

INSPECTION REPORT

CULCHETH HIGH SCHOOL

Culcheth, Warrington

LEA area: Warrington

Unique reference number: 111430

Headteacher: Roger Burgess

Lead inspector: Michael Miller

Dates of inspection: 1st to 5th December 2003

Inspection number: 259356

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 to 18 (Years 7 to 13)
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1,255
School address:	Withington Avenue Culcheth WARRINGTON
Postcode:	WA3 4JQ
Telephone number:	01925 762136
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Julie Berry
Date of previous inspection:	19 th January 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Culcheth High School is situated in the village of Culcheth, to the north-east of Cheshire. It is a community comprehensive secondary school for pupils and students aged 11 to 18 (Years 7 to 13). It is larger than most other secondary schools. There are 1,255 pupils on roll, including 177 sixth form students. The school's sixth form, known as the college, is broadly average in size. The school is now larger than at the time of the previous inspection. It is currently over-subscribed. Most pupils live relatively locally, but a substantial number travel to school by bus. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is above average. Most pupils are from white ethnic backgrounds. The percentage of pupils from other ethnic groups is low. There are currently 11 pupils whose mother tongue is not, or is believed not to be, English. Employment rates in the area are around the national average. Unemployment is slightly below average. At just over 5 per cent, the proportion of pupils registered for free school meals is below average. Seventeen per cent of pupils are on the register of special educational needs, which is broadly average. At nearly 3 per cent, the proportion of pupils having Statements of Special Educational Need is average but, at nearly 8 per cent, it is high in the college.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
17556	Michael Miller	Lead inspector	
10173	Catherine Hinds	Lay inspector	
12568	Chris Morris	Team inspector	English
30576	Peter Bannon	Team inspector	Mathematics
32289	Tony Lydon	Team inspector	Science (Lead inspector)
17158	Ted Graham	Team inspector	Art and design Design and technology Key skills
24127	Jim Kidd	Team inspector	History Modern languages
32147	Ann Wallis	Team inspector	Geography
20119	Tony Bell	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Special educational needs English as an additional language
30072	Joe Skivington	Team inspector	Music Religious education Psychology (Sixth form)
32225	Christine Hough	Team inspector	Citizenship Personal, social and health education
27082	Geoff Henshall	Team inspector	Business education French (Sixth form)
3534	Ann Braithwaite	Team inspector	Physical education Vocational courses
32344	Janet Waters	Team inspector	Science (Support inspector)

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The school is providing an **acceptable** standard of education for the majority of pupils, who attain average and higher than average standards overall. However, the school is underachieving. This is because there are groups of higher-attaining pupils, particularly in Years 7 to 9, who are not doing as well as they should in some subjects. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The achievement of most pupils by Year 9 is satisfactory but, given their prior attainment, the progress of higher attaining pupils from Years 7 to 9 is not good enough overall.
- In some subjects planning does not effectively meet the needs of higher attaining and gifted or talented pupils throughout Years 7 to 11.
- The school's leadership has clear vision for improvement and is increasingly effective.
- The school's evaluation of its performance is improving, but is not yet sharp enough.
- Standards of literacy are good.
- There is very good teaching in some departments, but this is not consistent across all subjects and in all year groups.
- Provision in music is excellent and pupils of all ages achieve high standards.
- The use of assessment to raise standards and achievement has improved, but is inconsistent.
- Most pupils like school, get on well together and have respect for themselves and others.
- The very good range of extra-curricular arts and sporting activities promotes pupils' enjoyment of school life.

The school has made good recent improvement particularly in developing the leadership and management team and this is starting to impact positively on pupils' achievement. However, overall the school's improvement since the last inspection has not been good enough, particularly in addressing the issue of increasing the level of challenge for higher attaining pupils. The monitoring and use of assessment data to help in this have improved, but are still not sharp enough. However, the school has a clear vision of its priorities and development planning is now satisfactory.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Year 11 and 13 results

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

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 at the end of Year 9

Pupils' achievement in their past work and in the lessons seen during the inspection in Years 7 to 11 is mainly satisfactory in most subjects. However, there is underachievement, particularly in mathematics at Year 9 and Year 11, in science at Year 9 and in religious education at Year 11, and therefore achievement is judged unsatisfactory overall.

Standards of literacy are good throughout all year groups and standards of numeracy are satisfactory. Pupils' competency in ICT is satisfactory by Year 9 and good by Year 11. By Year 9, standards are above the national average in English, mathematics and science. In English this represents satisfactory achievement, but in mathematics and science pupils do not achieve as well as they should, given their attainment when they start school. Pupils throughout the school achieve very high standards in music. In Years 7 to 9 pupils achieve well in geography and design and

technology, and satisfactorily in religious education, history and languages. Achievement is unsatisfactory in art and design because the curriculum is too narrow.

By Year 11, standards are above the national average in English, mathematics and science. In English and science pupils achieve satisfactorily, but in mathematics achievement is unsatisfactory compared with what these pupils achieved at Year 9. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve well in ICT, history, design and technology and non-examination physical education and very well in business education and music. Achievement is satisfactory in other subjects except for religious education and examination physical education, where it is unsatisfactory.

Arrangements for promoting pupils' personal qualities, including moral and social development, are satisfactory overall, but unsatisfactory for spiritual and cultural development because of limited multi-cultural development. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory. Attendance is satisfactory but punctuality is unsatisfactory, particularly at morning registration.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The overall quality of education provided by the school is **satisfactory**. Teaching, learning and assessment are **satisfactory** overall, but the use made of assessment information by teachers is inconsistent. The curriculum is satisfactory overall and planning for curriculum development and improvement is satisfactory. The curriculum is very effectively enriched through additional activities in the arts and sports. The quality of support, advice and guidance for pupils and students is satisfactory. The school's partnership with parents is satisfactory and many parents are taking an increasing interest in their children's learning and achievement.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are **satisfactory** overall. Senior management staff are committed to the school and work as an increasingly effective team. There are clear management procedures and the school runs smoothly. Subject leadership is satisfactory overall and in a number of subjects it is good and having a growing impact on improving standards and achievement. Governors are supportive of the school and perform most of their functions well. Governance is judged satisfactory overall although the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus for the teaching of religious education are not yet fully met in Years 10 and 11.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Pupils like their school and enjoy being with their friends. They like all the extra activities. They feel they are trusted, but not always treated consistently by all staff. In Years 10 and 11, pupils are more critical than in Years 7 to 9 because they feel less secure in their relationships with adults. Many pupils do not believe that behaviour is good and some parents share the pupils' concerns about this. Parents like the school but have some concerns about achievement. Inspection findings agree with the parents' concerns as well as their often very positive comments.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- take action to ensure all teachers and departments properly plan for, and meet the needs of, higher attaining and gifted or talented pupils and students;
- improve the school's systems for the review and monitoring of teaching and learning;
- ensure the consistent use of assessment and marking methods and spread good practice;
- continue the on-going development of a more relevant curriculum for pupils in Years 10 and 11, including more vocational, as well as the school's existing academic, courses;
- ensure a greater consistency in the school's approach to behaviour management;

and to meet statutory requirements:

- ensure the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus for the teaching of religious education in Years 10 and 11 are fully met;
- provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

SIXTH FORM SECTION OF THE SUMMARY REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The leadership, management and governance of the sixth form are **satisfactory**. The overall cost-effectiveness of the college is satisfactory. Attendance and punctuality are unsatisfactory but improving as measures put in place under the new management of the college start to take effect. Teaching and learning in the college are **good** overall in the subjects inspected. The students' personal development is satisfactory. Although the sixth form's effectiveness is satisfactory overall, some higher ability students in particular are not achieving as well as they should and progress between Years 11 and 13 is unsatisfactory in some subjects.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Achievement overall by some higher attaining Year 13 students in national examinations is not high enough and the progress made by students from the end of Year 11 in some subjects is not yet good enough.
- The new pastoral leader of the college is raising expectations of students and improving support for their personal development. Students are given good quality support, advice and guidance.
- In some subjects planning is not effectively meeting the needs of higher attaining and gifted or talented students in the sixth form.
- Working relationships between students, and teachers and students, are good.
- The quality of teaching is good in the college because of the teachers' good command and understanding of their subjects.
- The levels of attendance and punctuality of students in the college are not good enough.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Good. Teaching and learning are good and students enjoy the courses. Students' attitudes towards the subject are very good. Although pass rates in examinations are above average, standards seen were average and students' achievement in lessons was satisfactory. Discussion opportunities and background material provided for students extend their learning well.
French	Satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Although the use of the French language in lessons is a strong feature, many lessons are teacher-led, particularly in Year 12. This restricts students' learning. Whilst some students in Year 13 attain and achieve well, overall standards are average and achievement is satisfactory.
Mathematics	Satisfactory. Teaching is consistently good. However, students' lack of determination with homework and high absence rates, particularly in Year 13, are hindering progress. As a result, achievement in Year 13 is satisfactory whilst students in Year 12 are achieving well.
Science: biology	Satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Students enjoy biology and make sound progress at A-level in Year 13, where they achieve satisfactorily. Examination results in Year 12 at AS level have been poor, but the issue is being resolved and the achievement of Year 12 students seen during the inspection is now satisfactory.
Information and communication technology	Good. Teaching is consistently good and as a result students make good progress. Students' positive attitudes contribute well to their achievement. Teachers assess work very well and this supports students' learning well.

Humanities: geography	Satisfactory. A-level examination results are not yet good enough. However, AS level results are improving because teaching is good. Teachers use an increasingly wide range of teaching methods and work is closely related to examination requirements. Teaching and learning are now good and achievement satisfactory. Students' attitudes are good.
Humanities: psychology	Good. Teaching is good with some excellent features and, as a result, students achieve well. Standards have improved, although they are still below average. Leadership and management of the subject are good.

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 quality of advice and guidance available to students in the college is good. The school provides good support for its sixth form students, particularly in terms of study support facilities. The school has satisfactory arrangements for seeking students' views.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The leadership and management of the sixth form are **satisfactory**. Until recently, the evaluation of sixth form performance and the taking of effective action have not been focused sharply enough on raising standards and achievement. However, the sixth form leadership has now identified appropriate and urgent priorities for improvement.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students are pleased to be at the college and enjoy their life there. They recognise they are well taught and talk with enthusiasm about what they are doing. They value the help and support they get from staff and are particularly positive about the new pastoral leadership of the college. However, some are critical of the support they get for their future careers and courses, a feature already recognised by the new head of the college. Year 12 students do not feel as comfortable with their tutors as do the Year 13 students.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AND STUDENTS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Although achievement in most subjects is satisfactory, there is underachievement amongst some groups of pupils, particularly higher attainers, and achievement is therefore judged to be unsatisfactory overall. Standards in the core¹ subjects by Year 9 are above average in national tests in 2003. Standards by Year 11 at GCSE in 2003 were well above average nationally, an improvement on the previous year. Standards by Year 13 in A-level examinations were above the national average. Nevertheless, although the school is attaining these above national average standards, there are groups of higher-attaining pupils and students who are not doing as well as they should because they are not challenged sufficiently.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- In mathematics and science pupils by Year 9 do not achieve as well as they should given their prior attainment.
- In most subjects planning is not effectively meeting the needs of higher attaining and gifted or talented pupils and students.
- The use of performance data to set targets for pupils and students is improving, but is not yet sharp enough.
- In music, standards are good or better and achievement overall is very good.
- In mathematics lessons, achievement is unsatisfactory by Years 9 and 11 and standards of attainment in Year 13 lessons are too low in the sixth form (the college²).
- In art, standards and achievement by Year 9 are not good enough.

Commentary

1. There is a lack of planning within most subjects to challenge and meet the needs of pupils and students identified as gifted or talented. Higher attaining pupils and students do not achieve well enough or attain high enough standards in some subjects. The underachievement of higher ability pupils has been a concern of the governing body for some time. Together with the leadership group, governors have already started on a course of action to resolve the issue of underachievement. Nevertheless, these initiatives are still at an early stage of development and the impact of the changes is still to be felt.
2. The school's work in the implementation of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy³ is sound. Standards of literacy are good throughout all year groups. The pupils' and students' use and application of mathematics are satisfactory. Pupils' and students' competency in information and communication technology (ICT) is satisfactory by Year 9 and good by Years 11 and 13. The school currently makes satisfactory use of assessment and performance data to set overall targets for performance in tests and examinations. However, the use of individual targets for pupils is not yet sharp enough.

Key Stage 3 (Pupils in Years 7 to 9)

3. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school in Year 7 is above average overall. Standards of attainment in the 2003 national tests for English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9

¹ The National Curriculum core subjects are English, mathematics and science. The foundation subjects are: art; design and technology; geography; history; ICT; modern languages; music and physical education. In addition, religious education is taught to the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus.

² The school and the local community refer to the sixth form as the college.

³ The Key Stage 3 National Strategy aims to raise standards by strengthening teaching and learning in all secondary schools for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9. This National Strategy now affects all subjects.

were above the national average. However, when compared with the pupils' prior attainment⁴ at the end of Year 6, the results were average in English, but well below average in mathematics and science. Progress through Years 7 to 9 is unsatisfactory and represents overall underachievement in these subjects. The percentage of pupils attaining the higher Level 6⁵ or above is lower than expected. Analyses of the 2003 results by the school and local authority show that in science, whilst lower attaining girls achieve relatively well, higher attaining girls in particular underachieve.

4. Teacher assessments for ICT were well below average at the end of Year 9, although inspection findings are that standards are average. In English, mathematics and science, the school's trend of improvement, since the previous inspection, has been below that seen in other schools nationally. The trend is particularly affected by the weaker performance of higher attaining pupils in the national curriculum test in 2003.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	34.7 (36.9)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	36.9 (37.6)	35.4 (34.7)
science	34.8 (35.8)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 218 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year (2002)

5. In pupils' work and lessons seen during the inspection, achievement is good by Year 9 in English, ICT, design and technology, geography, history and in music. It is satisfactory in religious education, citizenship, modern languages and in physical education. Achievement is unsatisfactory in mathematics, science and in art. Standards of attainment are below average in art. They are average in mathematics, science, ICT, citizenship, modern languages and in physical education. Attainment is in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus in religious education. Attainment is above average in English, design and technology, geography, history and in music.

