachers to the curriculum is unsatisfactory. Staffing problems and the lack of specialist teaching continue to lower pupils' achievement, particularly in Year 11. The school provides some time for RE in the sixth form, but it is not enough over the two years to cover the content specified in the agreed syllabus. For these reasons, the curriculum is unsatisfactory overall.

179. The leadership of the teacher acting as head of department is good. The introduction of new, improved schemes of work, with particular attention to assessment, shows clear vision and a strong sense of purpose about the future. She has maintained high aspirations, despite prolonged and severe difficulties in staffing, and has made the best of the unsatisfactory situation. Her knowledgeable, innovative leadership, together with the good role model she offers to other staff and to pupils, has prevented teaching, learning and achievement from becoming unsatisfactory across the school. The management of the department is satisfactory, but the monitoring of pupils' progress through the analysis and evaluation of assessment data is in need of some improvement.

180. The major gain since the last inspection has been the introduction of the GCSE short course in Years 10 and 11. Results, however, are not yet as good as they should be. The school has,

however, now appointed a new head of department to start in September. Improvement overall since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The leadership of the subject is very good; management is good.
- Pupils achieve well in practical work because of the good teaching they receive.
- The overall standard of work is average by the end of Year 11.
- There are health and safety problems in food rooms and workshops.
- Inadequate accommodation and resources limit pupils' achievement.

Commentary

181. By the end of Year 9, the overall standard of pupils' work is average. This is a good achievement from pupils' below average starting point in Year 7. Pupils attain best in practical work, particularly in textiles and resistant materials. By the end of Year 11, the overall standard of work is average. Results in GCSE in 2003, too, were average.

182. Pupils' practical work is better than their knowledge and understanding of materials or processes. Pupils have above average skill with, for example, sewing machines in textiles. Higher attainers have an above average knowledge and understanding of how to use ICT design software to enhance their course work in resistant materials. The use and application of "SMART" materials is a particularly strong feature in textiles. There has been a steady improvement in the standard of work over the past few years.

183. Achievement in lessons is good in Years 7-9. This is because improvements have been made to the teaching of courses: the workbooks provided for pupils help to structure and improve their literacy, numeracy and capability in design work. In a Year 7 lesson, for example, pupils moved purposefully from practical woodworking to theoretical work. They read the helpful feedback notes written by the teacher and settled down to close the gaps identified in their work. This was a very good example of assessment guiding learning.

184. In a Year 8 textiles lesson, pupils in a lower set achieved well in groups. They planned and presented their work carefully prior to doing an electronic presentation of their ideas for improving an outside area of the school. One pupil with special educational needs was well supported by a classroom assistant, who freed him of the worry of writing and allowed him to be creative. In a Year 9 higher set, pupils showed good knowledge and understanding of electronic circuitry, but were frustrated when batteries failed and they could not put their ideas into practice. Where pupils underachieve, as in a Year 9 graphics lesson, teachers do not engage their interest and sanctions are applied too quickly, thus demotivating pupils even further.

185. Achievement by the end of Year 11 is satisfactory. Pupils achieve well in practical tasks in textiles, food and resistant materials, but not in theory. In an all-girl textiles class in Year 10, for example, excellent results were achieved when they machined coats with insulating properties for their drinks bottles. Understanding that theory is an important element of the examination, however, is a weakness for too many pupils. In both Year 11 graphics and resistant materials classes, lower attainers slowed the pace of the lessons. These pupils took no notice of the thorough written feedback provided by the teacher. Potentially higher attainers who wanted to improve their theoretical understanding lost interest. The teachers did not have the skill to re-engage both groups of pupils.

186. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7-9 and generally satisfactory in Years 10-11. They are occasionally very good or outstanding. The strengths of teaching lie in teachers' subject knowledge and the high expectations of some teachers. The strengths in learning lie in many pupils' desire to cook or to make things that look good or have a functional purpose – like the mobile phone cover that lit up, when a call was received. Too much teaching does not, however, take sufficient account of pupils' learning needs. Assessment of learning is stronger than assessment for learning: there are no displays in workshops, for instance, that show National Curriculum level descriptors or GCSE criteria.

187. Leadership of the subject is very good. There is a clear vision for the subject. Very good ICT initiatives, both in textiles and resistant materials, are raising pupils' achievement. Management is good. Improvements since the previous inspection have been at least satisfactory for those elements within the faculty's control. Improvement to accommodation and resources has been unsatisfactory.

188. Departmental facilities are inadequate. Serious limitations to pupils' achievement result from inadequate funding – such as for printer cartridges at GCSE level. Cleaning, resources and equipment in the food rooms raise serious health and safety issues. Cramped workshop conditions and the storage of waste materials in the technician's cutting room are unacceptable for safe working. Currently, technician provision is inadequate for the department's needs.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management of the subject are very good.
- The quality of teaching is very good: as a result, pupils achieve very well.
- By Year 11, the overall standard of pupils' work is well above average.
- Too few opportunities are provided for using ICT.

Commentary

189. The standard on entry to the school is average. By the end of Year 9, the overall standard is above average – as, for example, in using sketchbooks for research, design and the development of ideas. Pupils make rapid gains in their knowledge, understanding and skill in both two and three dimensions. They use a wide range of natural and man-made materials creatively in order to solve the open-ended problems set by their teachers. Year 9 pupils' large, dramatic charcoal drawings of birds, for instance, are particularly successful in capturing the unique qualities of these creatures.

190. By the end of Year 11, the overall standard of work is well above average. Higher attainers, for example, freely draw distorted sweet wrappers as part of their work on pop art. Lower-attaining boys draw equally well, but need constant reassurance from their teachers. Sketchbooks show a very high standard of presentation. Pupils understand the need for artists to work with the environment and not to destroy it. They reach a standard that is well above average in making ceramic tiles, based on an architectural theme and decorated using oxide washes. Results in GCSE have been well above average for the past two years. In 2003, girls performed particularly well in this subject. The number of boys taking art and design in GCSE has decreased over the past few years.

191. Achievement in lessons in Years 7-9 is very good overall. Pupils in Year 7 benefit greatly from training in using the formal elements of line, tone and colour. They make good progress and achieve very well when, for example, they use tracing and cutting techniques to create decorative

patterns based on aboriginal symbols. Pupils in Years 7-9 use annotated notes well to explain and evaluate their work.

192. Girls and boys often approach their work very differently. In one Year 9 class, the girls planned before drawing, but most boys plunged straight into the work. They all achieved very well, using tonal washes of ink to create animal studies, when working in the style of the artist Catrin Howrell. In this class, pupils regularly identified key words connected with the project and entered them on the whiteboard. This was a good example of pupils taking responsibility for their own learning.

193. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as everyone else, because teachers know them well and ensure that visual resources support them in learning. Higher attainers achieve very well, because all tasks are challenging, thus encouraging mental activity. Too few opportunities are available, however, for using ICT for creative work.

194. Achievement by the end of Year 11 is very good. Higher attainers confidently and successfully use a wide range of materials. They research ideas extensively and make very good links to practising artists. Lower attainers often lack self-esteem. Their attendance is intermittent. These pupils regard the teacher as the sole judge of quality rather than understanding that they themselves are partners in how they learn. All pupils know the assessment criteria by which their work is judged. Most pupils are beginning to relate these to their daily learning in class.

195. Teaching and learning are very good. The strongest features are teachers' subject knowledge of contemporary art, high expectations and interest in how pupils learn. Weaker features are failing to engage the interest of lower-attaining boys and the acceptance of high levels of noise when pupils are working. This department is, however, a very good training placement for students and newly qualified teachers. Displays are of high quality.

196. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. This is a very strong team. The assessment of learning is stronger than assessment for learning, although one teacher offers a very good lead on this aspect. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good: resources are better, teaching is of a higher quality and the attitudes of pupils are more positive. Unresolved problems are the unsatisfactory access to computers and insufficient storage.

Drama

Provision in drama is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' subject knowledge and enthusiasm are high.
- Leadership and management are good.
- The absence of sound and lighting facilities in the drama studio limits pupils' learning.

Commentary

197. Drama is taught to all pupils in Years 7-9 and is offered as an option in Years 10 and 11. The overall standard of work throughout the school is average, but it is above average in Years 7-9. In the GCSE examination in 2003, of the 48 pupils who took the examination, half obtained grades in the range A-C.

198. The permanent teacher, working with a Year 7 class for the first time, set high expectations right at the start of the lesson. Clear explanations for a warm-up activity, which were checked using quick, oral questions, reinforced these expectations and established a tight framework for learning. Pupils worked very well, making good eye contact with one another as they displayed the high concentration essential for success in the activity. As pupils worked hard to make good progress,

they applauded the teacher: she had learned all their names while the quick activity was taking place.

199. Pupils in a Year 10 class, using a script, *Killed, July 16th 1916*, were helped to deepen their understanding of the context through a quick discussion of the word “conchies” and its effect on other people. By establishing a timed activity in which small groups rehearsed a section of the script and by careful guidance and support to raise pupils’ awareness of the interpretation of characters, the teacher ensured that pupils made solid progress.

200. A Year 11 class, working on “the final scene”, reviewed the purpose of the lesson before being split into two groups. One group worked with a temporary teacher who further divided the group into two. One of these groups critically reworked the script and significantly improved their understanding of such features as dialogue and movement. In contrast, insufficient guidance from the temporary teacher limited the learning of the second group. Finally, working with the whole class, the permanent teacher re-established good learning by quickly encouraging sustained evaluations after each presentation. These focused pupils’ minds clearly on reviewing their performances and on such aspects as the use of space, language and gesture.

201. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, with much very good teaching in Years 7-9. Its strongest features are the enthusiastic, well-structured teaching of the permanent member of staff, who is the acting head of the subject. The leadership and management of the subject are good. Schemes of work have been revised and assessment criteria are currently being introduced into Years 7-9. Links between drama and English are thin. Accommodation has improved since the last inspection, but the absence of lighting and sound facilities in the drama studio limits the opportunities for pupils to acquire technical skills. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory overall.

Music

Provision in music is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have declined owing to insufficient emphasis on practical music-making.
- The quality of teaching is unsatisfactory overall in Years 7-9.
- Leadership and management are unsatisfactory owing to many recent changes in staffing.
- The provision for instrumental tuition is very good.
- There are few extra-curricular opportunities provided within the school.
- Statutory requirements for the use of ICT in the department are not met.
- Accommodation and the management of resources are unsatisfactory.

202. The department has three music teachers. Two of these are on maternity leave and one was appointed acting head of department the week prior to the inspection. One replacement supply teacher was also appointed the week before the inspection.

203. The overall standard attained by pupils by the end of Year 9 is below average. Only a small number of pupils take the subject in Years 10-11. The current standard of work in Year 11 is above average. In the 2003 GCSE examination, five out of the six candidates gained a grade at C or above; one boy gained an A* grade.

204. Standards in Years 7-9 have declined since the previous inspection because of major staffing changes and an over-emphasis on written work. In addition, pupils do not receive enough guidance on how to improve their work and have no opportunities to use ICT in music. A minority of pupils throughout Years 7-11 work at an above average (and sometimes high) standard in playing and performing. The learning of these pupils is enhanced by good instrumental tuition and opportunities to play and perform in ensembles and before an audience.

205. In Years 7-9, pupils' knowledge of music and experience in playing and performing are, overall, below average. Pupils have little knowledge of the elements of music and how to use them in composition. Pupils display a lack of enthusiasm and application to work. Their achievement is unsatisfactory during these years. In contrast, achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good, because attitudes are good in response to good teaching and because many pupils are experienced players and performers. In most lessons, pupils are unable to refine their work, because there are insufficient practice spaces. The development of singing and ICT skills are not embedded into schemes of work, so limiting pupils' opportunities.

206. Teaching is unsatisfactory overall in Years 7-9. Pupils do not learn and progress as much as they should, because they are not guided sufficiently in their learning towards appropriate standards and are not challenged to improve. Lesson time is wasted in setting up and putting away equipment. Pupils' books and the lessons seen indicate that there is too much emphasis on written work at the expense of practical activities. Teachers encourage pupils to share their work with the rest of the class, but many perform reluctantly, showing a lack of experience. Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is, in contrast, good overall. Its strengths lie in teachers' very good subject knowledge and their skill in knowing the best ways in which individual pupils learn.

207. The accrued discontinuities in staffing have led to a lack of vision and out-of-date schemes of work. The number of pupils taking the subject has increased in Year 10. These pupils achieve well, starting from a low base. Teaching rooms are used by other departments and the community, making it difficult for teachers to prepare their lessons. There is no space for group practices. The department does not provide enough opportunities for pupils to play and perform in groups. Many do, however, play in orchestras and bands outside the school, with the valuable guidance of visiting instrumental teachers. Overall, standards have declined in the subject since the last inspection.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are average in practical activities, but well below average in GCSE.
- The leadership and management of the subject are good.
- Lessons are very well prepared.

Commentary

208. By the end of Year 9, performances in practical activities are average, a satisfactory achievement. For example, many pupils, including those with special educational needs, throw the javelin satisfactorily in athletics and noticeably improve during lessons. Very well organised and imaginative teaching in an athletics lesson resulted in very good learning and good achievement by the great majority of pupils. Tennis skills are average: Year 8 girls, for example, are just developing forehand shots, but few have any other significant skills. Most pupils work enthusiastically.

