

# **INSPECTION REPORT**

## **ASHINGTON COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL**

Ashington

LEA area: Northumberland

Unique reference number: 122355

Headteacher: Mr Ken Tonge

Lead inspector: Val Lynch

Dates of inspection: 17<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> November 2003

Inspection number: 259365

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11 - 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll;	1032
School address:	Green Lane Ashington
Postcode:	NE63 8DH
Telephone number:	01670 812166
Fax number:	01670 855377
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Miss Julie Stephenson
Date of previous inspection:	March 1998

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The school is one of two secondary schools providing education for the ex-mining communities of Ashington and the surrounding villages. There are 1032 students in the school, of whom 236 are in the sixth form. The school has grown in popularity over the last five years. There are more requests for students to join Year 9 next year than there are places available. Very few students join or leave the school during a school year. National data indicates that when students are aged 11 in their middle schools, their attainment is below average. Data collected by the school just before students move to the high school indicates that by the end of Year 8, attainment is broadly average. Around 11 per cent of students have special educational needs; this is below average. The proportion of students from other ethnic backgrounds is very low and very few have a language other than English as their home language. An average proportion of students are eligible for free school meals, but this does not reflect the socio-economic circumstances of the town. The school, along with other schools in Ashington, is part of an Education Action Zone. The school is designated as a specialist sports college. It is also part of a consortium of schools providing initial teacher training.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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10173	Catherine Hinds	Lay inspector	
11044	Jean Hedge	Team inspector	
30576	Peter Bannon	Team inspector	
30596	Jack Brown	Team inspector	Science
7084	Jack Haslam	Team inspector	Design and technology
33153	Phil Hingley	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
8070	Joe Haves	Team inspector	Citizenship History
18854	Malcolm McGregor	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
8360	Frederick Peacock	Team inspector	Music
13217	Malcolm Butterworth	Team inspector	Physical education
20619	Jenny Hazlewood	Team inspector	Business education
15606	Christine Hill	Team inspector	Art and design English as an additional language Special educational needs
2932	Roy Hedge	Team inspector	Religious education
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## REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS</b>	
<b>STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS</b>	<b>10</b>
Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses	
Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
<b>QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL</b>	<b>13</b>
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
<b>LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES –</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, SUBJECTS AND COURSES</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4</b>	
<b>SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS</b>	<b>46</b>

# PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

## OVERALL EVALUATION

**This is a very good school. Students transfer easily and successfully at the end of Year 8. This leads to good achievement at the end of Year 9 that is maintained in Years 10 and 11. Teaching and learning are good because teachers and students enjoy working together and have shared aspirations to do well. The school provides good value for money.**

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The headteacher has high aspirations for students and staff and seeks every opportunity to promote self-belief and self-esteem. As a result, students respect themselves and each other and achieve well;
- The school has built strong partnerships with other schools, parents and the community and it is well respected, particularly for the contribution it makes as a sports college;
- The curriculum for 14 to 19 year old students is innovative and well designed to meet their needs. Students of all abilities are, therefore, motivated and enthusiastic about both learning in school and continuing their education and training when they leave;
- Students have very positive attitudes and behave very well at all times so that the maximum amount of time is spent on learning;
- Although teaching is a strength of the school, some teachers don't use homework or assessment information to encourage students to take responsibility for their learning;
- The accommodation is unsatisfactory and despite the best efforts of staff to improve the internal accommodation, students deserve better.

**The school has improved significantly since the previous inspection.** Test and examination results have improved and so has the school's popularity in the community. The key issues from that inspection have been systematically addressed. The most important improvement has been in the quality of teaching and learning.

## STANDARDS ACHIEVED

### Year 11 and 13 results

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

**Test results at the end of Year 9 are average and are much better than those in similar schools. Achievement is good.** Over the last four years, test results have dramatically improved. One of the reasons that achievement is good is that students, both boys and girls, do very well in English. English and mathematics results are above average and well above results in similar schools. In 2003, science results fell slightly, but are still average and better than similar schools. Achievement is at least satisfactory in all other subjects and is particularly good in physical education. GCSE results have steadily improved over the last four years and are also better than results in similar schools. Students achieve as expected on the basis of their test results at the end of Year 9. Results in English and science are above average and mathematics results are average. Students achieve particularly well in physical education. Standards in all years and in all other subjects are satisfactory, with the exception of art. There are no subjects where achievement is unsatisfactory. Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good. **Students' attendance and punctuality have improved and are satisfactory. Their personal development is very good, particularly their social and moral development.**

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The quality of education provided by the school is very good. Teaching and learning are very good overall.** Teaching and learning are consistently good in most subjects and very good in religious education and physical education. Teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 than it is in Year 9. One of the reasons for this is that teachers make better use of assessment information as they prepare students for their GCSE examinations. Relationships between students and their teachers are very good and contribute to students' willingness to learn. Teachers do not make enough use of assessment to tell students what they need to do to improve. There is no doubt that the high quality of teaching is improving standards in the school. The curriculum is also very good. The school works closely with the local college and the other high school in the town to provide courses that meet students' needs. There is a good programme of activities outside lessons. Care and support for students are also good, particularly at times when students have to make decisions. Accommodation remains unsatisfactory. The school has very good relationships with parents and the local community.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are very good.** The inspirational leadership of the headteacher is excellent. He has a sincere belief in the ability of others and a passionate commitment to success for all. Standards are, therefore, rapidly improving. The leadership of other key staff is very good. Management of the school is very effective. Governors are very knowledgeable and skilled and give very good support to the school. However, governance is only satisfactory because the school fails to fulfil some statutory requirements. Governors and the headteacher made exactly the right decisions when they decided to seek sports college status and to become involved in initial teacher training. Both these initiatives and many others are having a positive impact on teaching and learning and ultimately on standards.

## **PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

**Parents and students rate the school exceptionally highly.** Students enjoy the wide range of activities open to them. They know they are very well taught. Parents are very pleased with this very good teaching. Students are happy in school because staff treat them with respect and help them in their studies. They have no concerns about the occasional incidence of bullying as these are dealt with effectively. They are confident that staff will deal with any situations that occur in a firm, but fair, manner. Parents and students appreciate the school's commitment to seeking their opinions and managing any concerns. Parents feel confident that the school keeps them in touch with what it does. They express unanimous support for the school's leadership and management.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- Make more use of homework and assessment to involve students in taking responsibility for their learning;
- Ensure that there is sufficient good-quality accommodation to match the number and needs of students in the school;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Provide a daily act of collective worship;
- Ensure that citizenship is taught according to requirements.

## SIXTH FORM SECTION OF THE SUMMARY REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

The provision in the sixth form is very good and has improved since the previous inspection. Although examination results are below average, students achieve well. Teaching is consistently very good. This enables students to learn well and enjoy their studies. Temporary arrangements for leading and managing the sixth form are working well because of the commitment of the staff involved to work together for the benefit of students. The sixth form provides good value for money.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Although examination results are below average, there is some good achievement, particularly in English, French, design and technology and physics;
- Working closely with the local further education college and the other high school, the school provides a very good range of courses to meet the diverse needs of students, who want to continue in education post-16;
- Teachers make sure that students develop independent learning skills, a pre-requisite for success in higher education. Students are responding positively and enjoy taking responsibility for their learning;
- In order to provide the greatest possible range of courses, some lessons clash with others and some lessons have to be taught at lunchtime or after school. Some students choose not to study some subjects because of this arrangement. There is also no provision for religious education in the sixth form;
- Accommodation where students can socialise or study independently during the school day is very limited.

### QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Standards in English literature are good and a good proportion of students gain the higher grades. Standards in English language are satisfactory and are improving. Teaching is very good in both subjects and students are enthusiastic and keen to learn. They achieve well. Students achieve well in French as a result of good teaching. Very few students study the subject, but numbers are increasing.
Mathematics	Results in mathematics are good and have consistently improved over recent years. Teaching is very good and generates an enthusiasm for mathematics in students to the extent that many want to study the subject at university.
Science	Examination results in chemistry are below average, but are as expected on the basis of students' GCSE results. Examination results in physics are good and students achieve well. In both subjects, teaching is good. Students benefit from working with very knowledgeable teachers, who make both subjects interesting to study.
Humanities	Examination results and work seen in geography are above average, but more students could achieve higher grades. Teaching is good and results in students developing a range of geographical skills and interest in their work.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Students achieve well in design and technology and reach standards that are better than expected on the basis of GCSE results. Teaching is good, so that students develop their theoretical understanding and practical skills.
Visual and performing arts and media	Examination results in physical education are satisfactory, but a real strength of the work is the high number of students, who achieve sports leadership awards. Because teaching is so good throughout the school, students are keen and enthusiastic to participate in sport.



*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**

### **Advice, guidance and support provided in the sixth form are very good.**

Students appreciate the very good induction, support and guidance they receive when they join the sixth form. Support systems are carefully structured and are working well. Most students value the careful monitoring of their academic progress and the excellent guidance that they receive about careers and further study. The active sixth-form council and students' views are both listened to and respected. Study and social facilities for the sixth form are inadequate, but because students are happy with so much about their school they do not identify this as an issue. The school is aware of this and is currently exploring solutions.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM**

### **Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good.**

Leadership and management of the sixth form now match the quality found throughout the school and are clearly focused on securing improved results. As an outcome of recent changes, sixth-form students say that there are clearer support systems and increased rigour in the way the sixth form is led and managed. The sixth form is becoming increasingly cost effective as more students choose to remain in education post-16.

## **STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM**

Sixth-form students enjoy their school life, recognising the benefits of the many experiences open to them. They talk eagerly about their studies, knowing that they are taught very well and that staff guide them carefully. Students heading for university praise the guidance staff give them. Others are more critical of the support they get. Inspectors recognise some justification in these criticisms. Students value their community involvement, especially through the sports leadership programme.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

#### Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Achievement is good in Year 9 and standards overall are average. In Years 10 and 11, achievement is satisfactory. GCSE results are close to average and the standard of work seen is also average. In the sixth form, achievement is satisfactory, although standards are below average.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Test results at the end of Years 9 have improved considerably since the previous inspection and are much better than in similar schools.
- Liaison with partner middle schools is so good that students achieve well, despite changing schools at the end of Year 8.
- GCSE results have improved and the work seen during the inspection suggests that they are likely to improve again next year.
- Boys do not do as well as girls in tests and examinations, although these differences are not apparent in lessons.
- In the sixth form, students do well on vocational courses and on the courses they pursue to A-level. Few students gain the higher grades.

#### Commentary

##### Main school

##### Key Stage 3

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	35.3 (33.4)	33.3 (33.3)
mathematics	35.7 (34.9)	35.3 (34.7)
science	33.1 (33.9)	33.7 (33.3)

*There were 246 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

1. Overall, results in tests at the end of Year 9 are average and are much better than results in similar schools. This reflects good achievement when these students were 11 years old and in their middle schools their attainment was below average. One of the reasons that achievement is so good is that links between teachers in the partner middle schools and teachers in this school are very good. Students move schools at the end of Year 8 and there is no break in their learning. Another reason is that students, both boys and girls, do very well in English. Over the last four years, test results overall have dramatically improved. English and mathematics results are above average and well above results in similar schools. In 2003, science results fell slightly, but are still average and better than similar schools. The identified reason for this is the lack of a science teacher in one of the partner middle schools for a period of time. In mathematics and science, the proportion of students gaining the higher levels is below average. This reflects the lower than average proportion of higher attainers, who come to the school in Year 9. Girls' results are better than boys in mathematics and science. In 2003, results in English and mathematics exceeded the targets set. Science results were just below the target.

