

INSPECTION REPORT

THE PRIORY SCHOOL

Hitchin

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117499

Headteacher: Mr P Loach

Lead inspector: Mr M Beale

Dates of inspection: 9 – 13 February 2004

Inspection number: 259377

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

© Crown copyright 2004

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11 to 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	829
School address:	Bedford Road Hitchin Hertfordshire
Postcode:	SG5 2UR
Telephone number:	01462 622300
Fax number:	01462 622301
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr C Lacey
Date of previous inspection:	27 April 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The school serves the market town of Hitchin and some surrounding villages. It is slightly smaller than average, with marginally more boys than girls amongst the 829 on roll. This figure includes 106 students in the sixth form, which operates in a consortium with two local schools. Over 80 per cent of the students are of white-British backgrounds with no other ethnic group represented in large numbers. The proportion of students with a first language believed not to be English is higher than in most schools, and five are at an early stage of learning English. There are five refugee children and four students in the care of the local authority. There is some student mobility, but this is less than happens nationally. The proportion of students eligible for a free school meal is close to the national average. There are two main feeder primaries with another 38 sending pupils to the school. Attainment on entry to the school is below average overall, but attainment on entry to the sixth form is closer to that seen nationally. The proportion of the students identified with special educational needs is close to the national average, as is the number with a statement of special educational need. The current headteacher has been in post since September 2002, having taken over from a long-serving headteacher who opened the school in 1988.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
19385	Martin Beale	Lead inspector	Citizenship Mathematics (sixth form)
14066	Gill Hoggard	Lay inspector	
27188	Gill Murray	Team inspector	English
17541	Fran Ashworth	Team inspector	Mathematics (11-16) English as an additional language
30563	Jackie Pentlow	Team inspector	Religious education Biology (sixth form)
8052	Ken McKenzie	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Business studies (sixth form)
30545	David Castell	Team inspector	Geography
31685	Val Girling	Team inspector	Art and design
1489	Paul King	Team inspector	Design and technology
23324	Sylvia Greenland	Team inspector	History Sociology (sixth form)
32173	Barbara Brown	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
23268	Kevin Corrigan	Team inspector	Physical education Special educational needs
4126	Clive Parsons	Team inspector	Science
32219	Nicholas Smith	Team inspector	Music

The inspection contractor was:

PBM Brookbridge and Bedford Ltd
13A Market Place
Uttoxeter
Staffordshire
ST14 8HY

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be made initially to the inspection contractor. The procedures are set out in the leaflet '*Complaining about Ofsted Inspections*', which is available from Ofsted Publications Centre (telephone 07002 637833) or Ofsted's website (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

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	20
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION SUBJECTS AND COURSES	22
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4	
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	49

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a satisfactory school that provides sound value for money. New leadership and management are starting to identify and tackle shortcomings robustly. Planning for school improvement is based more securely on an analysis of strengths and weaknesses, although some of the action required is not yet consistently applied. Teaching is satisfactory overall, but varies considerably. Student achievement is satisfactory overall, although boys are not doing as well as girls.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The focus on improving teaching and learning and raising standards now promoted by the new senior team is starting to move the school forward.
- There is a considerable proportion of very good and excellent teaching; however, several less than satisfactory lessons are taught mainly by inexperienced or temporary staff.
- The school is wisely focusing its attention on improving boys' achievement, although it is too early to evaluate the impact of the action being taken, much of which is highly appropriate.
- The school has not developed a coherent approach to the promotion of all aspects of the students' personal development.
- In spite of recent action taken, attendance levels are unsatisfactory and several students are regularly late to school.
- The careers programme is thoroughly prepared and provides very good guidance for students.