209. By the end of Year 11, practical skills are generally satisfactory in games. Ball control is average in basketball and boys play the game enthusiastically. There is, however, an over-indulgence in dribbling and pupils have little tactical awareness. In badminton, girls have the necessary hand/eye coordination to sustain simple rallies, but do not have a range of strokes or service techniques. Better standards were seen in a soccer lesson: pupils were sufficiently skilful to keep effective possession of the ball. In the GCSE examination in 2003, the proportion of good grades obtained was well below the national average.

210. Teaching is often good and occasionally very good. It is good overall in Years 7-9 and satisfactory in Years 10-11. Lessons are very well prepared. Teachers give very careful consideration

to the selection of learning objectives that are then often shared with pupils, thereby adding purpose and interest to lessons. The department has a clear policy to vary the range of teaching styles it uses.

211. In Years 7-9, good relationships motivate most pupils, encouraging them to work with enthusiasm and enjoyment. Opportunities are regularly given to pupils to decide how they wish to learn. In theory lessons, however, information is sometimes too readily handed out to pupils before they have had the opportunity to consider and reflect upon issues. Coursework, carefully monitored by teachers, is marked promptly and in constructive detail.

212. Most pupils behave well in lessons, making sustained efforts both to improve and succeed. Lessons in Years 7-9 proceed with a good pace and purpose. Rarely do pupils miss taking part in lessons without good reason. When teachers require pupils to collaborate, they usually do so easily and effectively. This good level of cooperation assists pupils to learn well. In a Year 11 GCSE lesson, in contrast, a minority of boys showed little interest and behaved badly.

213. Good leadership and management by the head of department are reflected in the high standards of policy documentation, schemes of work and lesson notes. This quality ensures that most lessons have a very clear purpose and proceed at a good pace. Teachers use ICT well in lessons. Departmental policy is regularly updated and appropriately modified. The assessment of pupils' work is thorough: it helps pupils to understand how well they are attaining and progressing. The day-to-day running of the department is efficient. Many very good displays in the department and around the school provide information for pupils and celebrate their various achievements.

214. The extra-curricular programme is good. A significant number of boys and girls regularly take part in competitive sport. Clubs, competitions and matches are provided both at lunchtimes and after school. Improvement in the department since the previous inspection has been good. This is an improving department that now requires a concerted effort to raise GCSE results.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL SUBJECTS

Business Education

Provision in business education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Stimulating topics maintain pupils' interest and lessons are well resourced.
- Teaching focuses well on developing appropriate study skills.
- Sometimes, the lesson content and pace of working do not match pupils' abilities.

Commentary

215. Pupils' overall level of attainment is average and their achievement satisfactory. The standard of work is improving. A large number of pupils, from a wide range of ability, choose this academic course in business; the majority of these are boys. In 2003, 43 per cent of candidates gained a grade in the range A* to C, but a significant minority did not reach grade G.

216. The standard of written work and coursework assignments is close to average overall. A variety of worksheets, word grids, structured notes and tests are tackled satisfactorily. They are regularly checked and marked, with feedback on means of improvement. The best work is detailed and accurate. Sometimes, tasks are a little over-ambitious. Appropriate use is made of ICT for word processing, illustrating texts and providing information graphically.

217. In Year 10, for example, pupils sought answers about industrial production techniques from a video recording. Some found it difficult to sustain a task that involved 50 questions and the requirement to extract the answers from 20 minutes of film. All grasped the main issues, although

the end of the lesson was a little hurried because of the amount of material being checked. In Year 11, pupils successfully addressed the ethical issues of using low-wage workers in developing countries to manufacture sports equipment for western markets.

218. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Large groups are handled well. Pupils usually respond positively to those lessons that are well organised, suitably resourced and incorporate an appropriate variety of learning techniques. In the Year 11 lesson outlined above, the initial explanation of the topic was not clear, but pupils made solid gains in learning because of the varied activities with well-produced resources. Pupils are strongly encouraged in the important skills of finding out information for themselves and summarising it in their own words.

219. The leadership and management of the subject are good. The head of department, who does the bulk of the teaching, has established the subject well in the two years that he has been in post. The base room is a stimulating place to learn. The provision of ICT in this room, where there is only one networked computer, is, however, unsatisfactory overall.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The time allocation for, and organisation of, citizenship in Years 10 and 11 is good.
- Assessment is planned well in Years 10 and 11.
- The time within PSHE for citizenship in Years 7-9 is insufficient.
- There is insufficient monitoring of how well – and where – the subject is taught in Years 7-9.

Commentary

220. Citizenship is taught to pupils in Years 7-9 as a part of their PSHE course and through their other subjects. In these years, provision is unsatisfactory overall. In Years 10 and 11, there is a separate citizenship lesson each week. This provision is satisfactory.

221. There are no precise national norms available for this subject against which pupils' attainment and experience can be measured. The evidence from lessons and pupils' written work indicates that pupils' attainment in Years 10 and 11 is in line with the broad national picture and that their achievement is satisfactory by the end of Year 11. There was insufficient citizenship work with pupils in Years 7-9 during the inspection to make a firm judgement about attainment by the end of Year 9.

222. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have basic knowledge of aspects of the European Union. Pupils in Year 10 knew, for instance, which countries are in the Union and why Eastern European countries wish to join. Other pupils in Year 10 were aware of some of the issues of "fair trade". Pupils in Year 11 showed that they understood the concept of "community" adequately and higher attainers produced good definitions of the word "community".

223. Satisfactory opportunities are provided for pupils to participate in activities relating to citizenship. Pupils have, for example, practical experience of elections to the school council. They participate in fund-raising. The school makes satisfactory use of external speakers and groups to enrich pupils' knowledge. Unfortunately, too many pupils do not take good advantage of this expertise, and so do not extend their understanding or achieve well.

224. The quality of teaching ranges from good to unsatisfactory and is satisfactory overall. In the best examples, teachers have good command of the subject, plan lessons well, and interest and

involve pupils in discussion. These qualities were especially in evidence in a Year 11 lesson in which pupils decided what makes a successful community and began to plan one. In the unsatisfactory lessons, teachers did not motivate pupils successfully or present them with stimulating questions to enliven their thinking. Pupils generally do not have a positive attitude towards the subject. Too many do not regard it as important. This, together with teaching that lacks stimulation, is the major factor in explaining why pupils' achievement is no better than satisfactory.

225. Leadership is satisfactory overall, and good for Years 10 and 11. Management is unsatisfactory overall, although it is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. The head of department has clear, well-considered plans for the future. An audit has checked what other subjects contribute to citizenship. There is, however, insufficient monitoring of this contribution. Most subjects plan to provide opportunities to deepen education in citizenship, but the school does not know whether these opportunities are taken up effectively. This is especially important for pupils in Years 7-9, because a large proportion of their citizenship education is deemed to come through other subjects. The time allocated for citizenship within the PSHE course is insufficient to allow the course content to be taught effectively. There is a sound scheme of assessment for pupils in Years 10 and 11, but none for Years 7-9.