## Key Stage 4

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining five or more A*-C grades	48.0 (41.0)	52.6 (49.9)
Percentage of students gaining five or more A*-G grades	89.0 (89.7)	88.6 (90.9)
Percentage of students gaining one or more A*-G grades	94 (96)	94.6 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	32.7 (30.6)	34.7 (34.7)

*There were 286 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

- GCSE results have steadily improved over the last four years and are better than results in similar schools. Students achieve as expected on the basis of their test results at the end of Year 9. The proportion of students gaining the higher grades is below average, but this proportion has increased every year over the last three years. Results in 2003 were above the school's targets. Results in English and science are above average; mathematics results are average. GCSE results in business education, ICT, music and physical education are above average. Results in design and technology, geography, history, French, German and religious education are below average.
- Standards of work in Year 9 are good in mathematics, science, French, physical education and religious education. Students' achievement is very good in physical education and is good in all other subjects; the exception is art, where achievement is, nevertheless, satisfactory. Standards of work in Years 10 and 11 in physical education are very good. They are good in English, mathematics, science, music and religious education. Students achieve particularly well in physical education and do well in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, ICT, music and religious education. In Years 9 to 11, standards are satisfactory in all other subjects with the exception of art. There are no subjects where achievement is unsatisfactory.
- Girls do better than boys in tests and examinations, although these differences are not so apparent in lessons. Boys, however, do particularly well in English. Students with special educational needs do well. They make good progress in lessons because they are well supported by their subject teachers and support staff. Students are taught in groups according to their ability. Those in lower sets feel equally valued, behave well and make good progress. Over the last three years, seven students, who have statements of special educational need and extra help, have made such good progress that they no longer need this help.
- Standards in literacy are good and support learning in other subjects. Numeracy skills are satisfactory, although the development of a numeracy policy is at an early stage. Students' ICT skills are satisfactory, but could be better if more subjects used ICT as part of teaching and learning.

### **The sixth form**

- Examination results in 2002 and 2003 were below average. Few students gain the highest grades. However, these results reflect satisfactory achievement as school data indicates that attainment on entry to the sixth form is below average. Students do particularly well on vocational courses. Girls did better than boys in 2002 at both A2 and AS level. Results at A-level were particularly good in 2002 in English literature, mathematics, geography, and physics. At AS level, results were good in general studies and IT. Standards of work seen are

good in mathematics, geography and physical education. In all the other subjects inspected, standards are satisfactory. Achievement in all subjects inspected in detail is good.

### **Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities**

**Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good. Students' attendance and punctuality have improved and are satisfactory. Their personal development is very good overall.**

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good. They feel happy and secure and have a strong sense of loyalty to the school.
- Students have very good relationships with each other and all the adults with whom they work.
- The school provides a wide range of social and educational activities that all contribute to students' personal development.
- Sixth-form students work well and have very good attitudes towards their studies. They are good role-models for younger students.
- Both attendance and punctuality have improved, but could be better still.

### **Commentary**

#### **Main school**

7. Attendance and punctuality have improved since the previous inspection and are satisfactory. The school does not give attendance a high enough profile with students and parents in order to secure further improvement. Punctuality was an issue at the previous inspection. Punctuality to school is good, but a few boys are slow to move between the annexe and the main school.

#### **Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)**

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data:	8.4	School data:	0.8
National data:	7.8	National data:	1.2

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

8. The friendly and mutually respectful relationships between teachers and students ensure a very good working atmosphere in the school. These relationships increase students' confidence and self-worth and enhance students' personal development. Because students like their teachers, they approach lessons and other activities with a willingness to learn. Behaviour is very good and students get on well with one another. The school is calm and purposeful. Staff and students make visitors feel very welcome.
9. The school has good strategies in place to ensure that poor behaviour and the rare cases of bullying are dealt with swiftly. Improved teaching and learning and a better curriculum have all contributed to a reduction in the number of occasions when students are excluded. Most students enjoy coming to school and feel that they are getting a good experience, even though in some areas, accommodation is rather cramped.
10. When assemblies have a well-planned theme, students reflect on issues about world conflicts and tragedies. In some subjects, teachers raise issues, such as the nature of God, the plight of black people in America and Anne Frank's diary of survival, to challenge students' values and beliefs. The difference between right and wrong is highlighted and by discussing moral issues, students' decision-making skills are improved.

11. The wide range of additional activities that teachers organise stimulate students' learning and contribute to their moral, social and cultural development. The sports college ideals of leadership, teamwork, equality and perseverance are strong and these values spread throughout the school. This was particularly evident when the school invited local sports personalities to promote anti-racism in sport.

## Exclusions

### *Ethnic background of students*

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British

### *Exclusions in the last school year*

No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1020	124	3

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

12. Permanent exclusions are low, reflecting the school's commitment to do all it can to keep students attending school. Fixed-period exclusions are high. These figures have fallen this year because the school now has facilities to work with students, who might, in the past, have been excluded.

## The sixth form

13. Most students have a good work ethic and value the teaching and learning that they receive. Because of this, they work well with their teachers and are fine role-models for the younger students. Their attitudes are very good and they contribute well to school life. Many students take a responsible attitude towards their own learning and this is supported by the very good relationships they have with their teachers. Students enjoy participating in the additional activities that the school provides for them.

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

### Teaching and Learning

**Teaching and learning are good overall and very good in the sixth form. Assessment is satisfactory in the main school and is good in the sixth form.**

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The whole-school focus on teaching and learning within all departments is improving the quality and consistency of teaching.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which they use well in planning and teaching lessons.
- Whilst there are good systems to collect information from tests and assessments, the information is not used consistently in lessons to plan learning for individual students.
- There are very good relationships between staff and students that support learning, but the use of homework to promote independent learning is inconsistent.
- In the sixth form, teachers use their good subject knowledge to make lessons interesting and so students are keen to learn.

### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 144 lessons*

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
15 (10%)	30 (21%)	58 (40%)	41 (28%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

## **Commentary**

### **Main school**

14. The wide variation in the quality of teaching seen at the previous inspection is no longer evident as a result of the focus on teaching and learning across all departments. The school's involvement in initial teacher training, and particularly its work as a school-based trainer for physical education and design and technology, has significantly enhanced the understanding and development of good practice. Teaching and learning are excellent in physical education, very good in religious education and business studies and good in all other subjects.
15. Teachers have very good command of their subject and communicate this well in the great majority of lessons. Good planning ensures knowledge is systematically developed, but homework is not always used regularly and consistently to develop independent learning skills. In the best lessons, students are encouraged to take responsibility for aspects of their own learning. In physical education, excellent teaching encourages students to play a very active part in evaluating their work so they develop their skills and understanding of what they are learning.
16. In all subjects, productive working relationships exist between teachers and students and also between students. These characterise learning in most lessons and result in very good behaviour and good progress. This extends to learning outside lessons and leads to a very positive climate for learning throughout the school. Teaching is strongest in Years 10 and 11, where, overall, it is very good. There is a very sharp focus upon using examination criteria to assess work and there is regular guidance to students on how to improve.
17. The school has identified the need for improved quality and greater consistency in assessment. During the past year, systems have been set up to collect test and other information on students and staff are now expected to use this information to plan learning. Some teachers assess students' work very well and use the outcomes of their assessment to plan future work. This is a strong feature of the work in mathematics and design and technology, for example. However, involving students in the assessment process is less well developed. Marking in a number of subjects does not give students enough information as to what they need to do to improve and to get a higher grade or level.
18. Whilst students often work individually, in many subjects they are not always given the required support and skills to help them do this. Good resources are provided, for example, in ICT, which enables students to tackle coursework tasks on their own, but these resources do not encourage them to take the initiative and use other sources to extend their knowledge further.
19. Classroom assistants and other learning support assistants are used well throughout the school, particularly to support students with statements of special educational need. In the best lessons, teachers use a wide range of methods that include challenging questioning to check understanding. Resources and time are used well and work is well matched to students' needs. Gifted or talented students learn satisfactorily, but teaching strategies to ensure more challenging work for gifted or talented students are underdeveloped.

### **The sixth form**

20. Teaching and learning in the sixth form have improved and are very good overall. This is because teachers now involve students more in their own learning. Students are encouraged to undertake research, to investigate and to ask questions. Many lessons feature discussion and debate, which enables students to build confidence in their understanding of the topics they are studying. In turn, this approach helps students take more responsibility for their learning. Maintaining good levels of challenge ensures that students learn at a good pace and extends their knowledge and understanding. High levels of challenge occur when teachers assess students' work well and take account of this assessment in planning lessons. Where

students are more independent, they are aware of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

## **The curriculum**

**Overall, curriculum provision is very good, enriched by a good programme of extra-curricular activities. The school is well staffed and has a good level of resources, but the accommodation is unsatisfactory.**

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form is well designed to meet the needs of all students.
- Regular reviews of the curriculum have led to significant developments that allow greater choice of courses and create more effective use of time.
- Sports college status has helped the school to extend the opportunities that it provides in physical education.
- The school does not meet statutory requirements for citizenship in Years 9 to 11 or for religious education in the sixth form.
- Planning, co-ordination and monitoring of cross-curricular provision in ICT are unsatisfactory.
- Overall, accommodation is unsatisfactory, although staff make the best use of what is available.

## **Commentary**

### **Main school**

21. The school places great emphasis on meeting the needs of all students by providing courses that prepare them for further education and employment. This is particularly evident in the curriculum for 14 to 19 year olds. Partnerships with the local college and another nearby high school give students access to courses, specialist staff and resources that otherwise would not be available. Students can choose courses that are more suited to their needs. This has had a very positive impact on their attitudes to learning and in reducing levels of disaffection. Students with special educational needs have every opportunity to participate fully in the life of the school. The curriculum meets statutory requirements with the exception of citizenship. The school has audited subjects for where they intend to teach citizenship, but does not make sure that citizenship is taught according to requirements.
22. The school offers a broad range of ICT-related courses, including full and short courses at GCSE. However, the school does not yet have systems to check how well ICT is taught and used in other subjects. The course in Year 10 lacks challenge and does not provide sufficient progression from Year 9, especially for high attainers, so that learning and progress is limited.
23. The governing body and senior staff have a very clear vision for how they want the curriculum to develop and much work has been done since the previous inspection. Curriculum reviews have led to a re-shaping of the school week, with increased lesson length and shorter days on Thursday and Friday. This has resulted in better-quality teaching and learning and time for extra-curricular activities and staff development.
24. Sports college status is having a very positive impact on the school beyond providing a range of exciting sporting opportunities. Students' personal development and attendance have improved through the raising of self-esteem and a greater interest in other areas of learning. Extra-curricular provision is good. Excellent opportunities exist for students to take part in a wide range of sporting activities. Most, but not all, subject departments offer such opportunities and students are keen to participate.
25. The quality of the accommodation is unsatisfactory overall, although there have been significant efforts by staff and governors to improve the appearance of the school. There are

very good outdoor facilities and teaching rooms for physical education, but indoor facilities are poor. The accommodation for humanities and modern foreign languages is poorly designed and ICT rooms are too small. There are enough suitably qualified teachers in the school and staffing is enhanced by the presence of trainee teachers in the school. Resources are good overall. Resources are inadequate in the library.