Sound improvement has been made since the last inspection in 1998, although much of this is down to changes in the last 18 months. All test and examination results have risen, more rapidly so than nationally at Year 9 and A Level. Teaching quality has improved, but attendance has declined. While many of the main shortcomings have been tackled, others are only just receiving attention. For example, boys' underachievement is only now being tackled vigorously. Assessment procedures and practice have improved. Weaknesses in timetabling arrangements and staff deployment have been eliminated.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average
For Year 11, similar schools are those whose students attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

Achievement is satisfactory overall, but is good in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. Standards of work are broadly close to the national average in Years 7 to 11 and are above average in the sixth form. National Curriculum test results for Year 9 students have risen considerably overall, and were above average in science in 2003. Year 9 English results have not shown the same rapid improvement over the last two years, partly because of difficulties in appointing a head of department. Boys do not achieve as well as girls. This is most marked in Years 10 and 11 and is shown by the difference in their GCSE results, which is greater than nationally. Numbers are too small to identify any significant variation in the attainment of students from different ethnic groups, although the school is carefully monitoring any trends. Students with special educational needs achieve well and the small number in the sixth form do particularly well.

The students' personal development is satisfactory. Moral, social and cultural development are sound, but their spiritual awareness is not receiving sufficient attention. Most students

behave well and are positive about their studies, but a minority have not developed a mature and self-disciplined approach. Attendance is below average and several students are regularly late for school and to lessons. Fixed-term exclusion levels have been high, though they are starting to be reduced.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is satisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory overall, but is most effective in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. The curriculum is satisfactory; however, there is not a sufficiently concerted effort being made to promote themes such as literacy, numeracy, citizenship and the students' personal development within subjects. Links with parents and the local business community considerably enhance learning and broaden the students' experiences. The care, support and guidance provided are good. Careers education is a particular strength and the students' induction as they transfer into the school is thoughtfully planned.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good. The new headteacher and senior team have introduced much greater rigour to the work of staff, many of whom are responding well to the challenge of improving standards. Other staff with responsibilities are being supported, trained and guided to take on enhanced leadership roles within their areas. The governing body is taking an increasingly effective role in the school. It fulfils its responsibilities satisfactorily, although statutory requirements for collective worship and for teaching religious education in the sixth form are not met.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are happy with the school and all that it provides. They particularly like the provision for their children if they have special educational needs. While most students are pleased to be at the school, some have concerns about the behaviour of a minority, a matter with which the team concurs. Several students also feel that while the school seeks their views they do not feel that these are acted upon or that they have a real say in matters of major importance to them.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- rigorously implement strategies to raise boys' achievement, particularly in Years 10 and 11;
- tackle weaknesses in the teaching of inexperienced and temporary staff;
- monitor the effectiveness of the action being taken to reduce absence and improve punctuality;
- plan and implement strategies throughout the school to promote all aspects of the students' personal development and their understanding of citizenship;
- ensure that the development of literacy and numeracy is seen as a responsibility of all staff.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- for a daily act of collective worship;
- for teaching religious education in the sixth form..

THE SIXTH FORM AT THE PRIORY SCHOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

Sixth form provision is good. The well managed consortium arrangements broaden the range of subjects on offer and mean that students can choose courses that meet their aptitudes and aspirations well. These arrangements also result in provision that is cost-effective. Students achieve well; they make good progress and A Level results are well above average overall. This is because teaching is very good overall and most students are highly motivated to succeed. Results have improved since the last inspection as has the overall quality of sixth form provision.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Students learn skills and ideas rapidly because of challenging teaching from subject experts.
- The high motivation of students and the readiness of staff to be available to help those finding work difficult, enables students to make good and often very good progress.
- The school does not meet requirements for teaching religious education in the sixth form.
- While students are starting to take on roles around the school, there is scope for this to be extended.
- Students' work is assessed well and used to set targets and as a basis for effective support and guidance.

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. The students have positive attitudes and achieve well. Teaching is satisfactory and A Level results in 2002 were above average.
Mathematics	Provision for mathematics is good. Students achieve well because of expert teaching and the commitment of the students. A Level results are regularly above average.
Science	Provision for biology is good. Standards are above average at A Level. Students achieve well and respond enthusiastically to the good teaching.
Humanities	Provision for geography is good. Good teaching which actively involves the students in applying their knowledge is leading to above average levels of attainment. Provision for sociology is very good. Students achieve above average examination results because of excellent motivation and very good teaching.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Provision for product design is good. Standards are above average. Teaching and learning are good and along with the commitment of the students contributes to their good achievement.
Visual and performing arts and media	Provision for art is good. A Level standards have varied depending on the intake and group sizes, which are often small. Achievement is good and students make good progress from their earlier GCSE results. This is largely because teaching and learning are good.
Business	Provision for business studies is good. The department offers a range of examination courses to cater for a wide spread of ability and aptitude. There has been some variation in results at A Level but the high quality of teaching makes a very positive contribution to students' achievement in all examination courses.