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 2003. *Data in the "England" columns relate to 2002, the latest year for which national data were available at the time of the report's publication.*

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
English literature	25	100	94	24	38	36.4	38.9
Mathematics	16	50	74	13	34	19.4	31.3
Biology	15	80	82	20	33	28.0	33.2
Chemistry	15	60	85	13	37	20.7	35.2
Physics	6	83	82	17	36	31.7	34.3
Environmental science	10	90	83	10	32	30.0	33.4
Art	16	94	90	44	43	39.4	39.0
Design & technology: product design	4	0	89	0	32	0.0	35.7
Design & technology: textiles	2	100	n/a	0	n/a	30.0	n/a
Geography	14	100	88	64	36	46.4	36.3
History	14	93	92	29	37	38.6	37.8
Information & communication tech.	2	100	78	0	21	20.0	28.5
French	7	100	85	0	35	31.4	34.9
German	4	75	88	0	35	20.0	35.6
Music	3	67	94	67	39	36.7	39.0
Physical education	7	86	88	14	28	30.0	33.8
Business studies	15	100	89	67	32	47.3	35.4
Psychology	29	97	83	34	33	41.4	37.8
Sociology	10	60	84	30	34	24.6	33.8
General studies	71	61	79	3	26	17.8	30.0

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
English literature	31	100	99	35	44	83.9	84.3
Mathematics	8	100	93	63	52	97.5	84.7
Biology	5	100	94	60	46	92.0	74.1
Chemistry	4	100	85	50	37	90.0	81.1
Physics	5	100	93	60	43	88.0	78.6
Environmental science	6	67	95	0	40	36.7	78.7
Art	13	92	96	77	49	101.5	85.1
Design & technology: product design	8	100	95	38	36	92.5	76.5
Design & technology: textiles	2	100	n/a	0	n/a	70.0	n/a
Geography	12	100	97	92	41	115.0	80.9
History	21	100	97	29	41	72.4	81.2
Information & communication tech.	8	100	89	38	22	75.0	64.1
French	9	100	96	67	46	88.9	83.0
German	2	100	96	0	44	70.0	82.1
Physical education	1	100	95	0	30	60.0	73.2
Business studies	2	100	96	100	33	100.0	76.5
Dramatic & expressive arts	6	100	98	0	42	73.3	82.9
Psychology	20	100	94	20	39	68.0	77.7
Sociology	15	93	95	20	40	77.3	79.1
General studies	60	97	90	28	29	70.3	69.3

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

226. The main focus was on English literature and French, but German was also sampled. Two lessons were observed in German – one in Year 12 and one in Year 13. Teaching and learning were satisfactory in both. The overall standard of attainment was in line with course requirements in Year 12. In Year 13, there is only one student taking the course. Students are reasonably confident orally. In the writing seen, they tended to copy too much and had some difficulties with word order and using the correct case after prepositions. Achievement was broadly satisfactory in the lessons seen.

English literature

Provision in English literature is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The A2-level results in 2003 were a very good achievement.
- Both the AS- and A2-level courses are carefully planned and well managed.
- Students make good progress in this subject.

Commentary

227. English literature is a subject in which students do well. Fifty-four students currently study the subject at either AS or A2 level. The overall achievement of most students is well in line with course requirements and the majority of students achieve very well. In 2003, 31 students took and passed the A2 examination. Eleven students obtained either A or B grades.

228. In the Year 12 class, students studying Arthur Miller's play, *Death of a Salesman*, quickly drafted ten words to describe the character of Willy Loman. By collating their perceptions on a flip chart and at the same time deftly questioning them (particularly to check textual evidence and the meanings of such key words as "mercurial"), the teacher deepened their understanding of the character significantly. Using their knowledge of classical and Shakespearian tragedy, students identified characteristics that could be found in modern tragedy. This exercise led to a lively discussion of whether Willy was a hero or not. Using a video recording on modern tragedy reinforced students' understanding of tragedy and helped them to complete a sheet on key ideas successfully. Through the teacher's consistent use of probing questions to reinforce understanding, the students make good progress.

229. In another Year 12 lesson, focusing on a study of *The Chimney Sweeper* by William Blake, a number of well-structured tasks enabled students to make good progress. In a briskly organised lesson, students first worked in pairs to compile definitions of the word "innocence" before linking them to the poem. By asking students to identify one key idea in each stanza, the teacher pushed their understanding of the poem deeper. By working closely with the students and continually reinforcing the learning objectives for the lesson, the teacher ensured that students achieved well.

230. Exploring the relationship between Edward Thomas and his wife Helen through his poems *Wedding Wind*, *No One So Much as You* and *And You Helen* was crucial to the insights that Year 13 students gained after reading an extract from Helen Thomas's memoir, *World Without End*. Students used evidence from the poems to inform their reflections on the extent of Helen's pain and suffering in *World Without End* and were well able to respond to the teacher's searching questions to clarify their perceptions. Well-supported group work ensured that the students deepened their understanding of textual form, structure and language. Students achieved well.

231. In another Year 13 class, students thoughtfully studied Chaucer's *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* and re-read parts of the text, in small groups, to help them to prepare for presentations on the Miller and the Parson. Students identified thoughtfully key aspects of Chaucer's language of characterisation. By checking and teasing out aspects of students' perceptions, the teacher ensured that all students made good progress.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

232. The overall standard of literacy across sixth-form subjects is above average. Writing skills are particularly strong features in students' work in geography and history. Significantly, geography students' consistent use of highlighting to identify key points when reading in Years 7-11 has enabled them to produce very good notetaking in Years 12 and 13. Students' written work is well organised, generally accurate and carefully presented. The majority of students read fluently and with expression. When engaged in speaking and listening activities, they are well able to express points of view cogently and to sustain an argument supported by evidence.

Modern foreign languages

Provision in French is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching captures students' interest.
- Students enjoy the coursework on France in the Second World War.

Commentary

233. Results in the A-level examinations in 2003 for a small group of students were average. The majority of students made satisfactory (and occasionally good) progress from their attainment in

GCSE; three out of the nine students did not. Students' overall levels of attainment in Years 12 and 13 are average. Their achievement is satisfactory.

234. Students in Year 12 have a sound knowledge and understanding of the topics they study. They know the relevant vocabulary to enable them to read, speak and write about a variety of topics. In a lesson on family and relationships, for instance, they spoke confidently about their ideal partner, using the conditional tense appropriately, and even introducing several subjunctive verbs. The agreement of adjectival endings in written work, however, still causes some problems. Their understanding of the foreign language is good, and the whole lesson was conducted in French. During the lesson, they acquired new vocabulary that enabled them to extend their views on marriage and its alternatives.