### **The sixth form**

26. The sixth-form curriculum is very good with a broad choice of academic and vocational courses at different levels. Twilight sessions allow students to study subjects that cannot be timetabled within the school day. There are good work-related courses for one-year students, providing good preparation for employment. There is a good course made up of a combination of resit GCSE and GNVQ intermediate subjects. Students can choose additional certificated courses in ICT, Key Skills and Sports Leadership. Almost all students take a Sports Leadership award. However, the breadth of choice has resulted in timetable clashes that have a negative impact on the quality of learning for some students. The school does not make any provision for religious education in the sixth form and, consequently, does not meet statutory requirements. An 'Active Citizenship' programme runs for all students in the sixth form, where students work with younger students and other people in the community. The accommodation and facilities for sixth-form study are inadequate.

### **Care, guidance and support.**

**Provision for students' care, welfare and health and safety is good.**

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Induction arrangements for students entering the school are excellent.
- Systems for monitoring students' academic progress and providing advice based on this are good. Not all staff make full use of the new system as yet.
- Guidance about courses of further study and career opportunities is very good in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form.
- Relationships are very good and students know who they can turn to for help and advice if they have any problems.
- There is no medical room, so students, who are ill, have to sit in the foyer.

### **Commentary**

#### **Main school**

27. Students learn effectively with very good supportive advice and guidance. Arrangements for students new to the school in Year 9 are excellent and help them to arrive with optimism and anticipation about the challenges ahead of them. These very well-structured induction arrangements encourage parental involvement and many parents and students express their appreciation of the care provided.
28. Procedures for child protection are fully in place and essential policies are effectively implemented. The designated member of staff, teachers and other adults know what actions to take should they become necessary. There are very good standards of care for all students, including those with special educational needs.
29. Health and safety procedures are very good. The college takes reasonable steps to monitor and promote the health and well-being of its students and staff, although some subjects still have to complete risk assessments. Teachers are aware of their responsibilities towards students and know them well.
30. Relationships in the school are very good. Students speak highly of their teachers. They are happy and secure in the friendly and calm atmosphere that exists. If they experience problems, all of them know which adults to contact. The school employs a new, and potentially



effective, monitoring system to check students' progress and personal development. Many students have an understanding of the subject targets to which they should be aspiring. However, whilst many teachers use this system well, it is not being consistently used in all subjects. Newly appointed directors of learning ensure that different monitoring strategies are employed to cater for the varying needs of students in different years. Academic progress and personal development are, on the whole, well monitored. Information about careers and further study is very good.

31. Steps are taken to seek students' opinions through questionnaires and discussion. The school council is being re-constituted to make sure that it addresses important school issues and that formal account is taken of students' views. The leadership of the school is committed to ensuring the highest possible standards in all that it does for students. The standard of catering for students at breakfast and lunchtimes is excellent and is a good example of how the school cares. It is surprising, therefore, that there are no medical facilities where students can go when they are ill.

### **The sixth form**

32. Students are appreciative of the very good induction, support and guidance they receive prior to joining and when they join the sixth form. The support systems are carefully structured and are working well. Most students value the careful monitoring of their academic progress and the excellent guidance that they receive about careers and further study. There is an active sixth-form council and students' views are both listened to and respected. Study and social facilities for the sixth form are inadequate, but because they are happy with so much about their school, they do not identify this as an issue.

### **EXAMPLE OF OUTSTANDING PRACTICE**

**The school dining room is called the Food Court and Cyber Café. The eating arrangements at the school are very good, providing very good-quality food at convenient times, much appreciated by students.**

The food court managed by the "School Cook of The Year" is a super place to eat. It is open throughout the day from 8am. Every dietary whim and need is addressed. The fabulous range of home-made dishes would compete favourably with many restaurants. It is no surprise that staff have won national recognition for this service. Not only is the range and quality of the food first class, but the presentation is also excellent. Significant effort is devoted to providing the most attractive crockery available and substantial containers for the take-away service. Gone is the serving hatch! Instead, students circulate and select their own salads and drinks as one does in the very best food courts. Students queue sensibly and eagerly in anticipation of the delights ahead. A cashless card system promotes speedy service and equality for all. It is no surprise that the take-up of school meals has soared and students make delighted comments like "you can get stuffed, man". The impact on students' welfare is huge. There is surely a connection between this very healthy eating and the very calm civilised demeanour of the students. And all this occurs while students are working on the computers alongside, in an area known as the cyber café.

### **Partnership with parents, other schools and the community**

The school has **very good** partnerships with parents, the community and other schools and colleges.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The partnerships forged as a result of the school being a sports college are bringing a range of opportunities for students' personal development.
- Very good liaison with middle schools ensures a smooth transition for students and an exchange of teaching skills and knowledge.
- The school is committed to working with parents in a variety of ways and regularly seeks their views on aspects of the school's work.
- Some departments write very good reports for parents, but this practice is not consistent across all subjects.

## Commentary

33. Sports college status brings many benefits to students. The sports curriculum is enriched by extensive links with other organisations. There are a wide range of events, competitions, visits by sports personalities and unusual pursuits such as rowing and abseiling. These develop students' confidence and self-esteem exceptionally well. Other local organisations constantly use the skills and expertise of the teaching staff and school facilities so that very productive links are forged. Local first and middle schools benefit from the work that teachers and older students do with them. Staff in these schools value and are grateful for the increased opportunities that are provided for themselves and their children.
34. Links with middle schools are very strong so that there is little loss of learning when students move schools. Most department staff have purposeful termly meetings with middle school teachers and share information and skills. Both learn from each other about the needs of different year groups and plan the curriculum for Years 7 to 9 together. Schools also plan and develop initiatives together for the benefit of students. There are very good links with the local college that help students experience the world of work.
35. Similarly, the school fosters active and important partnerships with parents. There is standing room only at open evenings. One that took place during the inspection was exceptionally well organised and very informative for parents. Regular consultation with parents is a strong feature of the school's work. Parents can genuinely influence school development through, for example, the recently formed Parents Action Group and they know that their views matter. The school is pro-active in seeking parental views and ensures prompt follow-up to issues raised. Some annual reports are good, but not all. Whilst some teachers write very specific comments and set clear agreed targets for improvement, others write general comments about students' attitudes and give little detail about how they can improve.
36. The community education department is now a very significant partner in developing educational opportunities in the town. Students participate in community programmes. Many people from the community use the school's facilities regularly. The department organises a comprehensive programme of classes and students attend many of these.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

**The leadership of the headteacher is excellent. Other key staff are very good leaders. The management of the school is very good. Governors provide very good support to the school and, overall, governance is satisfactory.**

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Inspirational leadership by the headteacher has secured rapid and sustained improvement.
- The headteacher articulates a clear vision for the school and makes this clear so that the school is highly influential in the local community.
- School development planning focuses on teaching and learning and makes increasingly very good use of information to analyse, review and target activities.
- Managers ensure that the school not only runs very smoothly, but that available resources are targeted at school improvement.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form have recently improved because of the re-deployment of staff, who are already performing very well.

## Commentary

### The main school

37. The headteacher is dedicated to ensuring that students and adults develop and enjoy their time in the school. Standards are, therefore, rapidly improving. He has a sincere belief in the

ability of others and a passionate commitment to success for all. Everyone now believes they can achieve. He gives high priority to staff development, particularly in developing leadership skills. As a result, school leaders become increasingly skilled at developing effective teams and fostering very good relationships. He seizes opportunities that come along that will benefit the school. The school's involvement in Initial Teacher Training is an excellent example of this. Not only does this benefit the school, but these students get a very good experience and an excellent start to their professional lives. The school places high priority on appointing, deploying and developing staff and using their skills to very good effect. Governors and school leaders have made some excellent appointments to key positions.

38. Governors contribute fully to the leadership of the school because they know the school well and take responsibility for its strengths and weaknesses. They articulate their vision and take the required action to achieve this. Governors are fully involved in strategic planning and formulating school policies. They successfully hold the school to account for the success of these. They are an exceptionally knowledgeable and skilful group. Governance is, nevertheless, only satisfactory because the school does not meet some statutory requirements, for example, in the way it organises the teaching of citizenship.
39. The school is hugely ambitious and keen to learn from elsewhere. Innovation is a key feature of the school's work and one of the reasons for its success. Staff actively seek good practice elsewhere and adapt it into their own context. The headteacher and other key staff tirelessly develop and sustain links with an extensive range of organisations. The pursuit, achievement and success of having sports college status have led the way for a host of other initiatives, which benefit students and staff. These have fostered and harnessed enthusiasm and energy within the school community and with partners. There is now a palpable sense of optimism and purpose within the community.
40. Consultation with partners is a key feature of school leadership and management. This ensures that a rich breadth of opinion, skill and knowledge is brought to the school. The actions that the school takes to continually improve are much better than the actual written school improvement plan. Leadership knows exactly what needs improving in the school because of comprehensive review processes. Teaching and learning are at the forefront of all school activity and management measures the impact of actions against improvements in this aspect of its work. Some inconsistency in practice is evident due to the variation in individual ability and skill. The senior management team is fully aware of where this is the case and takes action accordingly. There is a restless pursuit of improvement. If some aspect of the school is not working well then new solutions are sought. Rigorous and regular departmental reviews underpin planning. Heads of department are expected to analyse data to identify successes and areas for improvement. Not enough use is made of data to identify whether all groups of students are achieving at least as well as they should, if not better.
41. The school runs very smoothly because staff are very committed and reliable. Support and teaching staff accept very high levels of responsibility. Financial management is excellent and ensures that the best use is made of resources to achieve priorities. Governors and the senior team strive for best value. The development of the food court and cyber café is a stunning example of how to achieve quality at the right price. School costs are high because the school successfully accesses additional money from several sources and uses this very effectively to improve provision. The school funds, for instance, additional mentor support for students so that directors of learning can concentrate on developing their academic support roles. This is just one example of how the school provides value for money.

## Financial Information

Income and Expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total Income	3,393,967	Balance from previous year	£766
Total Expenditure	3,380,771	Balance carried forward to the next	57,322
Expenditure per student	3,275		

## The sixth form

42. School leaders demonstrate an acute awareness of the importance of both formal structures and human interaction. They deploy staff and nurture their performance, especially in key positions. This exemplifies the approach taken towards sixth-form leadership and management. As an outcome of recent changes, there are clearer support structures and an increased rigour in the way the sixth form is led and managed. Leadership and management of the sixth form now match the quality found throughout the school and are clearly focused on securing improved results. The sixth form is cost-effective and is increasing in size. Facilities for study and socialising are currently inadequate. The school is aware of this and is currently exploring solutions.

### EXAMPLE OF OUTSTANDING PRACTICE

**When a school improves since its previous inspection to the extent that Ashington has you want to try and identify how it has happened and “bottle it”.**

One of the key features of the school is the mutual respect that everyone has for each other. This stems from the headteacher, who shows care and respect for staff and students alike. He knows that the only way to lead is through example. He believes that everyone has the potential to grow and develop, but that some people need support and encouragement to do this.

He believes in giving staff responsibilities and then nurturing them as they exercise their leadership role in the school. He used this approach with his senior team, who are the same team that he inherited when he joined the school. This team is a strength of the school. He knows his staff well and can, therefore provide support when necessary. However, he is not afraid to take hard decisions if this is what is needed to make sure that students have the best possible chances in life.

Everything that the school does is focused on raising standards and ensuring that all students fulfil their potential. He has high aspirations for his staff so that they in turn have high aspirations for students. This way of working leads to both staff and students having high expectations of themselves. He exudes self-belief and self-confidence that allows him to be open and honest with his colleagues, governors and inspectors.