Key Stage 4 (Pupils in Years 10 and 11)

6. GCSE results overall in 2003 were well above average when compared with all schools nationally. This represents an improvement on the previous year. When compared with similar schools, the results were above average. When taking into account the pupils' prior attainment in Year 9, the results are well above average for those gaining five or more A* to G passes and average for pupils achieving five or more A* to C grades. The progress made between Years 9 and 11 is satisfactory overall and the value added by the school in Years 10 and 11 is average.
7. Standards by Year 11 have improved overall as measured by the average point score. There has also been improvement between 2002 and 2003 in the proportion of pupils gaining higher A* and A passes at GCSE. The proportion of pupils gaining A* to C passes was significantly lower than predicted, based on their previous levels of attainment in both Years 6 and 9.

⁴ Prior attainment: this compares the standards reached by pupils at the end of a key stage in their education and involves an evaluation as to whether pupils attained better or worse than expected. Consequently, standards in tests and teacher assessments for pupils in Year 9 are compared with those in Year 6, the pupils' final year in primary school. Similarly, standards in GCSE examinations in Year 11 are compared with the pupils' performance at the end of Year 9.

⁵ The National Curriculum has been written on the basis that pupils, by the end of Year 9, are expected to reach Level 5. If a pupil is attaining Level 6 or 7 then he or she is reaching standards above that expected for a pupil of his or her age.

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	58 (58)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	95 (96)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	97 (98)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	39.6 (34.7)	37.4 (34.7)

There were 222 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

8. In pupils' work and lessons seen during the inspection, achievement is very good by Year 11 in music and in business education. Standards in music have been consistently very high over the past four years and music is a real strength of the school. Pupils achieve well in Years 10 and 11 in ICT, design and technology and in history. In ICT very good assessment procedures in Years 10 and 11 ensure that really challenging work is planned for pupils. Achievement is satisfactory in English, science, art, geography, modern languages, in the non-examination physical education course and in examination courses for religious education. Achievement is unsatisfactory in mathematics, where in too many lessons progress is hindered by poor behaviour. Standards and achievement are unsatisfactory in examination courses for physical education and in core course religious education. Attainment is average in mathematics, science, art, modern languages, the core course in physical education and in examination courses for religious education. It is above average in English, ICT, design and technology, geography, history and in business education. Attainment is well above average in music. No Year 10 or Year 11 lessons in citizenship took place during the inspection as pupils were revising for their mock GCSE examinations and no work was available for scrutiny.

Sixth form (Students in Years 12 and 13)

9. At the time of the inspection, no detailed national data was available to compare Culcheth High School's performance against other schools nationally in A-level examinations held in 2003. Comparisons are therefore made with 2002, the latest year for which such information is available.
10. Standards attained in the sixth form, on the basis of students' average points score⁶ in 2002, were average for males and above average for females. Standards were above average overall. Overall, standards were again above average in 2003. In 2003 the performance of Year 12 students in most subjects at AS level was below that expected on the basis of their prior attainment at the end of Year 11. In Year 13 the standards attained by students in A2 level examinations, in nearly all subjects, were also below that expected. Performance data suggests a trend of decline in the performance of students compared with the standards they attained at the end of Year 11, and consequently the progress made by the students, over the past three years. However the inspection findings are showing that the standards and achievement of the current Year 12 and Year 13 pupils are improving and in most of the subjects inspected achievement is satisfactory.

⁶ The average points score provides schools with a single statistic to compare the overall grades attained by their pupils with the grades attained by pupils in another school or the national average. By the end of Year 9, the Level attained by each pupil, for example, in mathematics, is given a score. A Level 4 = 27 points, a Level 5 = 33 points and so on. Therefore, in mathematics, for example, the average points score is worked out by adding up all of the points based on the level attained by pupils and then dividing by the number of pupils who took the test. Therefore, a school whose average points score for mathematics at the end of the Year 9 national tests is greater than 33 is one whose pupils are performing above that expected for their age. GCSE grades are also awarded points as are A level grades and these are calculated in the same way although the number of points awarded for each grade is different. For example GCSE A* is worth 8 points, grade A 7 points, grade B 6 points and so on until grade G which is worth 1 point.

The achievement of different groups of pupils with special educational needs

11. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is good by the end of Year 9 and in the sixth form and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Achievement is good in the learning support area where small groups of pupils are withdrawn.
12. Provision for gifted and talented pupils is unsatisfactory overall. Whilst planning to meet the needs of such pupils is very good in music and good in ICT, systematic approaches are lacking in mathematics, science, design and technology, religious education, art, geography, modern languages and in business education courses. The main school focus until recently has been on providing out of lesson activities for these pupils and in many lessons observed teachers do not plan effectively to meet their needs.
13. There are currently no pupils or students at the school requiring any additional English language support. However, there are satisfactory contingency plans should any such pupils arrive at the school.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are **satisfactory**. College students' attitudes and behaviour are **good**. Arrangements for promoting pupils' and students' personal qualities, including moral and social development, are **satisfactory** overall but **unsatisfactory** for spiritual and multi-cultural development. Attendance is **satisfactory** in the main school but **unsatisfactory** in the college. Punctuality, particularly to morning registration, is **unsatisfactory** throughout the school and college.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- College students have good attitudes to their work and behave well.
- Pupils and students like school and are interested in the activities provided.
- Some boys behave badly in lessons and disturb the learning of others.
- Punctuality is unsatisfactory and prevents sessions making purposeful starts.
- Too many college students miss too many lessons.
- The arrangements for the pupils' personal development lack cohesion and consistency, despite good promotion of their social awareness.
- The requirement for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils is not fully met.

Commentary: Main school

14. The good range of additional activities promotes pupils' enjoyment of school life. Many lessons capture pupils' attention. When teachers arrange interesting lessons and share exact expectations of behaviour most pupils respond well. Pupils then listen carefully, work hard and remain focused throughout sessions. Pupils get on well together and enjoy working with their peers and with others. Most recognise the need for rules. They respect themselves and others and are considerate of different views, opinions and experiences. They accept responsibility with poise and confidence. There are, however, two communities of pupils in the school. One which conforms and responds well to any task, teaching, responsibility or opportunity and a much smaller one which does not.
15. However a minority of pupils, mostly boys, show less regard for the conventions of good conduct. They lack consideration for the impact of their behaviour on others. Staff have to work hard in creating a positive atmosphere in lessons and whilst some do this successfully others do not. Some pupils are openly defiant and too many of the boys need to be removed from class particularly in Year 9 but also in Year 11. The establishment of a behaviour unit and appointment of learning mentors have made a positive contribution to the support of poorly behaved pupils. Short-term exclusions are rising because of recent changes in the behaviour policy. When the school's behaviour policy is not properly applied this confuses some pupils who react badly to inconsistency. Occasionally, pupils misbehave around the school. This is

generally rowdy and boisterous rather than intimidating. Staff manage any instances of bullying well.

16. Arrangements for the pupils' personal development are satisfactory overall but lack co-ordination. Few departments have built opportunities for the pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social, cultural and multicultural development into their planning. Some teachers and departments pay careful and deliberate attention to pupils' social and moral education. However, insufficient priority is placed overall on securing positive personal development in all pupils. Pupils take increasing responsibility for aspects of school life such as the Healthy Schools' Committee, which they enthusiastically support. These opportunities are good but sometimes not sufficiently promoted to ensure all pupils benefit. Some pupils have factual knowledge but only limited understanding of the cultures and faiths of others. They find it difficult to consider their responsibility to themselves and others within a diverse society. They are reluctant to explore their inner feelings and are therefore immature in their response to anything perceived as different or culturally unfamiliar. However, pupils with special educational needs have positive attitudes and very good working relationships with staff. This results in good levels of self-motivation, which helps to raise standards.
17. Assemblies are held for different year groups each day and some of these are of high quality. There is a thought-for-the-day, but most teachers do not make any use of this. Consequently, the school does not fulfil its statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

Commentary: Sixth form

18. Students show good commitment to the college and their studies. They often enjoy very good working relationships with their teachers so are keen to achieve well. They behave well in lessons and around the school so most are suitable role models for younger pupils. They take good levels of responsibility for themselves and others and show satisfactory levels of initiative. The new pastoral leader of the college has infused rigour into the organisation of some of the college activities and in particular the expectations for, and support of, the students' personal development. These higher expectations were initially unpopular with Year 13 students. Most now recognise the impact of these on their conduct and their sense of independence and responsibility. Assemblies are, for instance, gaining in popularity because the content inspires emotional responses. For example, a very good college assembly was seen where students presented a prize-winning video they had made. This had an excellent spiritual content in presenting the community regeneration within Warrington after the IRA bombing.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%) 2002-03

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data:	7.8%	School data:	0.3%
National data:	7.6%	National data:	1.2%

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

19. Attendance at the school is satisfactory but not as good as it was in the previous academic year. Attendance and punctuality in the college have improved but are still not satisfactory, with too many students missing too many lessons despite good promotion by the leadership of the college. The school's registration system is effective and has improved since the previous inspection. However, unauthorised absence in Year 11 is currently particularly high. The school is aware of the pupils who are likely to miss lessons and tries hard to improve their attendance. It is less rigorous in constantly analysing trends and data to predict and prevent deterioration. Many pupils arrive late to school and some are slow to arrive at individual lessons. Some teachers, but not all, promote punctuality insistently. The number of fixed period exclusions is

high, but involves relatively few pupils whose behaviour and attitudes have resulted in repeated exclusions. In the past year, the school has introduced an internal exclusion system in order to satisfactorily manage and reduce the exclusion rate for these pupils.

Exclusions

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	1241	94	2
White – Irish	5	5	0
Mixed – White and Black African	3	1	0
Mixed – White and Asian	3	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	4	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	3	1	1
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	3	0	0
Black or Black British – African	2	0	0
Chinese	3	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	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

The overall quality of education provided by the school is **satisfactory**. Teaching, learning and the use of assessment are satisfactory overall. Support, advice and guidance for pupils and students are satisfactory in the main school and good in the college. There are sound links with parents and the school's curriculum meets the needs of pupils and students, but the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus for the teaching of religious education are not fully met in Years 10 and 11. The accommodation and resources are good overall.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are **satisfactory** overall. They are satisfactory in Years 7 to 11 and **good** in the sixth form. The quality of assessment is **satisfactory** overall in the main school and the college.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Although there is good practice in some departments, the school's approach to planning lessons to meet the needs of the more able pupils and students is unsatisfactory.
- Teaching and learning are very good overall in music and the department's work is well supported through extra-curricular and enhancement activities.
- Teaching and learning are not good enough in mathematics throughout Years 7 to 11, or in Years 7 to 9 for art.
- Teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subjects are particularly good in the college.
- The sharing of information about pupils' and students' progress and potential needs, in order to meet their individual needs, is insufficiently widespread.
- There are many departments which give their pupils and students detailed advice on how they may improve their work.

- Target review days are a strong feature of the school's work but pupils' and students' targets are not always fully relevant to individual subjects.
- Teacher assessments in some subjects at the end of Year 9 are not accurate enough.
- Assessment in ICT is very good for Year 10 and Year 11 pupils, but is weaker in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary: Main school

20. In Years 7 to 9 teaching and learning are very good in music. Pupils of all abilities respond very well to the inspirational and enthusiastic teaching and, as a result, learning is pacy and exciting. Instrumental tuition is well taught by visiting specialists. Teaching and learning are good in English, ICT, design and technology, geography and in history. In physical education, teaching is good and learning satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in science, religious education and in modern languages. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in mathematics where teachers do not manage pupils' behaviour well enough and in art where work is not challenging enough and the pace of lessons is often too slow. In citizenship, although the teaching that does take place is satisfactory, there is too little time allocated to the subject.
21. In Years 10 and 11 teaching and learning are very good in music and pupils are good performers and composers with a good grasp of theory. Teaching and learning are good in English, ICT, design and technology, geography, history and in business education. They are satisfactory in science, religious education, art, modern languages and in physical education. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in mathematics. No Year 10 or Year 11 lessons in citizenship took place during the inspection.
22. In the best lessons, there are some important strengths, across a range of subjects, which reflect good practice within the school. These involve, for example, a good pace to lessons with lively questioning. Resources are used well to support learning throughout the school. The majority of teachers establish a good working atmosphere in their classrooms and good working relationships with the pupils. There is sound use of classroom assistants and other learning support staff. In the very best teaching, learning objectives are clearly set out at the start of lessons and reviews involve pupils at the end. Here, pupils are well challenged because expectations are high throughout for all groups of pupils. Consequently, pupils are interested and keen to learn. Some excellent teaching and learning were seen in Year 8 and Year 9 music lessons and the range of additional activities music offers enhances its work.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 159 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
5 (3%)	38 (24%)	65 (41%)	39 (25%)	10 (6%)	2 (1%)	0 (0%)

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

23. In mathematics, strategies were often lacking for dealing with poor or disruptive behaviour. This led to most of the unsatisfactory or poor teaching and learning which was seen in Years 9 and 11. However, other unsatisfactory teaching was seen in Year 9 art, religious education and in ICT. Further instances occurred in Year 11 English and in a mock examination revision session during what should have been personal, social and health education time. Such lessons illustrated the lack of planning to meet the needs of all groups of pupils. Consequently, there was a lack of challenge and lessons were uninspiring. Nevertheless, the highest proportion of very good or better teaching and learning was also seen in Years 9 and 11.
24. The teaching and learning of pupils with special educational needs are satisfactory overall. When teaching caters for individual needs and teachers use learning support assistants well, pupils make better progress. However, where subject teachers do not plan to specifically meet

the needs of pupils with special educational needs their progress is unsatisfactory. Teaching and support in the special needs area is good and results in good progress. There are weaknesses in the school's approach to teachers' planning, reflected in most subjects, which contribute to the underachievement of higher-attaining and gifted or talented pupils in national tests and examinations.

