

INSPECTION REPORT

THE BROMFORDS SCHOOL

Wickford

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115323

Headteacher: Mr J R Thomas

Lead inspector: Mr M Beale

Dates of inspection: 24 – 27 November 2003

Inspection number: 259375

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:	Foundation
Age range of students:	11 to 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	981
School address:	Grange Avenue Wickford Essex
Postcode:	SS12 0LZ
Telephone number:	01268 471201
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs M Whitham
Date of previous inspection:	24 November 1997

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

This is an average-sized comprehensive for students from 11 to 18 years of age serving the town of Wickford in south-east Essex. It has specialist technology college status and achieved a Schools' Achievement Award in 2003 in recognition of its improving GCSE results. There are more boys than girls amongst the 981 on roll – this figure includes 104 in the small sixth form. Student numbers are rising to accommodate growth in the town and numbers are also increasing in the sixth form, although staying-on rates are comparatively low. A relatively high number of students enter or leave the school at a time other than the start of Year 7. The great majority of students are of white-British origin; no other groups are represented in significant numbers and very few have English as an additional language. There are eight traveller children and a further five in the care of the local authority. Attainment on entry in Year 7 is now broadly average but was below average for the most recent groups of students to reach Year 11. There are few high attaining students on entry and a considerable proportion with weak writing skills. By contrast, attainment on entry to the sixth form is considerably below levels nationally, as relatively few students have achieved A* and A grades at GCSE. The number of students with special educational needs is average, but the number with a Statement of Special Educational Need is below average. Free school meal entitlement is close to the national average. There is relatively little unemployment in the area, although much employment is of a skilled and semi-skilled nature.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
19385	Martin Beale	Lead inspector	English as an additional language
9708	Sylvia Daintrey	Lay inspector	
23016	Terry Morrison	Team inspector	English
32379	Bob Brewster	Team inspector	Mathematics
15079	Tony Boys	Team inspector	Science Special educational needs
8052	Ken McKenzie	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
30563	Jackie Pentlow	Team inspector	Religious education
10759	Lynn Bappa	Team inspector	History
23324	Sylvia Greenland	Team inspector	Geography
31685	Val Girling	Team inspector	Art and design
27665	Alrene Lees	Team inspector	Music
32089	Anne Likeman	Team inspector	Design and technology
25748	Roger Moyle	Team inspector	Physical education
12408	Alan Frith	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
23268	Kevin Corrigan	Team inspector	Business studies (sixth form)
7871	Jean Mackie	Team inspector	Biology (sixth form) Chemistry (sixth form)
4351	Jeanne Strickland	Team inspector	Media studies (sixth form)

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS	10
Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses	
Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	14
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	21
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION SUBJECTS AND COURSES	23
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4	
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	51

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a good school, which provides good value for money. Its reputation and popularity have both increased significantly in recent years. Calm but strong leadership from the headteacher has developed a thoughtful staff team that is highly committed to raising achievement. This has been achieved in spite of difficulties in recruiting staff. Good teaching is leading to motivated students who achieve well. Most make good progress during their time at the school. GCSE results are above average; although National Curriculum test results for Year 9 students have been regularly below average in English, progress here is at best satisfactory. Weaknesses in students' writing when they enter the school are tackled effectively in many subjects.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Sharply focused teaching in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form motivates the students to achieve well and is a significant factor in the rising standards at GCSE and A Level.
- Some shortcomings in teaching in Years 7 to 9 in English and mathematics are leading to slower progress in these subjects than in Years 10 and 11.
- Improvements in leadership and management have enabled the school to secure considerable improvement since the last inspection through a clear focus on raising achievement.
- Staff are successful in meeting their commitment that all students are included in school life and can benefit from the wide range of opportunities on offer.
- Most students behave well and have a very positive approach to their learning; this accounts for the calm and harmonious atmosphere in which students feel secure and where success and achievement are highly valued.
- Students develop very good skills in information and communication technology (ICT), but do not have consistent opportunities to apply these in other subjects.

The school's effectiveness has increased substantially since its last inspection in 1997. Examination results at GCSE and in the sixth form have risen considerably, attendance is higher, the quality of teaching has improved and the school has also tackled successfully the main weaknesses. The provision for students with special educational needs has improved. There is now a consistent and thorough approach to assessing the students' progress and using the information to set targets for improvement. Requirements for teaching religious education are now met, but an act of collective worship is still not provided on a daily basis.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

Achievement is good overall, although the students make more rapid progress in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form than in Years 7 to 9. The school is very successful at enabling the students to make good progress during their time in the school, but the proportion who achieve the highest grades in tests and examinations is below average. Standards are average overall, but above average in Years 10 and 11. There are differences in the performance of boys and girls but not a consistent pattern. Departments are monitoring these differences and taking action, the impact of which is too early to evaluate. Year 9 test results have not shown the same rapid improvement as

GCSE and A Level. GCSE results have improved considerably since the last inspection and the A* grade puts the school in the top five per cent of similar schools in 2003. This is inflated because all students took GNVQ intermediate level ICT, which accounted for four GCSE grades. Even so, the students make good progress during their time in the school; both English and mathematics results at GCSE were above the national average in 2003 and science results were average.

Students' personal qualities are satisfactory. Their moral and social development is good; spiritual and cultural development are sound. The students behave well and generally have positive attitudes to school and to their work; however, fixed-period exclusions are high for a school of this size. This is because of the high expectations and firm line taken over certain forms of misbehaviour and is one reason why the school is calm and harmonious and the students feel secure. There is a strong atmosphere of trust that the students will make sensible choices. Attendance and punctuality are both satisfactory.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching is good overall and results in the students learning new skills confidently. Teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9 and accounts for the more rapid progress that students make on GCSE courses. The curriculum is broad and provides a wide range of opportunities for all students to achieve success. Innovative approaches are being adopted to introduce greater flexibility in the students' courses. Great care is taken to promote the care, welfare, health and safety of all students. Good support and guidance, based on secure assessment of standards, monitoring of progress and mentoring of students play an important role in raising aspirations and standards. The school has developed and strengthened its partnership with parents in recent years. It has promoted highly effective links with the community and other schools through its technology college status and through developing collaborative arrangements with other schools in the town.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good. The strong leadership of the headteacher has brought significant improvements, and provided a sharp focus for raising achievement. Firm action has been taken successfully, such as in mathematics, to ensure that this priority is met. There have been several recent changes in heads of departments. The school provides well for their training and development as well as managing staff recruitment difficulties creatively. Governors fulfil their role well. They support planning for the school's future, particularly in managing the temporary budget deficit. They have a good understanding of its strengths, and what steps to take to secure sustained improvements, but have not ensured that requirements are met for collective worship.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The school is well regarded by parents, who are mostly in support of its work with their children. They are particularly pleased with the help and guidance for their children. They speak highly of the headteacher and the improvements that he has brought. Students are proud of their school. They feel that this is a good school to be at, although a substantial number are not entirely happy, with some justification, with the behaviour of a very small minority of their peers.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- raise achievement in Years 7 to 9, particularly in English and mathematics;
 - sharpen lesson planning, challenge and the use of assessment in classes in Years 7 to 9;
 - continue the work being undertaken in subjects to monitor and tackle the variations in performance of boys and girls;
- and, to meet statutory requirements:
- by providing a daily act of collective worship.

THE SIXTH FORM AT THE BROMFORDS SCHOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is an effective, steadily improving and reasonably cost-effective sixth form. The attainment of students when they enter sixth form courses is well below that typically found elsewhere and relatively few are predicted to gain the highest A Level grades. However, students mostly exceed these predictions, particularly in ICT. Examination results have improved since the last inspection, but relatively few students achieve the highest grades at A Level. Numbers staying on into the sixth form have increased, although they remain below the national average. Clear progression routes are planned to take the students into further and higher education. Teaching is good and the work of the sixth form is well led and managed.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Expert and challenging teaching is leading to students achieving well in most subjects, but some teachers do not engage the students sufficiently in the learning process.
- Standards are well above average in ICT, but the students do not always have the opportunity to use their skills in other subjects.
- There is a clear direction for the development of the sixth form based firmly on raising standards, broadening the range of courses offered to cater for all levels of prior attainment and increasing recruitment.
- Students are keen to do well but are sometimes slow to show initiative and take responsibility for their learning.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Provision for English is satisfactory. A Level results are below average, but represent satisfactory progress for most students. Teaching is satisfactory as is the students' achievement.
Mathematics	Provision for mathematics is satisfactory. Achievement is satisfactory. A Level results have been well below average but current standards are much higher because of the good teaching and the students' positive attitudes to their work.
Science	Provision for biology is satisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory. Although standards are below average, this still represents sound progress for the students from their GCSE results. Provision for chemistry is good. Students achieve well. They make good progress from GCSE and attain standards that are close to the national average.
Information and communication technology	Provision for ICT is very good. The students achieve very well because teaching is good and often better and they are highly committed to their studies. Standards are above average and represent good progress from the students' earlier Year 11 results.
Visual and performing arts and media	Provision for media studies is satisfactory. Students achieve well and make good progress. A Level results are broadly average but have been improving of late. Teaching is satisfactory overall but with some very good features.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Provision for physical education is good. Teaching is good overall and sometimes better. Achievement is good and leads to consistently

above average results at A Level.

Business

Provision for business studies is satisfactory. Good teaching and the students' positive approach to the course are resulting in satisfactory achievement and standards that are close to national averages.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Students' progress is carefully monitored. Good support and guidance, based on this information, are provided. Their work is carefully assessed and marked so that most have a clear picture of what they need to do to improve. However, some teachers do not use the information available sufficiently to support the students' learning and their ability to achieve higher standards.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management are good overall. There is a clear direction for the work of the sixth form. Data is used well to evaluate the progress of students and to identify those who might be underachieving. However, this information is not used consistently at a department level to identify where adaptations to plans and teaching may be needed. In some subjects, there is not a clear link between teaching and learning at GCSE and sixth form studies where this would logically be the case. Lessons at GCSE in these subjects do not anticipate and prepare students for the learning styles that will be needed in the sixth form, and lessons in the sixth form do not build on logically from what has gone before.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students are generally satisfied with the provision. They generally feel that staff seek and listen to their views, but some are not happy with the range of enrichment activities provided. They feel that staff assess their work in a helpful way and they appreciate the help and support from their subject teachers and the time that they give to them.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

The 2003 GCSE results are good with the proportion of students gaining five or more A* - C grades being well above the national average. Achievement is also good in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. It is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. Inspection findings show that standards by Year 9 and in the sixth form are in line with national expectations. Standards by Year 11 are above national expectations.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results have improved significantly since the last inspection and at a rate that is more rapid than the national trend.
- History standards are well above national expectations.
- Standards and achievement in ICT are good in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form.
- Standards in English and mathematics remain below national expectations by Year 9.

Commentary

1. The students are achieving well in Years 10 and 11 because of the good and very good teaching which stimulates interest and provides appropriate levels of challenge for the students, who respond positively and are keen to succeed. Those who are identified as having special educational needs make good progress compared to their prior attainment. Many meet the targets set for them in their individual education plans as a result of the very good teaching from specialist teachers.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	31.2 (31.3)	33.3 (33.3)
mathematics	34.1 (35.3)	35.3 (34.7)
science	34.7 (34.7)	33.7 (33.3)

There were 193 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. National Curriculum test results for Year 9 students, when taken overall, have improved broadly in line with the national trend from 1998 to 2002. The results for 2003 were similar to those of 2002. In English and mathematics, the results were below the national average and well below the average for similar schools. Science results were stronger, being above both national and similar school averages. Results overall represent satisfactory progress for the students given their below average standards on entry to the school. The 2003 targets for the Year 9 test results were achieved. The relative performance of boys and girls has fluctuated over the years with no real pattern emerging. There are too few students from minority ethnic groups to make valid comparisons in performance, although their achievement, and the achievement of Traveller children, is no different from others in their classes. Inspection findings are that standards overall by Year 9 are in line with national expectations and better than those indicated by the 2003 test results. The school has experienced difficulty in recruiting staff in the past, particularly in the mathematics department, but has gradually established a more stable and increasingly effective team of teachers. This is having a positive impact on standards and achievement.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	71 (56)	50 (50)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	94 (93)	90 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (98)	97 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	36.6 (35.9)	39.9 (39.8)

There were 154 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. The improving results at GCSE are in part due to the strong performance in the GNVQ ICT course which students follow in Years 10 and 11 and which is equivalent to four GCSE grades. The results represent good progress overall for the students from their test performance in Year 9. Targets set for achievement at Year 11 were exceeded. While the girls' results are regularly higher than those of the boys, the margin is less than nationally.
4. Results in English language improved significantly in 2003 and, along with mathematics, were above the national average and the average for similar schools. Results were also above national averages in German, media studies, textiles and physical education. Science results, combining both the separate science and double science award figures, were in line with national averages. Results in business studies, drama and graphics were below national averages. The performance of boys and girls is variable across a number of subjects but there is no overall pattern. Findings during the inspection show that standards reflect those of the GCSE results in 2003, being largely above national expectations.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	95.1 (89.9)	n/a (94.8)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	21.5 (24.8)	n/a (39.4)
Average point score per student	232.1 (258.0)	n/a (263.3)

There were 30 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

5. Taken overall, the A Level results for 2003 are similar to those of 2002 and are broadly in line with the national average. The pass rate was almost 90 per cent and 19 per cent of passes were at the higher A and B grades. There was no significant difference in the results of males and females. Given the low attainment on entry to the sixth form, these results represent good progress for the students. Results for the AVCE ICT course were good, along with results in A Level English literature and physical education. However, results in physics declined from those in 2002.
6. The small numbers entered for A Level in the past make it difficult to establish clear patterns in performance over time and to compare the results of males and females. However, in 2002, when comparing performance in individual subjects with the performance in their remaining subjects, students did better in communication studies, English language, English literature and design and technology. Performance was comparatively weak in biology, general studies and sociology.