There is no simple answer to how improvement has happened but there are some key features worth highlighting:-

- When the headteacher took up post six years ago the senior team were encouraged to spend an intense period of time with students whose behaviour was causing concern. This time was spent talking with them and listening to what they had to say. Listening to them had quite a dramatic affect on their attitudes to school.
- The senior team still spends time on corridors and in the school grounds at break and lunchtime, again talking to students. They pop into lessons to talk to students about their work. They have a strong presence around the school, not policing, but talking with students.
- The headteacher has established genuine partnerships with the local college, the other high school and partner middle and first schools. All are prepared to listen to each other and to work together for the children of Ashington.

When asked about how he had improved the school he said, “by being tall, wearing a suit and smiling”. Many of us may have problems about the first two of these, but we can all smile. The headteacher is a lively, cheerful, encouraging presence around the school who students feel confident to approach. He believes that success in education can improve the local community’s belief in itself. When told that the team judged the school to be very good, his delight was not personal but was on behalf of the students, staff and the people of Ashington.

## OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

### Work related learning.

The provision for work-related learning is **very good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Vocational and work-related courses are very well established in the curriculum.
- The very good partnership with Northumberland College ensures students' differing needs are met through the wide provision of vocational and practical courses.
- Student confidence is developed very well through the work experience programme.

#### Commentary

43. Work-related learning is well established and the school is in a very good position to meet the requirements of the statutory work-related curriculum in 2004. The school has sought to meet students' different needs through work-related learning and experiences offered to help students continue in work-related training when they leave school.
44. An industry day in Year 9 provides students with a very good introduction to the world of work. Year 10 students are encouraged to take an active role in preparing for work experience in careers guidance lessons. Very confident Year 11 students speak highly of their opportunities to learn about life in the work place.
45. The vocational needs of both boys and girls are very well catered for by applied GCSE courses in Years 10 and 11. Lessons were seen in health and social care, business and ICT. Students are highly motivated and receive a very good introduction to these vocational areas. The Young Enterprise Award has also been successfully introduced with a group of young entrepreneurs taking part in the regional trade fair. Sixth-form students have very good opportunities to progress into vocational courses at A-level.
46. The partnership with Northumberland College is very effective and now offers high-quality provision in Years 10 and 11. Applied engineering is a popular choice for more able students. The specifically work-related NVQs in hairdressing and construction are offered to lower-attaining students. Although this provision is still limited in range, students are gaining in self-esteem and are proud of their progress. The liaison between the school and the college is very good. Attendance, progress and behaviour are monitored very well to ensure students make the most of their experience. Finance from the increased flexibility programme is used well to provide transport, correct and safe work clothing, and separate recreational areas for all students attending courses.

### Community provision

The school's links with the community are **very good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The expansion of youth work has a high profile and a positive impact on attitudes and behaviour.
  - Working relationships are very good and ensure that students benefit fully from the expertise of community and youth workers.
  - The range of courses offered by the community education service meets community needs.
47. The school recognises the benefits that working with other adults can bring to students. It also knows how this involvement of adults as teachers and learners can influence the aspirations of the community. There is a very good and comprehensive range of courses and opportunities offered to adults during the day and evenings. Courses are developed in

conjunction with the local residents to meet their needs and to break down any barriers that may exist between the school and its community. The adult education programme has been researched well and courses as diverse as ICT and Tai Chi are well attended. The very good facilities provided for the evening recreation sessions for the disabled are supported well by volunteer adult helpers and students working as community service volunteers.

48. A large number of full- and part-time youth workers are trained by the school to work with young people. Provision continues to expand and stimulate students' interest, for example, the fishing club and Duke of Edinburgh award scheme are popular with students outside of normal school hours. The Young Volunteers and Outward Bound residential courses for Years 9 to 11 are designed to build confidence and self-esteem. The breakfast club ensures students start the day with a healthy breakfast in pleasant surroundings. Students, who attend, are becoming more confident in their interactions with peers and learning mentors. They take care to leave the area tidy for others. Youth and community work has a major impact upon the excellent attitudes and behaviour of students throughout the school. Of particular note is the involvement of a youth worker to develop the school council. She has helped students to develop the remit for the council and to develop the processes that will lead to the election of representatives. Students recognise the different experiences and ways of working that an adult, who is not a teacher, can bring.
49. Community links with local sports clubs are varied and very strong and are helped by the fact that the school is a specialist sports college. Teaching expertise from the college is widely shared with first and middle schools through the sports co-ordinator programmes. Non-specialist teachers in these schools are gaining greatly in confidence as a result. Links with local industry are growing through visits that support the curriculum.

# **PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES**

## **SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4**

### **ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

Media studies was sampled and is taken as an alternative to GCSE English literature. In a very good lesson, students used computers to complete coursework. This consisted of the cover, index page and one feature of a magazine they had created to appeal to their chosen category of reader. This work was of a very high standard and followed individual research each student had undertaken.

#### **English**

The overall quality of provision in English is **good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There has been a steady improvement in standards at the end of Year 9 over four years and a significant improvement this year when test results were above average.
- Students' attitudes and relationships with teachers are excellent. Teachers give very good support to individual students.
- The leadership of the department is excellent and its management is very good.
- Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 are inaccurate and underestimate what students can do. Marking is also inconsistent.
- Accommodation and resources are very good. However, the mobile classroom is not a good teaching base.

#### **Commentary**

50. Test results at the end of Year 9 have consistently risen over the last four years with significant improvement in 2003 to above the national average. This is the result of very good leadership by the head of department and strenuous efforts by teachers. Girls attain higher standards than boys, but the gap between the achievement of girls and boys is narrowing. Students with special educational needs achieve well, reflecting excellent teaching of these students. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were very inaccurate in 2003 and students got much better results than predicted. The department is rigorously addressing this issue. GCSE results were below average in language and literature in 2002. Results improved in 2003 and there was a significant improvement in English literature, especially in the numbers of students achieving higher levels. There has been a considerable improvement in standards since the last inspection.
51. In lessons, students achieve well. They are generally well disposed to learn, are attentive, focussed, and responsive, and participate with enthusiasm. Oral work is confident, particularly in question and answer sessions. Students collaborate well in group work, which is more effective when students have a specific role in the group. Students write and read well, especially higher and lower achievers. Progress is evident during lessons, particularly as students are able to use their earlier learning effectively. Students work hard and enjoy their lessons. Relationships between teachers and students are excellent, as is students' behaviour.
52. Students' achievement is directly attributable to good teaching, some of which is very good or excellent. Teachers have a high level of specialist knowledge. Lessons are well planned with brisk pace. However, the pace of lessons and variety of tasks do not always give students enough time to think about what they have learned. Good use is made of a variety of activities, such as group work, question and answer, student self- and peer-evaluation, students helping each other, and so on. Resources are used well to support learning, including the use of ICT. Assessment information is shared with students and individual target setting and the

monitoring and evaluation of students' progress are strong features of the department. Marking, however, is inconsistent across the department.

53. Students also achieve well because of the excellent leadership and very effective management of the head of department. She has a clear vision of what she wants to achieve, high aspirations for the department and high expectations of students. She has an excellent command of the subject. She ensures that the English staff plan together, share good practice, identify problems and seek solutions. The department has been increasingly better accommodated and, apart from one inadequate mobile classroom and some use of non-specialist rooms, has classrooms that are well resourced. ICT is used well by students, but they do not have enough access to computers.

### **Language and literacy across the curriculum**

54. Students have good levels of literacy skills that support their learning in all other subjects. They are particularly good at speaking and listening. This means that teachers can use discussion as a way of learning. This, in turn, further develops students' verbal confidence and their ability to articulate their ideas clearly and with confidence. Students' reading skills are also good. All departments focus on teaching key words appropriate to their subject and are conscientious about how they mark written work for grammar and spelling.

### **Modern Foreign Languages**

The provision for modern foreign languages is **good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are good at the end of Year 9 and students achieve well.
  - Very good planning helps teaching to meet students' needs.
  - Marking gives younger students good information about how they are doing and how they can improve. Marking of work in Years 10 and 11 is not sufficiently detailed.
  - Teachers often use French and German well in lessons, but they do not always use it as much as they could.
55. Results in tests taken in 2003 at the end of Year 9 were above average; girls' results were well above average. This represents good achievement overall, since the students come to the school with assessments in French that are below average. Most students continue with French and a smaller number take up German in Year 9. Work seen in Year 9 is also above average. Students have a good understanding of spoken and written French and German and they write both well. Students do not perform as well as expected when speaking French or German.
56. GCSE results are below average but are improving because girls' results are improving. There was no similar improvement for boys. Results were skewed towards the lower grades, and in German no students gained a grade above C. The standard of work seen is better than this and achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. Some of the written work done by students in preparation for the coursework part of the examinations is above expectations.
57. Teaching is good in Year 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. All teachers plan their lessons very well with a variety of activities that are matched to the students' individual needs. Relationships between teachers and students are good. In Year 9 students' work is marked in a way that tells them how they are doing and how they can improve. This practice is not as well developed in Years 10 and 11. Students in these years do not get enough detailed information about how they are performing or how they can improve. In Years 9, 10 and 11 students lack confidence, speak hesitantly and their pronunciation is often inaccurate. One of the reasons for this is that teachers speak and allow students to speak too much English in lessons. This reassures the students, but does not allow them to learn from deduction and guesswork. It also limits students' ability to deal with the less predictable situations that arise at GCSE level.



58. Leadership and management of the subject are both now good whereas at the time of the previous inspection they were both unsatisfactory. The head of department has a clear vision for the subject and how it will develop in the future. This is particularly true of the use of ICT. Good management ensures that teachers of all years base their planning on well-written teaching schemes that also cover issues such as citizenship.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The leadership and management of the department are very good with excellent features.
- Procedures to track students' progress are very good and provide a wide range of profiles that are well used to predict examination potential.
- Test and examination results have improved over recent years.
- Assessment of students' work does not provide sufficient written information for them to know what to do to improve their work.

### **Commentary**

59. Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were above average and are improving. GCSE results have improved over recent years, apart from a dip this year caused by an unsuitable examination choice, now rectified. The improvement represents good achievement from average standards when students joined the school. Students with special education needs make good progress in lessons and are well supported by teaching assistants. Good progress is a prominent feature of many mathematics lessons. Students receive good explanations of work in lessons that encourage learning. However, written comments do not provide sufficient advice and detail for them to make even better progress.
60. Teaching and learning are good, and ideas for improvement always feature on the agenda of department meetings. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and quickly engage students' interest in lively mathematical activities. However, teachers do not always adopt a wide range of methods so that students' interest and concentration, especially in the middle part of lessons, are maintained at the level seen in the best. Students' competency in using ICT to support their work is satisfactory. They know when and how to use calculators to extend their calculating skills and more recently are learning to use graphic calculators in plotting shapes of curves. Whilst a class set of laptop computers are effectively used in a few classes, access to the main computer suites is restricted and hampers planned improvements.
61. The leadership and management of the department are very good and have several excellent features. Teamwork is highly valued and departmental meetings focus proudly on ways to make teaching and learning better. The excellent range of written documentation to support this includes up-to-date research relating to improving students' understanding of mathematics. The curriculum relates well to students' needs and there is good provision for those with particular talents in mathematics. Improvements since the previous inspection are good.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

62. Standards of numeracy across the school are satisfactory. In mathematics, they are good because teachers have made good use of the National Numeracy Strategy. This strategy has been introduced to subject departments as part of professional development. However, the co-ordination and implementation of a whole-school numeracy policy is at an early stage.

## SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership ensures that the department is focused on teaching and learning and, in consequence, standards are rising.
- Very good use is made of practical work to underpin the learning of scientific principles.
- Very good working relationships give students the confidence to enter into discussions.
- Marking of class books and tests does not give students enough help in identifying what needs to improve nor guidance on how to improve.

### Commentary

63. Results have been rising sharply over recent years and, despite a slight dip in 2003, test results are above average at the end of Year 9 and GCSE results are average. Standards have improved since the previous inspection. The pace of improvement in Years 10 and 11 has been slower. The changes in attitudes to science in Year 9 are only now beginning to have an effect in these two years. Consequently, achievement is only satisfactory overall. It looks set to improve because standards in classwork and examination coursework are much higher than previously produced. The head of department has sharply focussed the department on improving teaching and learning. More students are working at the higher levels and enjoying science.
64. Lessons are carefully planned with a range of learning activities. Science is made interesting so that students become more involved in their work. Practical investigations are used very effectively to help students understand scientific principles. Teachers' assessments have become more accurate because of the increased frequency of tests and the analysis of the results. Students with special educational needs work in smaller classes, get more individual help and, consequently, make good progress. Students develop good literacy skills through discussions and the many opportunities to write their own descriptions and conclusions. All students have a very good understanding of scientific method and high attainers produce predictions based on research and evaluate their work with maturity and understanding.
65. Teaching is good and has improved since the previous inspection. Lessons are carefully planned with a common structure to promote good learning. In the occasional lesson where planning is not so precise, the final check of understanding tends to be too brief. In consequence, teachers cannot be certain that all students have achieved the learning targets. Students get fully involved in the many discussions and develop independence through planning their own experiments in extended coursework investigations. However, in the shorter investigations, the same high quality is not produced because the work is more teacher-directed and students have fewer opportunities to plan their own work. Teachers have greatly improved their use of ICT to make learning easier, but lack of equipment in the laboratories means that students do not get access to computers on an individual basis. Books are regularly marked and graded, but only a small number of teachers include individual guidance and helpful advice. This hinders progress. The working relationships between teachers and students are very good and give students the confidence to join in the frequent discussions and to both ask and answer questions.
66. Leadership is very good and has improved since the previous inspection. Assessment and analysis of results are used effectively to plan the curriculum. Although assessment and target-setting systems are good, they do not go far enough in identifying specific scientific areas for individual students to improve. An innovative course in applied science has been introduced and allows students to undertake work related to their ability and interest. The head of department does not do enough monitoring of teaching and learning in order to ensure consistency and spread of good practice. He fosters very good teamwork and is providing the

leadership necessary to take the department forward. The department has made very good improvements since the last inspection.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

Provision in information and communication technology is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Examination results at GCSE are good because teachers have good specialist knowledge and students have good attitudes to their learning.
- Leadership and management of the department are good.
- Not enough progress has been made in monitoring and developing the use of ICT across the curriculum.
- Homework and assessment are not used sufficiently to extend learning, particularly in GCSE groups.
- The course in Year 10 that all students follow is not sufficiently challenging, particularly for more able students.

### **Commentary**

67. At the start of Year 9, students' use of presentation software is good, but they have little experience of computer control or modelling. By the end of Year 9, standards are average. Standards in GCSE examinations were average in 2002 and improved slightly in 2003, but there was an absence of the higher grades. Boys did better than girls. Students, who studied a short GCSE course, achieved well.
68. Standards seen in GCSE lessons are average for both boys and girls. Standards within the new course that all students follow in Year 10 are below average. Students receive a basic entitlement and develop specific software skills through the use of worksheets, but they do not build upon their learning in Year 9. Higher-ability students, in particular, are not sufficiently challenged by the work.
69. Teaching is strongest in GCSE groups and is satisfactory overall. A new team of teachers is in place for Year 9. They are developing teaching materials to improve the challenge and raise achievement, particularly for more able students. Classroom assistants effectively support the learning of students with special educational needs. Teachers have good specialist knowledge and plan well. Challenging questioning is used in the best lessons to develop understanding. Support materials help students achieve within their GCSE coursework, but homework is not used sufficiently to consolidate knowledge or support independent learning. The achievement of some groups has suffered due to staff absence.
70. Leadership and management of the department, which has recently come under the supervision of the head of business studies, are good. Liaison with middle schools now focuses on improving the planning of learning between Year 8 and 9. The school knows that the use of assessment, particularly in Year 9, needs improving, as does the course in Year 10.

### **Information and communication technology across the curriculum**

71. The teacher in charge of developing ICT across the curriculum also has responsibility for managing the school network. Currently, there is no monitoring of teaching to ensure that technologies such as the school intranet are developing and supporting independent learning. The use of online teaching and learning materials has, therefore, been slow. Overall, the number of computers and resources is similar to that found nationally, but access for some departments is difficult. The provision of a set of laptop computers has increased flexibility. The ICT classroom assistant provides good support for learning and manages the booking of specialist rooms and resources well. Around two-thirds of students follow an examination course that is either business or ICT related, which helps develop their skills and knowledge

through regular use of computers. Students' attitudes to ICT are good and they have sufficient skills to use it effectively. The development and use by subjects is, however, variable.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **Geography**

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Knowledgeable and hardworking teachers have very good relationships with students, which results in productive classwork, homework and coursework.
- Courses in Years 10 and 11 have been carefully selected to match students' aptitudes.
- The range and quality of fieldwork opportunities offered to students are good.
- Teaching strategies and approaches that create challenge and enable all students to reach their potential are underdeveloped.
- Short-term assessment and marking to enable students to improve are unsatisfactory.

#### **Commentary**

72. Standards in Year 9 are average and achievement by the end of Year 9 is good. In Years 10 and 11, standards are average and achievement is satisfactory. GCSE results were just above the national average in 2002, but in 2003, results fell below the national average. Few students attain the highest grades. In all years, students' standards in labelling and annotating maps, sketches and diagrams are good. Overall, standards have remained similar to the standards at the time of the last inspection. A new course has been introduced in Years 10 and 11 that is better suited to the aptitudes of the students, with a stronger emphasis on coursework, although the effect of the change on GCSE achievement will not be fully clear until 2004.
73. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Teachers' subject knowledge is used effectively to highlight the relevance of geography to local and wider contexts, especially through the use of case studies. There is good emphasis placed on the introduction of geographical terms. Teachers' expectations of students' learning are high. Very good relationships with students mean that teachers and students respect each other and students work productively. Teaching is mainly concerned with activities that require comprehension and recording of information so the range of teaching strategies used does not provide sufficient challenge, particularly for average and above average ability students. In Year 9, the way groups are organised means that the lowest-attaining students and those with special educational needs for learning are taught in the same groups and achieve well. The National Key Stage 3 Strategy has so far only made a small impact on teaching.
74. Assessment is satisfactory overall. Whilst students in Years 10 and 11 are aware of their target grades, students in Year 9 are not clear about expected achievement. All students are aware of the overall quality of their work through regular marking. However, marking is not sufficiently developed to provide students with a helpful commentary on their progress. Consequently, students are not sure of the next steps needed to improve in working towards their target grades and this slows their progress. Opportunities to use ICT to support learning are limited by insufficient availability of facilities within geography classrooms. A geography intranet site provides some support for independent learning, but is in the early stages of development.
75. The leadership of the department is good. The head of department monitors students' performance and teachers are aware of the achievement potential of students. He also manages the history department and time is given for this. Not enough of this time is used for monitoring, evaluation and the development of teaching and learning.

## History

Provision in history is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good in many lessons and it is often very good in Years 10 and 11; this provides for effective learning.
- Leadership and management are good and are focused on improving standards.
- Extra-curricular provision is very good and enriches students' experiences significantly.
- Assessment and marking procedures do not provide sufficient guidance to help students improve their work.

### Commentary

76. In 2003, teachers' assessments showed attainment to be average by the end of Year 9. 2003 GCSE examination results were below average. Work seen shows that current standards in Year 9 meet expectations and that standards in Year 11 are better and are now average. This improvement is because teaching is good and sometimes very good. Some excellent teaching was observed during the inspection.
77. Overall, teaching and learning are good. Achievement is good in Year 9 and students continue to progress well since transferring from middle schools. Students with special educational needs make good progress because lessons are carefully planned to meet their needs. Teachers have a secure knowledge of their subject and relationships are very good. Resources are used effectively. On occasions, teachers do not make enough use of supplementary questions and some lessons lack pace. Students work hard and develop a wide range of historical skills.
78. Achievement is also good in Years 10 and 11. Standards are improving because teaching promotes mature levels of discussion. Students are extremely well taught and make good progress. Students receive very good guidance on how to improve their work and expectations are high. As a result, they improve the quality of their oral work and show good understanding of detail.
79. The good leadership and management of the head of department ensure that staff are well supported and encouraged to be innovative. For example, practical steps have been taken to raise boys' achievement, using specific units of work best suited to their interests. The management of the department is efficient, resources have been improved and steps taken to maximise the use of staff expertise. The history club offers considerable enrichment and attracts a significant number of students to its programme of events. Assessment procedures do not provide sufficient individual guidance. One reason for this is the inconsistent quality of marking. Because of this, students do not always know how to improve their work. However, data is used effectively to analyse student performance over time. Improvement since the previous inspection is good.

## Religious education

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good so students make very good progress in lessons and achieve very well by the end of Year 11.
- Relationships are excellent and lead to very good attitudes and behaviour.
- Lower-attaining students make particularly good progress because work is expertly tailored to meet their needs.

- The department is led with vision and dedication so standards and the quality of provision are improving.
- Although students' work is carefully marked, there is too little individual advice about how to improve.

## **Commentary**

80. By the end of Year 9, students are working at above average standards. Lower-attaining students make particularly good progress because teachers understand their particular needs and adapt work to help them learn. All students achieve well. This very good progress is continued through to Year 11. All students are entered for a GCSE course. About a fifth sit the full course and results are above average. The rest follow a short course and, although they do less well in terms of results, they do very well given the very limited time they have for the course.
81. The main reason for the department's success is good teaching that results in carefully planned and challenging lessons. By the end of Year 9, students have made good progress in their knowledge and understanding of religion. They respond extremely well to the variety of interesting activities in lessons. Teachers have been highly successful in creating an atmosphere in the classroom where learning can flourish. Relationships between teachers and students are based on high levels of mutual respect, so students' attitudes help them learn and behaviour is excellent. Individual students with learning difficulties often have careful and thoughtful support. As they continue to achieve well through to Year 11, students advance their knowledge of world religions and develop very well in their ability to understand how religious beliefs influence moral actions. They clarify their own attitudes to controversial issues very well because teaching directly confronts them with moral dilemmas, often in a vivid way. Teachers do not, though, provide enough helpful comments on how work could be improved. Understanding is extended through visits to places of worship and visitors from religious communities. Girls do better than boys, but by less than is the case nationally.
82. Much of the success of the department is a result of excellent leadership. The teaching team has a shared vision of what they are trying to achieve and work together very effectively. Not enough use is made, as yet, of ICT. The department promotes the involvement of students in charitable activities, demonstrating in practical ways the impact religion can make on social involvement. There is a very good contribution to students' spiritual and moral development. The management of the department has been very effective in making improvements since the last inspection. Standards have improved, teaching is better and there is now no un-qualified teaching in the department.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **Design and technology**

Overall, the quality of provision in design and technology is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are improving; the work in all years is now better than it has been in previous years.
- Enthusiastic teaching and a good range of activities in lessons ensure that all students are involved in learning.
- There are still different systems of planning and assessment in the two aspects of the department.
- The department has not done enough to develop the vocational curriculum across the 14 to 19 age range.