Assessment

25. Teachers offer their pupils detailed advice as to how they may improve their standards and aim for higher levels at the end of Year 9 and higher GCSE grades. In several subjects, marking is of a high quality. However, policy and practice are not consistently applied across all subjects, with the result that target setting to improve pupils' achievement is not yet sharp enough. Consequently, pupils are sometimes unaware of the levels at which they are operating and what they need to do to improve. In physical education, art, geography and modern languages, the levels at which pupils are assessed by the end of Year 9 are somewhat inflated. The school is now looking at ways to improve the accuracy of levels in Years 7 to 9 and is working hard to encourage departments to establish portfolios of accurately levelled pupils' work. Assessment is used particularly effectively in music in all year groups and in ICT in Years 10 and 11 to set challenging and interesting work for pupils of all abilities.
26. Assessment of pupils with special educational needs is good overall. Very good assessment procedures give a clear picture of individual needs and aid in the writing of individual education plans. Targets in individual education plans are therefore clear, relevant and give good guidance to teachers when preparing lessons. Assessment systems are used well to measure progress towards these targets and monitor progress in core subjects and literacy.

Commentary: Sixth form

27. In the seven sixth form subjects inspected in depth, teaching and learning are satisfactory in biology and in French. They are good in English, mathematics, ICT, geography and in psychology.
28. The highest proportion of good or better teaching was seen in the college. Teachers' command of their subjects is good and homework is effectively used to reinforce learning. Some excellent mathematics teaching was seen in the sixth form, which showed an exceptional understanding of the needs of individual students. In psychology there were high levels of challenge and involvement of the students in self-evaluation. In sociology, students were encouraged and enabled to develop as independent thinkers.
29. In the college, assessment procedures are satisfactory overall and properly linked to the requirements of the examination boards. In the subjects inspected in depth, work is generally well marked with evaluative comments. However, as in the main school, the consistent use of assessment to target and respond to an individual student's needs is an area for improvement.

The curriculum

The school's curriculum provision is **satisfactory** overall throughout Years 7 to 13. Opportunities for extra-curricular activities and enrichment are good. The quality of **accommodation and resources** is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The imbalanced mathematics timetable is adversely affecting standards in Years 10 to 13.
- There is inadequate time allocated for the teaching of citizenship and religious education.
- The school's implementation of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy is not meeting the needs of higher-attaining pupils.
- Extra-curricular provision for ICT and music is very good.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory overall for pupils with special educational needs and there are insufficient ICT resources to enhance their teaching and learning.
- Good quality accommodation and resources are supporting good teaching.
- There are sufficient, well qualified and experienced staff to support the curriculum.
- The library has not improved since the previous inspection.

Commentary: Main school

30. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 have a suitable curriculum overall and the National Key Stage 3 Strategy is firmly in place in the core subjects. Overall, improvement in the school's curriculum has been satisfactory. The curriculum is now very good in music and that in English, business, geography, history, art and in design and technology is good. Since the previous inspection the cross-curricular ICT programme has been well implemented and the Key Stage 3 Strategy strand is firmly in place. Nevertheless, the school is well aware of the need to reform and enhance its curriculum to better meet the needs of its pupils. Consequently, it is currently formulating a curriculum for pupils aged 14 to 19 to ensure suitable progression for students of all abilities, including a wider range of vocational options in Years 10 to 13.
31. The curriculum in some subjects does not sufficiently challenge higher attaining pupils to enable them to fulfil their potential. The lack of a fully monitored curriculum for gifted and talented pupils throughout the school is also a contributory factor. In citizenship throughout Years 7 to 11, pupils do not have a consistent range and depth of learning experiences because of the inadequate time allocation.
32. The timetable for mathematics in Year 11 is unsatisfactory. This is because time allocation in that year is inadequate and there is insufficient continuity when the odd number of periods is spread over two weeks. Setting throughout the main school is in half-year blocks, which lessens the efficiency of teaching higher level GCSE in Years 10 and 11 as higher attainers are spread over two parallel sets. Learning in religious education is adversely affected by the one lesson each fortnight being mostly allocated at the end of the day. In Years 10 and 11 the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education are not fully met.
33. Pupils with special educational needs have satisfactory access to the same curriculum as other pupils, but with additional options. Sound alternatives to GCSE are available, such as key skills, world of work and certificate of achievement courses, which suit better the needs of these pupils.

Curriculum enrichment

34. Opportunities for curriculum enrichment and enhancement are very good. Participation in and activities through the arts and sports are very good. Most departments do not plan specifically for extension and enhancement work within lessons to support fully the development of higher attaining and gifted or talented pupils and students.

35. The music department has a flourishing extra-curricular programme which includes an award winning choir and swing band which have toured on the continent. This enrichment makes a great contribution towards pupils' personal development. There is a good range of sports teams and clubs as well as good opportunities for pupils to participate in individual events and activities. There are clubs and practices at lunchtimes and these are well supported, particularly for the inter-form sporting competitions. Enrichment days provided as part of the citizenship and personal, social and health education curricula are very effective. The use of outside specialist agencies adds further to the quality of these enrichment days. There is a well attended after school ICT club. Enrichment opportunities in English and drama are very good. There are popular, annual, major theatre and drama productions.

Accommodation and resources

36. The school has planned well to improve its accommodation. However, there are still some areas of the school requiring modification to make them suitable for disabled access. Accommodation is now good overall and very good for music and mathematics. Many areas around the school are enhanced by good displays of work. However, the library still needs further work. There is good use of the Internet as a research facility. There are few audio and visual resources. The stock of library books is limited, particularly for English. There are few displays to attract and encourage pupils to read or use books for information. The librarian cannot check its effectiveness because there is no system which tracks library use by groups of pupils or students.
37. Staffing in music is excellent and an important element in the very good teaching in that department. The only weakness is religious education where the school has not been able to make satisfactory arrangements to cover long-term illness. There are sufficient technical and support staff, including learning support assistants.
38. There is a good supply and range of resources to support the work in lessons. Pupils have good access to computers both in lessons and at break times. There are very good resources in music so whole groups of pupils and students can play and compose together. This makes a very good contribution to the high standards in music. Use of the very good resources in religious education is restricted because of staffing difficulties.
39. Accommodation in the learning support area is limited and inadequate, but staff provide a welcoming, supportive and secure area for these pupils. There are insufficient computer resources to enhance teaching and learning.

Commentary: Sixth form

40. In the college, the school strives to support courses attracting small numbers in order to preserve the range of choice and to encourage recruitment. At present, almost all courses lead to GCE AS and A2 level, with very few vocational options available. The key skills programme is unsatisfactory because it is not available to all students due to timetable clashes. Timetable issues in Year 12 affect continuity in the teaching of statistics. The enrichment programme for the sixth form provides a sound range of activities such as sign language, debating, drama and text processing. However, this programme does not provide equality of opportunity for all students as some lessons are timetabled against it. Accommodation and resources in the sixth form are good. Students have good access to study areas and computers to support their independent learning.

Care, guidance and support

The school has **satisfactory** procedures for ensuring the pupils' care, welfare, health and safety. Pupils get **satisfactory** support, advice and guidance in the main school and **good** in the sixth form. The school has **satisfactory** arrangements for seeking pupils' and students' views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good induction procedures help pupils settle quickly in school.
- Most, but not all, teachers know and respect the pupils and respond correctly to their academic and personal needs.
- Sixth form college students are well supported and guided.
- The school pays careful attention to the health and safety of the school community.
- Some departments provide good guidance for pupils, but others do not.
- Monitoring of the personal development of individual pupils is good, but there is inconsistent monitoring of the performance of different groups.

Commentary: Main school

41. Pupils say they adapted quickly to the school because of the three-day induction programme. They value the support of Year 11 pupils who are attached to individual tutor groups. A Year 7 parents' evening in October means parents can quickly alert the school to any concerns.
42. Working relationships between staff and pupils are good. Most teachers and tutors take time to sort out quickly any problems. Learning mentors and staff in the behaviour unit and special educational needs department are particularly sensitive in their support of pupils experiencing difficulty. Pupils sometimes lack confidence in their relationships with adults because they are unsure of the reaction of some staff. High long-term staff absence with two heads of year has adversely affected the support available for pupils. However, pupils recognise the variable quality of tutor support and heads of year mostly provide good support. Nevertheless, some heads of year do not spend sufficient time analysing and identifying group trends in their year groups for aspects of pupils' personal development such as behaviour and attendance. This restricts the school's ability to analyse patterns in order to target and plan improvement and pre-empt deterioration in performance for particular groups of pupils. Learning support assistants are suitably experienced and deployed. Very good use of such staff is made to support pupils with special educational needs, both within school and for national exams.
43. Progress in most subjects and courses is satisfactorily assessed regularly and pupils get sound advice on how to improve. Some departments, but not all, involve the pupils in evaluating their own work. The new target setting system has made a promising start and pupils now actively want a clear programme for target review. Satisfactory guidance is provided about course and career options for Years 9 and 11 pupils. Good support overall is provided by a careers advisory service. Staff listen increasingly well to the views of students through the school council and a Healthy School Committee. Year councils are beginning to emerge as a satisfactory means of consultation with pupils.
44. School leadership has improved the procedures for promoting the health and safety of the school community. These procedures are now satisfactory in all required areas. Child protection procedures accord with requirements and sick or injured pupils are cared for correctly.

Commentary: Sixth form

45. The school provides good support for college students. Regular assessments are routinely shared with students. Working relationships are good in the sixth form; consequently, students feel respected and valued. The school provides good study support facilities. The new pastoral leadership has improved the programme of university applications and tightened procedures to

support students' personal development. However, further improvement is currently hampered by the lack of clarity in management roles and responsibilities for the work of the sixth form.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has a **satisfactory** partnership with parents, other schools and the community and has **good links** with the local college. Overall, provision for the community is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school is successfully raising the profile of its partnership with parents, including the ways in which it responds to their concerns.
- Good links with the local college strengthen the school's curriculum.
- Some teachers give too little detail in reports to parents.
- The school does not report teacher assessments in foundation subjects at the end of Year 9.
- Current services provided by the school for the local community are of variable quality, although some are good. However, the school has ambitious plans to further develop them.
- Contact between local schools at senior management level is developing well.

Commentary

46. School leadership has brought renewed vigour into developing the partnership with parents. However, many parents have concerns about aspects of the school such as the standards pupils achieve and the low level disruption in some lessons. The staff listen carefully to concerns and take appropriate action in most cases. Parents who recognise the school's desire to involve them more in their children's education welcomed the introduction of the target review day. Many other parents are starting to take an increased interest in their children's learning and achievement as a result of these review days. The school increasingly seeks parental views and parents are satisfied with consultation processes. Parent governors show a determination to help the school to improve.
47. Parents receive regular, useful information about the school and their children's progress. Annual reports satisfactorily record the progress pupils make towards predicated targets but some of the information is too general to help parents guide their children's work. The school only reports national test results, and not teacher assessments, in the governors' annual report to parents.
48. Some departments develop constructive partnerships with local organisations. These regular links benefit the pupils who enjoy the variety of activities arranged. However, some departments are less active and the school does not ensure that all develop community links.
49. The school works effectively with local primary schools to ensure pupils transfer smoothly and links with other secondary schools are satisfactory. A few departments have direct links with primary schools, which ensure continuity in the pupils' work, but many do not. However, music makes a particularly strong contribution to links with other schools and with the community.
50. The special educational needs department has good links and regular contacts with the majority of parents. However, a small minority of parents voiced concern as to the support given to their children. Inspection judgements are that the school strives to do its best within the financial and legal constraints in which it works.

Commentary: The effectiveness of the school's community provision

51. The school provides a few good quality outreach services to the community. Local primary schools benefit significantly from a well-organised technical ICT support service. This meets a real need, provides good value for money, is flexible and is valued by the partner schools involved. The quality of the service is monitored effectively. Community groups have benefited

from high quality promotional video production by students working as part of the Youth Enterprise project. The quality of one film was sufficient to win a regional award. Other benefits to the wider community have come from an award winning Year 11 group refurbishing a hospital room, a wide range of charity activities and the production of high quality musical concerts. The activities are diverse and independent, the quality has been good and real needs in the community have been met.

52. However, good educational practice developed within the school is currently only shared with primary and other local schools in a piecemeal way. The links established with primary schools vary greatly between departments. There is little effective planning or evaluation of the needs, arrangements, quality or impact of the current activities. The recent appointment of an advanced skills teacher and a range of proposed developments linked to a bid for specialist status are forward looking but have yet to have a significant impact on the work of the school. Nevertheless, the support network between schools at headteacher and deputy headteacher level is developing well.
53. The school satisfactorily promotes the use of its facilities to a range of groups including adult education, sports teams, a local community centre and partner primary schools. The school provides space on its site for a private nursery and accommodation for a community police office and a government backed pupil and student guidance agency. These have a beneficial effect within the school allowing greater access to advice and guidance as well as sound benefits for parents and the wider community. Pupils and students involved in community projects often gain well in their personal development.
54. The leadership and management of community provision are satisfactory overall. The school's readiness to develop further is evidenced in two current major strategic bids linked to community developments. In addition, the school plays a proactive leading role in some important community partnerships. However, the quality of planning, monitoring, support and evaluation is inconsistent and there is only limited co-ordination at a strategic level across this diverse area.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall, the **leadership and management of the school** are **satisfactory**. The **leadership and management of the sixth form** are **satisfactory**. **Governance** is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Self-evaluation by the school of its performance and the monitoring of teaching and learning are underdeveloped.
- The evaluation of sixth form performance has not been sharply enough focused.
- The school has not responded quickly enough to issues such as the underachievement of higher attaining pupils.
- Governors are committed and knowledgeable and have an increasingly clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school.
- The headteacher and leadership group work well together as a team.
- Leadership and management are very good in music, but in art and religious education are unsatisfactory.
- Governors have not yet ensured that the statutory obligations for the teaching of religious education in Years 10 and 11 are fully met.
- The new pastoral leadership and management of the sixth form are good.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream classes by the special educational needs co-ordinator is unsatisfactory.