235. In the Year 13 lesson on science and technology, students studied an authentic text on the responses to mobile-phone masts in France. They acquired the vocabulary to enable them to put forward their own ideas on the best place for masts. In their files, students show a good knowledge of the kind of vocabulary that enables them to tackle topics as varied as animal experimentation or obesity. Students write with varying degrees of accuracy. Grammatical exercises are covered very thoroughly. Students have a good knowledge of verb tenses.

236. The teaching seen was good; one of the two teachers was absent during the inspection. Lessons are planned well. They incorporate a suitable variety of activities and methods, to which students respond well. Worksheets enhance lessons very effectively. In the two lessons observed, the teacher ensured that all students were stretched linguistically and included in discussions. In both lessons, students worked at a good pace and had to think hard.

237. Leadership and management of the subject are good. Students speak highly of the department's assessment procedures and the feedback they receive. They have particularly enjoyed the coursework component on the study of France during the Second World War and the Resistance.

Mathematics

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good and students learn well, particularly in Year 12.
- In 2003, half the students attained the highest grade at A-level.
- In 2002, in contrast, results at A-level were well below the national pattern.
- Leadership and management are good.

Commentary

238. In 2002, results in GCE A-level were well below the national average. This represented unsatisfactory achievement for the group. In 2003, whilst students in Year 12 fared badly at GCE AS level, students in Year 13, at the end of their course, attained better results than those seen nationally, with half the students gaining the top grade, a solid achievement.

239. Currently, there are six students in Year 13. Two work at the highest level and all are on course to pass the examination. Their overall achievement is satisfactory. They achieve well in work on shape, space and algebra. They use the Internet to download information on difficult solid shapes and then, after studying this individually, discuss it thoughtfully amongst themselves and with their teacher.

240. There are 17 students in Year 12. They understand the requirements for coursework in statistics. Most are progressing well in the initial stages of preparing experiments to test

hypotheses – such as whether male or female students, or younger or older students, estimate lengths of lines more accurately. They have a good knowledge of how to use statistical techniques. They know, for example, how to judge whether the differences found in results between groups in experimental tests are significant or are likely to have occurred by chance. Students in both classes are increasingly secure in the workings of algebra. Most students achieve well when applying two formulae consecutively to arrive at a single formula that represents the composite effect.

241. Teaching is consistently good. Teachers have solid subject knowledge that helps to maintain pace in lessons. Relationships are good. Students work well together, and with their teachers, when discussing aspects of work. This is because of the skill that teachers use in encouraging a variety of learning techniques. Students not only work through problems individually in written form, but also make oral and visual presentations to their peers and access the Internet.

242. Leadership and management are good. The new head of faculty has not only introduced a range of learning techniques, but has supported and encouraged other teachers well in their teaching. He has given up time to take the classes of colleagues who have been absent and now has an increasingly effective team of teachers. There has been satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection, as more students attain higher grades and the department's leadership and management have become more purposeful.

Mathematics across the curriculum

243. Standards of attainment are average in most other subjects. In ICT, however, they are above average. Students in ICT are good at modelling situations, using spreadsheets and formulae well. They interpret and plot graphs skilfully. Good use is also made of graphs in geography, where students analyse and interpret statistics accurately and rapidly. In science, too, students make suitable use of graphs and formulae. In business education and psychology, students are sufficiently numerate to handle relevant data accurately.

SCIENCE

244. The main focus was on biology and physics, but chemistry and environmental science courses were also sampled. Courses are offered at AS and A2 levels in all subjects. The faculty has an "open- door" policy where any student with a grade in the range A*-C at GCSE is accepted onto AS courses.

245. Environmental science attracts smaller numbers than the other science subjects, but provides appropriate studies for those students who have an interest in scientific matters, but are less attracted to in-depth concepts and academic theories. The course draws on both the locality (with visits to nearby sites of scientific interest) and further afield (with a residential ecology course in Anglesey). Overall achievement on the course is satisfactory.

246. Two good chemistry lessons were seen. There are currently 12 students taking the subject. In a Year 13 lesson, students confirmed Hess's Law on the enthalpy of reactions. They worked confidently and correctly with thermometers reading to an accuracy of 0.1°C. They were aware of the potential inaccuracies of the experiment and how to minimise heat loss to the surroundings. They were able to explain the potential pitfalls in the calculation of overall enthalpy changes.

247. In a good Year 12 lesson, students successfully developed half equations linked to redox reactions. They appreciated that the transfer of electrons is akin to the addition and removal of oxygen. This lesson was well planned, based on a step-by-step build-up of the techniques to balance equations and an overall consideration of the movement of electrons. In both lessons, excellent relationships existed between students and their teacher. Current students are making good progress in chemistry from their earlier GCSE grades. In recent years, there has been no consistent pattern in the quality of chemistry results.

Biology

Provision in biology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The department works hard to raise attainment and achievement.
- Lessons are well planned and usually incorporate suitable practical activities.
- There is little use of ICT within the subject.
- There is a good rapport between students and teachers.
- Students' work is regularly checked and their progress carefully tracked.

Commentary

248. The grades that students obtain in A-level examinations are generally consistent with their previous attainment. Overall, the standard of attainment of present students is average and their achievement satisfactory.

249. Three good lessons were observed. Lessons are carefully planned, logically sequenced and usually include practical activities that complement well the topic being taught. Students enjoy that strand of the course that focuses on enzymes, because they see its usefulness, linked to the commercial applications of biotechnology. In a Year 13 lesson on enzyme immobilisation, students successfully used lactase enzyme on a sodium alginate substrate to remove lactose from cows' milk. In a subsequent lesson, students worked well with pectinase to improve the extraction of fruit juice from apple puree. They collected the extract and linked the effect of the pectinolytic enzyme to the breakdown of the cell walls in the fruit.

250. In a good Year 12 lesson, students successfully planned and implemented investigations on the breakdown of hydrogen peroxide by catalase. They selected and changed appropriately the parameters that affect the reaction rate – such as the concentration and light. They handled and mastered the manipulation of the glassware that is associated with the collection of oxygen gas from the reaction.

251. Theoretical work is well supported by examples taken from past examination papers. These increase students' understanding and prepare them carefully for their examinations. Teachers provide students with detailed comment on their work and progress. Although there are limited computing facilities readily available in the science department, students express a general satisfaction with the ICT facilities available elsewhere in the school. Students contribute freely in class. They do not hesitate to seek clarification on any detail during lessons and learn enthusiastically.