## Commentary

83. By the end of Year 9, students' overall standards are judged by teachers to be below average. Work seen during the inspection in Year 9 is better than this and students are making good progress. In lessons, teachers provide opportunities for them to reach the higher levels expected by the National Curriculum. Students produce articles of good quality, express their ideas very well and communicate their designs clearly.
84. In 2003 GCSE examinations, results were below average. Students performed significantly better in the electronics option. Standards in Year 11 are now satisfactory. Students are making good progress and their achievement is good. They are capable of high-quality work, as can be seen, for example, in the detailed and well-presented project folders of the majority of students. Where students use ICT, the quality of coursework is improved. Good use is made of computers, particularly for computer-aided design and manufacture. Students are challenged to focus clearly on the requirements of the GCSE examination. As a result, students understand what they need to do and are helped to reach higher grades.
85. Teaching and learning are good. All staff have good relationships with students. Teachers are enthusiastic and knowledgeable and are able to easily engage students in learning. Higher-attaining students are sufficiently challenged. Key learning points are systematically reinforced and a good range of activities ensures that all students are learning. New knowledge is introduced as it is needed so that students can immediately use it to develop their understanding. The department places an emphasis on speaking and listening and writing skills. There is good use of numeracy in calculations when measuring length, weight and time. Teachers work well with students with special educational needs. Students' work is marked regularly and teachers generally provide encouraging and motivating comments. In Year 11, quality marking provides a comment that shows students how to improve their work. Teachers' work is made more effective by good technician support.
86. The two heads of department provide good leadership and manage their areas of design and technology well. Although there has been better co-operation since the last inspection, there are still different systems of planning and assessment in each department. The process used for assessing students' work is rigorous. There is a good level of student self-evaluation. A significant number of students are not taking a design and technology subject in the current Year 10 and class sizes are small. The school offers health and social care as a vocational option for students to study from 14 to 19 years of age, but vocational courses are underdeveloped.

## VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Drama was sampled. Students achieved well in their GCSE examinations in 2003. In a very good Year 9 drama lesson, students worked in small groups to read through a short play several times, taking on all the roles. Through this, they began to develop their understanding of the characters. At the end of the lesson, there was a high-level class discussion about the best way to portray the characters. This showed good language development.

### Art and design

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

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in lessons are below average because the range of materials used is too narrow and there are too few opportunities to explore and develop a range of ideas.
- Resources limit what the teachers can do in lessons and there are not enough artefacts and reference materials to inform and help students learn.
- The curriculum has suffered from some poor decision-making and this has had a significant impact on the learning opportunities students are given, especially in Year 9.

## Commentary

87. By the end of Year 9, standards are below average. Too much of the work is copied from the same artists studied by older students and is limited to oil, pastel and colouring pencils. Knowledge and use of colour are very limited because there is not enough painting. The lack of sufficient sinks and hot water limits the use of water-based activities. Because the curriculum is not designed to give the students the essential range of two- and three-dimensional opportunities, they do not make the progress they could. Teaching seen, however, is good. The range of styles and very good relationships encourage free information exchanges between teachers and students that are now making up for some of the gaps in students' learning. Teachers are very resourceful in meeting any shortcomings in resources and reference materials. They are hampered by the poor level of resources overall and the lack of computers.
88. Students' GCSE results are better than the results they get in their other subjects, but are bunched around the C grade. However, the numbers of students, who take the subject, are very low. In the work seen, nearly all is copied and there is very little evidence of students' individuality and imagination. Drawing skills are just satisfactory, but lack originality. There is very little three-dimensional work. The range of knowledge and skills that older students have from their previous work is too narrow to have any impact on their current work.
89. Leadership is unsatisfactory. Poor decisions have been made about the art curriculum, which have impacted significantly on the opportunities given to students, especially in Year 9. The range of media is too narrow and the opportunities for working three-dimensionally and learning about historical and cultural contexts are very limited. The contexts used for teaching do not always appeal to boys and so they are not inspired to continue with art in Years 10 and 11. The unsatisfactory management of the subject since the previous inspection shows in the unsatisfactory progress made on the inspection issues. Time for art has increased, but standards have fallen and are now below average at the end of Year 9. There is still no provision for three-dimensional work. Visits to galleries and working with other artists are not planned, which limits the broadening of students' understanding of art, artists and designers.

## Music

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

- Well-planned lessons encourage students to learn. Because of this, attitudes and behaviour are very good.
  - Many more students are now taking GCSE music and enjoying the course.
  - There is good spoken and written assessment of students' work.
  - Not enough students are encouraged to continue with instrumental lessons when they join the school in Year 9.
  - Homework is not well used to reinforce the work done in lessons.
90. In 2002, teachers' assessments of students at the end of Year 9 were average, as were the GCSE results. In 2003, assessments at the end of Year 9 were also average, but the GCSE results were well above average. Standards and interest dropped steadily after the previous inspection, but since the appointment of a new head of department, there has been a good improvement in music. Unfortunately, many students stop having instrumental lessons when they join the school in Year 9.
91. The standards seen are average in Year 9. This represents good achievement considering that the majority of students are likely to enter their middle schools with musical skills that are underdeveloped. By the end of Year 11, standards are above average and students achieve well. Good, and often very good, teaching is a key factor in improving the quality of learning. A few students, including some, who are talented, play orchestral instruments and this adds value and contributes to their personal development.



92. Teaching in Year 9 is good and inspires students to learn well. Students enjoy playing rock instruments and many are considering GCSE music in Year 10 because of the high profile of the subject and the good resources. Each module of work is marked and students' self-assessment reinforces how well they are progressing. No homework was given during the inspection and there was little evidence of homework being set in students' planners. There is good teaching overall in Years 10 and 11 that leads to a positive commitment from students. Students do well, particularly in their composing and performance modules. Students talk with interest about their work, but they have not used information and communication technology yet for composing as the system has only recently been installed.
93. Good leadership inspires students to do well. Management is satisfactory and is raising the profile of music across the school. Broadening the curriculum still further for Year 9 students will provide an even richer diet of musical experiences. Extra-curricular activities are being developed and both the recent show and the music day with partner middle and first schools were very popular.

## **Physical Education.**

Provision in physical education is **excellent**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The quality of teaching is consistently of a very high standard.
- Students' attitudes and behaviour are always excellent.
- Standards of practical work are exceptionally good.
- There are very good links with first and middle schools, which are developed through the sports college arrangements.

## **Commentary**

94. Achievement is very good. Standards of practical work by the end of Year 9 are better than in most schools. By the end of Year 11, they are very much better. Many girls have outstanding trampolining skills and produce excellent sequences containing a wide variety of somersaults. Boys are very good at table tennis and some play to a very high standard. Results in the GCSE examination are in line with national standards, having improved steadily from well below average at the previous inspection.
95. Teaching is excellent and results in very good relationships in classes. The large teaching team provides a wide range of experience and expertise. Learning objectives are always clearly identified. Very good use is made of technology such as video cameras, which students use regularly to analyse each other's practical performances. Students always work with vigour and enthusiasm throughout lessons. Boys and girls, including those with special educational needs, are given many opportunities to show initiative and all make very good progress.
96. Leadership and management are excellent. There is a strong team spirit amongst the teaching team. Staff take their work as a specialist sports college very seriously and the local community, and particularly partner schools, benefit from their expertise and innovations. Excellent teaching rooms and good resources for examination courses are helping teachers to improve examination results. The strong involvement in the training of teachers has many benefits for the department and students and for the student teachers themselves. Radical improvements have been implemented in all of the weaknesses mentioned in the previous inspection. However, the sports hall is in a poor state of repair and leaks when it rains. Despite this, both teachers and students are unfailingly enthusiastic and students really enjoy their sport.

## **EXAMPLE OF OUTSTANDING PRACTICE**

**Half of Year 11 come to physical education at a time and can follow a range of options. With little evidence of staff presence, they got themselves organised and began work.**

Some boys were going out to play football. In one part of the sports hall, they and their teachers sat putting on their boots. Boys were organising themselves and the equipment. No one needed chivvying up – they were all intent on getting ready for the lesson. Another group of boys quietly and efficiently got a number of table tennis tables out and began to play. A sixth-form student interrupted their play and took a small group through some warm-up activities. In another part of the sports hall, a group of girls were getting prepared to work on the trampolines. They knew what they were working on and how to ensure safe practice. Not only did the teacher coach them, but they voluntarily coached each other. They used a video camera to record their performances. Genuine delight was expressed when new moves were accomplished and genuine commiseration when moves did not quite come off. The atmosphere in the sports hall was so purposeful because students were enjoying their work and were taking responsibility for their work and behaviour. This situation is what every physical education teacher should be aspiring to for Year 11 students.

## **BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES**

### **Business studies**

Provision in business studies is very **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Leadership and management are very good and the focus is on raising standards.
- Very good and excellent teaching inspires and motivates students.
- Written work is checked regularly, but guidance on how students can improve is inconsistent.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes are very good and make a positive contribution to their learning.
- There is very good access to a range of resources that extends students' learning experiences.

### **Commentary**

97. Standards in Year 11 are very good. Results in 2003 show a significant improvement on those in 2002 when they were below average. Results are now well above average in the full GCSE business studies and average in the short course. Students do better in business than they do in other subjects. Achievement is good and students are steadily gaining knowledge and understanding. Students' very good attitudes and behaviour make a positive contribution to learning. Students confidently analyse television advertising to seek hidden persuasive messages. Applied GCSE students relate their findings from an industry visit to other areas of the business world, and use their target grades and understanding of the assessment criteria to reach higher standards in their coursework.
98. Teaching and learning are very good and in some lessons are excellent. Students learn very well as a result. Teachers use their very good knowledge of business to plan lessons, and they share learning objectives and engage and motivate students. In the applied GCSE course, students are monitored very well to ensure that teaching meets individual needs. This builds confidence and every student, including those with special educational needs, takes an active role in lessons, which has a positive impact on learning. In the student work folders, marking is regular, but the quality is variable and some students do not receive enough written guidance to help them improve.
99. The recently appointed head of department is committed to success and both leadership and her management are very good. She receives strong support from her team and schemes of

work are well developed by different teachers to share good practice effectively. Teaching resources are now very good, and there is increasing use of industrial visits to widen students' experience of the world of business. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection.

## **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP**

There were no personal, social and health education lessons during the inspection, but students' work was sampled for evidence of citizenship. From the scheme of work and students' overall attitudes within school, provision in personal and social education is judged to be good.

### **Citizenship**

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The positive atmosphere within the school promotes the values of citizenship.
- There are wide-ranging opportunities for citizenship within lessons and the wider curriculum.
- The school does not fully meet statutory requirements because learning objectives for citizenship are not identified in lesson plans in subjects where citizenship is intended to be taught.
- Assessment procedures are not yet developed enough to fully meet the requirement to report to parents by July 2004.