Commentary: Main school

55. The leadership of the headteacher and the leadership team is satisfactory. It is committed, principled and has clear lines of responsibility. Senior staff work well together to plan thoroughly for future development. A recent whole school approach to target setting for pupils is beginning to have an impact by raising pupils' awareness of how they can improve their work. The leadership of the music department is inspirational and has resulted in consistently high standards throughout the school. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory in art and religious education and they have not quickly enough identified and addressed weaknesses. In most departments, leadership and management are satisfactory and heads of department are working well to help create effective teams. However, there is insufficient guidance given on important long-term challenges such as raising the achievement of all pupils, including higher attainers and gifted or talented pupils. Senior staff have sound long-term strategies for school improvement, but the pace of change has not always been brisk enough.
56. Leadership of the special educational needs department is good. The management of the department itself is very good, but the management of the provision for pupils with special educational needs across the school is not yet effective enough. This is because the special needs co-ordinator is aware of strengths and areas for development within the department but is not yet sufficiently involved in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning for these pupils across the school. Consequently, strengths and weaknesses are not sufficiently well identified and good practice is not shared effectively enough, within and across departments. Documentation is thorough, meets statutory requirements and gives useful guidelines to staff. Pupils with Statements of Special Educational Need have their progress reviewed regularly and both parents and pupils are involved. Individual education programmes clearly identify individual needs and give sound guidance for teachers when they are planning lessons.
57. The management of the school is satisfactory. The school day runs smoothly because procedures are clear. Development planning is satisfactory. The leadership team's evaluation of the school's performance is improving and there are systems in place for the collection and analysis of performance data. However, such analysis is not yet used quickly or consistently enough to bring about improvement across the whole school and raise standards. Whole school self-evaluation and the monitoring of teaching and learning are underdeveloped and are not yet used effectively enough to improve the quality of education the school provides.
58. The governing body performs most of its functions well. Governors are committed, know the school well and understand its strengths and weaknesses increasingly well. They work efficiently through an effective committee system and play an active role in shaping the direction of the school. They have identified appropriate priorities for development and have recognised for three years the need to challenge the higher attaining pupils. There is a businesslike relationship between governors and senior staff and they hold the school to account. However, governors do not ensure that statutory requirements are fully met because a daily act of collective worship is not held for all pupils and the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education are not fully met because of insufficient curriculum time for the subject in Years 10 and 11. These were both issues for improvement at the previous inspection.

Commentary: Leadership and management in the sixth form

59. Overall, the leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. Governance of the sixth form is sound. The sixth form runs smoothly because sound organisational procedures are now in place and students are supported well by their tutors and the sixth form pastoral team. The evaluation of sixth form performance and the taking of effective action have not been focused sharply enough on raising standards and achievement. However, appropriate and urgent priorities for improvement have now been identified. These focus on improving students' attendance and punctuality, providing an improved range of courses to cater for all students and closer monitoring of attainment and achievement. The sixth form now has the capacity and the commitment to improve further and overall is cost-effective.

Financial information

60. Finances are managed efficiently and effectively. Governors keep a careful watch on spending to ensure that the school's educational priorities are met and resources are used well.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	3,892,794
Total expenditure	3,793,043
Expenditure per pupil	3,017

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	30,940
Balance carried forward to the next	130,691

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

The provision for English is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Test results in 2002 were well above average by Year 9 but lower in 2003.
- Teaching is good and encourages pupils to attempt challenging tasks.
- The behaviour of a minority of boys distracts attention in some lessons.
- There is good leadership and management by the new head of department, who has identified and is acting upon priorities.
- Inconsistent marking means that although some pupils receive good guidance, others do not.
- The good, inclusive curriculum ensures all pupils benefit from the same good range of learning opportunities.

Commentary

61. In 2003, the Year 9 national test results were above average compared with all schools nationally. However, this was a decline from 2002 when they were well above average. This was because the percentage of pupils gaining the higher Level 6 or above was lower in 2003. When compared with their attainment in Year 6, the progress and achievement of Year 9 pupils overall was average in 2003. In work seen during the inspection, standards in Year 9 were above the average. Achievement in Year 9 is good. GCSE results were above the national average for English language and literature in 2002 and improved further in 2003. Performance at the higher grade levels is improving. Work seen during the inspection reflects these standards and indicates satisfactory achievement by Year 11 when judged against prior attainment. Pupils of all abilities make similar progress.
62. In speaking and listening, pupils in all years participate well in discussions and argue their opinions well. In writing, by Year 9, pupils write well for a wide range of purposes and in a wide range of forms. Lower attaining pupils are less skilled at organising their writing, which limits their progress. By Year 11, higher attaining pupils are particularly adept at adopting an apt tone and style, thereby enhancing their work. In reading, pupils convey sound understanding of suitably challenging texts. However, at all ages, lower attaining pupils' responses to fiction lapse into re-telling the narrative. By Year 11, higher attaining pupils are able to offer critical responses well and justify their views with selective quotations.
63. The quality of teaching and learning is good. This is because questioning involves all pupils fully. Lessons are well structured and objectives clearly explained. There is a good balance of whole-class work and paired or group activities. Discussions at the end of lessons summarise main points well and return to the objectives. Good working relationships foster confidence in the pupils. Although there are good examples of marking and assessment giving good guidance for pupils, it is too inconsistent so some pupils receive far less real help than others, which restricts their progress. A small minority of boys in some lessons do not become involved with their work, cause distraction and this adversely affects the learning of others. Nevertheless, most pupils are keen to participate in lessons. They work well together and show initiative. They are good at evaluating each other's work and asking questions to further their understanding. The curriculum offers all pupils the same good opportunities for reading a wide range of texts and undertaking sustained writing. Social, moral and cultural issues are integral to the curriculum and feature strongly in lessons, but are not yet made explicit in schemes of work.

64. The new head of department was appointed at the start of the term and is managing and leading well the department. Suitable priorities have been identified and a start has been made to act upon them. Some teachers have been re-allocated in response to identified problems. The quality of teaching and the range of reading and opportunities for pupils to show initiative have all improved since the previous inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

65. The use of language and literacy across the curriculum is satisfactory overall. The teaching of literacy is good and, in most subjects, teachers pay close attention to key vocabulary and subject specific terminology. Good use of display in several classrooms puts a particular emphasis on literacy. In the graphics room, such display provides useful guidance on a range of literacy issues and makes a strong contribution towards pupils' literacy development. Display in music focuses well on literacy. However, there are inconsistencies in the extent to which literacy is emphasised across departments. In mathematics, pupils are given insufficient opportunities to read for themselves or participate in discussion. The newly appointed literacy co-ordinator has identified sound priorities for further development and conveys these enthusiastically to other staff. Whole-school training is having a positive impact on pupils' literacy development.

Modern foreign languages

Provision in modern languages is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment at GCSE in French and German is below average.
- Standards in Spanish at GCSE are well above average.
- The effective action taken by the department, in concert with the senior leadership team, is beginning to raise standards.
- Classroom display is of a very high standard and pupils use this regularly as a resource.
- In a significant number of lessons there is a lack of pace, insufficient use of the target language and not enough challenge for pupils who are highly competent in languages.
- The assessment of pupils' performance by the end of Year 9 is not consistently accurate and levels are somewhat inflated.

Commentary

66. Since 2001, standards at GCSE in French and German have been below average and, in French in particular, girls outperformed boys. In Spanish, results for pupils in Year 11 in 2002 were below average but there was a marked improvement in 2003 when the vast majority entered for the examination received higher grades. In lessons seen, standards by Year 11 in German were below average but, because of good teaching, there were examples of average and above standards in French. In Spanish, Year 11 pupils are performing much better than would normally be expected. Standards by the end of Year 9 are average overall in lessons seen and in teacher assessments.
67. Until recently, achievement in French and German has been unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9, but because of a range of initiatives designed to improve attainment, achievement in lessons in both subjects is now satisfactory overall by Years 9 and 11. Most GCSE pupils are making sound progress in oral and written assignments. In Spanish, achievement is good and pupils are developing real confidence in using the language and can follow Spanish when spoken at speed.
68. Teaching is satisfactory overall but there are inconsistencies in its quality across the department. All teachers have a secure command of their languages and there is a wide range of activities in all lessons. In good and very good lessons, there is extensive use of the target

language and pupils are engaged by the subject matter. Learning is satisfactory. However, on occasions, pupils display a lack of interest because some teachers use English too much when they should be using the foreign language. Consequently, pupils with real competence in languages are not challenged sufficiently to demonstrate what they can do. Moreover, although many pupils have an accurate understanding of their levels and of their progress towards GCSE grades, assessment practice across the department is not consistent and the levels assessed by teachers at the end of Year 9 are generally inflated.

69. Leadership and management are now satisfactory and teachers are working hard to improve departmental arrangements and to resolve issues in relation to GCSE attainment. A programme of regular lesson observations is helping the department to develop a more cohesive approach to the teaching and setting of pupils in Years 10 and 11. Nevertheless, there is as yet insufficient focus on the reasons for below-average attainment and limited monitoring of departmental performance.
70. Standards declined following the previous inspection and have not yet recovered to the levels described in the previous report. However, current improvements are satisfactory. Every classroom is a vibrant learning environment and the quality of display is outstanding. Indeed, pupils often use these displays as a resource when they are finding things difficult during lessons. In addition, the French and German exchange visits are a very strong feature and pupils correspond regularly with youngsters in other countries. The department is fully committed to languages for all.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour of a significant number of boys is hindering progress in too many lessons.
- Overall, the teaching of mathematics is unsatisfactory and behaviour management is weak.
- Achievement is unsatisfactory, particularly in the current Years 9 and 11.
- The very good progress made by Year 9 pupils taking the good and innovative ICT course in mathematics.
- There is insufficient curriculum time for the subject in Year 11.

Commentary

71. In 2003, results in National Curriculum tests for pupils at the end of Year 9 were above the national average. They were in line with the average for similar schools but well below average on the basis of the pupils' prior attainment in Year 6. Results were in line with English and science and there were no significant differences in the performance of boys and girls. However, these results show a significant decline from the previous two years when pupils' standards were well above average. Whilst GCSE results in 2003 for pupils in Year 11 were above the national average, this represented unsatisfactory achievement from Year 9 when results were well above the national average. There was no improvement from 2002 when results also showed unsatisfactory achievement from Year 9.
72. Standards seen in lessons confirmed that a steady decline is taking place in Year 9. Overall, the standard of the year group is average, which is unsatisfactory achievement from entry in Year 7. In half of the lessons, progress is hindered by unsatisfactory or poor behaviour. Gifted pupils make unsatisfactory progress overall as they do not achieve as well as they could. This is because, whilst the teaching of the most able pupils is good, there is no extra extension work provided for these pupils.

73. Many of the most able pupils in Year 11 make unsatisfactory progress because teaching is uninspiring and there is insufficient planning to meet the needs of individuals, particularly for the gifted. Learning in mainstream lessons ranges from unsatisfactory to very good. However, overall, attainment is average, which is not only unsatisfactory achievement since Year 9 national tests but also from entry to the school. Pupils with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily.
74. Overall, teaching and learning are unsatisfactory. Whilst teaching in some classes is often good or very good, too many lessons are unsatisfactory or poor because teachers cannot manage pupils well enough. This is a decline from the previous inspection. Even in the very good lessons teachers needed to be highly skilled to maintain pace and challenge. This is because a significant number of boys come into lessons with an unsatisfactory attitude. Attitudes and behaviour in lessons are worse than at the previous inspection. The best learning occurs where teachers set high standards for attainment and behaviour by asking searching questions and clamping down quickly on interruptions. Whilst starter activities are often challenging and enjoyable, teaching lacks variety. There is almost no group or practical work other than in the ICT in mathematics course for pupils in Year 9, for pupils not studying a second modern language, where progress is very good. There is insufficient emphasis on literacy in lessons to make use of the improved displays. Most teachers talk too much and do not provide enough time for pupils to produce written work. However, teachers assess work accurately.
75. Leadership and management are not as strong as at the previous inspection when they were judged to be good. There is satisfactory leadership in that the head of department is a very good teacher who supports others well with discipline problems. There is recognition that pupils enter lessons, often with unsatisfactory attitudes. The department is managed smoothly and satisfactorily on a day-to-day basis. However, there has not been enough tracking of pupils and teachers within lessons to ensure pupils are more engaged in their work. Neither is there enough time for mathematics in Year 11, nor enough continuity in learning for these pupils.

Mathematics across the curriculum

76. The teaching of mathematics across the curriculum is satisfactory overall. In geography, modern languages and in science pupils handle data well. Good mathematical skills enhance learning in music. In design and technology, pupils measure and weigh accurately. In physical education, pupils studying for GCSE understand the significance of pulse rates and measure them accurately. However, in English, religious education, art and citizenship there is little use of mathematics. Whilst there is a whole school policy for mathematics across the curriculum, not all departments write tasks into schemes of work to improve these skills. There is no formal tracking of how effectively mathematics is used in all subjects.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination performance at GCSE is above the national average.
- Too many pupils, particularly more able girls, make insufficient progress by the end of Year 9.
- Leadership and management of the department are good.
- The curriculum is highly organised and regularly reviewed.
- There is insufficient use of independent learning and self-evaluation by pupils.
- Planning for gifted or talented pupils is unsystematic.

