

INSPECTION REPORT

COLYTON GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Colyton, Devon

LEA area: Devon

Unique reference number: 113555

Headteacher: Mr B J Sindall

Lead inspector: David Potter

Dates of inspection: 26th – 30th January 2004

Inspection number: 259358

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar (selective)
School category:	Foundation
Age range of students:	11 - 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	757
School address:	Whitwell Lane Colyford Colyton Devon
Postcode:	EX24 6HN
Telephone number:	01297 552327
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Dr C J Bastin
Date of previous inspection:	9 th February 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Because it is a very popular school in a rural area, Colyton Grammar School serves a very wide region of east Devon, west Dorset and parts of Somerset. At the centre of that area are the small towns of Colyton and Seaton. Many students travel long distances to school.

The school is small, with 757 students on roll, 170 of them in the sixth form; there are more girls than boys in both the main school and the sixth form. A few students enter the sixth form from other schools, joining the 85 per cent of Year 11 students who stay into the sixth form, all of them for two years to study A-level courses.

The intake is advantaged: very few students are eligible for free school meals, mobility of students is low and, because of the school's selective status, there are very few students with special needs (most of whom have a hearing impairment) and none who are at an early stage of learning English. Colyton is. However. less selective than many grammar schools, taking in many students of just-above-average ability.

The school is outstandingly successful: it has received government awards for attainment and improvement and in 2003 it achieved specialist status for science, a project whose purpose is to make the school a beacon of excellence in science education, 'leading edge' and, very recently, 'ambassador school' status for its work with gifted and talented students. These awards testify to the school's excellence in these areas and confer on it a role to support other schools within the region in these specialisms. Since 1996, Colyton's GCSE and A-level results have placed it in the top few schools in England; it is currently top of the performance tables for mixed (both maintained and independent) schools.

The school is also very innovative: for example, it has begun a project to condense into two years the work usually undertaken by schools in pupils' first three years in order to extend the length of the sixth form to three years. The purpose is to enable students to study in greater depth and have the time to apply their studies in real-life settings.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1027	David Potter	Lead inspector	
12775	Judith Goodchild	Lay inspector	
32875	Nick Batchelar	Team inspector	English
31441	Maggie King	Team inspector	Mathematics
32582	Stephen Manning	Team inspector	Sciences
3555	Carol Emery	Team inspector	Design and technology
28899	Graham Sims	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
4317	Ken Madrell	Team inspector	Geography Citizenship
31385	Neil Gillespie	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT)
33014	Andrew White	Team inspector	Music
18888	Jan Boulton	Team inspector	Physical education (PE)
10053	Janet Simms	Team inspector	Art
4727	Jeff Hale	Team inspector	History
24339	Joyce Mackley	Team inspector	Religious education (RE)
19069	Brian Bartlett	Team inspector	Special educational needs (SEN)

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The performance of this **outstanding school** continues to improve and accelerate away from that of similar schools. Despite the school's position at the top of national league tables, its leaders remain ambitious for further improvement and are skilled in pulling the right levers to bring that improvement about. The focus on helping each individual achieve potential means that students of all abilities learn and achieve exceptionally well. Relationships are outstanding: students and staff work in partnership. All resources are deployed with great skill to promote a culture of learning, improvement and success. The school provides excellent value for money.

The school's **main strengths and weaknesses** are:

- The headteacher, supported by senior staff and governors, ensures that everyone connected with the school is committed to a clear vision of continuous improvement. As a result:
 - test and examination results are outstanding at all levels and continue to improve;
 - all students - including the gifted and talented, those of average ability and those with a learning difficulty - make excellent progress and achieve extremely well;
 - teaching is consistently of very high quality, with much that is excellent;
 - students are very capable learners who believe in their own ability to achieve.
- Students' attitudes to work and to the school, and their relationships with each other and with teachers, are exemplary and contribute greatly to their own and the school's success.
- The school is excellently governed and managed: evaluation and planning are exemplary and resources are exceptionally well managed.

Improvement since the last inspection in February 1998 has been excellent; very high standards and excellent quality have been driven still higher and very good progress has been made with ICT, the one weakness in the last report. The commitment to go on improving is admirable.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Year 11 and 13 results

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

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

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

Results are outstanding, placing Colyton in the top 5 per cent of schools in the country at all levels and in all recent years. GCSE and A-level results in 2003 were the best of any mixed school, maintained or independent, in England. For several years, pass rates at GCSE and A-level have been close to 100 per cent; only a handful of grades are below a B at GCSE or below a C at A-level. Students across the school reach **very high standards** in all subjects. Standards are remarkably high in the sciences, mathematics, modern languages, art and physical education. Students' written and spoken answers are detailed, extended, sophisticated and presented with enormous care.

Achievement is excellent for all age groups. Students enter the school in Year 7 with well-above-average attainment and go on to reach the remarkable standards in tests and exams at ages 14, 16 and 18 described above. These results therefore represent very good progress and the value added by the school is among the highest in the country. Achievement is very good in almost all subjects and excellent in several; the cumulative effect is excellent. Gifted and talented students achieve excellence in academic, sporting and cultural fields, and those who enter the school with relatively low attainment do exceptionally well. The school has a small number of students with a learning

difficulty, most of them with a serious hearing impairment; these students achieve as well as their peers. Students' literacy and their ability to use mathematics are excellent and their ICT skills are very good.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

The **personal development** of students of all ages in the school is **excellent**, as is the provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development: these are great strengths of the school. The mutual respect between students and staff, and the partnership for learning between them, are two of the keys to the school's outstanding success. The **behaviour, attendance** and **punctuality** of students are all **excellent**.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides an **excellent** education to all of its students. **Teaching** is **excellent** because of its consistently high quality; very little is less than good and none unsatisfactory. Combined with the excellent ethos, work ethic and relationships, the careful planning, pace and challenge of the teaching lead to **excellent learning** throughout the school. The **curriculum** is **very good**: it is very well matched to the needs of the students and contributes to the very high standards achieved. Provision for students with a hearing impairment is excellent. The **guidance and support** provided for students are **excellent**. Their work is assessed regularly and rigorously, and they are given clear guidance on what needs to be done to achieve their predicted results. Careers guidance is excellent and ensures that students are well prepared for the next stages in their lives. Links with the community, especially other schools, are excellent. The school is well resourced and accommodation is good. New buildings are of very high quality and there are plans to replace the inadequate ones. The site has been made very attractive and is very well looked after by site staff and students alike.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Central to the school's success has been the clarity of its key aim and the consistency with which that aim has been pursued over many years - a belief that all students can achieve success and a relentless search for improvements in teaching to enable them to do so. This drive has been led by the headteacher and shared by governors, staff, students and parents. All the school's innovations and the deployment of all its resources are focused on achieving this key purpose. The support and challenge provided by governors are excellent: they relentlessly pursue best value and excellence in all they do. The support provided by the administrative, technical, catering and site staff is of the highest quality. **Leadership, management and governance** are therefore **all excellent**. The very high standards attained by the students and the excellent achievement, teaching and learning mean that the school provides excellent value for money for its students and the community it serves.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Students have extremely positive views of the school, recognising the very good teaching they receive and the excellent relationships. Parents strongly support the school and are delighted by the progress their children make, by the teaching and support they receive and by the atmosphere of learning and high expectations that pervade. Both parents and students find the staff approachable, quick to respond and willing to 'go the extra mile'; they also believe that the school is very well led and managed. Some parents consider that the curriculum is narrow and regret the loss of food technology, textiles and Spanish, and reductions in the time available for physical education and sport.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

Inspectors judged that there are no areas of significant weakness in the school or sixth form and that the minor areas for improvement raised with the school already feature in its development plan.

THE SIXTH FORM AT COLYTON GRAMMAR SCHOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

The sixth form is **excellent** and **highly cost-effective**. Results of AS/A-level examinations consistently place the school at or near the top of national performance tables; in the light of their attainment on entry to the school, achievement is outstanding. Students enter the sixth form with excellent GCSE results, make rapid progress and go on to achieve outstanding results at AS and A-level. Students are very skilled learners and have outstandingly positive attitudes. Teaching is consistently of very high quality and excellent leadership is driving standards still higher.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Standards are high throughout the sixth form; many students make outstanding progress.
- Teaching is scholarly and consistently of high quality.
- Students manage their own learning and have excellent learning skills.
- Assessment of students' work and progress is excellent and helps them achieve.
- Students work in partnership with their teachers to achieve success.
- Students act as role models and leaders for younger students.
- Those who lead the sixth form and the school as a whole focus on achieving success for all and on year-on-year improvement.

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

Subject

Evaluation

English, languages and communication

English

French

Very good: students achieve high standards because teaching is consistently very good.

Excellent: students make excellent progress and achieve very high standards.

Mathematics

Mathematics

Excellent: standards are outstanding because of excellent teaching.

Science

Biology

Excellent: standards are outstanding and achievement is very high because of the very stimulating, challenging teaching.

Humanities

History

Very good: students maintain the high levels of achievement established earlier in the school because teaching is very good.

Engineering, technology and manufacturing

Technology (product design)

Very good: students achieve very well because of the quality of teaching and the partnership between teachers and students

Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel

Physical education

Excellent: results and students' achievement are excellent because teaching is consistently very good and often excellent.

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 **advice, guidance and support** provided for students are **excellent**. Their work is assessed regularly and rigorously, and they are given clear guidance on what needs to be done to achieve their predicted standard of work. Careers guidance is excellent and ensures that students are well prepared for the next stages in their lives.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is led and managed in the same **outstanding** way as the school as a whole. Every aspect, from long-term vision to day-to-day running and the support for individual students, is run extremely well and helps drive up standards.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students speak very highly of the sixth form. They value the partnership with teachers, summed up in the balance between challenge and support in teaching and in the quality of advice and guidance they receive. They appreciate how well the school and the sixth form are run.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

The most striking feature of the school is the **excellent achievement** of its students. Attainment on entry to the school is well above average overall, but many students are of just-above-average ability: all make excellent progress, leading to **very high standards** and outstanding results in tests and examinations.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The progress (value added) students make is amongst the highest in the country.
- All students - male and female, and those of all abilities and aptitudes - make equally good progress and achieve equally well.
- Test and examination results at the ages of 14, 16 and 18 place the school in the top handful of schools in the country in all recent years.
- The proportion of the highest grades (A*/A at GCSE and A/B at A-level) achieved is exceptional and continues to rise.
- Students' ability to use language and their mathematical skills are excellent, and their information and communications technology (ICT) skills are very good.

Commentary

Results have improved continuously since 1992 and for many years have placed the school at the top of national league tables at all levels. This has been achieved by ambitious, skilled and determined leadership to achieve consistently high quality. For over a decade, school leaders have sought small-scale, continuous improvements to teaching, the ethos of achievement, the individualised targets and the partnership for learning across the school; all are now excellent. As a result, students become very skilled learners with splendid attitudes to their work. Very high and continuously rising achievement and examination results follow; results have consistently exceeded the ambitious targets the school has set itself.

1. Students enter the school with well-above-average attainment in the national tests at the end of primary school. The tests of ability in language and mathematical ability students take to gain entry to the school show that, whereas many are of exceptional ability, around 40 per cent are just above average and the school admits a few students each year whose ability is below average in either mathematics or language.
2. Results in the tests at age 14 therefore prove outstanding progress; in English, mathematics and science, 99 per cent of students achieve Level 6 (above the expected level for this age) or above. Mathematics and science results are truly exceptional; 97 per cent achieve at least Level 7 and two-thirds Level 8.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	43.6 (44.7)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	48.7 (48.4)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	43.7 (43.4)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 117 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

3. Progress to GCSE and A-level remains rapid. For many years, all students have achieved at least five higher-grade (A* - C) results at GCSE; in 2003, over 80 per cent of all grades were A*

or A and less than 3 per cent below B. Results are exceptional in many subjects, with over 90 per cent A*/A results in six subjects in 2003. The school's target to exceed 90 per cent A*/A results across the piece in the next two years is achievable.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	100 (100)	52 (50)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	48.7 (48.4)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	43.7.(43.4)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	59.7 (58.2)	34.7 (34.7)

There were 113 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

4. Results in both the end of Year 9 tests and at GCSE are well above the average for selective schools and represent a further significant improvement on the excellent results reported in the last inspection, especially in the proportion achieving the highest grades and levels. Results have improved continuously since the early 1990s, when they were below the grammar school average in all respects.
5. The standard of work seen during the inspection mirrors these very high and rising standards. Students of all ages and in all subjects reach very high standards. They write and speak at length, presenting with enormous care answers that are detailed, well-argued and sophisticated. They are exceptionally skilled users of language, enabling them to tackle high-level tasks such as using a range of disparate sources to construct a complex argument in history. Their ability to use mathematics is also excellent: they can apply what they know to unfamiliar situations in, for example, science, design and geography. Their ICT skills are very good, as shown in the portfolios of work from all subjects that they compile in the upper part of the school. Their self-confidence and oral skill is shown by their ability to speak *ex tempore* and at length in a foreign language.
6. Achievement is therefore excellent and the value added by the school, from the end of primary school to the tests at age 14 and thence to GCSE, is among the highest in the country. Although students enter the school with well-developed mathematics and English skills, in other subjects, such as technology, art, music and physical education, their attainment is variable and average overall. Standards in these subjects are well above average by the end of Year 9 and very high at GCSE. Progress is therefore demonstrably very rapid and achievement is very good in almost all subjects and excellent in several; the cumulative effect is excellent.