### **Commentary**

100. The school has very successfully established an ethos that promotes the values of good citizenship. All students receive a guidance lesson once a fortnight where aspects of the citizenship curriculum are taught. An audit of provision in all subjects has identified a wide range of opportunities for teaching citizenship. However, these opportunities are for the most part incidental and do not feature sufficiently in the learning objectives of those subjects. This over-reliance on incidental provision means that National Curriculum requirements are not being fully met.
101. Standards are satisfactory in Year 9 and good by Year 11. Students acquire satisfactory levels of knowledge and understanding and develop a range of enquiry skills that enable them to communicate effectively. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions, reflect upon the experiences of others and consider the views of others. By Year 11, students engage effectively in activities that promote citizenship; for example, participation in the school council, community work and fundraising for charity. This school recognises the importance of these activities and actively encourages them.
102. During the inspection, no specific lessons in citizenship were timetabled. There was little evidence of lessons in other subjects planned to deliver specific citizenship objectives. Students could not identify such objectives being presented to them, except in the guidance period. Students do not receive sufficient feedback on their progress in citizenship. Where students follow different optional subjects, it is difficult for the school to guarantee that all have the opportunities they should have within the citizenship curriculum.
103. The school recognises the need to improve its practice. The new co-ordinator has worked hard to improve resources and to gain the co-operation of departments in completing an audit of practice. She is given good support and guidance by a senior member of staff. Students benefit substantially from what the school already provides and there are significant strengths on which to build.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 10 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.

### ***Level 3 GCE AS level courses***

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	15	53.3	81.6	0	33.2	10.7	33.2
Chemistry	14	35.7	84.8	7.1	36.9	12.9	35.2
English	8	87.5	92.0	0.0	29.9	26.3	35.7
Design and technology	5	20.0	89.2	0.0	32.0	8.0	35.7
General studies	50	78.0	78.6	14.0	25.7	26.8	30.0
History	7	85.7	91.8	0.0	37.2	18.6	37.8
Information technology	12	75	78.2	8.3	20.6	24.2	28.5
Mathematics	20	35.0	74.2	10.0	34.3	11.5	31.3
Other social studies	13	30.8	83.2	7.7	32.5	10.0	33.6
Religious studies	9	66.7	90.9	0.0	38.9	23.3	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
Biology	14	100.0	91.6	0.0	36.3	55.7	74.1
Business studies	12	100.0	96.4	16.7	32.8	61.7	76.5
Chemistry	7	100.0	94.0	0.0	45.9	51.4	81.1
English language	6	100.0	98.3	0.0	36.5	73.3	80.1
English literature	11	100.0	98.5	45.5	43.7	87.3	84.3
Design and technology	10	90.0	95.3	10.0	35.5	66.0	76.5
General studies	5	100.0	90.1	20.0	29.1	52.0	69.3
Geography	17	100.0	97.1	52.9	40.5	90.6	80.9
History	8	100.0	97.1	25.0	41.0	75.0	81.2
Information technology	17	94.1	89.1	23.5	22.4	67.1	64.1
Mathematics	11	100.0	93.3	45.5	52.2	87.3	84.7
Physics	10	100.0	92.8	40.0	42.8	86.0	78.6
Religious studies	6	100.0	96.3	33.3	44.0	73.3	82.2
Sports/PE studies	15	100.0	95.4	20.0	29.5	69.3	73.2

### **Level 2 vocational qualifications**

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business	11	81.8	87.1	0.0	16.5	43.6	60.1
Health and social care	14	78.6	90.1	0.0	16.3	50.0	62.5
Leisure and recreation	8	87.5	86.9	0.0	12.7	40.0	58.3
Travel and tourism	5	80.0	88.1	0.0	15.7	36.0	61.4

## **ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

Lessons in media studies and German were sampled. Students do well in A-level and AS level examinations in media studies. In a good lesson, students learned effectively how the audience for a magazine determined its language, appearance and choice of features.

In German, standards are below expectations and this is reflected in the most recent examination results. The one student of high ability, who was entered for the AS examination, made satisfactory progress. At A-level, learning is limited by the insufficient use of the target language expected at this level.

### **English**

Provision for English is **very good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There has been a steady improvement in standards in A-level English literature and A-level English language.
- Students' attitudes and relationships with teachers are excellent. Teachers give very good support to individual students.
- The leadership and management of the department in relation to the sixth form are excellent.
- Group work is less effective when students do not have clear roles to play.

#### **Commentary**

104. There has been consistent improvement in A-level English literature results since 1998 and results in 2002 were above average. Results in A-level English language were below average in 2002, but improved in 2003. Girls are generally more able than boys in language. Some students did not achieve their predicted grades at AS level and teachers are working with them to improve these through retaking examinations where necessary. Students achieve well in lessons. There is a genuine spirit of enquiry and a readiness to engage with tasks. They show increased understanding of new ideas as lessons progress and are able to apply them. They are good at analysing texts. Oral contributions are very confident.
105. Teaching, overall, is very good. The planning and structure of lessons are very good and pace is effective. Summarising is used well to revisit the objectives of a lesson and consolidate ideas. Teachers offer very positive challenge, support and advice to individuals in lessons. Texts are carefully chosen for students' individual interests and aptitudes. The monitoring of individual student's progress is well planned by staff. Assessment data and criteria are used to negotiate target grades with students. Teachers use excellent resources to support and enhance learning, including powerpoint presentations. Students use laptops in lessons to develop their independent learning.

106. Students are motivated, enthusiastic, interested and confident. They have a good grasp of specialist terminology, especially in English language, and are good at working independently and co-operatively to analyse texts. Their responses are confident and thoughtful. They enjoy working in groups and group work is particularly effective when they have clear roles to play. English literature students have been genuinely moved by some of their texts. They have empathised with young soldiers, many their age, so movingly portrayed by the World War One poets, which has given them a clear understanding of both the reality and the futility of war. Relationships between students and teachers are very mature. Students' files are comprehensive and well maintained. The large increase in students taking English this year is a reflection of the enthusiasm of older students and the very positive experience of English teaching in Years 10 and 11. The productive work ethos reflects excellent leadership and management, very good teaching and the very positive attitude of students.

## **French**

Provision in French is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is good so students achieve well from below average standards at the age of 16 years.
  - Teachers encourage students to develop their skills of learning independently rather than always relying on the teacher.
  - Marking is good and tells students what they need to do to improve.
  - The way French is timetabled means that students have to give of their own time if they want to study the subject in the sixth form.
107. In 2003, the two students entered for examinations achieved grades that were higher than expected on the basis of their GCSE results. Standards of work seen are in line with expectations; this shows good achievement from the below average standards on entry to the sixth form.
108. Students make good progress as a result of good teaching. Teachers select topics to match students' capabilities and raise the level of complexity steadily as students learn. Relationships are good, so students feel sufficiently at ease to take risks with their language and less-confident students feel well supported. The lessons are well paced, so that students of all abilities learn and progress well. Teachers value students' achievements and encourage them to retake examinations and improve their qualifications. Students are also actively encouraged to develop and use independent learning skills and the students' success at using these skills is carefully monitored. They make very good use of a range of opportunities, including the Internet, to broaden their knowledge of the background of France and its culture. Marking of work is well used because it is closely linked to students' individual targets. It is highly valued by students as an aid to their learning.
109. The subject benefits from good leadership. The head of department has a clear vision for the subject and its development. This is reflected in students' motivation. The range of individual learning opportunities shows a commitment to each individual student. Management is good because performance is monitored and good practice is shared amongst all staff. The number of students taking French has increased since the last inspection in spite of the difficulties in timetabling lessons. This means that some French lessons take place after normal school hours. Good attendance at these sessions shows students' real commitment to the subject. Teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection. Students now make good progress.

## MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The leadership and management of the department are very good with excellent features.
- Assessment procedures are very good and encourage students to target improvements they need to make in module tests.
- Teaching and learning are very good and, as a result, the standards of work are above national averages, and a strength of the school.
- Whilst teachers use a good range of teaching methods to develop independent learning, not all students are yet sufficiently confident to work independently.

### Commentary

110. Results in the 2003 A-level examinations are above average and a strength of the school. They have consistently improved over recent years. This good progress results from very good teaching and learning. Teachers are enthusiastic about mathematics and encourage students to continue with the subject in the sixth form. Most students stay on to complete a two-year course.
111. Attainment in lessons is good and students enjoy good relationships with their teachers. Their attitudes towards mathematics are very positive and several are expecting to specialise in the subject at university. In most lessons, teaching is skilful in providing opportunities for independent learning. However, in a few lessons, not all students are yet totally confident in learning independently and seek help too readily. ICT skills are very well developed, especially in the coursework modules. Access is not always available to the main computer suites, but a class set of laptop computers are well used to support learning.
112. Leadership and management are of a very high standard. There is a passion for improvement, especially in finding ways to create better involvement of students in their work. Documentation that underpins these improvements draws on up-to-date research and leads the agenda for departmental meetings. Standards of numeracy are well above average. There has been very good improvement since the previous inspection. Standards are now above national averages and resources are good. Assessment is very good with clear guidance to students on how they can improve their work.

## SCIENCE

The focus was on chemistry and physics, but biology was sampled. In biology, results have been below the national average, but in line with expectations. The subject is popular in Year 12, and about half of the students continue into Year 13. A very good Year 13 lesson was seen. Very skilful, enthusiastic teaching made imaginative use of activities and resources and enabled all students to learn well and make good progress. Students are achieving good standards in their work in this subject.

### Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good because teachers are enthusiastic and have very good knowledge of the subject and the requirements for assessment.
- Relationships are very positive and supportive.
- Leadership is good, with good teamwork, good use of resources and good progress in developing more independent learning skills in Year 12.
- Use of ICT to support learning is restricted by a lack of suitable equipment.

- Students are not as aware as they should be of what they need to do to improve their learning.

## Commentary

113. Results at A-level and AS level remain low compared with other schools, but are in line with expectations based on performance at GCSE. Numbers in Year 12 have increased, but some students have low attainment on entry, having chosen the subject as their third or fourth option because they have enjoyed it previously. Numbers taking A-level have remained small, but in the last two years, all students have achieved pass grades. Boys and girls do equally well. Students make good progress in lessons and achievement is in line with expectations in both Years 12 and 13. In Year 12, students have made good progress from GCSE. They show good practical skills, working with confidence in the laboratory.
114. Teaching is good. Teachers are enthusiastic and have very good knowledge of the subject and the assessment requirements of the examination boards. They know the abilities of their students well and use this information to plan lessons. They provide a good range of learning activities, including some good opportunities for independent learning, such as researching new topics and planning investigations. Assessments at the ends of topics are marked very thoroughly, but more routine work is less well marked. There is little specific guidance on how to improve, although work is often discussed in class and students assess some of the work themselves. Teachers have high expectations, and encourage students to plan their own practical work, although this can sometimes lead to activities running over into subsequent lessons. Good use is made of the data projector and the department has some useful software, but the use of ICT for teaching is restricted by the availability of suitable hardware.
115. Relationships are good and so when learning difficulties are encountered, or exposed by the probing questions of their teachers, difficulties are discussed and resolved positively. The small teaching groups at A-level ensure a high level of individual attention. Additional classes are organised for those, who underachieve in assessment modules, but some students are unsure of personal targets and what they should do to improve. Students use their own computers at home to research and produce work, but access to computers in school for private study is inadequate.
116. Leadership in chemistry is good. A new course was introduced two years ago that better matches the abilities of the students. There is a strong commitment to improvement and there has been some very good professional development in the department. Better use is made of assessment data, but this is not being used to identify any underachievement at an early stage and to help improve students' learning.

## Physics

Provision in physics is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good as a result of the teachers' very good subject knowledge and the good planning that closely follows the specifications for the subject.
- Relationships between the teachers and students and between students are very positive and supportive.
- Good use is made of the available ICT equipment for recording data in experiments, but there is insufficient use of ICT to support learning.
- Opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning are not as developed as they could be.