Commentary

77. Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 are above average compared with all schools. Test results in 2003 were well below average when compared with the pupils' attainment at the end of Year 6. This is a dip in achievement from the previous year when progress had been good. Standards seen during the inspection were average by Years 9 and 11. However, the overall rate of pupils' progress and achievement in Years 7 to 9 is unsatisfactory because able girls in particular have made less progress than expected. Standards in GCSE examinations in 2002 and 2003 were above average for both double and single science because pupils had made sound progress in Years 10 and 11. The progress and achievement currently being made by all groups of pupils in both single and double science by Year 11 is satisfactory.
78. Teaching by Year 11 is satisfactory overall and, as a result, most pupils learn satisfactorily. However, the quality of teaching varies with individuals. The most effective teachers have high expectations. Their lessons have good structure and pace and use a variety of teaching methods. However, in some lessons the more able pupils, including the gifted or talented, make less progress than expected and teaching and learning are unsatisfactory. This is because these pupils are given only limited opportunity for reflection, discussion and independent work. Nevertheless, some good teachers are particularly skilful at enthusing and motivating pupils of all abilities and, consequently, these pupils make better than average progress.
79. This department has developed a good system for tracking individual progress and, as a result, teachers have an accurate picture of how well pupils are performing. However, this information has yet to be used consistently to target support for particular groups in Years 7 to 9. Advice given to individual pupils is good but there is, as yet, no consistent approach to supporting the development of those who are gifted or talented. Pupils are generally aware of their targets but spend little time in lessons reflecting on how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
80. Curriculum planning is thorough and of a good quality and contributes significantly to the effective leadership and management of the department. The organisation of resources and support given by technical and learning support staff are good. The department has sensibly planned to review teaching and learning for Year 7 and vocational alternatives at GCSE in order to provide a more relevant range of options for all groups of pupils. However, the use of ICT to support learning and teaching is currently underdeveloped. Progress since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The good teaching is now leading to good achievement.
- There are very good assessment systems for pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- There is very good extra-curricular provision.
- The school intranet site is not yet sufficiently well developed.
- A small minority of pupils has unsatisfactory attitudes.

Commentary

81. On entry to the school in Year 7, pupils' ICT skills are below average. Teacher assessments of pupils at the end of Year 9 in 2003 show below average standards of attainment. However, standards of work seen by current Year 9 pupils are average and their achievement in work and lessons is good. The proportion of Year 11 pupils attaining an A* to C grade in their GCSE examination was above average in 2002 and 2003. Standards of work seen at the end of Year 11 are above average and the pupils' achievement is good.

82. By Year 9, pupils make good use of a range of software, such as spreadsheets, desktop publishing, word-processing and slide presentations. Research on the Internet helps pupils develop their research skills in preparation for work in Years 10 and 11. By Year 11, pupils develop sound ICT skills using industry standard software on a range of courses well suited to their needs. Very good assessment procedures in Years 10 and 11 involve pupils at all stages, highlighting areas where they need to improve their grades. Extended tasks in Years 10 and 11 help pupils develop their skills well when working independently, for example when using the Internet for project research.
83. Teaching and learning are good overall. Particular strengths of the teaching include good management of pupils and good knowledge and understanding of the subject. There is effective monitoring and support for pupils and good planning, linked to prepared materials and presentations. Pupils find the work interesting, behave well and waste little time. Learning is good as a result. Lessons are targeted at individual needs. Achievement in these lessons is good or better. Day-to-day management is good, with improved schemes of work, particularly in Years 7 to 9. Good assessment systems in Years 7 to 9 are developing satisfactorily as the new schemes are implemented. Assessment by teachers in Years 10 and 11 supports learning well because it is thorough, integral to the courses and involves all pupils. However, a small minority of pupils have unsatisfactory attitudes and this distracts staff from their main focus on teaching and impedes learning.
84. Leadership and management of the department are good. Documentation is thorough, effectively supporting teaching and learning. There is clear vision to move the department forward, raise standards and further support the use of ICT across the rest of the school. Monitoring of teaching and learning is well established and ensures a consistency of approach. Display is good, considerably enhancing the working environment. However, the school web site and intranet are under-developed and because of this do not effectively enough support learning.
85. The department has an open door policy, so pupils have good access to computer rooms at lunchtime and after school in order to help develop their ICT skills. Additionally, a group of pupils taking a short course GCSE have extra lessons after school to boost their course into a full one. This very good out-of-school arrangement makes a considerable contribution to the raising of standards. There have been significant improvements since the previous inspection. New specialist staff and two new technicians have been appointed. A significant amount of hardware and software has been purchased, which is being used well to support pupils' learning in the subject.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

86. The use of ICT across the curriculum is satisfactory. There is very good use of ICT in music across all years and good use in design and technology, geography and in mathematics in Year 9. Nevertheless, although there have been significant improvements in resources for ICT, some teachers do not yet systematically plan to make full use of these and ICT is underused in some subjects. The library is equipped with computers through which pupils can search for information on the Internet. However, there are insufficient CD-ROMs to fully support pupils' independent research. Information and communication technology rooms are available to pupils after school, providing good opportunities for them to continue their studies independently out of lessons.

HUMANITIES

History

Provision in history is **good** with very good features.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good leadership has led to the rapid development of the subject.
- Teaching is good and is being targeted well to meet the needs of individual pupils.
- Standards in external examinations are improving but are not yet high enough.
- Pupils' ability to analyse and interpret historical source material is very good.
- Display is of high quality, motivating pupils to enjoy the subject, and plays an important part in ensuring that many more pupils are choosing to study history for GCSE.
- The marking of GCSE work is outstanding, but assessment in Years 7 to 9 is not yet sharp enough to inform pupils of their levels.
- ICT is underdeveloped as a learning tool.

Commentary

87. In 2003, standards in GCSE examinations improved to average, from well below average in 2002 when there were no A* grades. However, 2003 saw a marked improvement in results and over a quarter of pupils, both boys and girls, reached grades A* and A. At the end of Year 9 the proportion of pupils reaching Level 5 and above in teacher assessments is above average and lower attaining pupils also reach levels above those normally expected.
88. By Years 9 and 11 standards are above average and pupils' achievement in lessons is now good. Pupils' achievement over time has been satisfactory but, because of better teaching and the use of resources and approaches to meet the needs of pupils of all levels of ability, it is now good in lessons. From the beginning of Year 7, pupils are making good progress in acquiring the relevant skills to enable them to understand how historians work. Furthermore, pupils' ability to analyse historical information and documentation and their ability to assess the usefulness of evidence and the confident use of historical terminology are major strengths both orally and in writing in Years 10 and 11.
89. Through the teachers' skilful questioning techniques and the use of a variety of methods to engage and enthuse their pupils, the learning needs of each individual are met. There is an emphasis on high standards of effort, behaviour and presentation of work. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their lessons. Indeed, the numbers opting to pursue history at the end of Year 9 doubled during the previous year. The marking of pupils' current GCSE assignments is outstanding. Teaching is, therefore, now good overall and in nearly one-third of lessons it is very good. Consequently, teaching is leading to marked improvements in achievement and attainment.
90. Leadership and management are now good because the new head of department has ensured rapid progress in the development of the subject in only just over 12 months. Assessment is an increasing strength and teachers are now looking at ways of improving the arrangements for levelling work at the end of Year 9. However, although teachers are using ICT well in the development of support materials, the use of ICT as a learning tool for all pupils is, as yet, underdeveloped because of problems of access to computers.
91. The department has made satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection. The quality of display in the history area and in the classrooms is very high and the walls are adorned with pupils' work. The historical trip to Ypres is the highlight of the departmental year and both teachers and pupils benefit well from such visits. Secure subject-knowledge and high levels of teamwork are evident in everything teachers undertake. The department is, therefore, well placed for further development and future success.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good and stimulates pupils' interest in the subject.
- Pupils are productive because working relationships with teachers are good.

- Higher attaining pupils are not always challenged sufficiently to produce their best work.
- The opportunities for pupils to develop their enquiry skills through fieldwork are underdeveloped.
- Systems to ensure the more accurate assessment of pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 are in the early stages of development.
- Good leadership and management of the department are leading to significant improvement.

Commentary

92. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 achieve well and attain standards which are above the national average. This is because teaching is good and an increasingly wide range of teaching methods, including good use of ICT, engage pupils' interest. Furthermore, teachers explain the subject clearly and use an increasingly wide range of teaching methods. Consequently, learning is good. Lessons are well structured and pupils move efficiently from one task to the next so no learning time is wasted. Higher attaining pupils explain geographical patterns and processes well. However, they are not always challenged to think for themselves and learn independently in order to produce their best work. All pupils use specialist terminology accurately and those with special educational needs achieve well because they get good individual support from teachers and classroom assistants. The opportunities for pupils to improve their enquiry skills through fieldwork are currently underdeveloped.
93. Standards and GCSE results are above the national average. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall because higher attaining pupils are not always sufficiently well challenged to produce their best work. Nevertheless, teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 are good overall. This is because working relationships between teachers and pupils are good and teachers manage classes well so most pupils are kept on task. Teaching is carefully tailored to examination requirements. For example, pupils in Year 11 produce well-structured coursework about the quality of residential environments in Warrington, which contributes well to their GCSE examination grades. Pupils manipulate data well and arrive at sound conclusions in response to geographical questions.
94. The new leadership and management of the department are good. There is a clear vision for further development and appropriate priorities have been identified. Assessment overall is good. As a result of this, the department is well placed for further improvement. Targets are set for pupils so they know how to improve their work and marking is thorough and consistent in support of pupils' learning. However, systems are still being developed to improve the accuracy of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9. Teaching and learning are monitored effectively. Improvement since the previous inspection is good and the department has shown the capacity and the commitment to improve further.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards attained by pupils in GCSE examinations are not high enough.
- Pupils' learning is hampered by the long-term absence of key subject specialists.
- Work is not always designed to meet the needs of lower attaining pupils or to sufficiently challenge higher attainers.
- The pupils' good attitudes contribute positively to their progress in lessons.
- The absence of effective assessment is a barrier to improvement and higher achievement.
- The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development.
- In Years 10 and 11 the school does not fully comply with the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus for the teaching of the subject.

Commentary

95. GCSE results in 2003 were below average, a decline since 2002. The number of pupils gaining the higher A* and A grades was well below average. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 who take the full GCSE course in religious education discuss moral problems such as euthanasia with sound awareness and understanding of the issues involved. In both examination and non-examination courses, written work is often thoughtful but sometimes badly expressed, even by higher attaining pupils. Most pupils are confident in using correct religious terminology and can relate behaviour to belief in the major religions. However, the majority of pupils in Years 10 and 11 do not receive religious education in full accordance with the statutory requirements of the locally agreed syllabus and, consequently, their achievement is unsatisfactory.
96. By the end of Year 9, pupils' levels of attainment are in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus and their achievement is satisfactory. Pupils are able to express satisfactorily personal and reflective views, for example, on the role of women in the church. However, lower attaining pupils with literacy difficulties encounter problems when expressing themselves in writing and pupils with special education needs do not always complete work because it is not tailored to their needs. Higher attaining pupils and gifted or talented pupils in Years 7 to 11 are not challenged to achieve better because the tasks set are too easy and demand little intellectual effort.
97. Teaching and learning are overall satisfactory, but this reflects a real balance of strengths and weaknesses. For example, where teaching is good, pupils are challenged to think for themselves and they respond well to repeated questioning by making very good intellectual effort. Where teaching is poor, the work set is inappropriate for even the moderately able pupils, classroom control is weak and the resultant poor behaviour disrupts learning significantly. However, pupils' attitudes to the subject are generally positive. They are able to and want to learn. The subject makes a good contribution to their spiritual and moral development. However, the marking of written work is not always helpful in showing the pupils how they can improve. There is a lack of any assessment linked to pupils' learning needs, which is not helping to reverse the recent downward trend in examination results.
98. A head of department has not yet been appointed since the departure in July of the previous post-holder. This lack of leadership and management is unsatisfactory because forward planning, assessment procedures and schemes of work are not being implemented. The situation is worsened by the absence, through illness, of other full-time subject specialists. Improvement since the previous inspection has been unsatisfactory.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is good.
- The GCSE results in most design and technology subjects are above average, but below in systems and control.
- The design and technology rooms provide supportive environments for teaching and learning.
- The team approach to the management of the department works well.
- Industrial and community links support and extend well pupils' learning.
- The use of computer aided design and manufacturing processes are under-developed.
- The department does not make sufficient or effective use of the school intranet.

Commentary

99. The standards attained by pupils at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were above the national average for design and technology. In lessons, standards are above average and by the end of Year 9 pupils have made good progress and achieve well. They gain a good experience of the design process alongside the development of a wide range of practical skills through technologically challenging activities. Homework is used well to reinforce and support learning. In lessons, there is good emphasis on developing literacy skills.
100. GCSE results in 2003 are well above the national average for resistant materials, food, graphics and textiles but for systems and control the results are below average. In lessons the standard of work is above average and achievement is good because of the pace and challenge set by teachers. Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of materials, research and in design development. Folios are good and graphical presentation is generally of a high standard. Pupils are starting to make good use of computer-aided design and manufacture but this has yet to become embedded well or to contribute to raising standards.
101. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers plan lessons well. They have a good rapport with pupils, share lesson objectives and set high expectations for the completion of work. Where lessons are very good pupils progress very well in their learning, and the work is demanding, challenging and interesting. Behaviour in lessons is good. Teachers challenge pupils well to respond to questions and to become fully involved in the activities. The needs of pupils with learning difficulties are regularly monitored to ensure satisfactory progress is made.
102. The leadership of the department is good with a clear ethos and high expectations of work and behaviour. The department is led by a head of department for food, a head of department for workshop-based subjects and a teacher in charge of textiles. The team approach to the management of the department is effective and staff work together well to plan and agree strategy. Teaching is monitored well. Schemes of work are in place but not all include planning for literacy, numeracy, citizenship and strategies for gifted or talented pupils. The links with feeder schools are not established in order to help suitable course planning at the start of Year 7. The department has identified key development issues to be dealt with in future planning and these are linked to the main school development plan. Assessment is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and a new computer based system is being established. In Years 10 and 11 the assessment is thorough and there is good feedback to pupils. There are good industrial and community links, particularly through food and textiles, to extend the learning and experience of pupils.
103. Teaching rooms are well organised and have displays of high quality, which are used effectively as a resource to help pupils and identify standards. However, limited use is made of the school intranet as a resource for teaching or to support pupils' learning. There are good extra-curricular opportunities including activities for gifted or talented pupils. There has been good progress since the previous inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

104. During the inspection, two visual and performing arts courses were inspected. These were art and design, and music. In addition, two other courses were sampled. These were drama and media studies.

Art and design

The provision in art and design is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The leadership and management of the department are unsatisfactory.
- Standards and achievement are too low in Years 7 to 9 because teaching is unsatisfactory.
- In Years 7 to 9, pupils follow a narrow curriculum.
- Assessment strategies are unsatisfactory and not well established across the department.