7. Inspection findings show that overall standards of work seen in the sixth form are in line with national expectations. In some subjects such as biology and chemistry, they are below but approaching national expectations. As in Years 10 and 11, good teaching is enabling the students to achieve well and make good progress.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students' attitudes and behaviour are good. Their personal qualities are satisfactory. Provision for their moral and social development is good and that for their spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' positive attitudes and desire to succeed make a significant contribution to their good achievement, especially by the end of Years 11 and 13.
- Most students behave very well, but a small minority, mainly in Year 10, do not always conform to the school's expectations.
- Sixth form students are given plenty of opportunities to take responsibility and develop initiative but sometimes lack confidence in promoting their achievements.
- Assemblies are used well to tackle moral and social themes but the school still does not provide a daily act of collective worship.

Commentary

8. Most students in Years 7 to 11 enjoy being at the school and appreciate the support of the teachers which helps them to achieve their best. Students in Years 7 to 9 especially like practical and creative subjects such as physical education, drama and design and technology. Their attitudes are good in most lessons, but the commitment of some boys to learning in English is sometimes unsatisfactory. This is despite the school's efforts to enthuse targeted groups of boys at the end of Year 7 through the 'Writers' Zone' project. Students in Years 10 and 11 are clearly motivated to succeed in their examination courses. Those on the 'alternative education' programme - which includes work experience and college placements, as well as accredited courses at school - are keen to explain their individual project work and persevere well with it.
9. The school sets high standards of behaviour, trust and respect towards others, including those who belong to groups that experience discrimination. Most students respond very well to these expectations and the result is a calm, safe and harmonious atmosphere around the school in which good learning can take place. However, there are small numbers of students in each year group, but most noticeably in Years 8 and 10, whose challenging behaviour sometimes disrupts lessons. In questionnaires and interviews, students report some lack of consistency in the way in which some behavioural issues are dealt with by teachers. The school deals well with incidents of bullying when it knows about them, but students, especially in Years 7 to 9, admit that they do not always report bullying as they fear the situation will get worse.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	7.9	School data	0.7
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.

10. Attendance has improved since the last inspection and is now consistently a little above the national average. Most students attend school regularly and arrive promptly to their lessons; consequently, they are able to make good progress in their learning. The attendance of most students from the Travelling community is good. However, there are a small number of boys and girls in Years 10 and 11 who rarely attend despite the efforts of the school and the Education Welfare Service.

11. The incidence of exclusions has risen significantly since the last inspection. The rate of permanent exclusions is broadly average for a school of this size but the rate of fixed period exclusions is high and there is also considerable use of internal exclusion. Half of the exclusions so far this term involve a small group of boys and girls in Year 10 who are particularly disruptive and abusive to staff and fellow students. The school is appropriately undertaking a thorough review - involving staff, students and parents - of its strategies for dealing with behaviour.

Ethnic background of students

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	935	109	3
White – Irish	2	0	0
White – any other White background	8	2	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	2	2	0
Mixed – White and Black African	2	2	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	7	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	5	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	1	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	1	0	0
Black or Black British – African	5	2	0
Chinese	5	0	0
Any other ethnic group	2	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	4	0	0

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

12. Students' personal and social development is enhanced well by a good range of opportunities to work together in lessons, to present their work in assemblies and to take part in activities such as the 'Easy Tiger' drama club in Years 7 to 9 and the Trident Gold Award scheme in Years 10 to 11. A good start was made in introducing a house system last year to encourage students' personal development further, and the younger students involved hope that the competitions and events will return after the inspection. A large number of students in Year 11 are positively involved as prefects, for example in showing parents round at open evenings, but the school recognises that their status as role models for younger students needs to be raised.
13. There are now three assemblies a week for each year group, which focus well on important themes such as healthy living, personal challenge and preparation for mock exams, but they offer no opportunity to reflect on a spiritual dimension. There is better provision than at the last inspection for a 'thought for the day' to be discussed in tutorial periods but staff are not confident in guiding any meaningful debate. A range of cultures, traditions and faiths are promoted satisfactorily in subjects such as history, religious education, English, music and dance but there is not enough celebration of other cultures for students to develop a real understanding of the diversity of British society.

Sixth form

14. Students are pleased they stayed on in the sixth form and very much value the help and support they receive from their teachers. The school has improved its provision for students' social development and treats sixth formers as mature individuals, encouraging and expecting them to take responsibility and develop independence. For example, many students undertake community service, much of it within the school, which can be accredited by the Millennium Volunteers project. Some students in Year 12 sometimes display a little immaturity and lack of initiative, and some members of the sixth form council are surprisingly hesitant in talking about their experiences of sixth form life. However, by Year 13 most students are capable of taking a leading part in activities such as devising and presenting an assembly on post-18 opportunities, chairing the main school council or running the peer support programme in association with Childline.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is good. The well-planned curriculum is taught well and the students' progress carefully assessed and their progress monitored. The care, support and guidance of the students are a high priority. Strong and effective links have been established with the school's partners and stakeholders.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good as is the assessment by teachers of the students' work. Teaching, learning and assessment are all better in Years 10 to 13 than in Years 7 to 9.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are motivated and enthused to work hard where teachers use their subject expertise well by planning interesting lessons, questioning the students skilfully and setting a high level of challenge.
- Teachers in Years 10 and 11 focus their lessons very successfully on examination techniques and requirements.
- Teachers mostly divide their lessons into distinct parts, which enables learning to be consolidated, new skills developed systematically and progress evaluated.
- Lessons do not always provide the challenge needed to move students on rapidly from their starting points in Year 7.
- Some lessons in the sixth form are dominated by the teacher with limited involvement of the students; however, several teachers skilfully draw out thoughtful and detailed responses from their classes.
- Significant improvements have been achieved in assessment practices and the use of information to guide both teachers in their planning and students on how they can do better.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 156 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactor y	Poor	Very Poor
4 (3%)	32 (21%)	60 (38%)	56 (36%)	4 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

15. The rise in standards and the students' achievement since the last inspection is due to improvements in teaching particularly from Year 10 upwards. Teaching is good overall in Years 10 and 11, and satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. This difference is manifested by more of the better teaching and less that is unsatisfactory taking place in Years 10 and 11. The action taken to improve teaching has focused successfully on the techniques needed at GCSE, but has not been as effective for classes lower down the school. Staffing difficulties have required the school to be expedient in the deployment of its best teachers to examination classes. This has resulted in less experienced teachers or staff teaching outside their main area of specialism being deployed to Years 7 to 9.
16. Where teachers are on top of their subjects and their classes, they use their subject expertise to very good effect. Lessons are lively and interesting, and questioning is probing and challenging. In these lessons, the students are highly motivated and co-operative, helping to generate an atmosphere in which their learning can thrive. These features are evident in many lessons in Years 10 and 11 and in the best lessons in Years 7 to 9. Teaching of students with special educational needs is good in their normal lessons and very good when they are taught by specialist teachers. Teaching assistants provide valuable support when they are briefed carefully by class teachers and involved in planning.
17. The guidance and structure of the national strategy to improve teaching at Key Stage 3 is used successfully by many teachers, not just in Years 7 to 9 but throughout the school. In particular, they divide their lessons into three parts with a clear focus for each. Lessons are carefully planned and well-prepared so that there is a seamless move from one activity to another. Starter activities are used to review previous learning and establish what is to be learnt in this lesson. Clear objectives are discussed, shared and revisited so that the students have a clear picture of what they are to learn and how successful they have been. Teaching methods and activities are pitched at a variety of levels so that the learning needs of all students are tackled. Teachers are also able to assess quickly how successful learning has been through carefully constructed and executed review sessions at the end of each lesson. These methods are having a greater impact in Years 10 and 11 because teachers use GCSE requirements as a firm basis for their planning and use assessment information effectively to pitch work at the right levels. These teachers have high expectations, challenge the students and ensure that the students are aware of what is needed to improve their work. This helps them to drive learning forward at a good pace.
18. For a variety of reasons, the structure of the strategy is having less of an impact in some lessons in Years 7 to 9; this results in slower rates of learning. Planning in some subjects is not based securely on guidance, such as schemes of work. Assessment information is not used to best effect, particularly in Year 7, to ensure that work is pitched at the right level. Too little ground is covered in some lessons, while the pace of learning is too comfortable in others. This results in some students marking time and not being challenged from the outset. School management recognises this weakness and is turning its attention from Years 10 and 11 where the focus has been, onto improving the quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9.
19. Marking in many subjects is helpful and includes the National Curriculum levels students are achieving, although this is not done consistently in all subjects in Years 7 to 9. In English, marking is very variable and not checked between teachers. Marking is more consistent in Years 10 and 11, because examination criteria are used effectively. Students at this level have a better grasp of how they are doing. The school has collected a great deal of information on assessment as a means of recording and analysing students' progress. Although subjects are making good use of this information, it is not used consistently to target individual students' weaknesses. In some subjects, students are involved in assessing their own work and that of others, but again this is not so across the board. In modern languages students are still too reliant on the teachers and have not developed sufficient confidence to trust themselves in this role. Examples of good assessment practice are in the thorough processes in ICT and physical education.

Sixth form

20. Many of the qualities that are to be seen in Years 10 and 11 are also evident in sixth form teaching. This is particularly the case in successful subjects such as ICT. Here teaching is well-organised and lessons are challenging. The expertise of teachers is put to good use through perceptive questioning and effective support for individuals. These qualities account, in many cases, for the students achieving better results than predicted from their performance at GCSE. Where teaching is not so effective, lessons are dominated by the teacher. Limited participation is sought or expected of the students, who tend to be passive learners as a result. This limits their ability to show initiative and to be independent in their learning. Students make slower progress in these lessons and their achievement in these subjects is at best satisfactory.
21. Assessment in the sixth form is good overall. Students are clear on how to improve from the written and verbal feedback they receive. Students' strengths and weaknesses are diagnosed and areas to work on are targeted effectively. Teachers use the wealth of information from assessment well, especially in physical education and mathematics. The assessment of students on the ICT AVCE course is very good, and has influenced assessment at other levels in the subject.

The curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good in both the main school and the sixth form. All curriculum requirements are met, apart from the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship. The school has made satisfactory provision to enrich students' learning outside of lessons. Accommodation is satisfactory overall. Resources are good throughout the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A creative and well-planned curriculum caters for all students and prepares them well for life.
- The school has fully exploited its technology college status.
- The alternative, work-related curriculum in Years 10 and 11, although only able to cater for a small number of students, is very well designed and provides them with very good opportunities to achieve.
- Although there have been serious staffing problems, the school has designed a well thought out graduate trainee programme to alleviate these.
- There are some inconsistencies in extra-curricular and enrichment provision.

Commentary

22. Curricular provision has improved significantly since the last inspection. The curriculum now provides a good range of opportunities to meet the needs, interests and capabilities of students of all backgrounds. Access to the curriculum is good for all students, including those with special educational needs.
23. The curriculum meets the school's aims well. The senior management team maintains a regular review of the school curriculum to ensure that it is up-to-date, and that it provides good learning opportunities for all students. The school has fully exploited its opportunities as a specialist technology college to widen the opportunities available to students in design and technology, ICT, mathematics and science. Provision for careers education and guidance is good.
24. All subjects of the National Curriculum, including citizenship and religious education, are included in Years 7 to 9. The school has invested heavily in ICT and all students are taught this subject in Years 7 to 9. Several innovative approaches are being adopted in Years 10 and 11. Students follow a broad and balanced programme of courses that lead to GCSE, GNVQ or other vocational qualifications. The school offers a wide range of courses, including vocational

courses and an alternative work-related curriculum that includes two or three days each week work experience. Students have the opportunity to begin a GCSE in design and technology in Year 9 and sit the examination a year early. All students study technology in Years 10 and 11 as well as GNVQ information technology. There have been improvements in the curriculum in science and mathematics as part of target subjects related to specialist technology college status. For example, students are able to take triple science and the Headstart programme has been introduced this year into the mathematics curriculum.