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 are provided with good support and guidance when deciding the courses to study. This continues during their time in the sixth form. Subject teachers set the students challenging targets, assess their progress carefully and give clear indications as to how they can improve and meet these targets. The role of the tutor is developing, although they do not yet take a sufficiently high profile in tracking the overall progress of their students and guiding their academic progress.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management of the sixth form are good particularly in ensuring that consortium arrangements work to the benefit of all students. Day-to-day management ensures the smooth running of the sixth form and strategic planning is effective in securing improvements. A strong focus on monitoring the work of staff has developed over the last year. The accountability of subject staff and the sixth form team for standards and the quality of provision has enabled shortcomings to be highlighted and action taken.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students are very happy with the sixth form provision. They like the breadth of study offered by the consortium, and they feel valued by staff. They find their teachers' support and ready accessibility of considerable benefit to their studies and many feel that they are challenged to do well. Most students feel that the guidance and advice for higher education is very helpful.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Students' achievement overall is satisfactory, and is good in the sixth form. The standard of work seen during the inspection was average overall and has improved since the last inspection. A Level results are consistently above the national average and the standard of work seen during the inspection in the sixth form was above average overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A Level results have been consistently well above average for the last three years and female students perform significantly better overall than their male counterparts.
- Students achieve well in the sixth form as a result of very good teaching and learning, good assessment of performance and their positive attitude to learning.
- National Curriculum test results for students in Year 9 have risen at a faster rate than nationally since the last inspection.
- Achievement for students in Years 10 and 11 is good, mainly as a result of good teaching and learning and accurate assessment of their needs.
- Boys generally do not achieve as well as girls, an issue that was also highlighted at the time of the last inspection.
- Students with special educational needs make progress as good as their peers and achieve particularly well in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form.

Commentary

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	31.9 (32.1)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	35.7 (33.3)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	35.0 (32.9)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 138 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

1. Although Year 9 test results have risen in all three subjects, there was a significant variation between the subjects in 2003. Overall results were in line with the national average, but below results in similar schools. They represented satisfactory progress from the students' earlier test results in Year 6. Science results have improved quite sharply and were above both the national average and results in similar schools. Students' performance in mathematics has shown a similar sharp improvement and results were close to both the national and similar schools averages in 2003. However, students are not performing as well in English and it is for this reason that overall results were not higher. Results were below the national average and well below results in similar schools. In addition, the gender difference reported in English at the last inspection still remains, with girls generally achieving better than boys.
2. Achievement overall in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. Teaching seen during the inspection was not as effective here as in other parts of the school, partly because of the large number of lessons taken by temporary and inexperienced staff. Standards are average in each of the core subjects and overall. This represents an improvement in English from the most recent test results. Students with special educational needs make sound progress, as do those identified as gifted and talented. The small number of students with English as an additional language are supported well and make good progress.

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	39 (38)	52 (50)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	86 (92)	91 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	93 (95)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	31.7 (34.7)	32.9 (34.7)