- ICT is not used as an artistic medium or as a resource.
- There is good accommodation and access to resources for teaching and learning.

Commentary

105. The teacher assessments for pupils by the end of Year 9 in 2003 were above the national average. However, in lessons seen pupils' achievement was unsatisfactory and standards below average. This is because pupils are not gaining a wide enough breadth of experience or covering the required range of activities and skills with the rigour expected. The development of painting skills is limited and pupils are not gaining a good experience of three-dimensional work. However, good use is made of resource material and pupils gain a good knowledge of other artists. Whilst pupils produce their own sketchbooks as a resource for ideas and techniques, the quality and usefulness of these varies from class to class. There is little work based on other cultures and religions. Overall, the work is not challenging for the majority of pupils.
106. The GCSE results in 2003 are below national averages, although in 2002 they were well above. In lessons, standards of artwork are average overall and pupils' achievement satisfactory. Where it is good, pupils demonstrate creativity and originality in their work. Pupils develop good sketchbooks as a resource for ideas and have the freedom to experiment with different graphical techniques. This is leading to the development of some good examples of coursework. However, pupils use a limited range of media and this restricts the range of their work. The majority of pupils have a positive interest in and enthusiasm for the subject.
107. The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Teachers have clear expectations. Good use is made of the wide range of resource material, including the work of other artists, to support teaching and provide stimulus for pupils. Lesson planning is satisfactory and objectives are shared with the pupils. However, in Years 7 to 9, where teaching and learning are unsatisfactory, the work is not challenging and the pace of lessons is slow. Neither is assessment well enough established or used to track attainment and provide feedback to pupils and parents. Satisfactory extra-curricular time is provided for pupils to complete their work. Homework is used well to extend learning or as preparation. The needs of pupils with learning difficulties are monitored and teachers ensure they make satisfactory progress. Nevertheless, there is no specific planning for extension or enhancement work for pupils who are gifted or talented.
108. The department is not led, managed or monitored well enough. Schemes of work for Years 7 to 9 are in place but these barely cover the required National Curriculum programmes of study. Assessment is unsatisfactory. Whilst there is more focus on assessment in Years 10 and 11, this is not directly or clearly enough linked to external examination criteria. The accommodation for art is good. The pupils access the Internet for research, but ICT is not used as an artistic medium or as an effective resource through the school intranet. Display is effectively used throughout the department and in many areas of the main school to show the work of pupils. Since the previous inspection, standards by the end of Year 9 have improved but GCSE results have declined and improvement overall has been unsatisfactory.

Music

Provision in music is **excellent** overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are high and pupils' achievement overall very good.
- Very good assessment procedures have a significant impact on learning.
- There is inspirational teaching, which challenges and enthuses pupils.
- The very good use of information and communication technology to support learning.
- The excellent leadership and management, which are committed to improvement.

- The very good extra-curricular enrichment opportunities, which involve many pupils.

Commentary

109. Examination results in 2002 were well above average with all pupils entered gaining grades A* to C. Results in 2003 were slightly lower because two pupils underachieved and one missed the exam, but standards have been consistently very high over the last four years. Teacher assessments of pupils by the end of Year 9 in 2003 were above average. In the current Year 9, standards are above average and achievement good. In Year 11, attainment is well above average and achievement very good.
110. By Years 9 and 11, pupils have above average performance skills. They use electronic keyboards very well to create imaginative well-structured pieces. Pupils have good access to computers with music software and use multi-tracking keyboards to enhance their pieces. Year 9 pupils achieve better than expected standards because of the very good specialist teaching they receive and the highly practical nature of lessons. Pupils with special educational needs thrive because their needs are carefully assessed and then met. Pupils who are gifted or talented are very well challenged, with the high expectation that they will produce and perform work, which is a real demand on their abilities.
111. By the end of Year 11, pupils' composition skills are well developed and they produce imaginative pieces in a variety of styles. They have a good grasp of the theory of music, as required for the examination, and are generally good performers on their chosen instruments. Pupils achieve very well given their average prior attainment on entry to the school.
112. Pupils learn very well because the teaching is very good and often excellent. They respond to inspirational and enthusiastic teaching by meeting the high expectations of their teachers. They enjoy creating music and cope with difficult tasks, because teachers ensure lessons have a wide range of activities, which capture the pupils' interest. Working relationships are excellent and teachers expect pupils to behave well and achieve well. The uptake of instrumental tuition is unusually high and well taught to a high standard by visiting specialists. Year 11 pupils are very good independent learners. They have excellent attitudes and work really hard in lessons. Marking and assessment procedures are very good. Targets are shared with pupils, who know how well they are doing and how to improve.
113. The head of department is an inspirational leader, with a clear vision and commitment to the highest standards. Consequently, there is an enthusiasm for the subject, which is infectious. Management of the department is excellent overall. The extra-curricular music includes the production of musicals, concerts by a variety of ensembles and the award-winning choir and swing band, both of which have toured on the continent. All these make a tremendous contribution to pupils' personal development and to the local community. Very good progress has been made since the previous inspection.

Other visual and performing arts subjects sampled in the main school

Commentary: Drama

114. One Year 11 lesson was observed. Very good teaching was directed at preparing pupils for their GCSE mock examination. Pupils clearly benefited from the focus on the best way to approach the test and asked very good questions to clarify their understanding. During the final part of the lesson they demonstrated very good role-play during small group rehearsals. A range of valuable extra-curricular events further enhances their experience of the subject.

Commentary: Media studies

115. One Year 11 lesson was observed in which pupils prepared an advert for an advent calendar. Very good questioning at the outset engaged pupils' interest as they developed a clear understanding of the rationale used in such advertising. The teaching built effectively on

learning in previous lessons and enabled pupils to achieve very well. As they fully understood the objectives, pupils were well able to evaluate each other's work.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Year 10 and 11 pupils do not achieve as well as they should at GCSE, but achievement is better for non-examination pupils.
- Good management and leadership of a new team of teachers are bringing about improvement.
- There are good extra-curricular opportunities for boys and girls.
- Assessment is not used to help pupils improve or analyse the performance of the department.
- Teaching is good and with an insistence on good behaviour, although the attitudes and behaviour of some pupils lead to only satisfactory achievement.
- The teaching of GCSE courses is too dependent on worksheets.
- The opportunities offered by the good accommodation and resources are valued by the pupils.

Commentary

116. GCSE results in 2003 were below average with few pupils attaining the highest grades. The results in 2002 show the same pattern. The achievement of pupils taking a GCSE in physical education is unsatisfactory. Neither boys nor girls achieve as well in physical education as in the other subjects they study. Teachers' assessments in 2003 for Year 9 show pupils reaching average standards overall, with boys attaining higher than girls. However, the basis of these teacher assessments is uncertain.
117. Pupils in Year 7 enter with average standards. However, their previous experience of activities differs widely, but they reach broadly average standards by Year 9. Achievement is satisfactory as pupils make satisfactory gains in skills, knowledge and understanding. In general physical education lessons in Years 10 and 11 pupils' achievement is satisfactory as they extend their skills through an increasing range of activities. Talented pupils achieve well through the opportunities they are given in extra-curricular activities. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.
118. Teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 are satisfactory. Teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 where there is a greater proportion of good teaching. Learning by Year 9 is satisfactory rather than good because a small but significant proportion of pupils, often boys, do not behave well. This is particularly noticeable as they arrive at lessons. These pupils do not listen to instructions or they engage in minor disruptive activities. Teachers manage these pupils well, are vigilant as pupils arrive and insist on good behaviour. Once the lesson is under way, most pupils make good progress. Nevertheless, achievement is limited because lesson time is lost in establishing good behaviour and attitudes. Teachers have good subject knowledge and effectively plan activities to develop pupils' skills and understanding. They help pupils improve by giving helpful advice and comments as they work. However, this feedback does not pay sufficient attention to National Curriculum levels in order that pupils understand what to do next to improve. In the examination groups there is over dependence on work sheets. Pupils have a satisfactory grounding in basic information. However, written tests show answers are too brief and do not link theoretical knowledge to the pupils' own practical experience. The marking of work is regular and supportive but does not relate closely to GCSE grades, so pupils are not always very sure how well they are doing.
119. The leadership and management of the department are sound and since the new head of department started in September are rapidly improving. Several new teachers have joined the

team this year. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory and the development plan for the subject is currently under review in order to bring about further improvement. A new scheme of work for Years 7 to 9 includes assessment opportunities designed to provide useful information to share with pupils and to analyse the performance of the department. Pupils value the good accommodation and resources in the department and are encouraged to use the facilities at break-time and after school. There is a good range of clubs and teams and inter-house competitions are popular.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

120. During the inspection, business education was inspected and three other vocational courses were sampled. These were child development, leisure and tourism and a City and Guilds occupational craft course.

Business education

Provision in business education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is very good.
- Standards at GCSE are above average.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- The leadership and management of the subject are good.
- Pupils are involved in a good range of enrichment activities.

Commentary

121. Standards at GCSE in 2003 were above national averages at grades A* to C, which represents considerable improvement over the previous two years. This was as a direct result of the new head of department's strategies to support pupils who had underachieved in Year 10. This support is now being extended to higher attainers in order to increase the currently below average percentage of higher A* and A grades. Standards in Year 11 are now above average and achievement is very good. Higher-attaining pupils show particular proficiency in marketing with good promotional ideas. They provide good detail to illustrate their arguments, have good analytical skills and apply business theory well to practice. Other pupils are less consistent in these qualities, but they react positively to the support of their teachers and strive to improve their performance. This support is helping to promote greater confidence in Year 10, as pupils learn to cope with the demands of a totally new subject.

122. Teaching is consistently good. The teacher has an extensive knowledge of, and insight into, the subject. Consequently, lessons are well planned, suitably paced and timed, with constantly challenging activities. A strong feature of the lessons is the frequent opportunities pupils have to work together in teams. Through this, they apply theory to practice, develop communication skills, take on responsibility for a good proportion of their learning and work independently. This helps pupils to develop analytical skills and learn to form judgements and explain them. Marking is frequent and consistent and pupils receive full, constructive feedback, which makes clear what they must do to improve. Consequently, learning is good

123. Leadership and management of the subject are good because the head of business has clear vision and direction. The department's revision of its strategies for raising overall standards has paid immediate dividends. Pupils are constantly aware of their progress through the course and of the targets to achieve. Efficient and detailed schemes of work are in place. The department has no formally timetabled access to ICT facilities, but careful planning ensures that groups have regular use of computers to enhance their learning and to aid presentation. Some pupils in Year 11 are involved in competing against fellow pupils and other schools in an

investment portfolio programme on the Internet. Two Year 10 students are involved in a prestigious business development plan involving a large organisation and the district council.

124. Since the previous inspection, the range of courses has become restricted to GCSE and GCE AS/A2, but discussions are well advanced over providing a range of courses more suited to the needs of pupils of differing abilities. The above average standards have been regained in the current examinations and assessment is now properly supporting target setting. The school continues to achieve the highest acclaim in the Young Enterprise scheme, having the best record of wins in the whole of Cheshire. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

VOCATIONAL SUBJECTS SAMPLED IN THE MAIN SCHOOL

Commentary: Child development

125. In child development the GCSE results for 2003 are average. In the lessons seen, standards are average but achievement is good. The quality of teaching and learning is good and a sound foundation of knowledge is being established. Case studies are good, they are well researched and presentation is of a high standard. Good use is made of ICT in all aspects of the work. Judgements are based on one lesson observation and a scrutiny of work.

Commentary: Leisure and tourism

126. Standards in leisure and tourism are below average by the end of Year 11. This is because less able pupils choose the subject. Teaching is good and helps the lower attaining pupils to achieve satisfactorily. Teachers and support assistants work well together to support and encourage all pupils. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall. A few pupils, mainly girls, are well motivated and achieve well.

Commentary: Other vocational courses

127. Groups of pupils follow vocational courses at a local college on one afternoon each week. A lesson was observed with a group taking a brick-laying course. The City and Guilds occupational craft certificate is a new addition to the alternative curriculum offered to pupils. Very good preparation by the teacher enabled the pupils to achieve satisfactorily in the lesson observed. Liaison is developing between the school and the local college to provide further support for pupils taking this new course.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

128. Personal, social and health education and the citizenship courses alternate over the school's two-week timetable cycle. During the week of the inspection, citizenship was being taught in Years 7 to 11. Consequently, no personal, social and health education lessons were seen in these years.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The time allocation for citizenship and personal, social and health education in Years 7 to 11 is inadequate, consequently pupils' learning experiences do not have consistent range and depth.
- The enrichment days are of high quality and make a valuable contribution towards enhancing the quality of pupils' learning.

- The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are not rigorous enough and, as a result, teachers do not consistently establish explicit links between citizenship and their subjects.

Commentary

129. Standards at the end of Year 9 are in line with national expectations and pupils make satisfactory progress. Achievement is satisfactory within the limited time available for the subject. During the inspection week there was insufficient evidence available to make judgements on the standards, achievement or progress of pupils in Years 10 and 11.
130. Teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 are satisfactory. However, in the very limited time allocated to lessons it is not always easy for teachers to help pupils develop their ideas fully. Nevertheless, in a very good Year 7 lesson seen, the teacher was able to draw out a range of relevant issues arising from discussions about the qualities of citizenship. Pupils' skills of participation were developed effectively through discussion about issues such as the plight of Aids victims and the political and moral issues of apartheid. Pupils expressed their opinions well and asked perceptive questions.
131. As with personal, social and health education, enrichment days form an important part of the curriculum and enhance the pupils' learning. These are organised on a rota basis for Years 7 to 11 and satisfactorily cover key aspects of the citizenship curriculum, including topics such as crime, drugs and European communities.
132. During the inspection week, lessons for Years 10 and 11 were replaced with examination revision and a briefing for work experience. Therefore, it was not possible to make judgements on teaching and learning for these year groups. The marking of Year 10 and 11 work is unsatisfactory because it is currently not undertaken. The school's reason for this is because of the inadequate time allocation for lessons.
133. The teaching of citizenship is currently the responsibility of form tutors and heads of year. However, there is an advanced skills teacher for citizenship, based in the school, who is developing the school policy and practice. Leadership is satisfactory with some areas of strength. This is because there is a clear vision for future development and this reflects an understanding of current weaknesses. Planning is satisfactory and development proposals for the subject are closely allied to the requirements of teaching and staff training. However, management is unsatisfactory because teaching is not currently monitored or evaluated rigorously. As a consequence, there is not a consistent approach to teaching or to the establishment of explicit links between citizenship and other subjects. The head of department has initiated an external network of citizenship co-ordinators, acknowledging the importance of making links with other schools.