25. Provision for students with special educational needs is good. Students who have a Statement of Special Educational Need receive good support, as do all others on the school's list of students with special educational needs. All students receive their basic curriculum entitlement and students in Years 10 and 11 have very good opportunities to follow an alternative vocational and work-related curriculum.
26. There is no overall co-ordinator of the extra-curricular programme. This means that there is some uneven provision in this area. The participation rate of students involved in expressive arts and sporting activities is average. Within the expressive arts, there are choirs, a school band and instrumental group. Drama and music offer opportunities through clubs, rehearsals and whole school productions. Lunchtime and after-school clubs include those in computing, science, art and technology. There is a regular homework club and lunchtime GCSE revision sessions are held in some subjects. The range of sporting activities is satisfactory; participation rates are average for boys and below expectations for girls. The range of educational visits is limited, due to lack of finance. The curriculum lacks the enhancement of more regular field trips and visits to museums, art galleries and places of worship. Year 7, 8 and 10 students' residential camps provide good opportunities for team building. Students' skills in modern languages are extended through short visits to France. Good enrichment liaison is made with partner primaries, through Technology College initiatives. The school has strategies in place to improve multi-cultural and industrial links.
27. Overall, the accommodation provided is satisfactory in both the main school and in the sixth form, although there are some significant variations between subjects. The inadequate size of the art rooms makes painting difficult and is having a negative impact on the art curriculum. The lighting in some English and history rooms is unsuitable for the use of projectors and whiteboards. There are good facilities in physical education, including a dance studio, sports hall, gymnasium and sports fields. There is a good-sized library, although the books are of insufficient variety to aid fully the independent learner. There is a well-equipped classroom for students who follow the alternative vocational curriculum in Years 10 and 11.
28. The school has good learning resources to meet the needs of the curriculum. ICT provision is good overall. There are suites of computers in various locations across the school. However, there is a lack of computer equipment suitable for music and art which limits opportunities for teaching. The very good resources in design and technology allow a wide range of opportunities for teaching and learning. The school has faced major staffing difficulties in the recent past. However, the use of a well-planned graduate trainee teacher programme has helped significantly to ensure that there are sufficient teachers in place in all subjects.

Sixth form

29. A broad curriculum, catering for most levels of prior attainment, is available to sixth form students and they have a satisfactory range of enrichment opportunities. The curriculum is as extensive as it can be for a sixth form of just over 100 students and there are plans to expand it steadily as numbers build up. The school adopts an innovative approach towards development and has started to create a flexible curriculum for the sixth form in which students can progress at different rates and take qualifications at appropriate times. All students follow an examination course in general studies that covers religious education, key skills, careers education, university application procedures and several other topics of interest. Almost all students have the opportunity to take recreational physical education. The tutorial programme

includes several expert outside speakers who can advise on higher and further education entry as well as other opportunities such as modern apprenticeships. Accommodation is currently too limited, especially for providing study and common room facilities although the provision of the almost-completed sixth form block will remove these limitations.

30. Extra-curricular music and drama activities provide opportunities for students to practise and improve their skills in informal settings, as well as through major productions. Provision is satisfactory in sport, particularly in football, badminton and swimming. Some sixth-formers coach younger students and help with the organisation of inter-house sport. Occasional visits are made to theatres, art galleries, museums and other institutions that support learning. Visits abroad are limited, but students in business studies, art and ICT are given opportunities to improve their skills and extend their knowledge. Students are given support with their learning through the provision of revision classes and courses and study skills talks. Students are given an insight into university life through visits to university campuses, higher education fairs and visiting speakers. The school is focusing on industrial links and preparing students for life in a multi-cultural society, as areas for further development.

Care, guidance and support

Arrangements for students' care, welfare, health and safety are very good. Provision of support, advice and guidance is good. The school makes satisfactory efforts to involve students in its work and development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are very good procedures for managing first aid in the school.
- Good support is provided for students who experience barriers to learning.
- Students are very well supported in Year 11 to help them achieve their potential in examinations, but guidance lacks rigour and consistency in Years 7 to 9.
- The school council does not have a high profile as a mechanism for students to express their views and bring about change.
- There is a coherent and effective programme of study support in the sixth form.

Commentary

31. A considerable number of staff in the office are very well trained in first aid and take very good care of students who report sick or injured. They keep meticulous records concerning the welfare of the students, monitor these rigorously and keep parents very well informed. Trained first-aiders are also positioned in key departments such as physical education and science. The assistant headteacher responsible for premises is committed to making the school a safe and improving environment for the students and manages all health and safety requirements effectively. Another assistant headteacher is similarly well organised and thorough in ensuring that child protection procedures are followed. The result is a school in which the well-being of all students, including the most vulnerable, is paramount.
32. The support for students with special educational needs has improved considerably since the last inspection and is now very good, especially in Years 7 to 9 where most support is concentrated. Students are, therefore, able to make good progress towards achieving the targets set for them. A senior learning support assistant makes a very valuable contribution to the vocationally-orientated programme of study, work experience and college placements which benefits potentially disaffected students in Years 10 and 11. The school makes very good use of the Traveller Education Service to settle in very successfully students who have little experience of formal education. It monitors carefully the progress of students from a travelling background and those who are looked after by the local authority. An outreach worker from the local student referral unit is providing very good support for students, mainly boys in Year 7 with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

33. Students in Year 11 are very appreciative of the extra help they get from their subject teachers, form tutors and senior managers as they approach their public examinations. The examination criteria provide a clear focus for the very good support and guidance which they receive; for example, there are extensive revision programmes and special mentoring sessions for students to review their progress towards their target grades. Guidance to help students in Years 7 to 9 to raise their academic achievement is not so effective because it does not always build with sufficient rigour on what students have already learnt in primary schools, and the school's academic monitoring system for Year 7 to 9 is only now changing to one based on National Curriculum levels. However, with the introduction of strategies such as having targets or objectives pasted in their books and attending termly academic mentoring days with their parents, the younger students are beginning to develop a clearer understanding of how well they are doing and what they have to do to improve.
34. Students' views are sought from time to time and the school listens to and acts on them appropriately. However, not many students are aware of the current issues being considered by the school council, partly because the methods of passing on suggestions and feeding back to tutor groups are not securely in place. The senior management team is aware of the problem and is working towards making the school council a more effective vehicle for giving students a voice and involving them in review and planning.

Sixth form

35. Students greatly value their teachers' help and support while they are in the sixth form. There is a well planned programme of general studies, tutorial periods and timetabled lessons for study support, staffed by sixth form tutors and the head of year, which provides good pastoral and academic support for the students. There is a good programme of advice on pathways into further and higher education which includes a visit to the Chelmsford Higher Education Fair, talks from a variety of expert speakers and access to a Connexions adviser. Nevertheless, over half the students responding to the questionnaire were not happy with the advice they receive about what to do after leaving school. In discussions they said that they would welcome more support in researching universities and completing the UCAS form, although they recognised that they were being encouraged to develop independence.
36. The school seeks the views of sixth formers more frequently than it does of students in the main school and responds well. For example, only half the students felt they had received helpful advice on what they should study in the sixth form, so the head of sixth form has introduced 'taster' lessons for the current Year 11. The sixth form council is not quite as effective as it might be because the students lack a little initiative, for example in raising funds for and organising their own social events.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Links with parents are good. Links with other schools, colleges and the community are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school has good arrangements for informing and involving parents with the result that most parents support the school well.
- The headteacher and senior staff provide excellent support for a range of schools in the area.
- Staff in some departments do not know enough about what the Year 7 students have already experienced in their primary schools.
- The school makes very good use of its community links to enhance many aspects of the curriculum in Years 7 to 11 and to support students in their personal development.

Commentary

37. Most parents - including those whose children have special educational needs or who come from the Travelling community - want their children to do well and express a good level of backing for the school. This makes a positive contribution to the students' good achievement, especially by the time they undertake public examinations in Year 11. The school provides parents with a good range of information, including on its web-site, and staff such as heads of year are easily accessible by telephone. Parents are invited to termly mentoring days when they have the opportunity to discuss with staff the student's progress towards individual targets. The school is making good improvements to the formal reporting system with the introduction of short interim reports and the use of National Curriculum levels to give a clearer picture of attainment in Years 7 to 9. The school works well with the parents' association (Friends of Bromfords) not only on fund-raising but also for consultation and feedback on school developments.
38. The school makes an excellent contribution to the improvement of education locally through its very pro-active leadership of a number of consortia of schools and individual support for schools in difficulties. It is extremely well regarded in south and east Essex for its work in disseminating good practice in areas such as training for middle management and researching into teaching and learning styles. It is a key player in the consortium of colleges, agencies and training organisations which provides an alternative, vocationally-based curriculum for students in Years 10 and 11. It fulfils its obligations as a specialist technology college very well by supporting local schools to improve their provision of science, technology and ICT; for example, students from primary and special schools come to Bromfords to use the facilities. Transfer arrangements from primary to secondary education are managed effectively. Nevertheless, some departments do not go out into primary schools to find out what their prospective students are doing so that they can plan to build on those experiences. This weakness is particularly noticeable in English and mathematics and results in a lack of drive in raising students' achievements in Years 7 and 8.
39. The school works very well with a considerable number of organisations and individuals to augment its provision for the students. For example, there are strong links with industrial partners in design and technology which give students valuable experiences of real-life projects. The police make an important contribution to the personal, social and citizenship curriculum, including organising and funding a special day for Year 10 on 'Hate Crime', and keeping parents informed of issues such as drugs. The school makes good use of expertise in the community to strengthen its governing body. It makes its facilities available to a number of local organisations such as the adult education service and a music school which enhances its reputation as a local centre for lifelong learning and development. It is an important partner in a national project for sharing good practice on-line. Links with the community are not consistently strong in all areas; for example, they are not as good as might be expected in subjects such as religious education, geography and music where opportunities to enrich the curriculum are missed.

Sixth form

40. Links with parents of students in the sixth form are similar to those in the main school. Links with other schools, colleges and the community are good. Those with the main school are a particular strength, with sixth form students helping and supporting younger students as part of their community service. There is a good link with the Anglia Polytechnic University which supports the curriculum, especially in encouraging students to think actively about a variety of different routes to follow after the sixth form. The school expects and encourages students to arrange to visit institutions of further and higher education but does not have many direct links that would help them to do so.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher is an extremely effective leader and is supported well by other members of staff with key responsibilities. Management is good and supports the improvement of teaching, learning and the students' achievement. Governance of the school is good. Governors have significantly improved their procedures and practices. They fulfil their roles and responsibilities well; however, the school does not provide a daily act of collective worship.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The clear direction provided by the headteacher has resulted in a sharp and successful focus on improving teaching and learning and raising standards.
- A thoughtful and rigorous approach is being adopted to devolving greater leadership responsibilities to middle managers and coaching those who are new in post or who lack specific skills.
- The school has dealt creatively with difficulties in teacher recruitment.
- Financial problems have resulted in the school entering into a deficit budget; plans have been agreed with the local education authority for the elimination of this deficit as the increase in student numbers levels off.
- Priorities for development are clearly identified from rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the work of the staff.
- Staff are successful in their commitment to ensuring that no student is denied the opportunity to benefit from all that the school has to offer.

Commentary

41. Weaknesses in management at the last inspection have been eliminated successfully, and the decline in which the school found itself at the time has been arrested and reversed. Much of this is down to the drive and direction provided by the headteacher, who was appointed not long after the last inspection. He has the support and confidence of staff, governors, parents and students for the manner in which he has improved the school and the future direction that he has mapped out for it. He is a calming influence yet has strong determination and a firm commitment to improvement. All those who have been associated with the school for some time, whether they are parents, governors, staff or students talk with much pride in the change in the atmosphere within the school and what a pleasant yet challenging environment it is in which to work.
42. Staff share the headteacher's vision and commitment and work well together as a strong and unified team. Above all is the commitment to educational inclusion that is being successfully achieved. Previous weaknesses in the management of provision for students with special educational needs have been eliminated with considerable success. Traveller children are supported well. The school has recently introduced procedures for identifying and extending gifted and talented students, although the impact of these developments is too early to evaluate. Gender differences, while not following a consistent pattern, are tackled in each subject as they arise. Recent changes in middle management, particularly at head of department level have given the school a chance to reflect on how the school needs to be led and managed over the next stage of its development. To this end, leadership is being devolved from senior to middle managers so that they can strengthen teamwork and focus more sharply on improving provision in their areas. Some recent changes are taking time to prove their worth, but there are clear indications of the success of this strategy.
43. One specific improvement in management has been the introduction of rigorous and thorough procedures to monitor the work of staff and evaluate the success of action taken. Where weaknesses are identified, robust action is taken to secure improvements. Most staff have risen to the challenge and have consequently seen their performance rise. The management of the performance of staff, their training and development has been instrumental in improving

the teaching. The support, guidance and induction of graduate teachers and newly-qualified teachers have enabled several to become highly effective practitioners in a relatively short time. Planning for the school's improvement is now based firmly on evidence of where strengths lie to be built upon, and where weaknesses need to be tackled and eliminated. Much has been done to improve the analysis of test and examination data to evaluate performance. The wealth of data available is used well by senior management as a further tool for establishing how well the school is doing. Some middle managers use this data skilfully, but not all are sufficiently adept and are, therefore, being coached to evaluate and monitor performance more effectively.