The school is inclusive by lowering the barriers to learning for each student. It has a large number of students with gifts and talents, a small number with a learning difficulty and a significant number whose entry scores are around the national average and for whom the rapid pace of the school might cause a problem. For each, the school asks 'what does this student need us to do so that s/he will achieve his/her potential?'. As a result, all students achieve well and the gifted and talented shine in a great range of fields.

7. The school rejects the concept of 'inclusion by group' ('those with learning difficulties', 'gifted and talented'), replacing it with 'inclusion by individual need': the strengths and need for support for each student are identified and teachers match tasks, questions and support to individuals. As a result, all students achieve well:
 - male and female students achieve equally well;
 - the large number of gifted and talented students achieve outstanding examination results, gain representative honours in sport and perform and display their artistic excellence publicly;

- those who enter the school with relatively low attainment do exceptionally well. All who enter with below-average and near-average 11-plus scores go on to achieve well-above-national-average results at GCSE, with most of their subject grades A* or A;
 - the small number of students with a learning difficulty, most of them with a serious hearing impairment, achieve as well as their peers - exceptionally well. As well as attaining very high academic standards, these students improve their skills as independent learners and, particularly those with hearing impairments, grow considerably in confidence and self-esteem.
8. Parents and students, in their responses to the questionnaire and in discussion with inspectors, expressed their delight with the standards achieved in the school. Over 97 per cent of parents agreed with the statement that their children are making good progress. Every single student who replied agreed with the statement that they are expected to do well.

Sixth form

9. Pass rates at AS and A-level have been close to 100 per cent for several years; almost 50 per cent of all grades (over three-quarters excluding general studies) are A and only a handful below a C. Results at A-level in 2003 were the best of any mixed school in England and were outstanding in a number of subjects: 80 per cent of the large number taking mathematics gained an A grade, as did half of the 100 students who studied sciences, over half of those who studied foreign languages, art and geography, and all of those who did sociology. Everyone passed general studies, well over half at grade A or B. Students' quite excellent learning skills (such as their ability to research and to work both collaboratively and independently) and their key skills (their literacy, ability to use mathematics and ICT) ensure that they can tackle complex concepts and arguments with confidence.
10. Achievement remains excellent in the sixth form. Measures of value added are hard to apply fairly because of the exceptional results at GCSE: almost all students reach or exceed the ambitious target grades set for them, mostly As and Bs. Just as in the main school, students of both genders and all abilities achieve equally well.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students' attitudes towards school and their work are **excellent**. Their behaviour, attendance and punctuality are also **excellent**. Provision for their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have excellent attitudes towards their learning, helping them achieve high standards.
- Excellent behaviour and relationships throughout the school enable students to work in partnership with teachers, greatly benefiting their academic achievement.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is excellent and contributes significantly towards their personal development.
- Attendance levels are well above the national average and there is no unauthorised absence.

Commentary

11. Students respond well to the high quality teaching - particularly its rapid pace and intellectual challenge - in all subjects. The school has a culture of 'highest possible achievement' and this fosters the excellent attitudes that students display towards their learning. Teaching staff have consistently high expectations of students and both coursework and homework are completed without exception. Students participate actively in the wide range of out-of-school activities provided for them despite the long distance the majority live from the school.
12. Behaviour in lessons is excellent, as it was in the last inspection. Students are courteous to each other and to visitors, and movement around the site is exceptionally calm. Working relationships between students and staff are excellent and are based on mutual respect.

Effective learning partnerships have been established and these are a significant feature of the school, making a major contribution to the high standards students achieve. Exclusions are almost unheard of.

13. The spiritual, moral and social and cultural development of students is excellent and this aspect of the school's work has improved significantly since the previous inspection. The school carries out a regular audit of its provision for students' personal development. Opportunities to promote students' spiritual development are taken in most subjects, especially in the excellent discussions in religious education. In high-quality assemblies, students are encouraged to reflect - on one occasion about how Fauré, who had no particular belief, could write music that encapsulated the spiritual beliefs of others. To honour Holocaust Memorial Day, students sat in silence reflecting on the horror of man's inhumanity to man whilst statements of concentration camp internees were read, accompanied by music from Fauré's Requiem. Students reflect on issues of belief and form judgements that enable them to develop personal insights. They are well aware of right and wrong, and have a very clear understanding of what is expected of them. This is reflected well in their concern for others, in the school and the wider community. A fine example of the relationship between students is the way that those with a hearing impairment are supported and included fully in all group activities by their peers. Social development is fostered throughout the school through an awareness of the need to be sensitive to others, developing tolerance through listening to views that differ from their own, as well as carrying out numerous tasks that contribute towards the smooth running of the school community. Students' understanding and tolerance of all cultures are powerfully encouraged throughout the curriculum.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of students

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	725	1	0
White – Irish	2	0	0
White – any other White background	7	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	4	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	5	0	0
Chinese	5	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	8	0	0

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

Attendance

14. Students' attendance is excellent - well above the national average, with no unauthorised absence for several years. This represents a significant increase on the already high standards reported in the last inspection. The school expects full attendance and monitors rigorously to ensure this target is met. Parents support the school fully by ensuring that their children attend. Occasionally difficulties with school transport means that students are late arriving at the start of the day, but otherwise punctuality to lessons is excellent.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data:	3.3
National data:	7.2

Unauthorised absence	
School data:	0.0
National data:	1.1

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

Sixth form

15. The attitudes, behaviour, attendance and punctuality of sixth form students are all **excellent**, as are their attitudes to learning and their personal development. They are highly motivated and very hard working, with a very clear focus on achieving their best in all they do. Students are excellent role models for younger students and provide excellent support to students new to the school. They act as ambassadors of the school, as prefects within houses and attached to year groups, run out-of-school activities and support the learning of younger students. Recently, prefects organised an inter-house art and music competition which was a great success and is still talked about with obvious enthusiasm. Through their interaction with the main school, sixth form students help raise the aspirations of younger students. Discussion is mature and thoughtful in all subjects, especially in general studies and critical thinking, and promotes students' personal development extremely well. Attendance in the sixth form is excellent.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides an **excellent** education to all of its students; teaching, learning, support and guidance are all excellent and the curriculum is very good.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching is **excellent** because a very high proportion is of the very highest quality and very little is less than good. The consistency leads to **excellent learning**: students are skilled, hard-working learners.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' achievement is excellent because of very good teaching.
- Students develop high-level skills as independent, highly-motivated learners because they are systematically taught how to learn in each of the subjects they study.
- Teaching is stimulating, enthusiastic and challenging.
- The progress students make is both tracked and supported by excellent use of assessment throughout the school: assessment makes a fundamental contribution to students' achievement.
- Students, and their teachers, know how well they are doing and how to improve.
- Any support needed is rapidly identified and put in place.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in number and (%) of lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
27 (18%)	83 (57%)	31 (21%)	6 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

16. Students' learning and achievement are excellent because of the consistent focus throughout the school on ensuring that teaching is of the highest possible quality. The school challenges

and supports staff to ensure that they, in their turn, offer similarly high levels of support and challenge to their students in the lessons they teach. This is a school in which expectations are high - teachers and students expect a lot of each other and each individual expects a lot of her or himself. In all subjects, teaching is consistently stimulating, enthusiastic and challenging; questioning and discussion regularly promote analytical and investigative thinking for the youngest as well as for sixth form students. On the rare occasions when teaching is sound (it is never unsatisfactory), this is because the pace drops, tasks are not sufficiently challenging or there is limited encouragement to explore beyond the obvious.

The school fosters the **development of students' learning skills and their development as self-managing, autonomous learners**. These skills are taught from the day students enter the school: in their early years, they are taught how to learn - how to think, listen to the teacher and each other, research, set out an argument, work independently and collaboratively. Library skills are given a high priority in Year 7 to ensure that students are able to research independently, using a variety of sources of information. ICT skills are developed across all subjects and assessed through a portfolio approach. Students in the upper part of the school therefore have excellent skills and attitudes to their work and can make use of all the opportunities provided. Teachers are skilled at answering questions with other questions to help students discuss and explore. No copying whatsoever was seen during the inspection.

18. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subjects and regularly evaluate their teaching to improve it still further. This, when combined with students' excellent attitudes, ensures that learning is excellent throughout the school: teachers see learning as a joint endeavour with students.
19. Improvements in the teaching of literacy throughout the curriculum have been very well led to ensure that there is a consistent approach to developing students' ability to use written language for thinking and learning. This approach has been extended through a similar focus on how teachers and students use spoken language. The development of literacy has been a key factor in achieving the outstanding results in mathematics and science.
20. The excellent teaching is underpinned by excellent use of assessment. Students' work is formally assessed at least once each term in each subject in each year group. Students' commitment to work is informally assessed and reported to parents. Students who are under-achieving or who show insufficient commitment are identified and action plans rapidly put into place. Very good use is made of the data about the performance of students to monitor their progress and to plan further learning, and also to evaluate the quality of what the school is doing and how to improve it. Marking and assessment are thoroughly understood by students, as a result of which target setting is precise and students have a clear understanding of how well they are doing and of what they need to do to improve still further. Almost all departments make very good use of data to track students' achievement. Homework is regularly set and marked and there are tight procedures for ensuring that it is completed and handed in on time. Although marking does not always include extensive written suggestions of how improvements might be made, students are made well aware of this through discussion.
21. The excellent teaching ensures that all groups of students make very good progress. Students with special educational needs benefit from the very high quality teaching that permeates the school. Those with hearing impairments receive excellent support from the learning support assistants (LSAs). Teachers have striven hard to ensure that they are knowledgeable about both the difficulties faced by students and the methods that will enable them to learn. For example, teachers know where to stand and how to speak to allow students to lip-read. The partnership between teachers and LSAs is exemplary. Not only do they work extremely well together during lessons but, beforehand, they design resources to remove the barriers to learning which the students will meet in that lesson, such as in group discussions and when watching videos. The quality of this preparatory work and the techniques employed during lessons are excellent.

22. Gifted and talented students are identified against consistently applied criteria and throughout the school there is additional support and appropriately matched provision to challenge and extend them. The tasks they are given and the way their work is assessed recognises that some may have higher thinking skills even though they might not attain the highest grades in conventional assessments.
23. The quality of teaching and learning has improved still further since the last inspection when the inspection report commented that the school was remarkable for the proportion of teaching which was judged to be good, very good or excellent. This continuing improvement is a result of the consistent focus on students' learning at all levels in the school, the rigorous and routine practice of self-review and on the total absence of complacency. It is a remarkable achievement.

The curriculum

The curriculum is **very good**. The provision of activities outside lessons is **excellent**. The school's accommodation and resources for learning are **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum results in very high standards throughout the school and for all students.
- The school's provision of courses suited to the needs of very-able students is a real strength.
- There is an excellent range of enrichment opportunities provided outside the school day.
- The excellent careers programme contributes well to guiding students' next stage of learning.