Commentary: Personal, social and health education

134. Provision in personal, social and health education is **satisfactory** overall. However, the time allocated for lessons in Years 7 to 11 is inadequate as a result of its rotation with citizenship within the timetable. The teaching of personal, social and health education is currently the responsibility of form tutors and heads of year. Enrichment days play an important part in enhancing pupils' awareness of the major aspects of personal, social and health education and the use of outside agencies and specialists adds further to the quality of the school's programme. This satisfactorily covers topics such as sex education, bullying and drugs awareness and pupils participate in whole year groups. More detailed aspects of these areas are covered in tutorials, but due to the very limited time allowance it is not always easy for teachers to help pupils develop their ideas fully. The time allowance for lessons is reduced further during Years 10 and 11 when other aspects take priority, such as work experience and examination revision. Whilst these play an important part in pupils' overall progress, the depth

of learning opportunities in important areas such as relationships, managing feelings and bullying is reduced even further.

Careers education and guidance

Provision in careers education and guidance is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The partnership between the school and the careers advisory service is developing satisfactorily.
- Links do not yet exist between careers education and the school's personal, social and health education programme.

Commentary

135. The programme is adequately provided principally through the Connexions Personal Adviser (Education) at relevant times in Years 9 to 11. This is satisfactorily undertaken through assemblies, tutorial time, or at day events and evening meetings with parents. In Years 12 and 13, advice is mainly on opportunities for employment, whereas the sixth form tutors and the leadership team give most advice on higher education. However, there are currently no specific careers lessons, nor is careers education a distinct part of personal, social and health education.
136. Connexions prioritise particular groups of pupils and students for individual interviews, for instance those identified as gifted or talented or having special educational needs. Others are seen in groups and can request individual help if needed. Pupils and students have satisfactory access to up-to-date software and information about professions and can take advantage of 'drop-in' facilities at lunchtime.
137. The work experience scheme is a particularly good feature of the careers programme. The main role of the school's careers co-ordinator is to work with the district business-education partnership to organise placements for pupils in Year 10. The co-ordinator also has a satisfactory input into the activities and enrichment days organised by the Connexions service. However, many Year 12 students felt that, in Year 11, Connexions was useful for those seeking employment, whereas advice for post-16 progression was not too helpful, or was given by teachers who were more anxious to recruit for their sixth form subjects.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, seven subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school. The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002, the latest year for which national comparisons are available.

Level 3 GCE AS level courses: 2002

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	8	62.5	90.0	37.5	42.7	23.8	39.0
Biology	26	61.0	81.6	23.0	32.2	28.8	33.2
Business studies	15	66.7	89.1	6.7	31.7	24.6	35.4
Chemistry	7	85.7	84.8	57.1	36.9	48.7	35.2
English language	11	72.7	92.0	27.3	29.9	28.2	35.7
English literature	6	100.0	94.4	16.7	37.9	35.0	38.9
Design and technology	11	54.5	89.2	9.1	32.0	18.2	35.7
French	3	100.0	85.4	66.7	35.2	55.0	34.9
General studies	24	83.3	78.6	8.3	35.7	27.5	30.0
Geography	6	66.7	88.3	16.7	36.4	23.3	36.3
History	6	100.0	91.8	0.0	37.2	30.0	37.8
Information technology	24	91.7	78.2	8.3	20.6	27.1	28.5
Law	6	100.0	--	50.0	--	32.9	--
Mathematics	8	87.5	74.2	12.5	34.3	23.8	31.3
Media studies	22	100.0	--	36.4	--	25.4	--
Music	8	100.0	93.6	50.0	39.4	43.3	39.0
Physics	14	71.4	82.0	42.9	36.2	32.4	34.3
Psychology (Other social studies)	20	90.0	83.2	10.0	32.5	28.5	33.6
Religious studies	5	100.0	90.9	0.0	38.9	31.6	37.9
Sports studies	8	87.5	82.8	12.5	27.7	27.1	33.8
Theatre studies	10	60.0	--	20.0	--	26.8	--

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses: 2002

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	13	100.0	96.1	46.2	48.7	84.6	85.1
Biology	15	73.3	91.6	20.0	36.3	52.0	74.1
Business studies	22	100.0	96.4	18.2	32.8	69.1	76.5
Chemistry	4	75.0	94.0	25.0	45.9	60.0	81.1
Communication studies	15	100.0	98.3	40.0	36.8	86.7	81.1
Design and technology	13	92.3	95.3	23.1	35.5	64.6	76.5
Drama	13	100.0	98.1	61.5	41.5	87.7	82.9
English language	31	96.8	98.3	19.3	36.5	72.9	80.1
English literature	17	100.0	98.5	35.3	43.7	80.0	84.3
French	5	100.0	96.2	0.0	46.1	68.0	83.0
General studies	32	90.7	90.1	21.9	29.1	62.5	69.3
Geography	38	100.0	97.1	21.1	40.5	69.5	80.9
History	17	100.0	97.1	29.4	41.0	75.3	81.2
Information technology	18	94.4	89.1	22.2	22.4	68.9	64.1
Mathematics	19	100.0	93.3	36.8	52.2	81.2	84.7
Media studies	15	100.0	--	40.0	--	86.7	--
Music	4	100.0	97.7	75.0	41.8	100.0	82.2
Physics	10	100.0	92.8	30.0	42.8	70.0	78.6
Psychology	11	100.0	(94.3)	18.18	(38.9)	67.27	(77.7)
Sports studies	4	100.0	95.4	25.0	29.5	75.0	73.2
Theatre studies	13	100.0	--	61.5	--	86.1	--
Performing Arts (AVCE)	6	100.0	92.5	16.7	40.8	70.0	78.8

Level 2 vocational qualifications: 2002

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Young Enterprise	32	93.8	--	34.4	--	21.9	--

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at AS level are below average and do not fully reflect the potential of all students.
- The very good subject knowledge of teachers promotes students' ability to engage in wide-ranging discussion very well.
- Teachers provide very good background material.
- Potential students are not informed fully of the differences between GCSE and A-level English language courses.
- Good working relationships between teachers and students, and between students, are conducive to very positive lessons.

Commentary

138. In 2002, students in both English language and literature achieved 100 per cent pass rates at A-level, which is above the national average. However, higher A and B grades were below the national average. Full pass rates were again achieved in 2003 and a marked improvement in the higher grades in English literature produced above average results. At AS level, results in both subjects are below the national average. Retention rates in both courses are high. Compared with their GCSE results, the progress made by Year 12 students over the past three years has been satisfactory for English literature, but unsatisfactory for English language. For most students in Year 13, progress has been satisfactory.
139. In work and lessons seen, standards by the end of Year 13 are average and achievement is satisfactory. In English language by Year 13, students use appropriate terminology when comparing transcripts, looking at the social implications of language usage and the diversity of language. During Year 12 the students often find the difference in content and approach between GCSE English language and A-level disconcerting and this affects their learning. Teachers are working hard to provide the students with support and guidance to help them overcome such problems. In English literature, by Year 13, students are increasingly adept at comparing very different texts, setting literature in the context of the time in which it was written and blending critical responses to the actual text with wider considerations. They summarise key issues succinctly within essays.
140. Teaching and learning are good overall. Of particular merit is the way in which teachers use their very good subject knowledge to promote wide-ranging discussion beyond the narrow confines of the course itself. This provides students with a good overview of the subject. The ethos created encourages students to voice their opinions and develop arguments well. Teachers provide very useful background materials and one teacher has supported students' learning well by producing a very helpful glossary of literary terms. Because of such factors, the students' response and attitude in lessons are very good. Very good working relationships between teachers and students help to create a positive climate for learning.
141. There is good leadership and management of the subject and, for example, recent changes in the allocation of teachers to particular classes is helping to raise standards and students' achievement. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

142. Standards of language and literacy are good and enable students to cope with the writing and reading requirement of most courses. Teachers pay good attention to the language development of students. In psychology, there are good opportunities for structured extended

writing and in ICT students are required to make presentations with the language tailored for specified audiences. Teachers pay good attention to the development of writing skills in geography, but insufficient practice in using language is given in mathematics. In most subjects, teachers give satisfactory emphasis to subject specific vocabulary. The arrangements made for developing language and literacy overall are good.

Modern languages: French

Provision in French is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The attainment of Year 12 students is below average.
- The use of French as the means of communication in lessons is good and consistent.
- Teachers' marking is constructive and informative.
- The achievement by higher-attaining students in Year 13 is very good.
- The opportunities for students to work independently are limited.

Commentary

143. Over previous years, the numbers of candidates and the nature of the entry have varied considerably, but most groups are very small. In 2002, all students gained a pass in A-level French, but standards were below national averages because none gained A or B grades. In 2003 the two candidates both gained A grades. Compared with their GCSE results, the progress made by Year 12 students over the past three years, in the 2001 to 2003 examinations, has been satisfactory.
144. In both current groups, the range of attainment is wide. Standards are average overall by Year 13 and achievement satisfactory. Most students are confident speakers, once they have a clear understanding of new items and phrases arising from their topics. They assimilate grammar and language patterns well, which enables a good standard of accuracy in their written work. A higher-attaining student shows a quick grasp of the more sophisticated language and incorporates it confidently into their work. This leads to a wide range of style and phraseology and a high level of creative writing and well-constructed argument. However, in Year 12 there is not as much progress beyond the higher level of GCSE as one would generally expect at this stage. The group of eight students tends to be hesitant in communication, passive in approach and consequently difficult to enthuse.
145. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Lessons are well planned and the materials used are well presented and challenging. Teachers have a deep and extensive knowledge of the target language. A strong feature of the lessons is the consistent use of French in all communication, apart from some necessary explanation of grammar or to check understanding. Nevertheless, much of the activity is teacher-led. Although students contribute to the lesson, they do not have much opportunity for group or pair work or for individual presentation. In Year 12, students do not yet take sufficient responsibility and initiative in furthering their own learning in order to increase motivation and standards. Marking is frequent and consistent, with full constructive feedback on strengths and weaknesses and how to improve accuracy and overall achievement.
146. Leadership and management of the subject in the sixth form are satisfactory. Schemes of work are in the process of being written to the same detailed format as in the main school, which was identified as a priority for early completion. At present, students use ICT independently. They have access to a website provided by the course book and can research other Internet sites, but there is no formal integration of ICT into the curriculum. Apart from attendance at language days there is no enhancement of the subject through visits or trips abroad. Since the previous inspection, students have reacted positively to the need to

incorporate corrections into their work and have improved their redrafting skills. Overall, improvement is satisfactory.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Overall, teaching is good because teachers challenge students.
- Standards of attainment in Year 13 lessons are too low.
- Students in Year 12 make good progress in statistics
- The unsatisfactory attitudes and poor attendance of a significant proportion of students, particularly in Year 13, are hindering overall achievement.

Commentary

147. In 2002, A-level results were in line with the national average, including those at the higher grades A and B. There was no significant difference in the results of male and female students. This represents a decline from 2000 when results were above average. A-level results in 2003 were similar to those in 2002. Results at AS level in 2002 were above the average, with female students attaining higher than males, but numbers were low. In 2003 no students completed AS level because they will not complete the third module of their course until January 2004. The progress made by most students from their GCSE results has been mainly satisfactory, but overall below their predicted grades.
148. Standards of Year 13 students observed in lessons were below average. This is because attendance is often poor. There are nine students on the course and seven are expected to continue to full A-level. When in lessons students work well and achieve satisfactorily, but most lack confidence and determination. From work in algebra and statistics seen in lessons, achievement was satisfactory as the year group was below average at GCSE. Standards and achievement are better in Year 12. These students' attainment was average on entry to the course and is now above average. They are making good progress in statistics and satisfactory progress in algebra because there have been teacher absences.
149. Overall, teachers work hard to promote better attitudes on the part of the students, particularly those in Year 13. Teaching and learning in Year 12 are good overall. However, learning in some lessons is satisfactory because teachers have to spend time with absentees from previous lessons. However, this is done skilfully, with very good attention to work for the more able students and a good pace being features of the best lessons. In one excellent lesson on statistics the teacher's reference to real life situations and very clear emphasis on vocabulary and notation promoted real enthusiasm and good standards from average students. Teaching and learning are good in Year 13, as typified by the teachers' good subject knowledge and plentiful opportunities for students to consolidate learning through suitably challenging practice. However, teachers of Year 13 have been unsuccessful in their encouragement of students to be more independent in their learning, more determined with homework and to attend lessons more frequently. Such factors are hindering the progress of Year 13 students.
150. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The course is well organised and teachers allocated well to classes. However, the numbers in Year 13 are low and the subject does not always attract the most able students. In Year 12, numbers have increased and there are clear signs of improvement. There is insufficient emphasis on independent study and library provision in mathematics is still poor. Overall, results in the sixth form are much the same as at the previous inspection, although teaching has improved. There has been satisfactory improvement overall since the previous inspection.

Mathematics across the curriculum

151. The use of mathematics across the curriculum is satisfactory. It is good in geography where students use correlation effectively to relate cause and effect and in business studies where cash flow operations and break-even points are well understood. In all other subjects seen, mathematics standards were sufficient to allow at least satisfactory learning in each subject. However, in English there was little use of numeracy.

SCIENCE

152. The focus of the inspection was on biology, but one lesson in physics and one in chemistry were also sampled. In both subjects, 2003 examination results show student progress was satisfactory at both AS and A-level. In the chemistry lesson, a small group of articulate and confident students were making good progress. In the physics lesson, a small group were making satisfactory progress using computer-based resources designed to make the scientific content relevant to them.