44. Changes in the organisation and effectiveness of the governing body have also helped to secure and sustain improvements. Governors now play a significant role in the school. The governing body has a secure level of expertise among its members covering fields that include finance. They are suitably involved in helping to shape the school's direction, set appropriate challenges and monitor the success of the staff in meeting these challenges through regular visits to see the school in operation. Their committee structure is used well to keep them up-to-date with specific issues and to extend their expertise.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,448,737	Balance from previous year	232,727
Total expenditure	3,575,901	Balance carried forward to the next	105,563
Expenditure per student	3,760		

45. The rapid increase in student numbers, along with some misguided financial decisions by the previous management, has meant that the school has temporarily been forced into declaring a budget deficit in 2003/04. A careful projection, based on known increases in student numbers in the town, shows that this deficit will be eliminated in the next three years and a healthy position return. In spite of these difficulties, funding has been used wisely to expand and improve accommodation and increase resources, particularly in ICT. Best value principles are suitably used to inform financial decisions. The budget is well-managed and governors are playing a crucially important role in monitoring expenditure.

Sixth form

46. Sixth form provision is well led and managed overall. The head of sixth form and team of tutors handle the support and guidance of the students carefully. Informed decisions are taken about improving provision and some innovative approaches are being established and evaluated. School planning takes good account of sixth form priorities. For example, the new block will contain what is potentially a valuable and well-resourced study area to develop the students' independence.
47. Staff with subject responsibilities are largely fulfilling these well but, in some cases, their limited management expertise has resulted in them not focusing on important aspects that impede achievement. This is particularly reflected in some limited teaching styles and a lack of continuity in approach to developing the learning styles of students in Years 10 and 11 that will be needed in Years 12 and 13. These weaknesses have been recognised and introductory courses put on for students. The use of data is also an area with scope for development at departmental level.
48. Some teaching groups are quite small but these are offset by larger groups in popular subjects such as ICT. There is a small subsidy of sixth form provision from the main school budget, but this is not hugely significant and has the potential to be eliminated as sixth form numbers

increase and courses fill up as staying-on rates increase and student numbers in the main school rise.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French is the main foreign language taught. German has been taught previously, but staff recruitment difficulties have reduced this to one GCSE group, which is taught after school. GCSE standards in **German** have risen and are above average, with a majority achieving well and gaining at least grade C. Three students, who had lived in Germany, took GCSE recently in Year 9 and all gained top grades. This is in line with the school's practice of encouraging students who speak other languages to gain qualifications. Under normal circumstances, only the most able students learn German and, in comparison with the average for all their other subjects, they do slightly less well in the language, mainly because of the lack of curriculum time. The teaching of German is good. Students are well motivated and learn rapidly, making good progress in the time available. The school wishes to continue offering a second modern foreign language alongside French, but can only justify the cost if students choose it in sufficient numbers.

English

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards of attainment are below national expectations. The achievement of girls in Years 7 to 9 is below the expected standard. The attainment of boys in English language, particularly in Years 10 and 11, and in English literature, is also below the expected standard.
- There is a shared commitment by staff, and planned improvement, to raise standards of students' attainment, but some management structures and procedures are not firmly established.
- Teaching is particularly good, where the students are effectively challenged in their learning, and the lesson managed in a manner that causes them to work hard.
- Teachers do not always use assessment to plan suitably to meet the needs of individual students.

Commentary

49. Results in the 2003 National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 were below the national average. The relative performance between boys and girls varies, but girls achieved less well in relation to national standards. Overall, the rate of improvement in students' attainment has been below that achieved nationally. GCSE results in English in 2003 were closer to the national average, although below for the higher grades. Students achieve less well in English than they do in their other subjects. Since the last inspection, there has been an improvement in students' achievements in GCSE English language. Girls' attainment is above that of boys in both English language and English literature, significantly so in English language. The attainment of boys is well below national expectations in English literature.
50. Inspection evidence is that standards are below national expectations. Students enter the school with weak writing skills, but the revised schemes of work and the National Literacy Strategy are beginning to improve standards in writing. The progress of students, including those with special educational needs, is satisfactory. Reading is sufficiently fluent for students to show understanding and to identify the key features from a range of texts. Year 7 students studying the poem *Stereotypes* by John Agard, appreciated aspects of West Indian culture, and were able to give examples from the text to explain their views. In both paired and group discussion on the language used in advertising, Year 8 students listened carefully, were responsive to the ideas offered by other students, and made their own suggestions. By the

end of Year 9, students' writing is generally more thoughtful and interesting. Ideas are developed, and suitably organised for their intended purpose. Vocabulary has been extended and sentence structure is more complex to extend meaning. Spelling and basic punctuation are generally accurate. Students are less confident in paragraphing and their writing often lacks the formal discipline of Standard English. Higher-attaining students are more accurate and creative in their use of language. Lower-attaining students and those with special educational needs exhibit weaknesses in sentence structure, spelling, and comprehension, although planned intervention and the opportunity afforded by the use of computer software are enabling students to write with more confidence and accuracy. Standards of attainment for students in Years 7 to 9 have not improved since the last inspection.

51. By Year 11, students are attaining the expected standards in the key skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Through their study of a range of literature, they learn to use English effectively in a range of situations and for a variety of purposes and audiences. Higher attaining Year 11 students, in response to challenging questioning by the teacher, gave perceptive and sensitive responses to Vernon Scannell's poem *Hide and Seek*. They were able to recognise the features of poetic language, as well as the different layers of meaning contained in the poem. Students' writing is more confident, demonstrates an appropriate choice of style, and is better presented. A student's narrative essay of how Henry V's use of language changes upon his becoming king was particularly well argued and illustrated from the text of the play. Most students respond well to both literary texts and non-fiction. However, some boys are not fully committed to their learning, and in consequence their progress is held back. Their writing is less mature and accurate. When students with low attainment, including those with special educational needs, have additional support in class, they focus better, contribute to discussions and their writing improves.
52. Overall teaching is good. The teachers are confident in their subject knowledge and plan effectively to meet the needs of the curriculum. They set clear objectives, and prepare a variety of activities that generally balance the key skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Teaching is particularly good when the questioning of students is challenging and the pace of the lesson causes them to work hard. Teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. Homework is regularly set, and is used to extend the learning of the lesson, or to prepare for the next lesson. Teaching is less effective when the planning does not meet the individual needs of all the students, and when there are limited opportunities for students to develop their understanding in discussion. The quality of marking of students' writing is inconsistent, though by the end of Year 11, students generally understand, in their extended writing, how they are progressing and how they might improve further.
53. Staffing in the subject has, in the past two years, changed significantly. The newly appointed head of department has a clear sense of direction, and a commitment to improvement that is shared with the other teachers, some of whom are recently qualified. Schemes of work are being revised, and resources developed. Additionally, intervention is planned and undertaken to raise the level of students' literacy skills. There are still some aspects of management that have not been developed sufficiently. Procedures are in place for the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, but these are not fully effective. Similarly, the extensive assessment information available does not sufficiently inform lesson planning.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

54. The National Literacy Strategy is incorporated into work in English, and is currently being implemented in the school. Subject areas have recognised the strategy in their schemes of work, and in the planning and teaching. Students' standards of writing are weak upon entry to the school. Teachers are aware of the need to emphasise correct vocabulary, and often key words are displayed in class. There is a regular focus upon aspects of language posted in students' exercise books. This provides for teachers of other subjects to reinforce the teaching undertaken in English, but the correction of spelling, punctuation and grammar errors is inconsistent in the marking of students' writing. Further successful strategies to develop

students' writing skills include a Writers' Zone, and a Summer Literacy School. Each student is given "Writing Rules" to support their learning, but these are not fully utilised.

55. The literacy strategy is supported by advice from the local education authority. In some subject areas, for example geography, there are imaginative approaches, such as place mats, emphasising key words and technical vocabulary. The strategy is at an early stage of development, and procedures for monitoring and evaluating the impact upon standards of students' literacy have yet to be properly established. Students generally read fluently, although often without sufficient tone and inflection to emphasise meaning. Opportunities exist for students to develop reading through the library and in subject areas, such as modern foreign languages and English, where reading is actively encouraged. Students generally speak confidently, and the responses of older students are supported with reasons. Students' literacy skills develop throughout their schooling, and benefit by the planned intervention in some subject areas. For example, in history there is a very clear emphasis on enabling students to write analytically, and every lesson starts with a key word activity.

French

Provision in French is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have risen steadily at GCSE since the previous inspection; however, attainment of all students at the end of Year 9 is below average.
- Boys' attainment is not as good as girls', even when national differences are taken into account.
- The department works well as a team and is innovative in its approach to teaching, making an important contribution to literacy.
- Marking and assessment are very good.

Commentary

56. GCSE results in French in 2002 were above the national average, with the girls' results well above and the boys' slightly above. The students achieved similar results in French as they did in the average for all their other subjects. In 2003, GCSE standards fell slightly, but nevertheless, both girls and boys performed better than predicted. Results at the end of Year 9 were below the national average in 2003, with boys' results well below. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory despite the below average results. This is because many students enter with weak literacy skills and work hard to overcome this. Boys achieve less well overall than girls, because in some lessons they are not motivated and do not apply themselves to the work. Students with special educational needs make the same progress as others, but some high attaining students make better progress than most others. The number of students who choose to continue with French in Years 10 and 11 has fallen slowly in the last three years. Those who choose the language achieve well and boys start to catch up at this stage.
57. Teaching and learning vary in quality from excellent to unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and are satisfactory overall. The best lessons include good use of French by the teacher and, in some lessons, by the students also. Strategies to support the development of literacy are innovative and successful. Teachers adopt a systematic and consistent approach to the teaching of grammar and students organise their work well. High-attaining students learn an extensive range of structures, writing well independently. Advanced work is provided for students who can benefit, such as those who already speak French. All students, except some very high attaining ones, lack confidence when speaking and, in a minority of lessons, teachers' expectations are too low, with a small amount of disruptive behaviour allowed to hinder learning. In Years 10 and 11, teaching and learning are good, characterised by good relationships, and boys, as well as girls, apply themselves well. Students develop very good listening skills, but most, even high attaining ones, remain surprisingly reluctant to use French

themselves, responding naturally in English, even when addressed in French. ICT is used with all age groups, but not enough to make a significant impact on learning. The way teachers respond to all students' written work is detailed and very helpful, leading to good progress.

58. The department is well led and managed. There is a clear vision focused on raising attainment and relevant aims with precisely quantified success criteria. The analysis of results is detailed, enabling comparisons to be made between the achievements of different groups, but the action planned to raise boys' attainment is not defined precisely enough. There is good teamwork within the department and good monitoring of exercise books, leading to feedback of high quality for students. The department has developed a good range of policies, which are put into practice, but there is no policy on ICT and the use of French in lessons is not yet consistent. The visits to France are worthwhile and well organised. Improvement since the previous inspection is good and is exemplified by the rising standards at GCSE. The progress and behaviour of older students are better than they were, but the results of younger students remain below average. French is used much by teachers in Years 10 and 11 and high-attaining students are now challenged, but still not enough with speaking.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject is well managed.
- Very good use of assessment keeps all staff fully informed about student progress and informs action.
- Results at Year 11 show a better than average improvement over time, although improvement in test results at Year 9 has been slower.
- The limited variety of levels of tasks provided in lessons, particularly in Years 7 to 9 is reducing the level of challenge.

Commentary

59. The mathematics department has been through a period of staffing difficulties over the recent past. This has impinged upon the achievement of the students and the standards that they have achieved. These problems are now in the past and there is a strong team in place that is already raising achievement considerably. In spite of these problems, results have improved at GCSE and improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.
60. The school's 2003 national test scores at Year 9 were below the national average and were well below those for similar schools. These results are largely similar to the last inspection while national averages have risen. There has been little difference between the performance of boys and girls in recent years. Achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and students are now working close to the national average.
61. GCSE results in 2003 fell from the 2002 level but remained above the national average overall. Girls outperformed the boys for the first time since 1999. The percentage gaining A* or A grades showed a good increase. Achievement is good in Years 10 and 11. In work seen, standards were above national expectations. The good progress in Years 10 and 11 has been due to the hard work of students supported by well focused teaching.
62. Across the school good quantities of work were seen with appropriate coverage across all strands. Presentation was at least satisfactory, with most good or better. Marking is carried out regularly, with many encouraging comments. Advice for improvement is not offered in books but is given by teachers in class. This enables the students to have a good idea of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

63. Overall, teaching is good across the school an improvement since the last inspection. While one lesson was unsatisfactory, the majority were good or better. The best lessons proceed with pace and appropriate challenge, maintaining the students' interest and ensuring that learning progresses well. Good planning uses time well, with the three-part lesson adding variety to the learning activities. Review sessions are used well to revise the learning and prepare for future lessons. Homework is well used to reinforce learning. Relationships between students are good. A good rapport between staff and students contributes to good class control and aids learning. Through good use of assessment, teachers are aware of the abilities and needs of their students. Work with support staff is good, resulting in students with special educational needs making similar progress to their peers.
64. Where teaching is less effective, particularly in Years 7 to 9, teachers do not expect enough of their students. The variety in the degree of difficulty between tasks set within lessons is insufficient. As a consequence of this and limited pace and challenge, the students lose interest and the progress of their learning slows. The department's plan to upgrade the work scheme for Years 7 to 9 is an appropriate issue for attention. Regular use of ICT as an aid for the majority of students has improved, but is still limited at times. While well organised use of ICT aids the learning of low ability students, new software is just being introduced for high ability students. A recently commissioned ICT facility in the mathematics area is a welcome development. The development of literacy skills is good. Opportunities that arise to practise the various skills, and to test them, are taken regularly.
65. Changes in department management have been instrumental in the improvements that have taken place this term. Leadership and management of mathematics are now good. The head of department is providing good leadership of the newly established team. Staff and students hold her in high regard. There is a clear vision of what is needed to raise standards, although a system of monitoring teaching and learning is only now in the process of being implemented. In addition, lack of curriculum links with feeder schools is preventing the department from familiarising themselves with the current standards achieved by the students when they enter the school.