Commentary

24. The school provides courses in Years 7 to 9 that meet the requirements of the National Curriculum, supplemented by a very good programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE), including careers education. The curriculum is very inclusive, supporting exceptionally well the small number of students with a special educational need and the many who are gifted and talented. A highly innovative acceleration programme is being phased in to complete this phase of the National Curriculum, which normally takes three years, in two, eventually allowing more time for AS and A-level studies. At this very early stage the programme continues to meet the needs of these students well. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is well conceived and, within the financial restrictions of a small school, offers a range of options to supplement a large core. The current range of choices is relatively limited: the narrowing of the curriculum in response to the need to rationalise and ensure cost-effectiveness has led to the loss of some highly successful courses such as Spanish. Provision for ICT has been greatly improved since the last inspection and is now very good.
25. Since the last inspection, the number of students with special educational needs has risen slightly and their difficulties have become more profound. The school has responded extremely well to this challenge by raising teachers' and LSAs' expertise, to ensure that their students reach the very high standards of which they are capable. Students with special educational needs have access to the full curriculum and the requirements of their Statements are met in full because of the level of support they receive from the skilled, trained LSAs. In addition, the school is adept at identifying and implementing a programme of individual support for students who, whilst not having special needs in the conventional sense, are comparatively low attainers. These students make significant progress between the ages of 11 and 14 and go on to achieve very high grades at GCSE.
26. There is a rich and varied programme of extra-curricular activities for all students. The activities are carefully planned and many complement provision in lessons, such as science and ICT clubs. There are activities to suit everyone including choir, brass band, book club, 'Young Enterprise', a wide variety of sports, foreign language exchanges, The Duke of Edinburgh award, charity events, Christian Union, Ten Tors, language speaking practice, debating, creative writing and 'Carnegie Children's' Book award'. Students respond positively and achieve

very well, particularly in music and sports. Participation is monitored and benefits are evaluated. Visits by experts in many subjects are well established. The extensive range of activities is well supported by students - for example, over half of all students participate in inter-house sporting activities.

27. The school benefits from a very well-planned careers programme which concentrates on progression to the school sixth form and then higher education; those who choose to move to other schools or colleges are also very well advised. A combination of work-shadowing and events such as industry day ensures that students can make appropriate choices about future employment.
28. Staffing is very good and matches the needs of the curriculum and the students. Teachers are well-qualified and knowledgeable subject specialists; even when there are temporary teachers to cover for illness or maternity, teaching and learning quality remain at least sound and students continue to achieve very well. The induction programme for new staff is excellent, so that teachers new to the school rapidly adopt the school's norms of high expectation and challenge. The work of support staff is excellent: the contribution to high standards made by the business manager, LSAs, technicians, reception, office, catering and site staff is described elsewhere in this report.
29. Accommodation and resources are good. A well-planned rolling programme of improvements has resulted in excellent new buildings, such as the sixth form block and the sports hall. The school site and the surrounding grounds have been attractively remodelled and are immaculately maintained; students respect the environment they work in and play their part in its upkeep. Some inadequate buildings remain: technology, music and art rooms are too small and one set of science laboratories is in need of renewal. However, there is a four-year plan to tackle all of these problems and its priorities are in the right order. Even in the small classrooms, teachers manage the situation so that it does not impact negatively on students' learning and achievements.
30. Resources are well matched to the needs of the curriculum. The library is well stocked and managed and supports the development of students' learning skills very well.

Sixth form

31. The school offers a wide range of AS and A-level courses well matched to the needs of those staying in the sixth form, providing a very good basis for continuing their education and for progression to higher education. All students also follow a general studies course to A-level. This course also addresses 'critical thinking', in which students take an examination and which greatly helps them develop as reflective and independent learners. Their experience is further broadened by the opportunity to take recreational physical education for one lesson a week and the many opportunities to participate in activities out of lessons. Skilled sixth form students volunteer to run clubs for younger students. Requirements for religious education are fully met.
32. Staffing, accommodation and resources for the sixth form are very good. In addition to the facilities available in the main school, sixth form students have a purpose-built centre providing excellent facilities for independent study and social interaction. This very good provision supports learning and achievement very effectively.

Care, guidance and support

The provision of support, advice and guidance based on monitoring is **excellent**. The steps taken to ensure the students' health and welfare are also **excellent**. The involvement of students through seeking, valuing and acting on their views is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The investment the school has made in a high-quality pastoral system provides excellent support and guidance for students.
- Academic monitoring procedures are excellent.
- The induction programme for students entering the school in Year 7 is excellent.
- The respect accorded to students' views and students' active involvement in the day-to-day life of the school and its environment contribute significantly to their personal development and sense of responsibility.

Commentary

33. Assistant headteachers act as heads of main school and sixth form, overseeing the progress and development of their year groups, building strong relationships with the students and their families and thus helping the students learn well. This very good knowledge of students and their backgrounds helps the school to provide support when needed. Students are known well by all staff and feel happy to approach them for help if experiencing personal or academic difficulties. All aspects of child protection and health and safety are properly and carefully managed.
34. Academic monitoring of students' progress is excellent. Regular assessments, including homework, ensure that students who are underachieving or struggling are quickly identified and action plans drawn up in agreement with students and parents. Students are given a time in which to complete their homework and parents are asked to sign if work is incomplete. This enables teachers to address any lack of understanding immediately and offer tutorial sessions at lunchtime or after school. Students come to the school from a wide geographical area and great care is taken in creating tutor groups and helping them settle in - for example, older students are nominated to meet new students near home on their first day so they know someone on the bus. A huge investment is made in helping students learn to accept responsibility for their own learning so that, by the time they reach Year 9, they are very confident and independent learners. The excellent pastoral support students receive underpins the success they achieve in examinations.
35. In addition to the school's standard monitoring procedures, students with special educational needs all have individual education plans (IEPs). These address specific needs and are also successful in encouraging the students to take greater responsibility for their own learning, thus reducing their dependence upon the LSAs. Annual reviews of Statements comply with statutory requirements and students and parents attend and contribute to these meetings.
36. Excellent careers education is provided for students from Years 7 so that, by the time they reach Year 9, they are well prepared for researching potential careers and responsible for selecting the subjects for GCSE that will give them the qualifications they require. Likewise, by the time they enter Year 11, they are clear about their goals and where they want to continue their post-16 studies. Personal advisers from Connexions provide individual interviews for all students in Year 11 and support the school well in a variety of ways.
37. Students' views are sought regularly in a variety of ways - for example, by evaluating the effectiveness of the PSHE programme. Their views contribute towards the school's annual review of progress. The culture of this school involves open communication; respect is accorded to the views expressed by students, which are taken seriously by both senior staff and the governing body. The school council is currently being reconstituted into a consultative body, working alongside other committees and the governing body to review policies and make decisions. By giving the council a budget, the school will open a formal pathway for students to the governing body, making them accountable for planning, monitoring and reporting on their spending.

Sixth form

38. Students in the sixth form are supported as well as those in the main school and benefit from the same high quality rigorous monitoring of their progress. They are well prepared for sixth form study and benefit from an effective induction programme when entering the sixth form that

prepares them well for the independent style of working and time management skills they need to be successful in their studies. UCAS applications and personal statements are prepared well in advance and the advice and guidance students receive is excellent.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The effectiveness of the school's links with its parents is **excellent**. The school's links with the community, including other schools and colleges, are also **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school's partnership with parents promotes the high standards that students achieve.
- Partnerships with other schools and colleges are excellent and are promoted strongly through the school's leading edge and specialist science school status.
- The school's commitment to the further development of its role in the wider community through its specialist school partners is very positive.

Commentary

39. An effective working partnership has been established with parents, supporting students' learning and the daily life of the school. A group of parents, for example, provides daily support to the librarian and many help with Young Enterprise, Duke of Edinburgh Award and Mock and Bar Trials. Because students come from a wide geographical area, parents have organised transport rotas to enable students to attend after-school activities. The Parents' Association (PA) is active and is used as a sounding board by the school for discussing proposed changes to the school and the annual development plan. The PA was instrumental in raising funds to support the school's application for specialist school status. Focus evenings are organised by the school in response to parental requests on topics such as school inspection and drug and alcohol abuse. Parents are expected to take an active role in monitoring homework and, if students fail to complete their work in the time allocated, parents have to sign to say that children have spent the required amount of time. This enables the school to identify quickly where problems are occurring in students' understanding. Parents are involved in the drawing up and review of the action plans that support their child's learning in these circumstances. Information evenings ensure that parents are fully informed of the study requirements for both GCSE and sixth form. Reports to parents, both interim and annual, ensure they know how their child is progressing and what s/he needs to do to improve. The high standards the students achieve are directly related to this very effective partnership that has been established between the school and its parents. Staff take great care to ensure that students' well-being and confidence are nurtured, since they acknowledge that the demands placed on students are high. Parents expressed an unusually high degree of satisfaction with the school and what it provides for their children.
40. There are excellent partnerships with other schools and colleges. Arrangements for the induction of students from primary schools are excellent, especially considering how numerous and widespread those schools are. The school is the leading provider for enrichment activities for gifted and talented students from rural primary schools and liaises very effectively with its primary partners in respect of all students, including those with special educational needs. Parents and a range of specialists from the education authority, speech and language therapists, a language development teacher, the Cochlear Implant Centre and the Connexions service are all involved in the support of students with special educational needs.
41. Its specialist school and leading edge status confer on Colyton a role to support other schools within the region in its areas of specialism - science and gifted and talented students. In conjunction with its specialist school partner, the NHS Trust, the school was turned into a hospital for one day so that pupils from four primary schools could experience first hand what it is like to be a patient. The school is equally active in secondary schools, working regularly with ten partners, sharing expertise and even staffing. The following examples testify to the variety of innovative activities organised in Colyton's specialist areas:

- promotion of healthy living styles throughout the community through health service screening and liaison with groups involved in health-promoting physical activities;
- liaison with health service organisations to raise awareness of career opportunities at all levels;
- close liaison with the local community school to share A-level science teaching;
- sharing expertise in the teaching of mathematics and science with other secondary schools;
- the school spearheads work for gifted and talented students in subjects such as mathematics and modern foreign languages.

It is planned to develop the school as a resource centre for adults who want to research the NHS as a potential career path. There is little large-scale business local to this rural school but links have been established with business and industry further afield for placements that support the work of the classroom or give students experience of the world of work.

Sixth form

42. Sixth form links with other schools, colleges, parents and the community are as **excellent** as those in the main school, such as the help provided by sixth form students to local primary schools to help them with practical work in science. Links with universities are excellent, including video links with Warwick, Bristol and Plymouth Universities and in the future with Birmingham and Cardiff, where a lot of the school's students go to study medicine.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The main keys to the school's success and improvement are its **excellent leadership** - the sustaining vision that success for all can be achieved through an endless series of small-scale improvements - backed by equally **excellent management and governance**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The results of excellent leadership and management have been sustained improvements in examination results, teaching and learning quality, and school ethos.
- The headteacher has ensured that the whole school community shares his vision of success for each individual student through high-quality learning.
- The vision is translated into reality through excellent use of data to evaluate strengths and weaknesses and to plan precise improvements.
- The school runs smoothly and is outstandingly well managed, including financially, enabling teachers to focus on the raising of standards through high-quality teaching.
- The school's resources are of high quality and decisions about their deployment are made on the basis of improving learning and achievement.
- Governors make a major contribution to the school's success: they are genuine critical friends.
- The school provides excellent value for money.

Commentary

43. In the last inspection report, leadership, management and governance were described as 'excellent' and the track record of school leaders, especially the headteacher, in bringing about sustained improvement was highly praised. That the school's performance has accelerated in every way since then is clear evidence that those judgements remain accurate. Student and parents both recognise how well the school is run: 99 per cent of the 400 parents who replied to the questionnaire said that the school is well led and many commented with great warmth about the accessibility and responsiveness of the headteacher and other senior staff. Over 700 students replied to their questionnaire: every single one said that this is a good school to attend, that they are expected to work hard and that the school is well run: these figures are extraordinary.
44. The quality and improvement have been brought about by the headteacher and the members of the leadership team relentlessly asking two questions:

- ‘what does this individual need to ensure that s/he achieves the very best s/he can?’: the school is highly inclusive by helping each individual achieve potential;
- ‘how can each subject refine its practice so as to raise its performance every year?’: huge improvements have been made over more than a decade (see para 4) through the cumulative effect a very large number of small steps in the same direction.

Based on this twin approach, **the school’s approach to target setting is outstanding.** Targets for individual students are based on their previous performance plus a large element for challenge. GCSE targets are very ambitious - around 90 per cent for A* and A grades, never below a B. Students’ success in achieving their targets is exceptionally high. Although the ability of the intake varies from year to year, targets for subjects and for the whole school go up every year and are based on what was achieved last year plus a factor for the known improvement rate: again, these very ambitious targets have been met or exceeded every year.