## **Commentary**

117. In 2002, results at A-level improved and were exceptionally good in comparison with other schools. At AS level, results have been low compared with other schools, although they are in line with expectations. About one third of the students started the course with low GCSE scores. Boys and girls do equally well at AS and A-level. Students that do well at AS level usually continue into Year 13.
118. The quality of the students' work is good, and students achieve well in lessons. Students' notes and work in both years are clearly presented and match the requirements of the specifications at AS and A-level very well. Results of experimental work and calculations are completed to a good standard and end-of-topic assessments show that students make good progress in both years.
119. Teaching is good. Teachers show very good knowledge of the subject and communicate their enthusiasm well. Joint planning of lessons takes account of the abilities of students and ensures that good learning opportunities are provided. New textbooks have been provided that give students better support for independent learning. Students are encouraged to prepare for new topics by reading and researching. Good use is made of the limited ICT resources available in the department for recording results of experiments, but there is less use made of ICT for general teaching. Targets are set for students at the start of Year 12 and progress is monitored by tests and end-of-topic assessments. The marking of assessments and coursework is done thoroughly and useful comments show students how to improve. There is insufficient time in some lessons for reviewing learning objectives.
120. Students work co-operatively and support each other and a good working atmosphere exists in lessons, with a good focus on learning. Most students complete the courses they start. Access to the library and to computers in study periods in school is sometimes difficult.
121. Leadership in the subject is good. Teaching has developed to provide more opportunities for independent learning. Examination results are carefully analysed to identify where improvements could be made. Laboratories and resources have been improved and there is very good technical support.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

One A-level lesson was sampled. Students are taught well and have achieved success in their AS level examination. They have positive attitudes to their work. All have carried out analysis of user needs within a range of organisations and are using this to develop their specifications for ICT systems. The teacher gave targeted individual support and guidance to students about their coursework, based on very good subject knowledge and understanding. Levels of independence are good.

### **ICT skills across the curriculum**

In the sixth form, students develop their key skills, including their use of ICT. Standards are average overall and many use computers both for research and in lessons, for example in chemistry, physics and mathematics. In business education, the understanding and use of ICT are very good.

## **HUMANITIES**

One lesson of history was sampled and the standard of teaching and learning was satisfactory. Provision is good and the standards achieved meet expectations. In discussion with students, it was apparent that they are taught to a good standard over time. Students have a clear view of how the subject can support their future career aspirations.

## Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Courses have been carefully selected to match students' aptitudes, resulting in good achievement in AS and A-level examinations.
- Knowledgeable and hardworking teachers have high expectations and very good relationships with students.
- Not enough emphasis is given to the learning objectives of lessons for outlining the purpose and direction of the learning within the topics studied.
- Insufficient opportunities to discuss information and ideas presented in lessons limit the chances of students achieving the highest grades.

### Commentary

122. Standards of work seen and examination results are generally above average. A new course has been introduced at A-level that is well suited to students' aptitudes. It has a stronger emphasis on coursework and issues-based geography.
123. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use it to plan their work. The subject is presented using a good range of relevant resources with emphasis on up-to-date sources of evidence and case studies. Students show strong levels of interest in the work and develop a range of geographical skills. Teachers' explanations are authoritative with good attention to clarification of key geographical terms and ideas. They provide a good level of information so that students leave lessons able to use the information and principles outlined to develop their learning further. Students listen and work diligently and contribute when allowed to do so. Insufficient attention to managing time and pace of lessons results in too few opportunities for students to discuss the context, understanding and application of their work. They do not often develop the highest levels of understanding and learning. The most effective teaching encourages students' critical thinking, drawing their attention to the integrity of evidence and sources and any limiting parameters. Not enough emphasis is given to the learning objectives of lessons in outlining the purpose and direction of the learning within the topics studied so that students can recognise, review and assess their understanding and progress.
124. Coursework is well organised with a good range of choice to match the different interests and aptitudes of students. Comprehensive guidance booklets and a structured programme of supervision from teachers support students' coursework. This leads to good achievement in coursework. Students use ICT for individual research and presentation of work and teachers are beginning to use ICT to support their teaching. Homework is satisfactory overall. The best examples encourage independent learning through reading as preparation for lessons or engage the students in evaluative activities to consolidate work in lessons. Students regularly receive constructive feedback on their work, telling them how they can improve and enabling good progress to be made.

## **ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING**

### **Design and technology**

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

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students are achieving well in lessons and standards achieved in examinations are improving.
- Teaching is good; sessions are well structured with a range of activities that effectively help students to build up their knowledge and understanding.
- Students work well together and share ideas and information freely.
- The subject areas are well led and there is a good range of learning resources.

#### **Commentary**

125. GCE A-level and AS level results are satisfactory. Standards of work of current students are satisfactory. Students are achieving well in relation to predictions based on GCSE results. Students do well as a result of effective teaching, which demands much of them. The lesson structure and activities clearly focus their learning. Students recall knowledge well and apply it confidently; their project work shows the same confidence as their class work.
126. Teaching is good and students learn well as a result. The principal features of the good teaching are clear objectives, sharp planning, brisk pace and a good range of teaching strategies. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and students practise what had been discussed. Their skills and techniques improve as lessons progress. Students have opportunities to carry out research, working as individuals to formulate ideas and record their findings. Teachers helpfully draw together their ideas and provide explanations.
127. Students work productively and respond very well to the supportive teaching and different learning styles they experience. They support and help each other effectively and, in groups, talk and listen to each other in a mature way as part of their learning. Students are always confident when offering ideas in more open discussion. They draw well on their knowledge of design and meeting the requirements of a specification. They recall earlier knowledge and understanding well and apply it effectively. Project work generally shows the same confidence as their work in class.
128. The department is well led and managed. There is a commitment to building on what has already been achieved and to improving standards. Recording of progress and target setting, based on careful analysis of student performance from testing and assessment, is well established. Learning outcomes are sharply focused.

## **HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL**

### **Leisure and tourism**

Four lessons were sampled. There is a good range of courses to meet the differing interests, aspirations and abilities of students. The number of pass grades in examinations is average, but there are no higher grades. Achievement is satisfactory given the lower than average attainment of students when they start the course. Teaching is good; teachers plan lessons well with a range of activities and use group work to stimulate learning. In the new one-year applied GCSE, teaching and learning are excellent and all students, including those with special educational needs, take an active role in presenting their research to the group. All students are highly motivated and this has a positive impact on learning.

## Physical education

Provision in physical education is **excellent**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent teaching motivates students to do well.
- Lesson preparation is of the highest quality and always has clear learning objectives.
- Teachers employ different styles of teaching effectively.
- Students get opportunities to show initiative and to take on responsibilities.

### Commentary

129. The school has a number of courses available for sixth-form students. Although numbers on A-level courses have been small, results are in line with those in other schools and these courses are becoming increasingly popular. The sports leadership award courses offered at three levels are exceptionally good at promoting students' personal development and developing communication skills. Many students teach groups of younger pupils either in their own schools with their teachers or at this school. They skilfully organise quite large groups of younger pupils into groups and teach them the skills of different activities. The impact of this work and the work that teachers do is raising standards and interest in sport in the community.
130. The quality of teaching and learning is excellent. Teachers prepare in every detail and teach lessons with expertise and enthusiasm. Thus, students' interests and enthusiasm are stimulated and maintained. Marking of written work is extremely thorough and clearly helps to improve standards of work. Students clearly understand the levels at which they are working and the examination grades to which they can aspire. Use of the Internet to obtain information is encouraged.
131. All students work enthusiastically with sustained interest. They have an obvious sense of purpose and direction. Teachers allow students to have responsibility for their learning. Oral contributions in lessons are very good, probably because homework is often effectively used to prepare to take part in the lessons. It also improves the pace and purpose of the work. Students are encouraged to raise questions and express and defend opinions. Teachers' high expectations of them ensure that correct technical vocabulary is used in discussions. Both teachers and students use ICT effectively and with confidence.

## BUSINESS

Provision in business education is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is very good leadership and management of the subject, which has a clear focus on raising standards.
- Standards are rising because of the good quality of teaching and the positive attitudes of students.
- Timetable clashes limit the standards for some Year 13 students.
- There are good resources and access to ICT; links with industry are increasing, but there is no opportunity for work experience.
- There is inconsistent use of marking to inform learning.

### Commentary

132. Standards in business education are good. In 2003, results in the A-level economics and business course improved significantly on the previous year and were better than many other subjects. In the double award course, standards are satisfactory and continue to improve. The single award results are below expectations, due to low prior attainment or timetable clashes

for Year 13 students, resulting in some missed lessons. All intermediate GNVQ students achieve well to gain either a creditable pass or merit award.

133. Achievement is satisfactory. Students combine economic and business knowledge to tackle issues of globalisation in the Third World. In Year 13, the small group of AVCE students use research well under the guidance of their teacher, but lack the stimulus of interaction with a wider range of students. As a result of an industrial visit, applied GCSE students show a higher understanding of business in discussion with their teacher than is sometimes apparent in their written work.
134. Teaching is good overall and in some lessons it is excellent. Students learn well as a result. Lessons are well planned with a range of practical activities and students are clear about what they are learning. In the applied GCSE course, students are monitored carefully to ensure that their individual needs are met. This builds confidence and every student, including those with special educational needs, takes an active role in lessons. This has a positive impact on their learning. In a few AVCE lessons, there is insufficient support for lower-attaining students and materials are not selected carefully enough to meet their needs. The use of marking to give students guidance and help them improve is inconsistent.
135. The recently appointed head of department is committed to improvement and both leadership and management are very good. She receives strong support from her team and schemes of work are well developed by different teachers to share good practice effectively. Resources for teaching and learning are good and the use of ICT is a good motivator and enhances learning. The applied GCSE students do not have an opportunity for work experience to further increase their confidence and business knowledge through interaction with adults in the world of work.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

One Year 12 lesson was sampled in health and social care. Standards of work were good, reflecting good achievement at this stage in the course. The teacher maintained a brisk pace throughout the lesson by using a variety of different tasks, including role-play, which students enjoyed and benefited from. They, in turn, were enthusiastic and very keen to learn.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA**

Art was sampled. Standards seen and the most recent examination results are in line with expectations. However, students have a narrow range of knowledge and skills and very little experience of three-dimensional work. Students work confidently in different scales, but too much work is copied with not enough original work. They can make the connections between their own work and that of other artists, but their limited experiences of materials and processes restricts their expressive potential. Teaching is good because students are now being given the support to improve and broaden their work. Resources and reference materials are limited and of poor quality.

A Year 12 music technology lesson was sampled where one student was doing a presentation about popular music of the 1970's. Excellent teaching had ensured that the researched material was competently presented to the class and included audio and visual presentations to supplement the main points that were being raised. Challenging questions from the teacher and the other students ensured that this was a worthy learning experience for all concerned.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
<b>The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
How inclusive the school is		2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3	2
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	3	3
<b>Overall standards achieved</b>		<b>3</b>
Students' achievement	4	3
<b>Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities</b>		<b>2</b>
Attendance	4	4
Attitudes	2	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2	2
Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		2
<b>The quality of education provided by the school</b>		<b>2</b>
The quality of teaching	2	2
How well students learn	2	2
The quality of assessment	3	4
How well the curriculum meets students needs	2	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		2
Accommodation and resources	4	4
Students' care, welfare, health and safety		3
Support, advice and guidance for students	2	3
How well the school seeks and acts on students' views	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		2
The quality of the school's links with the community	2	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	2
<b>The leadership and management of the school</b>		<b>2</b>
The governance of the school	4	4
The leadership of the headteacher		1
The leadership of other key staff	2	2
The effectiveness of management	2	2

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