252. Teaching is good. Two members of staff teach the subject. Students are appreciative of the arrangements made to cover for the long-term absence of the lead teacher. The subject is developing well through the innovative techniques used during practical sessions of review and reinforcement. The leadership and management of the subject are good. Comprehensive assessment practices are in place. Coursework is marked in detail and appropriately graded. There has been a steady improvement since the last inspection.

Physics

Provision in physics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve reasonable success in the subject.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall.

- No girls currently study the subject.

Commentary

253. Most students who study the subject achieve success in their A-level examinations. In 2003, six Year 12 students sat the AS-level examination: five passed, including one student who achieved grade A. All five Year 13 students who entered the A2 examination passed; one student gained grade A. The overall standard of work is average.

254. Most students realise the potential indicated by their previous GCSE grades in science. During the inspection, students in Year 13 were revising the option on astrophysics. They had good command of the concepts of the absolute magnitude of the brightness of a star. They handled calculations soundly, using the formulae and units specific to cosmology. Year 12 students handled satisfactorily the concepts in linear dynamics, working examples at a level that matched the requirements of the examination. Students' achievement is satisfactory.

255. Class sizes are small, with teaching shared by two members of staff. Lessons allow for close contact between teachers and students, resulting in a careful monitoring of progress in both classwork and coursework assignments. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject, sufficient to support the more specialised areas of the A-level course. Teaching methods are conventional and do not extend to supported self-study by students. The standard of teaching is satisfactory.

256. The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. The Year 12 and Year 13 classes currently include no girls: it is a matter requiring careful investigation why the subject is not attractive to girls in the school. The previous inspection report does not provide a basis for a judgement on improvement since 1998.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching, learning and achievement are all good.
- Early success has been realised with the first cohort of students taking the course.

Commentary

257. Until recently, sixth-form computing courses were not offered at the school. Students wishing to follow these courses were taught at another local school. Students may now study for the Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education (AVCE) course in ICT in their own school. Ten students prepared for this examination in 2003 and all passed at a broadly average level of attainment.

258. Students' achievement is generally good, especially taking into account the weak provision for ICT in the school when they were younger. Students make rapid progress in their studies. Their coursework shows dedication, pride and maturity. Year 12 students, for example, studying the way that ICT serves commercial organisations, brought their own experience in employment to bear on what they had been taught. They made detailed comparisons, based on well-developed understanding of data, processing and reporting. Their work was also characterised by a determination to understand and follow the mark schemes used for their examinations, in order to improve their performance.

259. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are good. Teachers have good command of their subject. They plan very well and have developed detailed units of study that are published on the

school's intranet. This approach promotes a good level of independent study and critical self-assessment. Students work in a mature way and, in consequence, make good progress.

260. The leadership and management of provision are very good, displaying the same qualities that are improving provision in Years 7-11. The innovatory construction of the intranet and students' independent use of their ICT skills are important factors in the success that has been achieved to date. The improvement in ICT since the previous inspection is good.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

261. Provision of ICT across the sixth-form curriculum, in contrast, is currently unsatisfactory. The level of use of ICT is fairly low, but growing. Little use of ICT in teaching was seen during the inspection. This was partly due to the lack of equipment and network provision within subject rooms. There are, for example, no interactive whiteboards and few data-projectors, so restricting the use that teachers may make of laptop computers. Teachers are keen to embrace new technology and apply it to their work.

262. Students use ICT extensively for their own coursework in many subjects – such as in art, business education and psychology. The Internet is widely used in modern foreign languages for research, allowing authentic documents in the foreign language to be obtained readily on topics of interest. About half the subjects have at least some networked access.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' attainment is well above average.
- Teachers plan well and have high expectations of students.
- Students are well motivated, conscientious and enthusiastic. They achieve well.
- Very effective assessment clearly informs students how to improve.
- Leadership and management are of high quality.

Commentary

263. Students' attainment is well above average. Results in the GCE AS- and A2-level examinations in 2003 were well above the national average. In the GCE A2-level examination, all except two of the 12 students gained the top A grade and all passed. Every student achieved either well or very well indeed. This represents a very good, highly commendable achievement by students and their teachers. Similar standards were achieved in previous years.

264. Students in Year 12 have a good understanding of how landscapes and places change. One group, for instance, used the good understanding they gained during a fieldwork visit to explain why cliffs in Norfolk are retreating. They knowledgeably discussed the issues involved in managing this coastline. In another lesson, they effectively used satellite photographs and written material to accurately identify the causes and effects of flooding on the Mississippi River. Students have a good understanding of how cities grow and change, and use geographical models effectively to help to explain why such changes occur.

265. Students in Year 13 have a good understanding of how different natural environments across the world are threatened. They clearly understand some of the complex links between people and the environment and how the destruction of the natural environment might be stopped. One group, for example, studied information about afforested areas in Cameroon. They drew

accurate conclusions regarding the effect of people on the environment and suggested sensible ways in which adverse effects could be reduced in the future. They have a good understanding of the issues relating to population growth, the levels of development reached by countries around the world and the impact of multinational companies on trade and economic growth.

266. Students have a very good grasp of geographical terms and use them correctly in discussions and written work. They extract information efficiently from a wide range of resource materials and take notes effectively. Written work is fluent and essays are well structured. Files show a clarity of understanding, recording and analysis that is rarely seen.

267. Students make good progress through the course in gaining knowledge and understanding and extending their skills in using information to draw appropriate conclusions. They work hard, persevere with complex pieces of work and are keen, well motivated and conscientious. During lessons, they work at a brisk pace, are fully involved and work effectively with one another. As a result, their achievement is good.

268. Teaching is good overall and some is very good. Teachers have a firm command of the subject. Discussion is always lively and well structured, with robust questioning. Explanations are clear and well illustrated and teachers ensure that all students are fully involved. The objectives of lessons are made known to students at the start, with a suitable assessment activity at the end to assess whether they have been achieved. Lessons are planned thoughtfully with a series of well-designed activities, often in pairs or groups, that ensure that students use the knowledge they gain and reinforce their understanding.

269. Expectations are high. Students respond by always producing a high standard of work. Lessons move at a swift pace, so that students accumulate information rapidly. They maintain interest and concentration throughout. Resources are chosen carefully and are exploited effectively. Work is assessed thoroughly. The very good system of regular assessment enables teachers to provide clear information about the standard students have reached and how they may improve. Homework is set regularly and is purposeful.

270. The subject is very well led and managed. There is a clear sense of direction and a desire to reach the highest standards. Plans for the future are well focused and are based on effective evaluation and review. The scheme of work includes well-organised opportunities to attend conferences and a useful fieldwork experience in Norfolk.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Marking is very good, helping students to see clearly how to improve their work.
- Most students have very positive attitudes to work and so achieve well.
- The department is led and managed very well.
- Some students do not take enough responsibility for their own learning.