45. The headteacher and senior staff, especially the members of the leadership team, are very skilled in knowing which small-scale improvements will make the difference and they ensure that the focus of attention is always on improving teaching, curriculum and relationships so as to improve learning and achievement. Each member of the leadership team leads on major themes, such as the acceleration project, professional development of staff or students’ individual learning needs. Their leadership is distinguished by flair and meticulous planning. Teaching by senior staff and subject leaders frequently provides excellent role models for other staff. The leaders of almost all subjects powerfully support the ambitious drive for continuous improvement because they are skilled at self-evaluation and improvement planning in their subject areas and because they monitor teaching and learning carefully.
46. Governance is of unusually high quality. Governors combine visibility in the school - most are frequent visitors and attend its public functions - with active support for its plans and ambitions and with critical friendship of the highest quality. Many governors have devoted hours of their time outside meetings to research best value in projects and to labour - often physically - on the school’s behalf. Chairs of committees know with precision the school’s strengths and weaknesses in their areas of responsibility and can show how they have drawn up, researched and costed plans to address areas which need improvement. All governors understand and share the school’s vision and challenge the senior staff regularly and shrewdly to show how that vision is being achieved. The school’s governors, like its senior managers, are excellent strategic thinkers: the two groups work together, challenging each other as they go, to think through with meticulous care the implications of any proposed change such as the acceleration project for staffing, accommodation, resourcing and for students’ welfare and self-confidence, planning several years ahead.
47. The school’s management systems are also excellent and form the basis for all improvement planning. At the individual student level, data from the tracking of progress and from the monitoring of teaching and learning enable teaching methods to be fine-tuned in order to help all students achieve their best. At the whole-school level, self-evaluation systems support innovation, as described in the previous paragraph in respect of the acceleration project.
48. Financial management is outstanding. Governors and the business manager have the clearest understanding of the school’s priorities and ambitions and they monitor every aspect of spending with the greatest care, benchmarking against similar schools and making clear judgements about the effectiveness of their decisions. The support provided by the administrative and site staff is of the highest quality, ensuring that the welcome is friendly and efficient and that the site is impeccably maintained. Students recognise how well the school is looked after and play their part in keeping it entirely free of litter and graffiti.

Governors pursue the principles of best value relentlessly: when reviewing tenders, they visit other organisations where potential contractors have worked, assessing the quality of their work and seeking views of their reliability. The school manages all building projects itself, operating where possible through local contractors in order to be able to monitor contracts closely and insisting on tight deadlines and no

cost-overruns. As a result, they have achieved outstanding value for money in new buildings such as the sports hall and in re-modelling parts of the site.

49. The very high standards attained, the progress made by students of all abilities and the excellent teaching and learning, all within expenditure below the average of similar schools, all add up to a school providing excellent value for money.

Sixth form

50. The sixth form is led and managed in the same outstanding way as the school as a whole. Every aspect, from long-term vision to day-to-day running and the support for individual students, is run extremely well and helps drive up standards. The school is unusual in monitoring sixth form teaching as thoroughly as it does that in the main school. Governors are as well versed in the needs and progress of the sixth form as they are in the affairs of the school as a whole. The sixth form is highly cost-effective and lives within its means.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	£2,492,719	Balance from previous year	£400,694
Total expenditure	£2,366,278	Balance carried forward to the next	£527,136 *
Expenditure per pupil	£3,193		

* Balances were large at the time of the inspection because the school was awaiting a bill for £500,000 for the balance of payment for the sports hall.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

In this curriculum area, the school provides courses to GCSE in English language and literature, French and German, all of which were inspected in detail.

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students make very good progress and achieve very well.
- Students' attitudes, behaviour and motivation are excellent.
- Teaching is very good.
- Very good use of assessment and thorough and detailed marking contribute effectively to the progress students make.
- The range of reading in Years 10 and 11 lacks breadth.

Commentary

51. Students make very good progress in English in relation to their prior attainment. On entry to the school, students' attainment levels in English are well above average. By the end of Year 9, standards achieved are very high. Progress is maintained in Years 10 and 11 and attainment at GCSE is very high compared to the national average and that of similar schools. Both boys and girls make good progress and teachers of English have successfully narrowed the gap in attainment between boys and girls through well-chosen strategies. Within the context of the overall exceptional levels of attainment in the school, performance data indicate that students achieve slightly less well in English at GCSE than they do in the other subjects they study.
52. Students' attitudes and behaviour in English are excellent. They respond well to challenge and participate actively and enthusiastically in lessons. They discuss and reflect to a high standard and cooperate very well with each other. In a minority of lessons this facility with discussion is not sufficiently directed by teachers in order to ensure that it leads to learning and that all students are involved.
53. Teaching is very good. The best teaching is planned around clear learning objectives and presents carefully-structured challenge to individual students. The teaching of writing is a strength of the department. Students learn how to write well in a variety of forms and styles as a result of systematic and explicit teaching. Teachers' marking of written work is detailed, thoughtful and constructive. Regular common assessment tasks, including imaginative and well-planned opportunities for oral work, are used well to track individual students' progress. The development of reading is well supported by the scheme of work for Years 7 to 9 and through detailed critical study of poetry, prose and drama for GCSE. An innovative 'internet book café' project is stimulating students' interest in reading through the creative use of ICT, strongly led by the students themselves. The range of prose texts studied in Years 10 and 11 is constrained by the choice prescribed for examination and, as a result, lacks breadth and challenge appropriate for students of high ability.
54. The department is well led. There is a clear focus on developing the literacy skills of all students and promoting their enjoyment and understanding of literary and non-literary texts. Well-chosen strategies, such as the choice of texts and tasks for assessment, have led to improvements in standards, particularly those achieved by boys. The analysis of performance to identify the

scope for still further improvement in English, to bring its results into line with those of other subjects, is not as sharp as it should be.

55. Management of the department is very good. A very good scheme of work for younger students has been adapted to enable an accelerated curriculum to be covered in Years 7 and 8. The provision for drama in this two-year curriculum design is, however, not yet secured. There are good systems in place for the regular monitoring of students' progress. Systematic observation of teaching and professional dialogue about teaching are carried out and contribute to further refinement of the high-quality teaching. As a result of these actions, standards achieved have risen from the already-high levels reported in the last inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

56. Students have very highly-developed skills in written and spoken language. The school has very effectively adapted and extended the literacy strand of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy in its own planning for literacy throughout the curriculum. Through well-planned and deliberate teaching about written and spoken language, students acquire a strong grasp of the vocabulary and the range of written forms they need to use in different subjects. Literacy has, for example, been a major factor in the exceptional results achieved in mathematics and science. Reading is very well supported by the excellent library and by the library awards scheme operated by the school's librarian.

Modern foreign languages

Provision in modern foreign languages is excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students make excellent progress and achieve exceptionally high standards in all aspects of modern foreign languages by the end of Year 11.
- A combination of very good teaching, excellent response from the students and an ethos which encourages learning results in excellent achievement in all year groups.
- The department is led and managed very well, resulting in a highly effective team of teachers who have very high expectations and work very hard to achieve them.
- A wide range of teaching methods and very good use of resources, particularly ICT, help students to learn and contribute to the very high levels of motivation shown by them.

Commentary

57. Students' achievement in modern foreign languages throughout the school is excellent. They make rapid progress in all year groups, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Most enter with little or no experience of a foreign language and, by the end of Year 9, standards in French are already very high and by the end of Year 11 the proportion of students reaching the highest levels is very impressive. The GCSE results in 2003 were outstanding; they were far above the national average, with over four-fifths achieving an A*/A grade and half of them at A*. The results in German¹ were almost as impressive. The results in Spanish, studied by a quarter of the year group as a second foreign language, were quite exceptional, with almost 90 per cent achieving an A*. Students performed extremely well in languages compared with the other subjects they study and compared with national averages. Since the last inspection, results have continued to improve because of significant improvement in students' speaking and writing skills, in which they now show an equal level of outstanding competence to that achieved in reading and listening.

¹ Students taking GCSE in 2003 had studied either French or German as their first foreign language from Year 7. All students studied Spanish as their second foreign language in Year 9 and a quarter opted to continue Spanish as a GCSE option in Years 10 and 11. The system currently in operation is for all students to study French from Year 7 through to GCSE. German is then studied as a second language in Year 9, with students having the option to take the subject through to GCSE. Spanish is no longer offered as a second foreign language and the students who took GCSE Spanish in 2003 were the last to have had the opportunity to do so.

58. These excellent achievements arise because the school's ethos, the teachers and the students all aspire to achieving the highest standards. Teaching is very good overall, varying in individual lessons from good to excellent. All of the teachers are fluent linguists, with excellent command of their respective foreign languages, and one teacher is a native French speaker. In addition, the school has three experienced foreign language assistants. As a result, students have very good models from which to learn their skills and the benefit is particularly noticeable in Years 10 and 11, where students' speaking and writing skills are very well polished by the time they take their GCSE examinations. In most lessons, teachers use a wide range of methods and resources and are constantly seeking innovative ways in which to improve students' understanding. Fast-paced oral work, use of visual aids, paired work and judicious use of the very well-equipped language laboratory keep students on their toes and help them to encounter language in many different situations. The pace and variety of some lessons are improved even further through the occasional use of the computer suite and the more frequent, and excellent, use of an interactive whiteboard. Only one of the four language rooms is equipped with this facility, which means that staff have to vie for its use and often do not have access to it when its use could be beneficial.
59. Relationships between staff and students are excellent and the resulting atmosphere in lessons engenders excellent learning. Students' behaviour throughout the school is excellent. Lessons are leavened with good humour, but students are always treated respectfully and encouraged to participate. Students respond in like manner and are highly motivated and eager to learn. When asked to get on with a task, they do so quickly and willingly. In whole-class activities, the standard of concentration is excellent, although not all students volunteer answers and teachers could do more to draw out the more silent members in each class. However, when working in smaller groups or in pairs, everybody is fully engaged and the work ethos in these sessions is extraordinarily good. The interest shown by students in the few lessons where the teacher places an over-reliance on the use of a textbook and whole-class activities is still commendable, but contrasts starkly with the buzz that is evident in most other lessons when students are given greater opportunity to interact with each other.
60. The department is led and managed very well. The head of department has created a very effective team of highly-motivated staff who have very high expectations of themselves and of the students. This is evident in the considerable amount of their free time teachers give to help students prepare for their oral examinations and in the range and quality of language taught and used in lessons. Staff are not content to teach easily-learnt stock phrases, but seek every opportunity to enrich students' vocabulary by teaching a wide range of expressions and encouraging them to develop a rich vocabulary. Foreign exchanges and visits organised by the staff contribute to the richness of students' experiences within the languages department. The curriculum is very well planned, and excellent and increasing use of ICT is helping to turn the department's scheme of work into a dynamic and interactive document through which staff are able to share good practice. There are very good procedures for keeping track of students' progress, again through effective use of ICT. The department's action plan takes full account of the school's priorities for development and links its own thrust for improvement into the professional development objectives for each member of staff. The department received a glowing report at the last inspection. Since then, it has got even better. Staff are aware of the pressure to maintain such high standards but, through their dedication and commitment to the principle of continual improvement, there is a steely commitment to maintaining, and wherever possible improving, their own very high standards.

MATHEMATICS

In this curriculum area, the school provides a GCSE mathematics course which was inspected in detail.

Provision in mathematics is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' achievement is excellent throughout the school.
- Teachers' use of questioning and the climate they create for mathematical dialogue underpin students' excellent mathematical and personal development.
- The head of department is an excellent role model to staff and students in his focus on learning.
- The department is totally and unanimously committed to improving standards through the development of teaching.
- Planning of topics and lessons is outstanding in its focus on how to extend each individual student's thinking based on thorough assessment.