Mathematics across the curriculum

66. Basic mathematical skills are well taught by the department. Across the curriculum, previously learnt skills are practised in the different subjects but the formal development of those skills is unsatisfactory. Student's mathematical competence, satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11, is sufficient to allow access to all areas of the curriculum.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good for students in Years 7 to 9 and they attain above average standards.
- The teachers make good use of the results of tests and assessments to monitor the students' progress.
- Monitoring of teaching and learning has not been rigorous enough to ensure that the quality is consistently good.
- Standards in experimental and investigative science are not high enough.

Commentary

67. Standards in the national tests for students in Year 9 have been improving above the national rate and were above average in 2003. Progress for students in Years 7 to 9 is good when compared to their previous test and assessment results. The standard of students in Years 7 to 9 from work seen during the inspection is average, although the standards in knowledge and understanding are higher than in investigative work because the routine practical work they undertake does not place enough emphasis on investigative skills such as evaluating, predicting and analysing results.
68. Standards seen on the inspection for students in Year 10 and 11 are average, and their achievement is satisfactory. GCSE results in 2002 were below average for double award science but were in line with expectations for these students, since the highest attaining students take the separate science (biology, chemistry and physics) examinations. Results for A* to C grades for these students were average, although the number gaining the highest grades was below average. This course requires considerable extra commitment from the students since they have to undertake regular lessons after school in order to complete the work. The 2003 results for GCSE improved and were average for A* to C grades. There are no significant differences in the achievement and progress of different groups of students.
69. Teaching is good, with some very good teaching, and the students generally have good attitudes to their work. This allows the majority to achieve satisfactorily, with good achievement in Years 7 to 9. In some lessons the teaching is not as effective as it could be because there is not enough challenge, or the teaching methods do not keep all students fully engaged in their work. Routine practical work tends to focus on carrying out experiments by following instructions. Most students do this well but the lack of emphasis on evaluating, predicting and explaining their results means that standards in these skills are lower than in routine practical skills. This leads to a slow pace of learning. In the best lessons the teachers use a wide variety of methods to present the work in lively and interesting ways that stretch all students appropriately. The national Key Stage 3 strategy has not yet had much impact on teaching styles, although some training has taken place and some teachers are using ideas from the strategy to add interest and variety to their lessons.
70. Management of the department is good and the head of department has provided satisfactory leadership in tackling the issues raised at the last inspection, so that improvement has been good and standards have been raised. Although there has been some monitoring of teaching and learning, it has not been rigorous enough to ensure that the quality of teaching and marking are consistently good. Apart from inconsistencies in marking, the teachers use assessment well to monitor the students' progress and promote good learning. This has helped to raise standards.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GNVQ ICT results are very good; accreditation in Year 11 has not catered appropriately for all lower-attaining students but changes are to be implemented this year.
- Students make good progress from Years 7 to 9; all students follow an ICT examination course from Year 9 to 11 which has a very positive impact upon overall ICT standards.
- The management of the ICT department is very effective.
- The department is working to improve the attainment of boys although there is more to do to achieve parity with the standards attained by girls.

Commentary

71. There has been a very good improvement since the last inspection in standards, in the ICT curriculum, resources and in the management of the ICT department. As a result, the students achieve well.
72. Standards by Year 11 in the GNVQ ICT course are well above average and the percentage of A*-C grades in 2003 continued to increase, demonstrating a good improvement over the previous year. This represents very good progress for the students. The performance of girls is consistently better than that of boys. Standards in Years 10 and 11 vary between groups but overall are just above average for boys and above average for girls. Students make good progress during their GNVQ course. Well-developed assessment procedures ensure that course requirements are fully met. The students are kept well-informed of their progress and are aware of what they need to do to improve further. Teaching and learning strategies are being implemented to improve boys' grades.
73. Standards seen by the end of Year 9 are consistent with national expectations overall, but there is a significant difference between boys and girls. Girls' overall attainment is above average and boys' standards are below average overall although there are some boys in Years 7 to 9 with good levels of ICT competence. Girls' performance in GNVQ coursework, which is started in Year 9, is better than that of boys. Students are well motivated by the course because of well-planned teaching which uses effective learning resources to cater for the whole ability range.
74. The recent success of the department reflects the very effective leadership and management by which several specialists and non-specialist ICT teachers are able to contribute to the impressive examination results. The department is aware of the need to ensure that accreditation in Year 11 caters appropriately for the least able. Changes are being implemented and a small number of students will take a vocational GCSE examination. The number of computers available for students' use is larger than average for a school of this size and the resources are efficiently deployed, reliable and well maintained. This is, in part, because of the very positive and mature attitude shown by students when using ICT equipment. The technical support extends to local primary schools which benefit from school's technology college status.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

75. The use of ICT across the curriculum is supported by an effective and widespread computer network, which has a better than average number of computers for a school of this size. This includes some machines with an initial learning system, which is used effectively, particularly in Years 7 to 9, by the learning support department. ICT rooms are well dispersed around the school and the learning resource centre is well equipped with computers and is well used for homework and general research. Students have well developed ICT skills and knowledge, particularly after beginning their GNVQ course in Year 9; these skills are not consistently exploited in some subjects. The use of ICT to enhance teaching and learning is satisfactory in most subjects. Physical education, design and technology and business studies make good use of ICT, but there is scope for further development in art and design, history and music.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in Years 7 to 9 are improving and the gap is narrowing between boys' and girls' results.
- Good teaching of interesting lessons motivates students well and leads to good learning and achievement.
- Very good and consistent management of students' behaviour results in a harmonious atmosphere for learning.
- There is not enough fieldwork in Years 7 to 9 to develop adequately the students' investigation skills.
- Marking is not sufficiently consistent or helpful to students.

Commentary

76. Students in all year groups are achieving well because the majority have enthusiasm for learning. Teaching and learning are good. Owing to the good management and the satisfactory and committed leadership, the department has clear capacity for further improvement.
77. Groups taking GCSE in recent years have been too small for reliable statistical comparisons with national figures. The standard of work of current Year 11 students is average overall because they are responding well to the good teaching that is preparing them well for their examinations. Coursework based on a visit to the Peak District is being completed to a good standard by most the students.
78. Standards at the end of Year 9 are average, and are improving. The gap between boys' and girls' standards is narrowing, because of the variety of teaching strategies that are being adopted by the department. These include mixed-gender seating and short, focused tasks. The work of the higher-attaining students is above average, showing attention to detail and a clear understanding, for example, of the causes and effects of tectonic activity. Lower-attaining students also work well and follow the same topics, but with less detailed information and less reliance on their ability to write at length.
79. Satisfactory provision for students with special educational needs includes support assistants in the classroom and appropriate work and individual attention in many lessons, so they are learning at the same rate as most of their classmates.
80. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen, which is part of the overall good improvement since the previous inspection. Management of students and their behaviour is very good because teachers adopt consistent approaches and insist on high standards. This leads to a good atmosphere for learning that motivates students to work well and to enjoy the subject. The lesson content is always interesting and is presented as a variety of short tasks to enable all students to learn equally well. However, there is often a lack of attention in providing opportunities for students to think for themselves, such as leading them to work out the processes involved in natural phenomena. Although assessment in class is good, and formal assessment is geared to National Curriculum levels, marking in books is inconsistent, with too little guidance given as to where improvements are needed. Reading, writing and the use of key vocabulary are emphasised well and clearly improve during Years 7 to 9. Students' numeracy skills are adequate for the requirements of the courses followed. One shortcoming is that, at present, fieldwork and investigational studies are limited in Years 7 to 9. These

opportunities are not well developed and, therefore, an important area of skills is comparatively neglected.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average by the end of Year 11 because teachers make use of very effective strategies to develop students' analytical skills.
- Students achieve better than expected because of the good teaching overall.
- Teaching is very good in Years 10 and 11 because teachers have a very good understanding of examination requirements.
- Curriculum leadership is very good and provides a clear vision, focused on high standards.

Commentary

81. Results in the GCSE examination were well above average in 2002. Those for 2003 show similar levels, although numbers opting for the subject were too small to make meaningful statistical comparisons.
82. Students enter the school with below average standards. In work seen these have risen to average by the end of Year 9 and well above average by the end of Year 11. By the end of Year 9, students have developed a broad range of historical skills, including an adequate understanding of chronology. They are aware of the significance of primary and secondary sources. The history curriculum places a good focus on enabling students to understand how history can be interpreted differently – this means that standards in this area are above the national average. By the end of Year 11, the growing number of students opting to take history at GCSE achieve well above average standards. This is because teachers make use of very effective strategies to improve skills in analysis right from the beginning of Year 7, and these are bearing very good fruit by the time they begin the GCSE course. Such strategies are leading to improved standards for students of all levels of attainment. They are also leading to improved standards in writing.
83. Achievement is good in Years 7 to 9 because teachers lay the foundation for the development of a good range of skills. The achievement of students in Years 10 and 11 is very good because teaching is carefully matched to their needs and leads to very effective learning. Students show a very good understanding of examination requirements and know just what they need to do in order to get a high grade. Average and lower-attaining students are able to do this so well because of the skilful structuring of tasks by teachers. In all years, the achievement of students with special educational needs is good because teachers are sensitive and responsive to their needs. Boys as well as girls are able to achieve higher standards than the national average because tasks are well structured and have a very clear purpose.
84. Teaching and learning are good overall, although better in Years 10 and 11 where teachers are more experienced. This represents an improvement since the last inspection. A particular strength of the teaching is the way in which teachers expect students to think and write analytically and then provide them with the tools to do so. In the best lessons, teachers enable students to achieve well because they constantly check and reinforce their understanding. However, occasionally teachers provide insufficient guidance so that students are unsure of how to deploy historical information. Another strength of the teaching is that lessons are very purposeful and teachers have high expectations of students, who understand exactly what they need to do in order to achieve their best. Relationships with students help to create a positive climate for learning. As a result, almost all students work hard, behave well and show pride in their achievements.

85. Management is good with clear planning and effective strategies for improvement. Teachers work well as a team and there is clear evidence of the sharing of both good practice and concerns. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The curriculum is also enhanced by visits and visiting speakers. There is insufficient use currently made of ICT as an additional resource to enhance learning.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching is leading to rising standards at GCSE.
- The best teaching is challenging and involves the students in active learning to which they respond positively.
- Improvements in the department are as a result of the good leadership.
- There is variable use of constructive comments in marking, so the students do not always know how the work can be improved.

Commentary

86. At the end of Year 9, the students reach standards that are in line with the expectation of the locally Agreed Syllabus, although there is no formal data to make a comparison. The students are stronger on the learning from religion and in giving their own views on topics and are weaker on recall of facts about world religions. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good. Students join the school with knowledge; skills and understanding that is slightly below the expectations of the locally Agreed Syllabus for religious education and progress to being in line with the expectations by the end of Year 9.
87. Students following the GCSE course obtained results slightly below the national average, although there is a rising trend. Results have improved from 30 per cent A*-C grades in 2001 to 44 per cent in 2003. Work seen in lessons and in books is in line with the national average, but in Years 7 to 9 students are weaker in relating world religious views to issues. The achievement of the students following the GCSE course is satisfactory. The achievement of boys is lower than that of girls, an issue the department has already identified for improvement. Students with special educational make progress at the same rate as other students.
88. Teaching is of a similar quality in all years. The best teaching is challenging and has good pace and vitality that stimulates the students' interest and encourages them to express their views, give reasons for their answers, apply their knowledge and give examples to show their understanding of issues. In some lessons support materials are available for students with weaker literacy skills and there is an emphasis on the literacy skills of the students in reading aloud and in extending their vocabulary. Attitudes of the students to religious education are good and often very good. All students are encouraged to participate and the good teacher-student relationships ensure that the students feel confident in expressing personal views. This contributes to the students' good learning. However, in some cases the discussion is teacher-led, which limits the amount of student contribution. The marking of the students' books gives encouragement, but the use is variable of constructive comments to enable the students to have a sharp focus on what is needed to raise their attainment level. This is better in Years 10 and 11.
89. Improvement since the last inspection is good. All the positive aspects have been maintained and other areas have been tackled successfully. Good leadership and management have enabled the improvement of the GCSE results. There is a clear vision for improvement and new staff in the department are supported well. The department is currently developing the

use of ICT as a vehicle to enhance teaching and learning, but recently the curriculum has not been enhanced by visits to places of worship or by speakers sharing different faiths, an area identified as an entitlement by the Agreed Syllabus.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11; students achieve exceptionally well in textiles technology.
- Students in Years 7 to 9 are not sufficiently involved in helping to assess their own work and are not always clear about what they have to do to improve.
- The curricular opportunities are good at both key stages, but higher ability students in Years 7 to 9 have insufficient opportunity to extend their design ideas.
- The quality of leadership and management is very good and provides a clear vision for improvement.