Biology

Provision in biology is **satisfactory** overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A-level standards are improving.
- Standards and achievement in AS examinations are not high enough.
- Improved monitoring procedures are enabling teachers to give students very good individual advice and guidance.
- There is some very good teaching, but overall the quality of teaching is too variable and good practice is not shared widely enough.

Commentary

153. In 2002, whilst all Year 13 students entered for the A-level examination gained a pass, results at grades A and B were below average. Standards improved in 2003 with most students gaining grades A or B. These students made satisfactory progress in relation to their GCSE grades. In 2002 the Year 12 AS level results were well below average with only half the students gaining a pass and no higher grade passes. In 2003, standards at AS examinations were unsatisfactory with only just over a quarter of those entered gaining a pass. Consequently, the progress made by the students was unsatisfactory. This was a result of poor guidance for students choosing the course, inadequate monitoring of their progress and some ineffective teaching methods. However, leadership and management have improved and, as a result, these issues are being resolved by the development of rigorous monitoring of student progress and improved guidance on effective teaching. Because of these changes, the achievement of students seen during the inspection is now satisfactory. Male and female students across the ability range made satisfactory progress in relation to their attainment at GCSE.

154. Teaching overall is satisfactory and, as a result, students learn satisfactorily. However, the quality of lessons is too inconsistent and ranges from very good to below average. Examples of good or very good practice are too often specific to individual teachers. This is because the sharing of best practice is currently under-developed. The most effective lessons employ a wide range of teaching styles, which are effective in helping students and in promoting independent learning. In one less effective lesson, students were given little opportunity for independent work and, as a result, students of all abilities were insufficiently challenged and too passive. Teachers help individuals well by monitoring their progress and giving very good individual advice and guidance. However, there is a lack of use of ICT to support learning.

Improvement since the previous inspection has been unsatisfactory as examination results were then above average in biology and progress in sixth-form science was good overall.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good and pupils achieve well as a result.
- Assessment systems are very good.
- Students work well independently.
- Students have very positive views of the course.
- There have been significant improvements in the quality of accommodation and resources.

Commentary

155. A-level examination results are inconsistent from year-to-year owing to the fluctuating numbers of students taking the courses. There are also some significant variations in their attainment levels at the start of the course. At A-level in 2002, although not all students gained a pass and the percentage of those gaining an A or B pass was average, results were above average overall. In 2003, all students entered in Year 13 gained a pass, although no student gained a higher A grade. At AS level in 2002, although the percentage of students gaining a pass was above average, the proportion gaining a higher grade A or B was well below average. In 2003, the percentage of Year 12 students gaining a pass declined, but those attaining a higher grade increased slightly. The school's predicted grades for current students are average and they are starting to achieve above average grades in on-going assessments. Standards are improving. Compared with their GCSE results, the progress made by Year 12 and Year 13 students over the past three years, in the 2001 to 2003 examinations, has been satisfactory and slightly above that expected.
156. Standards are improving and in the work seen in the inspection are above average. Students are now achieving well. They analyse and test their work thoroughly. They are beginning to appreciate how computers can assist business and how they are used in society. The students develop good literacy skills whilst using industry standard software. Teaching is good overall, which leads to good learning. The best teaching is well planned, catering for individual needs and targeting individual students where necessary. Through good teaching, students learn there are several techniques which can be used to approach a problem and how to adapt these techniques to their major projects. Students have very good attitudes towards work. They appreciate the good support from staff and the good quality of the rooms in which they work.
157. Leadership and management of the subject are good. Students are given high quality information so they know exactly how to gain marks on each assignment. Assessment systems are very good and used effectively to identify strengths and areas for improvement and to track attainment and progress. Students are fully involved in this assessment process, so they know what to do to improve. The significant developments in accommodation and resources in the subject represent good improvement since the previous inspection.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A-level examination results are not yet good enough.
- Good teaching is closely tailored to examination requirements, teachers explain the subject clearly and use a range of effective teaching methods.
- The good working relationships between teachers and students.

- Not all students are challenged sufficiently to think for themselves and work independently.

Commentary

158. A-level and AS level examination results in 2002 were below the national average. School data for 2003 shows that A-level results were similar to the previous year with students gaining grades below that which could be expected compared with their GCSE results. Consequently, their progress and achievement was unsatisfactory. However, AS level results in 2003 were considerably better than the previous year and represent good progress and achievement for the students concerned when compared with their previous attainment. Compared with their GCSE results, the progress made by Year 12 students over the past three years, in the 2001 to 2003 examinations, has been satisfactory and slightly above that expected.
159. Large groups of students are studying geography and attainment is average and improving. Overall, achievement is satisfactory but, in work seen during the inspection, there were examples of students achieving well. This is because teachers are using an increasingly wide range of teaching methods, including lively debates and discussions and the use of ICT, which engage students' interest. Teaching and learning have improved and are now good overall. Lessons are closely related to the requirements of the examination syllabus and students are given structured individual help in answering examination questions. This helps to produce good quality coursework and develop effective study skills. Teachers praise and encourage students in order to give them confidence so that lessons take place in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. However, students are not yet challenged sufficiently to think for themselves and produce their best work. The reluctance of some students, especially males, to contribute to discussion inhibits their learning.
160. The new leadership and management of the department are good and starting to make a significant contribution to raising attainment. There is a very clear strategy for further improvements in coursework preparation, allocation of resources and the use of varied teaching and learning methods. Teaching is monitored effectively, the department is well organised and good practice is shared. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory and the department has good capacity to improve further.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good and supports students' independent learning.
- The students are interested in their own learning and work well.
- Teacher assessment and students' self-evaluation are used well to improve attainment.
- There is a measure of low attainment because the course is demanding and beyond the capabilities of some students.

Commentary

161. A-level results in 2002 were below average overall and for students gaining higher A or B grades. Results in 2003 show an improvement with just below half gaining A and B grades. AS level passes in 2002 were above average overall, but with fewer than average higher-grade passes. Results in 2003 were not as high as in the previous year.
162. Standards in Year 12 are average and achievement good in relation to their capability. Students use psychological terms with growing understanding. Written work indicates a good start on subject methodology and very helpful marking shows students how they can improve. However, students often fail to provide a sound evidence base from which to argue and their writing becomes unclear. Lower attaining students tend to be disorganised and are more

reliant on the teacher's support rather than independent research and reading. Improvement is evident in other students' work where answers are more full, clear and better informed.

163. In Year 13, students are working at a level in line with national averages and students continue to achieve well. Group discussions are challenging because students have to think hard, work collaboratively and present their findings to the rest of the group. Written work has more rigour and evidence to back up statements and students evaluate more confidently. There are still examples of overlong pieces of writing, which do not order supportive sources very effectively. Aspects of ethics in investigations are, however, well understood.
164. Teaching and learning are good overall. Some very good teaching, with excellent strategies for learning, was observed. Students generally respond well, although at the start of one lesson, several students arrived late and took some time to become involved in the work set. The subject is perceived as more difficult than students imagined. There is a concern on the part of the teacher that, in a growing number of cases, the practical demands of the course are beyond the capabilities of some students. This is leading to the need for work which is better designed to meet the needs of individual students. However, students know what they must do to improve because the marking of their work is very helpful. There is an improvement list for every student that sets out individual targets and this is annotated by both teacher and student.
165. Psychology was not taught at the time of the previous inspection. The subject is led well and managed efficiently as part of the social science department. Assessment is secure because every piece of work is marked effectively to examination standards. Resources are good. ICT is used well and students regularly log on to tutorial sites that support and supplement their learning.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

Personal, social and health education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The personal, social and health education programme provides students with support in many areas, but not those of sex education, drugs awareness and alcohol abuse.
- Aspects of citizenship are covered well through opportunities for students to use their initiative and take part in activities such as the college council.
- The enrichment programme offers students good opportunities to develop a range of personal skills.
- The personal, social and health education programme is not equally available to all students as it clashes with timetabled lessons.

Commentary

166. As a result of the school's timetable, insufficient lessons were seen to make an overall judgement concerning standards. However, discussions with students and staff show that students have satisfactory opportunities to develop their personal and social skills through their weekly tutorial lessons and the sixth form enrichment programme. The personal, social and health education programme currently covers the more practical aspects of student life, including interview technique, study skills and personal statements for university application forms. In a Year 12 lesson seen, students were satisfactorily working from a key skills booklet and discussing their own strengths and weaknesses.
167. There is no current coverage of sex education or the raising awareness of drugs and alcohol misuse. However, the head of sixth form plans to deal with these issues in the future, using visiting specialists and outside agencies. The enrichment programme is well structured and

provides students with a good variety of different activities, which help to develop their personal skills. These include debates, sign language, drama, text processing and sport. Two of these were observed during the inspection, sign language and debate. Students participated with high levels of enthusiasm, responding very well to the visiting staff. In the debate session, the quality of the discussions was very good. Students displayed well-developed listening skills and the ability to express their opinions clearly. Topics discussed were diverse, ranging across the law, communication and politics. When asked, all students said they enjoyed the activity because it helped to increase their self-confidence and they enjoyed the opportunity to debate topics in which they were interested. The enrichment programme does not provide equality of opportunity for all students because academic lessons are timetabled to run across the allocated time. Consequently, numbers attending the different activities are low because not all students are able to participate.

168. The college council provides a very good opportunity for students to participate in the decision-making and organisation of sixth form life and to take responsibilities for different initiatives. These include fund raising for charities, organising social events and taking responsibility for day-to-day matters within college.

OTHER SUBJECTS SAMPLED IN THE SIXTH FORM

169. During the inspection, a number of other sixth form subjects were sampled. These included key skills, art and design, business education, design and technology, media studies, German and Spanish, music, physical education, sociology and theatre studies.

Commentary: Key skills courses

170. Judgements are based on the observation of one lesson including discussions with students, an interview with the co-ordinator and a review of all schemes of work. Provision in key skills courses is unsatisfactory overall. Results in 2003 were above average in ICT but below in numeracy and communication. In ICT, teaching and learning are good; consequently, students achieve well and make good progress. The teaching of key skills is timetabled for ICT, numeracy and communication. However, with the current timetable arrangements, some students are not able to attend. The scheme of work for ICT is comprehensive with well-planned and structured activities. However, for courses in numeracy and communication the schemes of work are not in place and planning is unsatisfactory. The co-ordinator for key skills provides very good management but does not have sufficient responsibility to ensure effective planning and the monitoring of teaching across all the courses provided.

Commentary: Art and design

171. Judgements are based on a discussion about their work with students during a lesson, and the ongoing scrutiny of work during the inspection. Standards overall were average and achievement satisfactory. Students have developed good sketchbooks and they experiment satisfactorily with different media, including textiles, and techniques. They are confident when discussing their work and demonstrate a good knowledge and understanding of other artists. They use this knowledge satisfactorily to develop their own creative interpretations.

Commentary: Business education

172. Two lessons were seen, one each in Years 12 and 13. Teaching, learning and achievement were good. Standards are overall average, reflecting the wide range of attainment in both year groups. Students work well and purposefully together and, consequently, make good progress. They are confident in their questioning and in requesting help and guidance. Leadership and management of the subject in the sixth form are good. There is a very good range of enrichment opportunities for students, particularly represented by the school's impressive record in the Young Enterprise scheme.

Commentary: Design and technology

173. Judgements are based on the observation of a Year 13 lesson, a discussion with Year 12 students and the ongoing scrutiny of work during the inspection. There are well-established courses at AS and A-level with a focus on resistant materials, graphics and food. The standard of work is above average. At AS and A-level there is good progress and achievement through the good standard of teaching and learning. The quality of design work is of a high standard in graphical presentation, research and design development. Students have a good knowledge and understanding of materials and techniques. At both AS and A-level students can model their ideas well as part of the design development process.

Commentary: Media studies

174. One Year 12 lesson was observed. Here, there was very good teaching of how to use the language of film criticism. Consequently, learning was very good. Discussions were lively, students clearly enjoyed the opportunities to apply critical concepts to films they knew well and achieved well. The teacher engendered an atmosphere in which students felt confident about voicing opinions. During the lesson, they demonstrated an increasingly confident use of specialised terminology.

Commentary: Modern languages - German

175. One Year 12 lesson was seen. Teaching and learning were very good. Standards were above average and achievement good. The use of German as the sole medium of communication in lessons is enabling students to progress well beyond GCSE standards. The teaching is bringing out the best in the higher attaining students, by encouraging them to express their arguments and opinions and challenging them to justify them. This has a strong impact on their learning and is enabling some very good achievement.

Commentary: Modern languages - Spanish

176. One Year 12 lesson was seen. Teaching and learning were very good. Standards were above average. The high attaining students show a determination to communicate and are progressing well beyond GCSE standards. Teaching, consistently conducted in Spanish, is very good. Students are constantly challenged and respond with enjoyment and enthusiasm. Achievement is very good.

Commentary: Music

177. One Year 12 lesson was seen. Teaching, learning and achievement were very good and standards above average. This was a very good lesson because the teacher constantly enabled the reinforcement of learning and challenged the students to make evaluative, reasoned judgements about their work. Consequently, the students' analysis and understanding of 18th-century music was significantly enhanced.

Commentary: Physical education

178. One lesson was sampled in Year 13. Very good teaching motivated and engaged the students. They contributed very well to a lively whole class discussion on the media and sport. They demonstrated above average standards of knowledge and understanding of the topic and achievement was good.

Commentary: Sociology

179. One Year 12 lesson was seen. Teaching and learning were excellent. Standards were above average and achievement very good. This was an excellent lesson with very high quality

resource materials, which supported the students' learning very well. There was a very high level of challenge throughout the lesson, which resulted in a high order of questions from the students themselves. Students were encouraged to be independent in their thinking. This was reflected in their very good achievement and understanding of the subject.

Commentary: Theatre studies

180. One Year 12 lesson was seen. Teaching and learning were good. Standards were average and achievement satisfactory. The lesson opened with a lively starter activity where students, without speaking actual words, used noises, intonation and gesture to convey meaning. Good teaching effectively linked this to ensuring activities where pairs of students used similar techniques to represent mood in short scenes. Students all participated enthusiastically, and careful structuring of the lesson provided useful opportunities for students to evaluate each other's performance.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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