Commentary

61. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were among the best in the country and well above those of similar schools; almost all students achieved above the expected level. At GCSE, results were equally impressive with almost half of students achieving the highest grade. These results continue an improving trend, raising already very high standards even further.
62. These very high standards are confirmed by work seen during the inspection. Students' standards on entry are well above average; by the end of Year 11 they are among the highest in the country and so progress is very rapid. All students can describe graphical transformations and generate and explain these mathematically. They show exceptional skills in using and applying mathematics in unfamiliar situations and confidently explore concepts such as proof both orally and in writing. This represents excellent achievement throughout the school for all groups and for both boys and girls.
63. Teaching and learning are both excellent. This is an improvement on the last inspection, when they were very good. In individual lessons taught by substantive teachers, teaching was never less than good and nearly half was excellent. Its consistency results in excellent learning. Lessons and topics are extremely thoroughly planned to challenge and extend students' thinking. Assessment is very well used to match work to students' needs. Teachers make outstanding use of probing questions, modelling and discussion to encourage students to explore mathematical reasoning and to comment on each other's ideas. Students thus learn how to experiment with numbers and concepts without fear and they develop self-reliance. For example, in a Year 7 lesson, students were asked to complete number crosses, identify patterns and prove that these always worked. Each student's ideas were welcomed by the teacher and explored with the whole class to explore misconceptions or errors. This approach also fosters excellent personal development so students learn to appreciate other views and work together to solve problems. Students are courteous, co-operative, self-confident and committed to learning. Relationships are excellent. Lessons proceed at a cracking pace, allowing students enough time to try problems and providing further challenge as soon as they are secure in their learning. Teachers make very good use of ICT. For example, in a Year 11 lesson on transformation of functions, a computer program enabled students rapidly to produce graphs of different functions and to concentrate on the effect of, and explanation for, the changes observed. Teachers routinely expect students to go beyond 'the answer' and to reflect on what is happening and why: thus they become inquisitive mathematicians.
64. Leadership is excellent. The head of department leads by example and is an excellent role model for staff and students in his own approach to learning. He has vision and a clear priority, shared by all staff, to improve standards continuously through the development of teaching.

This is evident in, for example, his team-teaching with newer colleagues and his excellent induction of a supply teacher covering a long-term absence. Management is very good. The strengths and weaknesses are known and inform planning for further improvement. Students' knowledge and understanding are carefully monitored and any signs of under-achievement are addressed through action plans, which are highly effective in re-focusing students. The department makes relatively limited use of data analysis to support its otherwise excellent self-evaluation. Improvement since the last inspection has been excellent. Standards have continued to rise and minor issues raised have all been addressed. The department already has plans to improve yet further, addressing all the areas that are not already excellent.

Mathematics across the curriculum

65. Students' mathematical skills are of the highest order and they make superb use of these in a range of contexts. For example, in art and design they show excellent spatial awareness in translating between two- and three-dimensional representations. In ICT, students confidently investigate codes in number bases other than ten, while in science they select appropriate graphs to represent and evaluate their experimental findings. Students confidently apply their learning in different situations without having to be reminded or told to do so.

SCIENCE

The science department provides a broad science course to GCSE (double award) for roughly half of the students and a course leading to GCSE in the three separate sciences (biology, chemistry and physics) for the others. These courses were inspected in detail.

Provision in science is **outstanding**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management of the department are excellent.
- Most teaching is very good or excellent.
- Teachers challenge students to think and find solutions for themselves, leading to very high achievement.
- Relationships between staff and students, and students' attitudes, are excellent and are conducive to very good learning.
- Teaching staff are highly committed and enthusiastic and have very good subject knowledge.
- There is very good assessment and monitoring of students' progress to promote learning.
- Technicians provide very good support for teaching and learning.

Commentary

66. Students' attainment on entry to the school is well above average, but their experience of science varies. By the end of Year 9, their attainment in the national tests is very high, even for selective schools. Achievement is therefore excellent. At GCSE, attainment is also very high even when compared with schools whose students have similar prior attainment. Results at GCSE are exceptional: almost all of those studying separate sciences achieve three grades A*/A, as do over 80 per cent of those studying the combined (double award) course. Achievement by the end of Year 11 is, again, excellent.

67. Teaching is very good overall, much of it outstanding. Teachers are highly knowledgeable and authoritative. Lessons are very well planned and structured to stimulate interest and enthusiasm. Students show high levels of concentration and application. In all years, students are challenged continuously to think and solve problems for themselves, leading to very effective learning. The pace of teaching is rapid and students apply themselves with great diligence and self-motivation. Mutually respectful relationships between teachers and students lead to a very warm and friendly atmosphere and eagerness to learn. The teachers care very much about their students and their learning. As a consequence the students enjoy their studies, work hard and achieve very highly.

68. Assessment and monitoring of the achievement of individual students and of teaching groups are very effective; as a result, students understand their own progress and teachers know what needs to be done to improve it further. Teachers are well aware of the range of prior attainment and potential of their students and pitch their challenge and expectations accordingly.
69. Although the three science subjects are located in different parts of the school, the department's accommodation and resources are good. The new laboratories are very pleasant and the older ones will soon be replaced. ICT resources and their use in lessons to enhance learning are very good and developing rapidly. Learning is inspired by stimulating practical work, facilitated by a highly capable team of technicians who are eager and encouraged to develop their expertise further and play a key role in the work of the department.
70. The outstanding leadership and management provided by the head of science have led to increasingly good examination results over successive years and to the sustained, rapid improvement of an already strong department. She has the enthusiasm and vision to go on developing the work of the department and the achievement of its students. Departmental planning is guided by effective analysis of attainment and by the head of science's responsiveness to the needs and potential of the students and her colleagues. To further the aims of the science college, she has imaginative ideas for developing scientific awareness in local schools and the community, with whom there are already strong links.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The department teaches ICT as a separate subject in Years 7 to 9, as well as ensuring and promoting its use across other subjects. In Years 10 and 11 (and in the sixth form), ICT is not taught as a separate subject, but its use is developed and co-ordinated through the other subjects of the curriculum. Thus students do not enter GCSE examinations in ICT; instead they assemble portfolios of their ICT work drawn from other subjects and these are submitted for assessment for a Key Skills Level 2 award in Years 10 or 11.

Provision for ICT is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management of the subject are excellent.
- Gifted and talented students are challenged to reach high standards.
- Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic.
- Diagnostic assessment of students' abilities enables teachers to set high targets that students successfully strive to achieve.

Commentary

71. When they arrive in school, students' knowledge of ICT varies, but is generally just above average. Excellent leadership has resulted in an ICT curriculum well suited to the needs of all students in the school, especially those who are gifted and talented. As a result, students are attaining standards far beyond those expected and their achievement is therefore very good. All students are set precise and challenging targets for achievement; their progress is monitored through a rigorous diagnostic assessment process and they achieve or exceed their targets.
72. The excellent learning that takes place in their early years at the school means that, by Year 9, students have a very good knowledge and understanding of ICT and are skilled in using it across the subjects they study. Some of the material being used is exemplary. Students in Years 10 and 11 are following a Key Skills course that reinforces earlier learning; they are enthusiastic and skilled in using advanced ICT skills. Considerable progress is made in lessons because of the fast pace and high expectations set by the teachers. Students work very well independently, encouraged by their teachers to learn by discovery and therefore gain skills far beyond expectations. Students enjoy ICT and value the support of their teachers.

73. All teaching is at least good and some is excellent. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic and have established a strong working relationship with their students. They are aware of the students' abilities and always encourage them to excel in their work. Teachers' enthusiasm has encouraged students to produce some stunning work. The feedback from tests and homework is positive and rewards students for good work. Students behave excellently; their attitudes are outstanding and this inevitably leads to an ideal learning environment.
74. The department is very well organised and effective in managing improvement; the many improvements that have been made are carefully consolidated to ensure that they continue to be effective. The well-researched schemes of work include many excellent features such as clear lesson objectives, mapping to the National Curriculum and advice on suitable resources. The school builds students' skills up to levels that will enable them to use ICT independently and effectively. Students are challenged to reach exceptional standards.
75. The ICT team (co-ordinator, teachers, network manager and technicians) has excellent working relationships, working as a team to improve teaching and learning opportunities. The network and equipment are well maintained. The technicians are highly competent and respond rapidly to the needs of the department. The computer to student ratio is slightly below the national average; the networked computer suites are in high demand and just sufficient to meet current demand.
76. At the time of the last inspection, provision for ICT was the one aspect of the school identified as a weakness. Since then, improvement has been very good: there are now four well-equipped and maintained suites of networked computers and 11 classrooms with interactive white boards and there has been a significant improvement in the ICT learning environment. Improvement in ICT across the school has been promoted by excellent leadership: an excellent programme of staff development and careful monitoring of standards. Physical education, mathematics, science, geography, design and technology and modern foreign languages all make very good use of ICT in lessons. Music, religious education, history and art have all improved in the provision and use of ICT since the last inspection, but have only adequate provision, with scope for further improvement. All subjects contribute to the key skills programme in Years 9 and 10.

HUMANITIES

In this curriculum area, the school provides courses to GCSE in history, geography and religious education, all of which were inspected in detail.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very high across the school and are the direct result of very good teaching and students' very good attitudes to learning.
- Students therefore make very good progress and achieve very well.
- Leadership is very good; the department 's vision for learning is excellent and is consistently promoted by all staff.

Commentary

77. Students' experience of history on arrival to the school is uneven; their knowledge is average, but their literacy and learning skills are high. They make very good progress and achieve very well indeed: results at GCSE are very high and the department has a long-standing record of examination success, with all students gaining grades A* - C and a sharply rising percentage

gaining grades A*/A, (almost 100 per cent in 2003). By the end of Year 11, students write fluently and knowledgeably; their grasp of key historical topics is frequently very impressive.

78. Standards and achievement across Years 7 to 9 are also very good. Students have very good levels of knowledge and understanding and many use sources well, though this aspect of their work does not always develop as quickly as other historical skills. Essay work by the end of Year 9 is consistently very good. All students write extensively and confidently and this skill has been successfully targeted as a key focus for improvement by the department. Students' oral work, however, can sometimes be a little too speculative and insufficiently evidence-based. Nonetheless, they all respond readily to the challenge to construct and respond to complex arguments and to link key ideas and causes for themselves, and their sense of purpose and self-confidence reflect their excellent attitudes to learning. Behaviour is always exemplary. What makes history such an exceptional experience is the respect students and teachers have for each other; students genuinely relish learning and contribute readily to class discussion because they know they will receive perceptive and courteous feedback both from their teachers and from their peers. The confidence to 'try ideas out aloud' and to evaluate the contributions of others are key elements in their success and are a direct result of the high expectations that teachers have of them.
79. Teaching is consistently very good and has a profound impact on students' learning and achievement. It is at its best when, through the use of perceptive questioning, teachers generate high-quality discussion and debate. Teachers' subject knowledge is consistently very good and is used very well to sharpen students' understanding and to encourage them to develop their own ideas further. The department makes every effort to tailor teaching to individual need and students with special educational needs are well supported and achieve as well as their peers. Gifted and talented students are accurately identified and receive good support. However, there are times when other students need to be made more aware of the importance of being self-disciplined and precise in their use of language. Marking and assessment practice are consistently excellent and all teachers set their sights high. They constantly encourage students to be reflective and the language of discourse between teacher and student is always sophisticated. Simplistic, incomplete or 'blurted' answers are not accepted. It is teachers' consistent readiness to nurture students' sense of ambition and involvement that most explains this department's splendid record of academic success.
80. Leadership is very good; teachers have an excellent vision for learning in history. The department is also well managed: there are very good-quality schemes of work and other policies which, together with the well-structured improvement plan, ensure that teaching is well co-ordinated and geared to the maintenance of high standards. Systems for monitoring examination success are very good and the department is very reflective about its practice. The department offers good support to the development of students' literacy skills and makes satisfactory use of ICT. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management of the subject are excellent.
- GCSE results are very good and well above the average of similar schools.
- Teaching is consistently very good and sometimes excellent.
- Excellent use is made of performance data to set targets and to plan work.
- There are excellent procedures in place to monitor and evaluate the work of the department.

Commentary

81. Standards are well above the national average and that of similar schools. The standards students attain in geography are well above the level expected nationally for students in Year 9:

in the most recent teacher assessments, three-quarters of the students were at Level 7 and above. In 2003, all students secured GCSE passes at the higher grades and nearly half gained an A* grade. The standards achieved by girls are higher than those of boys.