Commentary

90. GCSE results in 2003 were above the national average. Students performed less well in food and graphic products than in their other subjects and above average in resistant materials, systems and control and significantly above in textiles. The A*-C grades show a steady improvement over three years in resistant materials, systems and control and textiles.
91. Standards are above average in Years 10 and 11. The development of design ideas and accurate construction of products are evident. Design research is effective in informing thinking, particularly in textiles, where students use the information to make key judgements about the design. There is good achievement in most material areas and very good achievement in textiles. On average, girls achieve higher standards than boys.
92. The new system of starting GCSE courses in Year 9 has the potential to succeed in engaging students in their preferred material area, but does restrict the depth of experience for lower ability students. There is insufficient time for them to return to concepts to extend and consolidate the learning. In general, lower ability students need more guidance to structure their research. Standards are average and achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. In a variety of projects, students explore the characteristics of materials and processes and make good progress in the development of their practical skills. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress at both key stages.
93. Lessons are well planned and provide an appropriate range of tasks to develop knowledge and understanding of materials and processes. Links with local colleges and industry are enhancing the learning experience as teachers emphasise industrial practices for the design and manufacture of products. Clear learning objectives are shared with students and teachers use skilful questioning techniques to extend their thinking. Assessment is very good in Years 10 and 11 and satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. Marking is undertaken regularly but insufficient use is made of the results to modify plans for teaching in Years 7 to 9. Marking in Years 10 and 11 helps students to improve, enabling them to set individual targets for the next stage of designing and making their product. Self-assessment by students is underused, restricting the opportunities for them to identify where their work could be developed to reach the requirements of the next grade or level. Attitudes and behaviour are very good; students are generally calm, responsive and responsible. This is a particular strength in textiles in Years 10 and 11 where mature, co-operative relationships are evident. Teachers emphasise technical and specialist vocabulary; students use literacy skills to support the communication of design

ideas, including step-by-step plans for making a product and annotated drawings and sketches. There are limited opportunities for students to organise discussions in small groups; this is restricting their speaking and listening skills.

94. Very good improvement has been made since the last inspection. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The subject leader is very aware of the strengths and areas for development. There is much evidence of teamwork to support key priorities. All staff engage in reviewing the work of the department to develop its approaches to teaching and curriculum content. Teachers receive very good technical support.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

95. Art and design and music were inspected in depth and lessons were also sampled in drama and media studies.
96. Three lessons of **drama** were observed. The teaching was at least good in all three and was very good in a Year 11 lesson where the teacher challenged the students well as they devised group performances. Standards in the three lessons were broadly average, but the students were seen to be making good gains in their learning and were achieving well. In general, students are consistently challenged in their critical analysis of both text and performance. They work hard and rehearse well.
97. The lesson of **media studies** that was observed in Year 11 was well taught and the students were achieving average standards in a practical production activity in the resources centre.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good use of assessment in Years 10 and 11 ensures that students know how to improve their work.
- Students draw well using pencil and coloured pencil.
- The standard of painting in all years is below average, because this skill is not taught.
- Computer technology is not used in a sufficiently creative way to develop ideas.
- Lesson planning for Years 7 to 9 does not always meet the needs of all students.

Commentary

98. Most students arrive at the school with an average ability in art and by the end of Year 9, having made satisfactory progress, they are working at the level expected nationally. Achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. Students with special educational needs achieve similarly to their classmates. They gain an understanding in the basic skills of drawing, using colour and pattern and making three-dimensional forms in a variety of media. They relate their work to that of artists and craftspeople in Europe and elsewhere in the world. Some higher-attaining students in Year 9 demonstrate their understanding of one-point perspective and sensitive use of pencil in designs for their "Dream Room" and relate this to the work of Magritte. The teaching of painting is inadequate and has an effect on students' understanding of colour theory and appreciation of the work of famous painters. As a result, the standard of painting is below average and is used as a method of colouring shapes in blocks of colour, without tonal shading or sensitivity. Computers are used to research topics on the internet and word processing is used to improve presentation.
99. By the end of Year 11, students are working at a level above the national average. Standards at GCSE have been above average for the last three years, with students often achieving their

best grade in art and design. The percentage of A*-C grades fell in 2003 but students achieved much as expected. Students of all abilities achieve well due to individual care from teachers. High attaining students demonstrate considerable skill in tonal drawing of objects, using both monochrome and colour. Research by high attaining students is supported by references to the work of famous artists or craftspeople, as in the clay masks inspired by those of Maori and African peoples. Talented students are offered good opportunities to develop to a high standard in a variety of two and three-dimensional media, but not in paint. Painting is used as a way of decorating three-dimensional work, but not as a method to create composition work in depth.

100. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. However, work planned for large mixed-ability groups is often pitched to the middle and no extra arrangements made to help lower-attaining students who find art difficult. Lesson aims are clear but not always enforced, so that pace slackens and students lose concentration and become less productive. Marking and assessment relate to the National Curriculum and are used well to inform students how to improve their work. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 is good. Planning follows the examination syllabus and assessment is related to GCSE criteria, ensuring students know what level they are at and how to improve. Good use is made of prepared sheets that guide students through themes, supporting those who are less able.
101. The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory, although the department development plan fails to identify actions to raise standards. The lack of teaching in painting is a fundamental omission. Large group sizes throughout the school and inadequate sink facilities exacerbate this unsatisfactory situation and have a lasting impact on the curriculum. Good opportunities are provided for the development of students' literacy mainly through learning specialist vocabulary. Good support is provided for new teachers in the department who are monitored regularly. The art department works co-operatively to support joint ventures and a good contribution is made by the plentiful artwork and murals around the school. Standards and achievement have risen, making progress good since the last inspection.

Music

Provision in music is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching in Years 7 to 9 is good, particularly the guidance given to individuals and groups, which is helping students to learn well and improve their musical skills.
- Students enjoy practical work and are good at performing music.
- The leadership and management of the department are unsatisfactory.
- There are only 2 computers in the department in the department and so students in Years 7 to 9 do not get the opportunity to use these for composition.

Commentary

102. Students' achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. Standards are below average by Year 9, but their experience of music before they start this school is limited in most cases. In Year 9, students enjoy and are good at performing. Students are not strong composers and many by Year 9 do not have a broad general knowledge of music. Both these problems are being tackled through of a series of new projects. Students do not get the opportunity to use computers with keyboards and appropriate software to help them with composing, because there are only two computers in the department. Most students starting the GCSE course, therefore, do not start with a good musical background, nor do most of them play instruments sufficiently well to perform confidently. Here though, the computers are just sufficient in number for the few students doing the GCSE course to develop compositions which they can hear and amend immediately. Standards are below average by Year 11, but the students achieve satisfactorily. Seven of the 13 GCSE students taking the examination in 2003

achieved an A*-C grade and all students achieved a grade. There were too few students taking the examination to compare with national averages or to compare boys with girls.

103. Students learn well in Years 7 to 9 because teaching is good. Lessons are well planned to include variety and interest. They are conducted at a good pace. Challenging tasks ensure that students work hard and persevere in order to play successfully. Students work well together in small groups, planning and rehearsing their performances. The teacher's help in these rehearsals is excellent and this allows students, including lower attainers and those with special educational needs, to make good progress through well targeted advice, instruction, demonstration and encouragement. Students are encouraged to use and learn new words which soon become part of their vocabulary. They count beats carefully maintaining a good pulse and recognise and compose rhythms containing different note values. Students play their pieces for others in the class. Further advice and knowledge about what makes a good performance are also given and students join in with constructive comments about themselves and their friends. In a few lessons, a small number of students do not attend closely enough and precious learning time is taken up dealing with these distractions. In Years 10 and 11 teaching is satisfactory overall and students learn adequately. Questioning establishes good understanding of compositional techniques. There are good opportunities to rehearse in small groups without the support of the teacher. This was done well in Year 11 with good organisation and planning. In Year 10 students are not so good at this and need better direction. The teacher helps individuals, especially the lower-attaining students who receive good support. A higher attaining student in a Year 11 lesson was not challenged sufficiently with appropriately demanding tasks.
104. The department has undergone changes since the last inspection, and there has been insufficient improvement. The leadership and management of the department are currently unsatisfactory. The department has not developed a culture of rigorous self-evaluation and, even though there is a plan for development, results and standards are not analysed sufficiently to help teachers recognise where and how to help students to improve.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good; teachers plan lessons using a range of activities that allows all groups of students to learn well.
- GCSE examination results are consistently above the national average.
- Long-term staff absences during the last four years have adversely affected girls' standards, achievement and participation. Currently, staffing is stable.
- Curricular links with partner primary schools are underdeveloped.
- The recently appointed subject leader has a strong commitment to improvement and success.
- ICT is used well to support teaching and learning.

Commentary

105. Standards of Year 9 and Year 11, in lessons and work seen, match national expectations. However, girls' standards are below those of boys, mainly due to the effects of long-term staff absences during the last four years. Currently, staffing is stable and girls, along with boys, are achieving well across Years 7, 8 and 9, from well below average levels of attainment on entry. Achievement overall is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Year 11 students' examination results in physical education are consistently above the national average. Students achieve better pass grades than those in their other subjects and standards are rising at above the national

rate. Students with special educational needs and the talented, achieve well. High attaining students are successful in a range of sports at district, county and sometimes, national levels.

106. Teaching is well-planned, varied and challenging, because it consolidates and extends students' knowledge and skills through a range of activities and by effective questioning; consequently, students are well focused and lessons proceed at pace. Work is planned to suit all students. For example, in a Year 7 dance lesson, lower-attaining students improved well, because the teacher used appropriate grouping, modified tasks and demonstrations. The learning of higher-attaining students is accelerated by extension tasks, grouping and extra-curricular participation. Teachers provide opportunities for independent learning in most lessons. In a Year 9 dance lesson, students planned work, judged peer performance and performed to an audience. Learning is less effective in the few lessons where students are given few opportunities to explore their own ideas. Students' learning is enhanced by their positive attitudes and good relationships. However, small numbers underachieve because of poor concentration and irregular participation. Most students, across all years, improve their numerical skills through opportunities to score, measure and record performance. Teachers emphasise key words and are adept in their use of questioning. These approaches improve students' technical vocabulary, and their speaking and listening skills. ICT is used well to support teaching and learning.
107. Leadership and management are good. Good procedures are in place to monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of teaching and students' standards. Assessment systems are good and are used well to monitor students' progress and set targets. Improvement since the last inspection is good. The proportion of good and very good teaching has increased; examination results have improved to above average; the curriculum is more balanced and is fully inclusive for all students.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

108. No subjects were inspected in depth, although some lessons were observed in business studies and in leisure and tourism.
109. Two **business studies** classes were observed in the main school. In a Year 10 lesson on functional areas within a business, despite the efforts of the very well prepared and knowledgeable teacher, the poor behaviour of students did not create an appropriate learning environment and as a consequence learning of the topic was unsatisfactory. In a good Year 11 lesson, the lively group was well handled by the teacher and all students were kept on task during the carefully structured lesson on purchase documents. Individual support and guidance ensured that all students' understanding was checked and reinforced where necessary.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The positive attitudes of the students and teacher-student relationships provide a pleasant working relationship.
- Good leadership has enabled a good start to be made to this new course.
- The strand of citizenship requiring the active involvement of students and also their use of ICT are still in the process of developing.