Commentary

271. The standard of work in both Years 12 and 13 is average. The AS- and A-level results in 2003 were below average, although all students passed. There was some underachievement from a minority of students, much of which was, however, the result of factors outside the control of the department. The standard of work seen during the inspection was average. A minority reach above average standards.

272. Students in Year 12 generally have good knowledge and understanding of the topics they study. In a sample of essays written under practice examination conditions, students showed good understanding, for example, of the reasons for the growth of Lutheranism in Europe. Those by the highest attainers contained very cogent arguments. Most students successfully evaluate a range of historical sources.

273. The majority of students in Year 13 have good knowledge and understanding. They use sources well to develop their understanding of past events. Those studying the reign of Mary Tudor, for instance, used a range of first-hand accounts to evaluate the success of Mary's policy of burning heretics and compared them with historians' views. The highest attainers successfully evaluated the historians' views. The lower attainers do not skim-read texts easily to identify key points rather than (sometimes unimportant) detail.

274. Most students have a very positive attitude to work and achieve well overall. Some students, however, do not take enough responsibility for their own learning. They do not take the initiative enough in lessons, preferring always to let teachers lead lessons. As a result, they do not achieve as well as they could.

275. Teaching is very good overall. Its key strengths are very good subject knowledge and the very detailed, helpful marking of students' work. Teachers use a suitable range of activities that both challenge and motivate students. They try to ensure that all students contribute to class discussions. They use questioning effectively to check what students have learned. Teachers make good use of a range of resources.

276. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The head of department (also head of humanities) provides a very good role model for his very effective team of teachers. Although teachers encourage students to use ICT, the students do not use ICT sufficiently in lessons, because the department does not have any computers in teaching rooms.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students show good interest and application in the subject.
- Teaching and assessment are systematic and well organised.
- The proportion of higher grades obtained at A2 level was low in 2003.
- Students have insufficient opportunity to debate basic concepts of the subject.

Commentary

277. The proportion of students obtaining grades A or B in the 2003 A2 examination was low, but all 20 students passed the subject. Both standards and numbers taking the subject are rising. Most students progress from AS to A2 level and a good proportion go on to study for a degree in the subject. One third of last year's AS-level group achieved grades A or B and only one student failed to pass at the first attempt.

278. The standard of current work is at least in line with predicted grades and is average overall. Written work is detailed and systematic and provides a good basis for revision. Well-written and carefully presented essays show the benefits of good preparation. Students work quietly and conscientiously and, by Year 13, analyse new material in the subject confidently, through discussion and questions, and add their own interpretations.

279. Year 12 students worked hard at reading and note-taking on the impact of Vygotsky and Piaget on child development practice. They produced clear summaries, prompted by their teacher

to include relevant examples from the text. A parallel group responded well to a variety of whole-class and group activities in revising their knowledge of Freud.

280. Teaching and learning are always at least satisfactory and good overall. Teaching is systematic, conducted with humour and based on a good rapport. This style of teaching on privation led to Year 13 students forming thoughtful comments and questions about what they had learned previously as well as on the new work presented in the lesson. Students adeptly pointed to defects in research information or methodology and discussed implications with insight. They report approvingly on the thoroughness of their preparation for examinations. There are, however, only limited opportunities for students to work in groups or discuss their basic understanding.

281. Leadership and management are good. The subject is shared between two teachers, one of whom is an examiner in the subject. The lead teacher is part-time and also contributes to the teaching in two other faculties. There is no head of department. The coordination of teaching is mainly through informal meetings. The subject is generally well resourced, but there is no base room and some lessons take place in unsatisfactory, laboratory surroundings. Work is regularly assessed, progress is logged and constructive feedback is given, as part of a careful system for monitoring students' progress.

Sociology

Provision in sociology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Some teaching is well organised and lively.
- Most students show positive attitudes to the subject.
- Written work is average, but some is poorly assessed.
- Course leadership and management are unsatisfactory.

Commentary

282. Overall attainment is average. There is a good basis for sixth-form work in the recently introduced GCSE course. Advanced-level (A2) results were a little below average in 2003, although nearly all candidates passed. Results were below average at AS level in 2003.

283. Standards of written work are about average. Achievement is satisfactory overall. Not all the sample of work seen during the inspection was well organised nor do students' work-files contain information on the syllabus or assessment criteria.

284. In Year 12, students made clear, relevant presentations on aspects of the education system and defended their views satisfactorily under the challenge of the teacher's questions. Throughout, they received support, encouragement and positive feedback from their teacher. They showed good recall of earlier work. Opportunities were, however, missed to draw in the rest of the class or to invite peer questions after each presentation. Some students in another Year 12 lesson, in contrast, were hesitant in offering their opinions on gender differences in educational performance.

285. A small Year 13 class displayed satisfactory knowledge of criminology in both a discussion and a class test. They had a good overall grasp of the subject. Relationships amongst students within all the classes seen – and between them and the teacher – were adult and relaxed. The teacher showed excellent knowledge of his students. The teaching and learning that it was possible to see, in the absence of the head of department, was in all cases at least satisfactory and sometimes good. Tests, given regularly by one teacher, are marked with encouraging comments; there is, however, little evidence of constructive feedback or targets for improvement. Some work is unmarked.

286. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. The head of department, absent during the inspection, did not ensure that work was provided for students. It was not possible to access departmental records during the inspection. No course information was available other than draft schemes of work. The assessment evidence in students' files is sparse. The informal meetings between the two teachers who take the course (one of whom taught additional lessons during the inspection) are used to discuss students' progress. The two teachers do not, however, have a common system for monitoring and assessing students' work.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

287. There was no major focus in this domain, but design and technology was sampled. In the two lessons seen, the provision was good. The standard of work is average. The number taking the subject at A2 level is low. Over the past few years, all students have gained a pass grade, although the proportion gaining the higher grades is below average. Recent decisions by course leaders have led to more innovative projects being offered. As a result, current students' motivation is high and their achievement is good. This is evident, for example, in the Year 12 designs for body adornment and shoes. Students taking both art and product design transfer skills across the two subjects. The use of electronics and "SMART" materials successfully combined function with safety in an outdoor garment for a young child. A Year 13 student uses ICT very well in an architectural project, when researching, designing and presenting ideas.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

288. The major focus was on art, but drama was also sampled. Drama is currently taught to nine students in Year 12. In the lesson seen, teaching, learning and achievement were all good. The overall standard of work was average. The teacher and students worked well together in an examination of movement, accent, timing, gesture and facial expression. Two major features of the lesson's success were the effective way that students drew different dramatic elements together and the depth of evaluation that was carried out by both teacher and students.