82. Standards in the current Year 9 are well above average. This represents very good achievement for students, including those students with special educational needs, in relation to when they started at the school in Year 7. Students of all abilities demonstrate very good factual knowledge and understanding of both physical and human geography. They acquire a good range of skills in map work and can undertake detailed geographical enquiries. The quality of students' written work is very good. Numeracy and ICT skills are used very effectively.
83. Standards in the current Year 11 are well above average, representing very good achievement by students who opt for geography. Written work is well structured and shows very good analysis and interpretation of maps and other data. Students' use of technical language is excellent. Coursework is very good. Students are able to plan their work effectively and produce well-structured assignments, which show very good use of geographical skills and techniques. The use of ICT is a strength of their work.
84. Teaching and learning in geography are very good and sometimes excellent. Relationships in the classroom are very good and students display excellent attitudes to their work. Teachers have very good subject knowledge; they are enthusiastic and committed and use a range of effective approaches in the classroom. Planning is very good and students always know what is expected of them. The pace of learning is brisk and students of all abilities are suitably challenged. Students' learning is developed well through the use of a good range of resources including high-quality video material and very good textbooks. In Years 10 and 11 students are very well supported with training in examination techniques. Assessment is very good and provides students with a clear understanding of their achievement and what they need to do to improve.
85. The leadership and management of geography are excellent. Strong departmental teamwork is helping to raise standards. Accommodation and learning resources are of very good quality and meet the needs of the curriculum well. The curriculum is enhanced through a good programme of fieldwork. Excellent use is made of performance data to set targets and to plan work. There are excellent procedures in place to monitor and evaluate the work of the department.
86. There has been a very good improvement in the provision in geography since the previous inspection. The range of fieldwork opportunities has been extended, assessment procedures are now secure and the quality of documentation has improved.

Religious education (RE)

Provision in religious education is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Exceptionally high standards are achieved throughout the school.
- Teaching is usually very good or excellent and never less than satisfactory.
- Leadership and management of the subject are excellent.
- Improved assessment procedures support students' learning and raise expectations.

Commentary

87. Students' attainment on arrival to the school is average. By the age of 14 all are achieving at or beyond the level expected for more-able students by the local syllabus and by the age of 16 all students achieve exceptionally high results at GCSE. In 2003, over 90 per cent of Year 11 students achieved A*/A in the GCSE short course and over 90 per cent of Year 10 students also achieved A*/A grades, after starting the course in Year 9. These students are now well on

track to complete the full course GCSE with similarly high grades. Improvements in assessment and sharing expectations with students are raising standards even higher.

88. At the time of the inspection, much of the teaching in the department was undertaken by temporary staff because of maternity leave. It is a tribute to the temporary teachers themselves, the substantive teachers, the students' learning skills and attitudes and the school's induction programme for teachers that standards and quality were being maintained.
89. Teaching is usually very good or excellent and never less than satisfactory. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of the subject and plan their lessons in detail. They provide clear presentations and are skilful in asking questions that test students' understanding. Lessons have well-sequenced activities that maintain students' interest and enable them to build on previous learning well. In a Year 11 lesson introducing a unit on science and religion, students were able to respond to a video clip exploring the 'Big Bang Theory' using a range of philosophical viewpoints they had explored in Year 10; this is but one example of many of the department's support for students' spiritual development. The quality of discussion was impressive on searching statements such as 'If god exists you should be able to prove it scientifically'. Very effective teaching extends students' thinking through probing questions and thought-provoking written activities. Challenging tasks link learning with contemporary life: in Year 8, for example, students learn about the teachings of the Qur'an by exploring its teaching on the role of women and comparing these with the media portrayal of Muslim women today. Carefully-selected resources stimulate good learning. During a lesson on the incarnation, Year 8 students explored a Christian poem to analyse which phrases depicted Jesus as physically man and spiritually god. Their explanations showed a mature understanding of some very demanding ideas. Students reflect on their own beliefs and values in relation to Christian and other belief systems and so learn more about themselves. In an effective activity, Year 7 students considered some key Sikh beliefs about God, service, right and wrong by positioning themselves on a line between agree and disagree and explaining their reasons. The quality of thought and explanation was excellent, with all students listening carefully to what others have to say. Students show adult and mature relationships when working together.
90. Since the last inspection, the use of new technology to support learning has improved and there are appropriate plans for further development. The use of assessment has also improved. The development of sharply-focused assessment tasks with clear criteria linked to levels, together with self-assessment and clear targets, has helped raise students' expectations and students have responded well.
91. These high standards result from the excellent leadership and management of the subject. The head of department is highly valued by staff and students alike as conscientious and inspirational. Thorough planning, the effective use of monitoring and evaluation enabling the sharing of good teaching and learning practices, and the shared high expectations have ensured high achievement and continuous improvement.

TECHNOLOGY

In technology, the school provides a course to GCSE in design and technology (product design), which was inspected in detail.

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve exceptionally high standards.
- Leadership and management are very good, with very good arrangements in place to sustain improvements.
- Students have very good skills and depth of knowledge because of the very effective teaching.

- Students make very good progress and achieve very well because planning is effectively linked to assessment.

Commentary

92. Results are well above average, with a very high percentage of students reaching the highest levels at the end of Year 9 and A*/A grades at GCSE. Students' standards of work and their experience of design and technology when they enter the school in Year 7 vary widely and are average overall, so achievement in Years 7 to 9 is very good, and excellent for many students. Students develop confidence and competence in selecting and using a variety of tools and equipment, and gain a thorough knowledge of the 'design and make' processes needed to produce a quality product. By the end of Year 9, they apply their very good skills, knowledge and understanding imaginatively and creatively to produce very high standards of work. Students in Years 10 and 11 build well on the learning gained in previous years, enabling them to develop ideas further using a good range of graphics techniques; they research their projects thoroughly and analyse their findings. Their very good knowledge and understanding of materials and components enables students to make very good progress and achieve high standards in designing and making. Students' use ICT proficiently to develop and enhance their coursework.
93. Teaching is very good. Relationships are excellent, promoting confidence and mutual respect and, when coupled with the very positive attitudes students have towards their learning, create a productive and safe learning environment particularly when large groups are doing practical work in small rooms. Teachers' very good subject knowledge is shared effectively with students and probing questioning checks previous knowledge and promotes investigative and analytical thinking. Planning is good and well linked to assessment, helping students to improve their work. Students are aware of their targets and know what they need to do to improve. Teachers support the development and use of technical language very well and give excellent support to individual students to help them make progress in lessons.
94. Leadership and management are very good: a strong team of teachers is very well led and has a shared vision for the future of the subject. The department constantly reviews its performance in order to improve on the already high standards and high-quality provision. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good with increased and very good use of ICT, higher standards and consistently very good teaching.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

In this curriculum area, the school provides courses to GCSE in art and music, which were inspected in detail, and in drama, which was sampled. Drama is taught as a separate subject for all students in Year 9 and for those who choose to study it in Years 10 and 11. Standards achieved at GCSE are very high and the subject was very well taught in the lessons seen. The subject makes an important contribution to the social, moral and cultural development of students in both the taught curriculum and in the varied range of extra-curricular activities.

Art and design

Provision for art and design in the main school is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are excellent, with standards in current examination classes similarly high.
- Students of all abilities achieve very well in a wide range of two- and three-dimensional media.
- Teaching is excellent and students respond as very effective partners in their learning.
- Sketchbook work-journals are highly imaginative and creative.
- The department is excellently led and managed.
- ICT resources in the department are inadequate.
- Accommodation is too small for large classes or for proper storage of students' work.

Commentary

95. Results at GCSE in recent years have been very high, well above the results of similar schools, with a majority of those taking the examination achieving grade A*. Students' art skills on entry are average, but are underpinned by very high standards of literacy and spatial awareness. Excellent teaching and a much-improved curriculum in Years 7 to 9 enable students to make extremely rapid progress, so standards by Year 9 are very high. Students' skills in a good range of two- and three-dimensional media are well above average. They also begin to create highly investigative, exploratory sketchbooks, annotating these well with reflective commentary. Students of all abilities achieve extremely well. Recent effective curriculum changes have begun to reverse the tendency for boys to be under-represented in GCSE groups because projects now engage boys' interest better. They therefore develop more positive attitudes and succeed as well as girls. Students' technical skills, for example in painting and drawing, develop to very high levels of refinement.
96. Attainment in the current Years 10 and 11 is also very high indeed, with Year 10 a particularly strong year. Recent staff absence has not affected standards adversely because successful recruitment and excellent induction have maintained the extremely high quality of teaching and learning in examination classes. The majority of students in both years are working at standards likely to gain A* or A grades, using a rich variety of media. Sketchbooks and working journals are often outstanding - visually imaginative, creative and personally reflective - with the highest significantly exceeding GCSE expectations. Most demonstrate students' very hard work, lengthy preparation and commitment outside lessons. These features reveal students' enjoyment and are a significant element in their success. Students use their pre-existing excellent technical ability very effectively to explore visual ideas in much greater depth than is usual. For instance, in the current Year 10 project about conceptual art, students' understanding of abstract ideas is excellent. They can discuss concepts behind their three-dimensional work with high levels of perception and discernment. Year 11's current printing project demonstrates excellent, complex technical competence. Students of all abilities, including extremely talented artists, achieve exceptionally well.
97. Teaching and learning are excellent: students' responses match teachers' very high expectations. The curriculum is accurately judged to extend the intellectual content of students' work to equal or exceed their excellent skill levels. Work is very effectively planned with the demands of these very able students in mind. Lessons are therefore very well structured, occur at a brisk pace, include a wide range of challenging activities and offer excellent opportunities for evaluation and discussion about achievements. Projects are well designed, with carefully formulated support sheets guiding students of all abilities about what to do to achieve their best work. Very tight target setting, with frequent, highly-focused assessment giving further guidance about how to improve, results in students meeting their targets and being very well motivated by higher ones.
98. Leadership and management are outstanding. The head of department is an excellent role model. Self-evaluation is very good and data well understood and used. The effect on standards of a larger proportion of boys in GCSE classes needs to be monitored carefully, in this subject where boys' attainment is significantly lower nationally. Accommodation remains cramped, especially in one of the rooms. Although this is managed well, space remains a key weakness. The availability and use of ICT were poor at the last inspection. Although there has been some improvement - the department now has one computer - this is not enough for the demands of the curriculum. Use of the school's ICT suites alleviates shortages, but students are not learning, as they should be, about the use of ICT as an everyday creative learning tool. Overall, the department has made very good improvement since the last report.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are very effective in ensuring that students make rapid progress.
- GCSE results are excellent because of very good teaching.
- A wide range of extra-curricular activities enhances students' learning.
- Relationships between students and staff are very good.
- The department does not yet make full use of ICT to widen students' musical experiences.

Commentary

99. On entry to the school, the standard of students' musical education varies considerably. Very good teaching ensures that the great majority of students reach standards well above the national average by the end of Year 8. Achievement is therefore very good.
100. A new GCSE music course has been successfully introduced in Year 9 to overcome small option groups in Years 10 and 11. In Years 9 to 11 students now follow a tutorial programme in music, most of it outside the normal working day, allowing them to take an additional GCSE and to perfect their practical skills, which are often exceptional. High expectations by both the teacher and the students ensure that examination results are excellent and that achievement remains very good. Relationships between the teacher and students are mature and based on mutual respect.
101. Teaching and learning are very good. The head of music's subject knowledge and understanding are extensive and help him to provide clear learning objectives and a variety of challenging musical activities that are well planned and executed. His practical skills are an asset and are used to build excellent relationship with students.
102. Students display mature attitudes, inquisitive minds and a hunger for knowledge, which they enthusiastically absorb and use to produce compositional and practical work of a very high standard. Students enjoy the challenge of fast-tracking theory work and an accelerated music course in Years 7 and 8 because they are eager to improve their musical skills. Consequentially, students' achievement is high. Their understanding of tempo, pitch, rhythm, style, time signatures and key signatures is very good and is discussed intellectually when appraising performance and compositions. Their understanding of musical structures, performance appraisal, orchestral instrumentation, compositional techniques and practical interpretation is impressive and the result of learning a musical instrument at an early age, the nurturing opportunities of this school, effective teaching and students' own aspirations.
103. The successful implementation of the new GCSE course and the new schemes of work for Years 7 and 8 is the result of the teacher's careful preparation and the way he matches the programmes to the needs of each student. The planning should now go on to develop more regular homework and better marking to ensure that the present high standards are maintained and that very able students reach their full potential.
104. The subject is very well led and managed, as a result of which there has been very good improvement since the last inspection. The head of department is committed to quality and has a clear vision of what is required to make this department excellent. Particularly impressive achievements are the implementation of the new GCSE course, tutorials, additional help for those students who need it and the management of a very good team of peripatetic instrumental teachers. The head of department is aware of the need for more work in ICT and for more accommodation for instrumental teaching because he monitors and evaluates students' progress regularly. He motivates students both in the classroom and when directing the department's extensive extra-curricular programme. His vision goes beyond the walls of school, encouraging students to visit and perform in prestigious events, raising the profile of the school, building the confidence of the school's ensembles and enriching the lives of all participants.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The department provides a core programme for all students from Year 7 to Year 11; this course was inspected in detail.