Commentary

110. The students have only been studying citizenship for just over a year. Attainment at the end of Year 9 is in line with national expectations. The current Year 11 has not been following a formal citizenship course and so a comment on their standards cannot be made. Current Year 10 are working at a level broadly in line with that expected at this stage in the course, although there is no assessment data yet available and no lessons were seen during the inspection. There is no national data to compare standards at either Year 9 or Year 11. The students' achievement is satisfactory in this new subject.
111. The good relationships between staff and students and between students themselves encourage a positive environment in which learning can take place and in which the students feel secure. Students work well in pairs and in groups, when given the opportunity. A booklet has just been introduced so that students can monitor their coverage of the aspects of citizenship. Year 9 students have made a good start in completing this and it has the potential for further development. This booklet is also helping to clarify the students' distinction between PSHE and citizenship. All students are encouraged to participate in lessons and there is no variation in achievement by gender or by students with special educational needs. In Years 7 to 9 teaching and learning are satisfactory. No teaching was seen in Year 10. Form tutors teach the subject and all students were undertaking a unit test. The answers in the test indicate satisfactory learning. Variety in teaching is enhanced by visiting speakers and other events; the students appreciate these as well as the contribution that drama makes to the subject. The department does not have a base for their work and lessons are taught in several rooms; this means that the students do not have access to additional resources during a lesson and there are no wall displays to supplement the learning.
112. Leadership is good; many ideas have already been put into place. There is a clear vision for the way forward, set out in a suitable development plan. Management of the subject is satisfactory in ensuring the team of staff have access to all resources; however, monitoring of teaching and learning is not carried out because of the current timetable arrangements. National Curriculum requirements are met, although some areas are still developing. In particular, the strand that requires students to 'negotiate, decide and take part responsibly in both school and community based activities' is not sufficiently embedded to ensure that all students have this opportunity. The opportunities for students to use ICT and the assessment scheme are also being developed. The department has a good base for rapid improvement.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, eight 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 – this is the latest year for which comparative data is available.

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Design and technology	6	100	89.2	0	32.0	33.3	35.7
General studies	11	72.7	78.6	9.1	25.7	20.0	30.0
Physics	5	80.0	82.0	0	36.2	20.0	34.3

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	6	66.7	91.6	33.3	36.3	46.7	74.1
Communication studies	9	100	98.3	22.2	36.8	80.0	81.1
English language	5	100	98.3	0	36.5	60.0	80.1
English literature	8	100	98.5	37.5	43.7	90.0	84.3
Design and technology	8	100	95.3	25	35.5	72.5	76.5
General studies	35	57.1	90.1	8.6	29.1	36.6	69.3
Physics	5	80	92.8	20	42.8	68.0	78.6
Sociology	7	100	95.4	0	39.6	65.7	79.1
Information technology VCE	23	100	84.3	52.2	24.5	87.8	64.3

Level 2 vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Science GNVQ	8	75.0	n/a	0	n/a	0	n/a

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English was inspected in depth and some French observed. At present, **French** is only taught to a small group of Year 13 students. The lesson observed was very well taught. The students made good progress and the standard of their work was above average. Relationships were very good and the teacher supported the students' learning with useful activities that maintained a good pace to their learning. The students were able to express their ideas with a fair degree of fluency and good accuracy.

English

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students progress well in lessons because of good teaching, particularly where they are effectively challenged, and encouraged to work independently.
- Teachers' relationships with students are good, and help students develop very good attitudes to their work.
- Students are keen and interested. They learn very well, with enthusiasm and enjoyment, and work together co-operatively.
- There is a commitment to raise standards, and planning for improvement; however, although procedures for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning are established, they are not firmly embedded to be fully effective.
- In a minority of lessons, the opportunity for discussion is not fully utilised, and limits the students' capacity for critical thinking.

Commentary

113. The overall standard achieved in AS and A Level examinations in English Language and Literature, and English Literature, is below the national average, as was observed at the time of the last inspection. Attainment is satisfactory, considering the students' qualifications on entry. The number of students, mainly females, studying these subjects is small.
114. Observation of work during the inspection confirms these standards. Students are keen and participate fully in lessons. In a Year 13 literature lesson observed, the students studying the poetry of William Blake, initially were hesitant, but encouraged by the teacher, recognised the features of the poetic language. In comparing Blake's *London* with that of Wordsworth's *View from Westminster Bridge*, they appreciated Blake's use of metaphor, the effect of repetition, and his imagery. They were aware of the historical and social context in which the poems were written. Similarly, students in a Year 12 lesson were learning about and developing an appreciation of the language and meaning of prose extracts using an anthology. In their analysis, they were able to recognise both the contrasts and connections between the extracts, to learn about characterisation, and to appreciate how different religious, social and cultural attitudes are reflected in language. They are responsive to literary features and patterns of language. The writing of a number of students is pedantic, and occasionally repetitious, although higher-attaining students demonstrate an ability to sustain an argument, appropriately expressed, with suitable textual quotation. The writing of students generally lacks the detail and depth expected of the highest grades. Most students make an appropriate use of linguistic and literary terminology. Since the last inspection the standards seen, despite recent staffing difficulties, have been maintained.
115. Teachers use their command of the subject well to support the learning process, balancing pair and group discussions with appropriate intervention to make clear the complexity and stages of the process and to build on previous learning. They have good and friendly relationships with their students, whom they know well. Lessons are planned suitably to meet

the needs of the students. Teaching is particularly effective where students are encouraged to develop their critical thinking skills through challenging questions and focused discussion. Students' work is monitored and evaluated, and they know how well they are doing and how they might improve.

116. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The current head of department, recently in post, has a commitment to develop the study of English in the sixth form, and to raise standards. There is planning for improvement, and procedures to monitor and evaluate performance, but these are yet to be firmly embedded. Resources are sufficient for the needs of the students, although there is an absence of books of literary criticism to support students' independent study.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

117. Teachers are aware of the importance of effective communication. There is a consistent approach to the development of key skills across the curriculum through a programme of general studies. Most teachers stress the significance of important terms and their use. The vocabulary of some students is narrow which restricts their understanding of shades of meaning. Students are confident about speaking in class, and group work develops their ability to listen, reason and argue a point. They read with reasonable fluency, and are able to research information independently. Writing is less well developed for the majority of students. The marking of students' writing is inconsistent across other subjects, and does not always indicate inaccuracies in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching is beginning to raise standards in sixth form mathematics.
- The positive attitude of the students is aiding their learning.
- Time-tabling difficulties make the management of the re-sit course for GCSE very difficult to manage.

Commentary

118. Staffing difficulties, which have been robustly tackled by the school, have impinged negatively on the number of students opting to study mathematics and on their achievement. There were no A Level candidates in 2003. Results at AS Level in 2003 were well below the national average. However, work seen for this term by those same students is satisfactory. It is now in line with national expectations in Year 13. Books contained work at an appropriate level, with progression through differentiation indicating satisfactory progress. Students followed the new work being taught, the differentiation of 'e' to the power of x, with understanding. In Year 12 work seen was above expectations, with students making good progress with the statistics element of AS Level.
119. Teaching is good in both Year 12 and 13 and the students' achievement is satisfactory. Members of staff are well qualified and very confident with their subject. Aided by the department's good use of assessment, teachers have a clear understanding of the needs of their students. Lessons moved along briskly. Work set for completion outside lessons is of good quantity and represented a suitable challenge. Students have a good attitude to work, those in Year 13 making a particularly good effort to overcome their poor results in 2003.
120. A course to improve GCSE grades is offered. Constraints imposed by the timetable mean no student is unable to attend all the lessons. This makes managing the course very difficult. Very good organisation by the Teacher concerned minimises the effect of the difficulties.

121. The management of the sixth form provision is good. Although entry requirements to the sixth form at grade C are lower than in most schools, students are well counselled and supported in their learning. As a result those in Year 12 were fully aware of what was expected of them. Arrangements to help those in Year 13 overcome their poor previous progress have been well thought through.

Mathematics across the curriculum

122. Students studying in the sixth form, the majority of whom have gained at least grade C in mathematics at GCSE, had sufficient mathematical ability to access the variety of subjects on offer. Students who felt that their mathematics needed some reinforcement were making use of the opportunity to re-sit GCSE, although the difficulties with that course have been outlined above. Where the mathematical demands of subjects were above GCSE standard, in the sciences for example, those demands were being met through the improved A Level teaching in mathematics.

SCIENCE

123. Biology, chemistry and physics are taught at AS and A Level and GNVQ intermediate science is offered for Year 12 students. Biology and chemistry were inspected in depth and lessons sampled in physics and GNVQ science.
124. **Physics** results in 2002 were below the national average. In 2003 five students were entered, with C being the highest grade achieved. In the lesson observed, although attainment was below average, the teaching enabled the students to achieve satisfactorily. The **GNVQ science** course is well structured and complements the A Level science provision well, although numbers taking the course are small. In a lesson observed, good guidance was given by the teacher prior to the undertaking of a presentation on reproduction in bacteria, which was subsequently tackled with commitment and enthusiasm.

Biology

Provision in biology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Some good opportunities are provided for students to consolidate knowledge and understanding through debate and presentations, although teaching and learning styles are limited overall.
- The teachers provide good guidance for, and evaluative feedback on, the students' coursework.
- The depth of subject knowledge shown by the teachers instils confidence in the students.
- There is insufficient use of ICT to enhance learning.
- There is a limited understanding of the requirements for, and skills of, effective self evaluation.

Commentary

125. The 2002 A Level results for biology were well below the national average. Results for 2003 were broadly similar, although half of the students did reach their expected grade based on their previous GCSE performance. Small numbers make it difficult to establish clear trends in performance over time. Students in both Year 12 and Year 13 are currently working at standards that are below national expectations but this represents satisfactory progress and achievement, given their prior attainment on entering the sixth form. There is no significant difference in the achievements of males and females.

126. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The teachers have secure subject knowledge and this underpins some clear expositions and questioning which challenges the students to apply their knowledge. This was particularly evident in one lesson where Year 12 students had prepared a presentation on the factors affecting enzyme activity. The teacher rightly praised the efforts of the students and sensitively drew out key learning points through focused questioning. This enabled the students to clarify their thoughts and consolidate their understanding. In another Year 12 lesson, the students took part in a debate on genetic engineering, which also provided good opportunities for exploring both the biological principles and the moral issues involved. The students respond positively to these challenges and say that these approaches help them to reinforce their understanding of the subject.
127. Lessons are carefully planned and teachers ensure that students experience full coverage of the curriculum. However, in some lessons pace is modest, activities are largely focused on the copying of notes. There is insufficient demand placed on the students to make active contributions and thus deepen their understanding. Even under these circumstances, the students are fully committed to their studies and work hard. There is limited use of ICT to support learning in the subject. As a result, the students are missing opportunities to develop further both their research and data analysis skills.
128. The students are well trained for the practical coursework and the evaluative comments and feedback were commended by the external examiner. This good practice is less evident in the marking of students' work throughout the year, although the students' progress is monitored through end of module assignments and tests. The students are aware of their target grades and know how well they are doing.
129. The head of the department has only recently taken up the post and, as yet, does not have a good grasp of her key responsibilities, although she is beginning to recognise the demands of her new role. Management is satisfactory, with clear systems in place to ensure the effective day-to-day running of the course. However, procedures for monitoring and evaluation are not well embedded and there is insufficient focus on improving teaching and learning. Leadership is, therefore, unsatisfactory. Informal discussions about priorities for the future have been undertaken, but these have yet to be clearly set out in a plan of action. This is particularly important if the department is to meet the growing challenge of increased numbers in the sixth form and the wide ability range of the students. Given the current provision and the achievement shown by the students, overall improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The good subject knowledge of the teachers underpins effective questioning techniques and challenges students effectively to apply their knowledge of the subject.
- Students are well informed about the structure of the course and good opportunities are provided for them to develop their examination techniques.
- Students appreciate the individual attention provided by the teachers, particularly in the smaller Year 13 group.
- There is limited use of ICT to provide an additional dimension to teaching and learning styles.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the work of the department lack rigour.

Commentary

130. Numbers taking A Level chemistry in the past were too small to make national comparisons or to establish trends over time. In 2003, while only two students gained the higher grade B, six out of eight students either met or exceeded their target grade for the course. The current

Year 12 and Year 13 students are working at standards just below national expectations overall, but good teaching is enabling them to achieve well and make good progress from their starting points on entry to the sixth form. There is no significant difference in the achievements of males and females. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

131. The teachers plan their lessons carefully and share the learning objectives with the students so that they are clear about what they are expected to achieve by the end of the session. The teachers have a clear and systematic approach to the development of key ideas so that the students can follow the arguments logically and thus deepen their own understanding of the subject. Effective questioning challenges the students to think and apply their knowledge to new situations. In a Year 13 lesson, for example, the students were asked to apply their knowledge of NMR spectroscopy to determine the unknown structure of a compound. The same group were challenged in another lesson to use their knowledge of enthalpy changes to develop an understanding of the Born-Haber cycle. In both sessions, the students showed an active interest in the work and readily engaged in discussion, using technical vocabulary with confidence. In general, higher attainers are more successful than lower attainers in applying their knowledge and understanding to unfamiliar situations. However, there are some good examples where sensitive prompting from the teacher enables lower attainers to make valuable contributions to discussions.
132. The teachers provide appropriate opportunities for the students to develop the practical skills that are required for the coursework. The students' mathematical skills enable them to tackle the quantitative aspects of the course with at least reasonable, and in some instances, good levels of confidence. There is some detailed written feedback on the students' work which enables them to identify areas for further consolidation. The students value these comments and the personal support provided by the teachers. They are aware of their target minimum grades and how well they are progressing towards them. There is insufficient use of ICT to support the students in developing their research skills, an important activity which helps to consolidate understanding.
133. The course is managed well by the experienced head of department, who ensures that the programme runs smoothly, with effective support from the technicians. Leadership is satisfactory overall. There is a clear sense of direction but review and evaluation of the impact of teaching on learning are informal rather than systematic. While there are priorities for development, these have yet to be captured into a plan of action with clear targets, outcomes and timescale. This is particularly important given the increased numbers following the subject and the wide ability range of the students. The head of department, with his unquestionable experience and commitment to the school, is well placed to secure further improvements in the subject.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have improved and the students build on well from their earlier results in Year 11.
- There is a considerable proportion of expert teaching, which is leading to the students' learning very well.
- Highly effective leadership and management have secured significant improvements and help to provide a very broad range of experiences for the students.
- Strategies to increase the number of female students taking the advanced ICT course are meeting with success.