Art

Provision in art is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is very good; as a result, most students achieve their full potential.
- By Year 13, the overall standard of work is well above average and a very good achievement.
- Too many students lack confidence, when talking formally about their work before their peers.
- Opportunities for visiting galleries or making trips to cultural centres are few.

Commentary

289. The overall standard on entry to the sixth form is above average: some students have done exceptionally well at GCSE level. Literacy levels are very good – as when students are writing about artists or cultures or evaluating their own work. Many, however, lack the confidence to explain their work orally to others. Use is made of ICT for research, but opportunities are missed for exploring its use as a creative tool. By the end of Year 13, the overall standard of work is well above average. Over the past few years, results at AS level have been above average, whilst those at A2 level have been well above average.

290. Students understand the examination criteria by which they are judged. They also recognise, because teachers model this very well for them, that the creative journey is a very personal one. As a result, students usually take responsibility for their own learning. Most work very hard to attain high quality in, for example, experimental and abstract studies or in observational drawing.

291. Students in Year 12 are more confident orally than those in Year 13. When individual students take the lead and act as a catalyst for discussion, inhibitions fade and students talk articulately about their concerns and interests in art. Students in both years, for example, are intensely interested in the contemporary art scene. They are familiar, through Internet research, with the work of living artists as well as those from past eras. Their sketchbooks are exciting mixes of emerging ideas and developed designs. They are clearly annotated to communicate their ideas to others.

292. The personal working areas of Year 12 students reveal a wide range of interests in fine and applied art. Higher attainers' capabilities are fully realised in, for example, the decorative surface decorations on shoes or in the large, threatening, plaster-and-straw image of a human/monster form. Year 13 students work freely and confidently, using a wide range of materials. They achieve very well when using blown glass, ceramics and aluminium. Outstanding achievement by present and past students is evident in the dynamic drawings and expressive models displayed in the gallery. Unlike Year 12 students, who concentrate very well on their work, current Year 13 students have a tendency to gossip.

293. Teaching and learning are very good and occasionally outstanding. Teachers form a very effective team of enthusiasts, who act as very good role models for students and trainee teachers. Students appreciate the uniqueness of the art education offered to them and college tutors comment favourably on the maturity of the work produced.

294. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. There is a very clear sense of vision, but concern over possible safety issues limits the enrichment activities offered outside the school. There are fewer opportunities than usual for visits to galleries. Few boys take the subject at this level, although those who do so achieve very well.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

295. There was no major focus in this domain, but PE and travel and tourism (AVCE) were sampled. In PE, students generally work at appropriate levels, although their files indicate that too much information is copied down. The best work is produced in research projects where students have been given more responsibility for how they they learn. These projects contain examples of good, original work, some of it making very good use of ICT. The marking of students' work is particularly thorough. It is up to date and contains thoughtful comments from teachers that are designed to improve written work and to assist students to reflect on issues.

296. Travel and tourism is taught within a consortium arrangement with other schools. This is the first year of teaching the two-year course. The overall standard is above that usually expected at this stage in the course. Students have a good knowledge and understanding of, for example, the features of a tourist attraction. They use this knowledge effectively to analyse its strengths and weaknesses and to suggest possible improvements. They show a clear understanding of management issues. Achievement is good: students work hard, acquire understanding quickly and make swift progress.

297. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have a secure command of the subject and use this to plan lessons carefully, with a well-structured series of lively activities. Students are well motivated and keen to be involved. In one lesson, for example, students acted as travel agents, responding to enquiries from customers about how their holidays might be affected by geographical problems such as earthquakes and the extremes of climate. They quickly understood the issues and provided the answers confidently and effectively.

298. Leadership and management are effective. The course is thoughtfully organised, with well-planned opportunities for visits. A carefully structured system of assessment and thorough marking enable students to understand the progress they are making and how they may improve.

BUSINESS

Business Studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A wide variety of learning methods is used in well-structured lessons.
- The study base (apart from networked ICT) and learning resources represent good provision.
- Systems for assessment, feedback and target-setting for students are good.
- The department strongly emphasises study skills and examination techniques.

Commentary

299. The level of attainment is above average. Students' achievement is good. In 2003, both students passed at A2 level with B grades. Two-thirds of students achieved high grades at AS level in 2003 and all candidates passed the examination.

300. The overall standard of classwork and written work is well in line with course requirements. Files of work have very clear notes in a variety of formats. Well-written essays receive feedback that normally includes specific targets for improvement. By Year 13, most students analyse and discuss the outcome of research well and evaluate evidence carefully – key skills for A-level success. In a Year 13 class, students' progress over the two years of the course was well demonstrated by their quiet, systematic work on examples of business practice. In this lesson, they made decisions, after a good level of debate, on how the ethical stance of businesses should be categorised.

301. Teaching and learning are good. In a Year 12 lesson, students' understanding of the assessment criteria for AS and A-level was enhanced by the challenging task of students marking one another's essays and giving feedback. The task was completed with reasonable accuracy under the gentle prompting of the teacher. Resources for work are well produced, but lack ready access to the Internet. The teacher places strong emphasis on examination technique: a Year 13 class, for example, used model answers to practise the writing of long essays. The work in class is generally supported by regular checks on progress and understanding.

302. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The general developments achieved by the head of department have already been indicated in the report on work at GCSE level. All the teaching at this level is done by the head of department. There is a good system for the monitoring and assessment of students' work: targets are normally set for improvement after each piece of assessed work. Pupils are consulted on their progress and on their reaction to the teaching of the course. The Young Enterprise scheme is a useful addition to the curriculum.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

303. There was no major focus in this domain, but general studies was sampled. Students in the sixth form follow this A-level course as an opportunity for enrichment and to develop their understanding of contemporary life. During the inspection, students were studying the unit on how power is exercised in political life. In the lessons observed, students had a positive attitude and benefited much from the contribution this course makes to their general education. Teachers plan lessons well and give clear explanations to students that help them to understand, for example, the complexity of such situations of conflict as in Northern Ireland.

304. Teachers respond quickly and confidently to current affairs. In one lesson, the teacher used the killing of Shaikh Yasin, which occurred during the week of inspection, to illustrate how people may interpret events differently. The teacher showed an outstanding grasp of the situation in Israel/Palestine. The use of handouts downloaded from the Internet, including one from Aljazeera, was very effective in enabling students to see how people make different judgements about the significance of an event. General studies makes a valuable contribution to students' personal and intellectual development.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school	3	4
How inclusive the school is		3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	4	4
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	3	4
Overall standards achieved		4
Pupils' achievement	3	4
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		4
Attendance	0	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	3	4
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	3	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		4
Accommodation and resources	3	5
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		4
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	4	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		4
The quality of the school's links with the community	3	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3	3
The leadership and management of the school		3
The governance of the school	4	4
The leadership of the headteacher		2
The leadership of other key staff	3	3
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). 0 = information not available.