Provision in physical education is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average and students achieve very well.
- Teaching is always at least good; most of it is very good or excellent.
- The range and number of extra-curricular activities are excellent.
- Students have extremely positive attitudes and excellent relationships with their teachers.
- Assessment procedures and schemes of work are good, but do not specify some activities in enough detail.
- Very good facilities help students' learning.

Commentary

105. Students' standards in physical education on entry to the school vary widely and are average overall. By the end of Year 9, they attain well-above-average standards in most activities; their achievement is thus very good. The strength lies in the development of very good performance skills. Year 9 girls are very skilful when playing hockey and have a good understanding of tactics. Year 9 boys build a secure knowledge of health and fitness and are able to recognise different types of exercise. Students gain this knowledge in their fitness lessons and through teachers' insistence on thorough warm up activities at the start of every lesson. Students' analytical and evaluative skills are not as well developed as their performance skills because this aspect of the National Curriculum programme is not sufficiently planned for and developed in all lessons.
106. Students in Years 10 and 11 attain above-average standards because they continue to improve their games and movement skills and their achievement in one lesson per week is very good. They have a very good knowledge and understanding of skills, tactics and strategies and are able to read situations and select appropriate solutions. As part of the excellent extra-curricular programme, attended by over half of the students in the school, many individual students and teams achieve very high standards in district and county competitions in netball, cricket, rugby, football, athletics and hockey. These talented students benefit greatly from the excellent opportunities their teachers provide.
107. The very good teaching, combined with students' very positive attitudes and excellent relationships, ensures that students make rapid progress. Students support one another well, often spontaneously congratulating one another's achievements. In the many excellent and very good lessons, teachers' excellent subject knowledge allows them to pinpoint areas for improvement in students' performance, helping bring about rapid progress. Students' learning benefits from teachers' individual attention, extending the more able and helping those who find an activity difficult. Students with disabilities are not provided with support assistants even when the group is large; these students nonetheless achieve very well because teachers have established excellent relationships and give them a great deal of sensitive support.
108. The leadership and management of the department are excellent. Very good improvements have been made since the previous inspection, most notably the drawing together of boys' and girls' departments to form a united team with a shared desire to raise standards and the capacity for still further improvement is excellent. The department makes a strong contribution to students' social, moral and cultural development through the extensive extra-curricular activities programme; it has developed many community links with students, schools and clubs, both locally and in Exeter. Currently, areas of assessment and curriculum planning are not detailed enough to plan for literacy, numeracy, citizenship and ICT. Students are assessed accurately and informed about their performance but students' understanding of how to

improve their level of work in each activity is an area for further development. The new sports hall and dance studio, combined with the all-weather pitch and court areas, provide very good facilities and are a very positive factor in promoting high standards of performance.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

109. In this curriculum area, the school has introduced the GCSE applied business course into Year 10 this year; this course was sampled. Numbers opting for the subject are high. In the lessons observed, standards were high and achievement was above average because the teaching was thoughtfully planned and well organised. The teacher shares his very good subject knowledge with students and uses a good range of activities to ensure that students enjoy and get involved in their learning. Students are developing a good depth of knowledge of business concepts and their application to business organisations.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP (PSHE)

110. The school provides a PSHE course and a citizenship programme for all its students; the focal point of citizenship is the PSHE course and elements are taught through the other subjects. Neither course is examined; citizenship was inspected. PSHE was sampled and is very good overall. There is a well structured and resourced programme of topics, taught mainly by form tutors. The programme includes excellent provision for careers education and for teaching about alcohol and drug abuse. There are very good links with community groups and agencies, for example the police and local health workers. Since the last inspection, there has been a good improvement in the programme, which now includes citizenship.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The leadership and management of citizenship are good.
- Teaching is good, sometimes excellent.
- The introduction of citizenship as a National Curriculum subject has been well planned.
- Opportunities for students to develop their skills of participation and responsible actions as citizens are numerous, but are not formally identified.
- Assessment procedures for the subject are not yet developed.
- The organisation and presentation of students' work in their citizenship folders are not as good as they are in other subjects.

Commentary

111. Standards of work seen are above average and students' achievement in citizenship is good. In Years 7 to 9, students make good gains in knowledge and understanding of topics covering crime, government and human rights. In Years 10 and 11 they develop good knowledge and understanding of human rights, racism, globalisation and environmental issues. For example, in Year 11, students have an enrichment day in which they make a detailed study of the work of the United Nations. This is very good and the students' work shows a detailed understanding of how the organisation works and how countries have different perspectives on issues such as global warming. Modules of the citizenship curriculum are taught through other National Curriculum subjects, especially religious education and science. In these subjects, the standards of students' written work and their achievement are good. In religious education, for example, the written work of students in Year 10 on the topic of Britain as a multi-cultural society shows a very good understanding of views on racism and how to combat it. In science, students in Year 10 develop a very good understanding of environmental issues and globalisation through a study on tropical rainforests. Sometimes written work in their citizenship folders lacks organisation and is not as well presented as their work in other subjects.

112. It was only possible to observe a small number of lessons in which citizenship was being taught. In these lessons, both teaching and learning were good and in one lesson they were excellent. Most of the teaching of citizenship is carried out by form tutors who are not subject specialists, but are very well supported by detailed lesson plans. In the lessons seen, a good variety of approaches was used and students made good progress with their learning. Excellent teaching and learning were seen in a Year 7 lesson; the students were assembled in the main school hall, which the teacher had organised as the House of Commons. Then, in the role of Speaker, he delivered an excellent lesson that captivated their imagination and enabled them to gain an excellent understanding about the work of parliament.
113. The work of the school forum is effective in helping students to develop skills of participation and responsible action. Lines of communication are being developed with the wider school community. Members of the school forum are encouraged to undertake action research projects to help with their decision-making. For example, students are currently researching healthy eating, part of which involves a visit to another secondary school to look at good practice. There is a good range of other opportunities aimed at developing students' participation and responsible actions as citizens. Many students are engaged with fund-raising activities; some students in Year 11 are prefects and others help as form monitors. Students are engaged in a good range of activities within the local community, including work with local primary schools, helping induct students new to the school and supporting the elderly. However, these opportunities for the students to develop their skills are not formally identified in the planning for citizenship. Students show that they are good citizens in their courteous treatment of visitors and in the way they look after the school site.
114. Leadership and management of citizenship are good. The co-ordinator has a clear vision for the development of citizenship education. He is a knowledgeable and innovative leader and in the classroom is an excellent role model for students and staff. There is a good system for students' self-assessment in citizenship but procedures for teacher assessment are not yet as fully developed as they are in other subjects.
115. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Provision for citizenship as a National Curriculum subject has been planned effectively across all year groups. This is a subject still at a relatively early stage of development.

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

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
English literature	14	100	94	43	38	45.0	38.9
French	7	100	85	14	35	41.4	34.9
Geography	6	100	88	83	36	55.0	36.3
Mathematics	12	100	74	42	34	40.8	31.3
Sociology	5	100	83	60	32	48.0	33.6
Religious studies	7	100	91	57	39	44.3	37.9

Level 3 GCE A-level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	11	100	96	100	49	118.2	85.1
Biology	30	100	92	77	36	104.1	74.1
Business studies	19	100	96	58	33	90.5	76.5
Chemistry	28	100	81	82	46	110.0	81.1
Drama	7	100	94	100	42	111.4	82.9
English literature	20	100	98	80	44	104.0	84.3
French	10	100	96	60	46	98.0	83.0
Design and technology	8	100	95	100	35	110.0	76.5
General studies	84	100	90	80	29	106.0	69.3
Geography	22	100	97	73	40	98.2	80.9
History	13	100	97	69	41	95.4	81.2
Mathematics	31	100	93	68	52	103.9	84.7
Sociology	10	100	78	70	39	104.0	77.7
Physics	32	100	93	75	43	100.0	78.6
Religious studies	7	100	96	43	44	88.6	82.2
Sports studies	11	100	95	100	29	114.5	73.2

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

In this curriculum area, the school provides courses to AS/A-level in English literature and French, both of which were inspected in detail, and in German and Spanish, both of which were sampled. Standards in both German and Spanish are very high: results have been excellent, with an extremely high proportion graded A and B. Teaching in the small number of lessons seen was always at least good. Students build well on the excellent foundations laid at GCSE and their achievement in both languages is excellent.

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students make very good progress and achieve high standards.
- Students' attitudes to learning and their ability to manage their own learning are excellent.
- The quality of teaching is consistently very good.

Commentary

116. At the start of their AS-level course, students in English have levels of attainment which are well above the national average. They make very good progress and achieve very well because of very good teaching and their own excellent attitudes to developing themselves as active learners. Since the previous inspection, standards have risen and are now well above the national average for the subject. By the end of Year 13, students write polished critical essays, explore and reflect through discussion, and research and present their findings extremely well. They have developed strong skills in critical reading and literary analysis and can place their understanding of the texts they read in historical and cultural contexts. On occasion, discussion in class does not have the clarity of structure needed to ensure that the high-level oral skills of the students result in as much learning as they should.

117. Teaching is consistently very good and continues to have a marked impact on learning, which is also very good. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and this, together with their enthusiasm for the subject, ensures that their teaching is both challenging and supportive. The best teaching demands that students work with increasing autonomy within a clear framework provided by teachers. Less successful teaching is over-reliant on class discussion in which students remain dependent on the teachers for planning and shaping the learning.

118. The subject is well led and managed in the sixth form.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

119. Students have very highly-developed skills in written and spoken language. The benefit is considerable, not just in subjects which rely heavily on extended writing, such as history, but in the precision of language and argument students bring to their work in mathematics and science, and in the way they present their own views and listen to those of other students and the teacher when taking part in discussion in all subjects.

French

Provision in French is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students make excellent progress and achieve very high standards by the end of Year 13.
- The teaching is of high quality, providing very good coverage of the A-level syllabus and helping students to develop key language skills.
- Very good leadership ensures that staff maintain very high expectations and work hard to achieve them.

Commentary

120. Standards in French are very high. Although the number of students studying languages is relatively small, a very high proportion achieve A or B grades each year. Students make rapid progress from the excellent foundations laid at GCSE and their achievement is excellent. They manage the transition to A-level very well, quickly learning to deal with highly complex language, as is demonstrated by students' impressive ability to understand French which is spoken very rapidly by one of their teachers who is a native speaker. Students develop all four skills of reading, listening, speaking and writing very well.
121. Teaching is very good. Teachers have very high expectations of students and provide them with a rich diet of spoken and written material, allowing them to develop a very good knowledge of their chosen topics and to increase their range of vocabulary and understanding of the language. Simple teaching techniques are used to good effect: in a lesson in Year 12, for example, the teacher asked students to write their answers on small whiteboards and then to show her what they had written, allowing her to correct any mistakes immediately and to provide further teaching input. Very good use is made of the language laboratory to develop students' listening skills. ICT is not used as extensively as in Years 7 to 11, but students are directed to useful web-sites and occasionally make use of ICT to present their work.
122. Students' learning is excellent. Most are highly motivated and their work folders, though not always organised as carefully as they could be, show evidence of much diligence and thorough coverage of the syllabus. Assignments are prepared thoroughly and teachers provide students with helpful feedback in class and when marking their work. Students look critically at their own work and that of others, working in pairs to determine how the writing could be improved.
123. The subject is led and managed very well. The excellent teamwork and very high expectations which characterise provision in the main school are also evident in the sixth form. Teaching is shared effectively between two teachers and experienced foreign language assistants provide additional expertise. A particularly valuable part of the course is the opportunity for students to undertake a week's work experience in France.
124. The very high standards, quality and leadership described in the last report have been maintained.

MATHEMATICS

In this curriculum area, the school provides courses to AS/A-level in mathematics, which were inspected in detail, and in further mathematics, which was sampled. Results in further mathematics have been excellent, with almost all students achieving A grades. The subject is currently being taught by a supply teacher during the absence through illness of the substantive teacher; standards are being maintained.

Provision in mathematics is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in pure mathematics are outstanding.
- Gifted mathematicians make outstanding progress from already high standards at the start of the course.
- Excellent teaching strategies support a partnership with students in their learning and enable them to develop as confident and self-reliant learners.
- Students' progress is very carefully monitored and extra support is provided to individuals.