Commentary

134. There has been a significant improvement in sixth form ICT provision since the last inspection; the successful AVCE courses build upon the strengths developed in the GNVQ course in Years 7 to 11. Results in AVCE ICT in 2002 were well above the national average and improved in the double award AVCE course in 2003. The A/B grades were very good and no candidate scored less than a C grade. This represents very good progress for the students concerned. All students who were entered for the single award AVCE in 2003 were awarded grades in the A to D range and about one-fifth achieved the higher A/B grades. These results represent good progress for the students from those in Year 11. Many students achieved above their target grade in the AVCE examinations. The examination grades attained by female students tend, overall, to be better than those of male students. The department has worked successfully to increase the number of female students taking the advanced course and this is having a positive impact upon examination standards and on the work in lessons where there is now a much better gender balance.
135. Standards seen on both advanced courses during the inspection were never less than good and often very good. Students are very committed and achieve very well because of very good teaching by experienced staff within a very well led and managed department, where work is challenging and resources are effective in promoting learning across the whole ability range. Assessment is thorough and support for individuals is good; students are well informed about their progress and know what they need to do to improve further.
136. Students' confidence improves as they progress through the courses and develop their ICT skills and knowledge while deepening their understanding of the nature of the advanced course. Work in school is effectively enhanced through contacts with appropriate external organisations, which help to broaden students' understanding of the practical applications of ICT in business and the community. Students have good access to ICT resources. They are well supported via the school intranet, in terms of course information, structured activities and guidance. Good use is made of interactive whiteboards to ensure that all students have opportunities to become fully involved in whole-class work, through well-researched group work and well-produced presentations.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

137. Satisfactory use is made of ICT in other subjects. Students have good access to ICT resources and have good and often very good ICT skills as a result of the GNVQ course, which they followed in earlier years. This GNVQ qualification enables most students to be accredited with a Key Skills ICT qualification at Level 2. There is a great deal of very effective, autonomous use of computers by students for coursework and some good group presentations were seen. The use of ICT for teaching in some subjects is good but there is a significant weakness in teaching and learning in biology and chemistry.

HUMANITIES

138. No humanities subject was inspected in depth, although lessons were observed in geography, history, law and sociology. **Religious education** requirements are covered fully through incorporation into the general studies programme. Although lessons of general studies were observed, none of these were covering religious education matters during the inspection.
139. One lesson of **geography** was seen, in Year 12, with five students in the group. Standards were average. Teaching was good; students were highly motivated and learned well, due to the high standard of teacher knowledge and the challenging work that contributed to their independent thinking skills. In 2003 two students took the A Level examination gaining B and C grades; none entered for AS level. There is currently no geography in Year 13.
140. Teaching of a Year 13 **history** lesson was excellent. Very skilful questioning enabled the students to show what they knew as they discussed why Lyndon Johnson did not achieve his aims in Vietnam. The students warmed to the task and their responses became more

assured as the lesson progressed. They were able to think analytically and were achieving above average standards.

141. A brief observation of a Year 12 **law** lesson was undertaken. This was well taught and the students made good progress as they revised procedures from arrest to sentence as well as appeal routes in criminal cases.
142. The one lesson of **sociology** that was observed in Year 12 was taught satisfactorily. The students were making satisfactory progress as they considered gender roles within the family, although the standard of their work was below average overall.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

143. No subjects were inspected in depth in this area, although some lessons in **product design** and **textiles** were sampled. The product design lesson in Year 13 was very well taught and the standard of work as the students used two-point perspective was above average. The students were engrossed in developing their work and took a pride in what they had achieved so far. The short observation of a Year 13 textiles lesson showed that the students were achieving well above average standards as a result of expert teaching and focused support as they identified characteristics of natural and man-made fibres.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

144. Media studies was inspected in depth and some lessons were also observed in art and design and performance studies.
145. Standards have improved in **art and design** since the last inspection. In the last few years the numbers of students studying art in Years 12 and 13 has been small therefore there are no national comparisons, but in 2003 they achieved much as expected from their earlier GCSE results. At present, standards in the small group are above average, with high attaining students demonstrating considerable skills in drawing, using pastels and one with good painting skills. Enquiry in sketchbooks is well documented and relates to artists' work. Trips to galleries in London and Barcelona have inspired students and broadened their artistic context. Students learn well because the small group size facilitates teachers to plan for individuals and allows plenty of time for personal attention. Good assessment procedures linked to examination criteria ensure that the students know how to improve and in which aspects. The course is well led and managed, although demand varies from year to year. Accommodation has been improved since the last inspection, with provision of a sixth form studio where they can work undisturbed between lessons.
146. Some lessons of **performance studies** were sampled. A lesson observed in Year 12 was excellent. Teaching was challenging and inspiring and students were highly engaged throughout the lesson. A Year 13 lesson was satisfactory, rather slow and uninspiring but students rehearsed satisfactorily even though the intensity often observed in such lessons was missing. Standards are average.

Media studies

Provision in media studies is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Media studies is a well-established and increasingly popular A Level option.
- Standards are improving.
- Students respond well to teachers' subject knowledge and enthusiasm, although recent staffing changes have been unsettling for them.

- Accommodation and resources do not adequately match the growing student numbers.

Commentary

147. The A Level in media studies was offered as a subject within the English department at the time of the previous inspection. It is now a separate subject with its own head of department. There has been good improvement since the last inspection, with increasing numbers and a recent rise in attainment at a higher level. The majority of A Level students have taken the GCSE course, which gives them a sound basis for A Level work. Standards have remained broadly in line with the national figures and compare well with those in other subjects at the school. Set against their previous attainments, results in media studies show students doing well overall. In 2003, 11 students took the A Level examination. All passed but only one reached Grade C. However, the AS Level results in 2003 were very much better, with a rise in higher level attainment. Over half the students in this group attained A/B grades.
148. Work seen in lessons and work files shows that students are working steadily to maintain these standards, though a number have limitations in their general vocabulary and understanding which affect their written work. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, with some very good features. Working on the horror genre, students in Year 13 concentrated closely on the film clips shown, learning to evaluate and compare techniques, and showing some understanding of the effects of change and fashion on the cinema. The teacher's expertise and enthusiasm were used very effectively, as she helped students to recognise key features, make comparisons and become more secure in their judgements. Their spoken participation, however, was limited, and seldom went beyond answering the teacher's questions. Even in this second year of their course, students were not taking a lead, bringing some of their own prepared observations or questions and engaging in discussion. They relied on the teacher to lead and direct at each stage, and there was little interaction or argument in the group as a whole.
149. Year 12 students showed similar interest and good response to the sound subject knowledge of the teacher. In this first year of their course they used subject specific vocabulary and were able to answer questions about the nature documentary they were shown. The teacher was careful to ensure the inclusion of three students who had only recently joined the course and to check their understanding. With the use of a worksheet and writing task in the second part of the lesson, there was a loss of the interest and impetus seen in the first part of the lesson. Opportunities for more active participation by the students were missed.
150. In both years, teachers' knowledge and enthusiasm were key factors in students' learning. Both were well demonstrated. Less in evidence were strategies for encouraging class discussion, in a field where students could be expected to have some experience and personal views and preferences. Students' written work shows that they are capable of independent study and investigation. Their work is carefully marked, with analytical commentaries which help them to develop their understanding and range.
151. Leadership and management of the department are good and show sound appreciation of current needs and possibilities. The media room is a good size for discussion and video viewing but unsuitable for practical work and movement, even with these small groups. Access to the school's ICT resources is important and valued, but the equipment available in the department is barely adequate as numbers rise. Recent and imminent staffing changes have been unsettling for Year 13 and will now also affect Year 12. However, there is no shortage of subject expertise and the new head of department is keen to establish effective shared staffing of the A Level course.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are consistently above average and represent good progress by most students.
- Teaching is good and occasionally very good, enabling students to achieve well.
- Students undertaking examination courses are given good support and guidance.
- The numbers of female students following sixth form courses in physical education are low.
- There are no opportunities for students to participate on leadership award courses, such as the community sports leader award (CSLA).

Commentary

152. Standards in lessons and work seen by Year 12 and 13 students, match national expectations, and show good improvement from their work in previous years; most students are achieving well. The results of students following A Level courses are consistently above average; they achieve better grades than in most of their other subjects. No valid comparison can be made between the performance of boys and girls, because of the low numbers of girls on examination courses. Talented students achieve well in a range of sports at district, county and sometimes, national levels.
153. The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 12 and 13. Students achieve well across both years, due to good teaching. Teachers show wide subject knowledge and are aware of the different ways in which students learn. They successfully use methods and resources that meet their needs. In an A Level theory lesson, featuring work on the application of science in sport, the teacher used video support facilities, engaged students in research work and involved them in discussion on performance enhancing drugs. All students made good gains in their knowledge of this aspect. A significant minority of students find the change to sixth form study difficult and initially, do not take sufficient responsibility for personal learning. Teachers give good support and guidance by easing them into research and further reading. Students have good access to ICT resources and use them well to research and enhance written assignments. Students are able to ask quite perceptive questions of their teachers using appropriate technical language. Speaking and listening skills are good. Most students are able to write at length on a variety of topics, such as the historical and cultural basis of sport and global trends in international sport. The extended-writing skills of a small minority are less well-developed. Students are encouraged to develop their numerical skills, through a variety of tasks, such as, graphical summaries of fitness test results. Most handle numerical data well. Teachers' expectations of students are high, and they respond very positively; retention rates for courses are good. Students' work is marked consistently and good diagnostic comments ensure that they know how to improve.
154. Leadership and management are good as is the improvement since the last inspection. Good procedures are in place to monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of teaching and students' standards. Assessment systems are good and are used well to monitor students' progress and to set attainment targets. Learning resources for examination students are generally good. Recreational activities are timetabled to allow participation for all sixth form students, but there are no opportunities for them to develop their leadership skills by following courses such as the CSLA. All students have access to an afternoon of recreational activities; participation rates are good. School-based activities include football, weight-training, aerobics and badminton. Good use is made of off-site facilities, with a good number of students participating in swimming, horse-riding and golf.

BUSINESS

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good overall and particularly stimulating in Year 13.
- Current Year 13 students are achieving well and have a very good understanding of the requirements of the subject.
- Despite the subject being managed well enough, there is only now a comprehensive development plan in place.
- There is a lack of relevant industry links to provide further stimulus for students.
- There are currently no dedicated, appropriately equipped teaching rooms for business studies.

Commentary

155. Four of the five students who were entered for the VCE achieved a pass in 2003. Although numbers are low, students usually gain a pass in the subject. Results are generally below the national average, although comparisons are not particularly meaningful with such low numbers. Achievement is satisfactory overall with students usually gaining their predicted grade, apart from 2003 where the department experienced some staffing difficulties. Current Year 13 students are achieving better than this and show a good understanding of the relevant business technical vocabulary.
156. Teaching and students' learning are good overall. The Year 13 teacher is able to use his considerable business background to provide stimulating examples for students. In two good Year 13 lessons on the use and construction of cash flow statements, the teacher used a variety of materials to reinforce students' understanding. The video sequences were expertly woven into the lessons and were used as a stimulus to check understanding of a range of financial concepts, such as types of assets, liquidity and business costs. In the two Year 12 lessons observed, the teacher's careful but slow delivery ensured that the students made satisfactory progress in their use and understanding of business aims and objectives. In all cases, coursework is marked thoroughly, correctly matched to the unit specifications and in most cases students are given thorough and positive feedback on their work.
157. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. Although the subject has been managed well enough it is only now that a comprehensive development plan has been put in place to develop the subject. This has come about with the recent appointment of a new head of department who has a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the area. Within this plan, there is an identified need to establish relevant industry links to provide a further stimulus for business students. There are currently no dedicated, appropriately equipped teaching rooms for business studies. There has been satisfactory progress since the last inspection.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

158. All students have previously taken a **general studies** course in Year 12, with a substantial number opting to continue with this into Year 13. In the current academic year, students in Year 12 are not obliged to take the course, although many do. The school is reviewing whether to continue with this pattern of choice. Although the general studies course offers the students an additional AS or A Level grade, results have consistently been well below the national average.
159. Two sessions of general studies were observed during the inspection, one in Year 12 and one in Year 13. Teaching of both lessons was satisfactory and the students were achieving average standards as they studied genetic engineering and devolution.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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

poor (6); very poor (7).