Commentary

125. A-level results in 2002 were far above the national average, with two thirds of students securing top grades. Results were even better in 2003, continuing the pattern of very high and rising standards over the last five years.
126. Very high standards of work were also seen during the inspection. Students' standards on entry are very high, most having achieved the highest grade at GCSE. By the end of Year 13, standards are among the highest in the country. From observations of students' work and lessons, achievement is excellent. It is best for those with higher standards on entry. Female students' achievement is in line with that of their more numerous male peers. Students' understanding in pure mathematics is outstanding. Highest attainers, most of whom also study further mathematics, confidently handle complex concepts such as manipulation of trigonometric functions, complex numbers and proof, and show exceptional skills in questioning and challenging mathematical ideas.
127. Teaching overall is excellent. Lessons are a partnership between teachers and students based on mutual respect and common priorities. Teaching is highly successful in promoting self-reliance and in helping students to develop as thinkers and learners. For example, in a Year 12 lesson, students were asked to evaluate another student's answer to a question, without seeing the question. They learned the importance of structure, annotation and communication in solving real-life problems. The enjoyment of reasoning, justifying and communicating mathematically is fostered and is very evident in every lesson. In a Year 13 lesson, students tackled different problems involving complex numbers then presented and justified their ideas to their peers. A lively discussion ensued which enhanced their understanding and resulted in excellent achievement. Teachers' very high level of knowledge enables them to challenge and extend the thinking of gifted mathematicians who achieve exceptionally well. Students are highly committed, enjoy the subject and thrive on its demands. They feel very well supported and advised by their teachers and confidently seek help in and beyond lessons. They value the accessibility of their teachers beyond the school day. This particularly supports students with slightly lower standards on entry, who sometimes find the pace demanding.
128. As in the main school, leadership is excellent and management very good. The sixth form is given due attention in plans for further improvement and in monitoring the work of the department. Students' work is very carefully monitored and actions are tailored to the needs and circumstances of the individual. The department does not offer a choice of modules. The modules offered are heavily weighted to pure mathematics leading to exceptionally high standards. Exceptional standards have been maintained since the last inspection, representing very good improvement.

Mathematics across the curriculum

129. Students' mathematical thinking is extremely well applied in their other subjects. In geography, they routinely use complex statistical techniques to compare and interpret different sets of data. In product design, their excellent conceptual understanding of scales enables them to design accurate working drawings. In music, students recognise patterns in, for example, a fugue and can apply mathematical concepts in their compositions.

SCIENCE

In this curriculum area, the school provides courses to AS/A-level in biology, chemistry and physics. The AS/A-level courses in biology were inspected in detail and the other courses were sampled. In chemistry, standards are consistently outstanding. At A-level, about 80 per cent of students attain grade A or B. This is the result of very good, challenging teaching, the self-motivation of the students and the adult climate for learning. In physics, standards are very high, although results fell a little in 2003, when two-thirds of students attained grades A or B and all students passed; in 2002, three-quarters were graded A or B. Teaching in the lessons observed was very good. The students were highly self-motivated and there was an adult atmosphere most conducive to learning.

Biology

Provision in biology is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are outstandingly high.
- Teaching is highly stimulating and challenging, leading to very high achievement.
- The climate for learning is adult and self-motivated.
- Leadership and management of the subject are excellent.
- Technicians provide very good support for teaching and learning.

Commentary

130. Results at A-level are very good indeed and have increased progressively in each of the past four years. There are very high proportions of A and B grades and almost all students reach at least grade C. Students who have attained very highly at GCSE are challenged and stimulated to go on to reach the highest levels, while those whose potential is more modest are also guided and supported to achieve very highly. Thus achievement is excellent for all.
131. Teaching is excellent: it never fell below very good in the lessons observed. Teachers are authoritative and inspiring. They challenge the students to think and solve problems for themselves. Teachers and students show mutual respect and appreciation and there is a mature atmosphere, highly conducive to learning. The students concentrate and apply themselves with a high degree of eagerness and self-motivation. The pace and depth of learning are exceptional, ensuring that the highest standards possible are reached. Progress is monitored through regular setting and marking of assignments. Students' notes and written work are extensive and very conscientiously completed. Coverage of the syllabus is thorough and provides a very good preparation for examinations and future careers.
132. Practical work is used very effectively to enhance learning and students are confident and capable in the use of equipment. The resources available are very good and the expert technicians make a highly valuable contribution to teaching and learning.
133. The excellent leadership and management of the subject ensure that the needs of all students are well met. Teaching and the utilisation of resources are well organised. Attainment and progress are carefully monitored so that teaching and learning can be adapted and developed to ensure that all students achieve the heights of which they are capable.
134. Standards and quality are both improved from the already high levels reported in the last inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

As in Years 10 and 11, ICT is not taught as a separate subject in the sixth form, but its use is developed and co-ordinated through the other subjects students study. Provision in ICT was sampled across all subjects and courses. Students do not enter AS or A-level examinations in ICT; instead, they assemble portfolios of their ICT work drawn from other subjects and submit them for assessment at Key Skills Level 3. The fact that three students have been accepted at Oxford or Cambridge to read for degrees in computing is testament to the strength of ICT knowledge and practice. ICT skills are developed and practised very effectively in most sixth form subjects. In visual and performing arts subjects, although provision has improved, ICT does not yet play the full part it should.

HUMANITIES

In this curriculum area, the school provides courses to AS/A-level in history, which was inspected in detail, and in psychology, geography, sociology and religious studies, all of which were sampled.

Standards in psychology are well above the national average: all students pass the examination, but the proportion achieving the highest grades is below the school average. Teaching is sound: it is well organised and resourced, but not as challenging as it should be.

Religious education fully meets statutory requirements. A unit in the general studies course is carefully planned to meet the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus and to build on earlier learning. In addition, all students attend an annual sixth form conference organised in conjunction with the University of Exeter. This is an improvement from the last inspection, when provision was described as 'barely adequate'. The uptake of A-level religious studies has increased since the arrival of the current head of department who introduced a challenging philosophy and ethics course more appropriate to high-ability students. Results and standards are very high; the one lesson seen was exceptionally well taught.

Standards and results in geography are very high. Two lessons were seen, one in Year 12 and one in Year 13, and in both teaching was very good and the students made very good progress with their learning.

In sociology, standards are also very high; students' oral and written work is impressive and examination results are exceptional - all of the small number who took the subject gained grade A in 2003. Teaching and learning were excellent in the one lesson seen.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very high and students maintain the high levels of achievement established earlier in the school.
- Teaching is very good, particularly the use of assessment, and has a marked impact on standards.

Commentary

135. Standards at A-level are very good and students achieve well. In recent years, almost all have achieved the very highest grades. The standard of current students' work is very good and, for many, excellent. Although there remains some variation in the quality of their essay writing, students make rapid progress as they move through Year 12 and the impact of teaching takes full effect. The investigation and use of complex source material are often very good. Students develop excellent overall knowledge of the period they are studying and their work becomes increasingly well-composed and structured.
136. Teaching is very good. Teachers' own subject knowledge is excellent and they use it well to develop students' understanding. A wide range of tasks is used to ensure students are actively engaged in, and manage, their own learning. Marking is excellent and is used very well indeed to guide students in improving their work and to help teachers with their planning. When students under-perform, they are expected to repeat work until it is acceptable. Students are regularly involved in the assessment of their own work so that they gain an understanding both of how well they are doing and where they need to improve. Teaching always extends them and their responses and attitudes to learning are both very good.
137. Leadership and management in history are both very good. Teaching programmes are kept under constant review and are frequently revised to take account of syllabus changes and the results of the department's own evaluations. Teachers of history work together well to review the quality and impact of their work, refining teaching programmes to meet students' needs whenever necessary. Every effort is made to ensure that the range of activities and experiences offered in history are relevant and demanding and that students are able to make a smooth transition to the next stage in their education.

138. All aspects of the department's work have improved since the last inspection.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

In this curriculum area, the school provides a course to AS/A-level in design and technology (product design and product design in 3D), which was inspected in detail.

Design and technology (product design)

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

Mains strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very high and achievement is excellent.
- Learning is very good because of the high quality of the teaching and of the partnership between teachers and students.
- Students' critical analysis and evaluation of their coursework are very good.

Commentary

139. A- and AS-level results in 2003 were very high. The standard of current work is also very high, with all students achieving at or above their predicted, challenging grades. Students of all abilities therefore make very good progress and achieve well. Although the numbers of students choosing to follow this course are small, projected figures for 2004 show a significant increase.

140. These high standards are the result of the very good relationships between teachers and students, who work as a team so that the very good teaching is translated into effective learning. Students are attentive, work productively and respond well to supportive teaching. They apply a wide range of design and development techniques, including graphic skills and ICT, to developing, modelling and testing their chosen products. Students' analytical and investigative skills are very highly developed and they create a wide range of imaginative products. Students work effectively from working drawings and investigate and modify designs, achieving high-quality outcomes.

141. Teaching is very good: lessons are well planned and structured so that students can investigate, developing an independent approach to their learning. Attitudes towards learning are very good and teachers and students work together to achieve high standards. The tutorial approach offers students the opportunity to evaluate their performance critically and explore with teachers how they can improve it. Relationships between teachers and students, and between students themselves, are very good, creating a positive and respectful learning environment.

142. The subject is very effectively managed; improvement since the last inspection has been very good and there are clear strategies for improvement and for continued high achievement.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

In this curriculum area, the school provides courses to AS/A-level in art, music and theatre studies: all were sampled. Standards achieved in drama are very high and the subject was well taught in the one lesson seen. Standards in art are excellent; results are very high and the subject is taught to the same excellent quality as in the main school. Standards in music are also high; results are excellent and the subject is very well taught.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Within this curriculum area, the school runs the AS/A-level course in physical education, which was inspected in detail.

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results are at the highest level and the achievement of students is excellent.
- Teaching is consistently very good and often excellent.
- Students have excellent relationships with their teachers and their attitudes are extremely positive.
- The leadership and management of the department are excellent.

Commentary

143. Almost all students gain grades A and B at A-level. Students' achievement is excellent in relation to their capabilities and their performance in Year 11. The course is becoming more popular despite there being no opportunity at present to study physical education at GCSE level. Analysis of results shows that boys and girls attain equally well in all aspects of the course.
144. Students' excellent achievement is largely the result of their ability to work independently and their confident approach to learning. Progress is firmly rooted in the excellent relationships that teachers establish with the students and the students' real enthusiasm for the subject. Students are very good performers and take part in at least one sport to a very high level. They research well using a wide range of resources and references and share their findings accurately with others. They make thoughtful and perceptive comments and use subject-specific vocabulary accurately. They use ICT very effectively, particularly for research and in the production of their personal exercise programmes.
145. The atmosphere of productive learning in lessons is a reflection of the very good teaching. Teaching and learning are particularly effective when students are encouraged to research topics for homework and come well prepared to discuss their findings, for example in a lesson focusing on women in sport. Teachers do not accept partial or superficial answers and challenge and probe to promote deeper understanding. In most lessons, very good pace keeps students working at or near capacity. A few lessons lose pace towards the end and students make less progress. Students are given ample experience of answering examination questions and marking schemes are thoroughly prepared to help them understand requirements fully. Teachers use ICT frequently and very effectively in lessons to display information, provide students with access to previous work and for interactive presentations.
146. Leadership and management are excellent. Thorough evaluation of assessment data ensures that students make rapid progress and that standards in the subject improve. Students enjoy and help with the extensive extra-curricular activities and the recreational games programme open to students in Year 12. For example, they report how much they value the courses because they provide an accreditation linked to their proposed careers in sports science, for example. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good, with the establishment of the A-level course.

BUSINESS

147. In this curriculum area, the school currently runs the A-level course in business studies, which was sampled. Results in 2003 were very good and the work seen during the inspection reflects these standards, with students achieving extremely well, particularly as they did not study

business to GCSE level. Teaching is good with very good subject knowledge shared effectively with students in well-planned and organised lessons. Students are actively involved in their learning, developing their ability to interpret and analyse information and apply it well to business situations.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

148. In this curriculum area, the school provides a general studies and critical thinking programme, examined at A-level, for all students; this programme was sampled. Students achieve high standards in this very well-taught programme and their examination results are well above average. The programme makes a significant contribution to students' knowledge and understanding of the world and to their development as learners and thinkers. The critical thinking component in particular is a valuable means of helping able young people develop their intellectual potential.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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