There were 148 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

- GCSE results have risen in line with the national average but with considerable fluctuations over the period 1999 to 2003. The proportion of students achieving five or more A*-C grades was below the national average throughout this period and the proportion of A*/A grades fell from 2002 to 2003. In spite of the fall from 2002, the 2003 results represented at least satisfactory progress overall for students from their earlier Year 9 test results. GCSE targets were not achieved in 2003. As at Year 9, English was the weakest of the core subjects in 2003 and results were below the national average although they compared favourably with similar schools. Results in mathematics and science were both in line with the national average and well above results in similar schools. The only subject in recent years to achieve consistently above average results has been drama. By contrast, results in English language, business studies and German have been significantly below average for the last two years.
- The gender difference at Year 9 widens considerably by Year 11. Girls have consistently achieved better overall results than boys at GCSE and particularly so in 2003. While girls outperformed boys in many areas, boys did not do significantly better than girls in any subjects. The school is aware of this problem and is starting to focus its attention on narrowing this gap. Action taken has not yet had time to produce tangible results, but there are some signs that boys are starting to achieve at a better level than previously.
- Teaching is more effective in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9 and most students are motivated and committed to their studies. Consequently, most students are achieving well with the exception of those with low attendance levels and a few in each year group who exhibit poor behaviour and attitudes to learning. The standard of work seen during the inspection was generally in line with national expectations with some variation between the subjects. Standards are above average in each of the design and technology areas and in French, but are below average in geography and art. Students with special educational needs make good progress. Teachers are provided with a great deal of information by the learning support department, which enables them to plan lessons appropriately using a range of differentiated activities. When present, learning support assistants provide additional help for teachers and ensure students with special educational needs work productively in lessons. Students with English as an additional language continue the good progress made earlier in the school. The school has identified some gifted and talented students, who are achieving similarly to others in their year groups in the school.

Sixth form

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	91.8 (82.8)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	36.3 (28.6)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per student	321.3 (293.8)	253.1 (254.5)

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

6. The sixth consortium provides a comprehensive range of A Level subjects which consistently produce results which are well above average. Overall results rose in 2003 over the previous year's figures, with the number of pass grades increasing by almost 10 per cent. As at GCSE, female students perform significantly better overall than male students. The average point score for an individual A Level is generally close to the national average. Many students take general studies as an extra subject, which serves to increase their overall point score.
7. Numbers of students studying individual courses are often quite small and results are subject to fluctuations from year to year. Comparative data is only available at present for the 2002 results when they were well above average in chemistry and above average in English, biology and sociology. By contrast, results were below average in art and general studies and well below average in mathematics. The latter was exceptional and due to a weaker cohort of students than normal. The 2003 results in mathematics increased considerably and are likely to be well above average when comparative data becomes available. Art results also improved considerably in 2003.
8. Very good teaching and learning and students' positive and productive attitude to work ensures that students achieve well in lessons and over time. Enthusiastic and expert teaching ensures that lessons are productive and learning is very good. The small number of students with special educational needs make particularly good progress and are attaining high standards in their courses. Standards seen during the inspection in the eight focus subjects and in other lessons sampled were above average overall. Of these focus subjects it was only in art where standards were below average. They were average in geography and above average in English, mathematics, biology, business studies, product design and sociology.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory in Years 7 to 11 but are very good in the sixth form. The students' personal development is satisfactory overall. Attendance and punctuality are unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 11 but sound in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is no daily act of collective worship.
- The exclusion rate is high overall.
- Behaviour is generally good in class but deteriorates on occasion out of lessons.
- Students' moral and social development is satisfactory overall but their spiritual development is unsatisfactory.
- Cultural development is satisfactory but wider multi-cultural issues are not sufficiently developed.

Commentary

9. Behaviour observed in lessons during the inspection was generally satisfactory. Where teachers provide strong role models and ensure that students are aware of their high expectations, it is good. In some areas of the curriculum such as science and design and technology, students behave very well because they are excited and engrossed by their work and take an active part in their own learning. In contrast, in some art and modern language lessons, there is a lack of challenge and support which results in unsatisfactory behaviour. When teachers' management of behaviour is too lax, a significant minority of students take advantage of this and disrupt learning. It is this minority who find it difficult to behave around the school when there is no direct staff supervision.
10. This lack of respect for others is also evident in the reasons behind the high numbers of exclusions. The systems for addressing the underlying reasons for exclusion are underdeveloped as are the processes for monitoring students who join the school after being

excluded from elsewhere. A minority of students do not have a sufficiently well-developed understanding of the reasons behind the rules and conventions of the school. Students' moral and social education and development is satisfactorily addressed in most subject areas with opportunities for collaborative work and peer support in group work and discussion. However, staff do not consistently stress the principles for living together in a caring environment to develop the students' own self-control. Although students feel safe in school, they are not given sufficient challenge or space to develop further a sense of responsibility for their own actions.

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	675	122	1
White – any other White background	18	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	28	11	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	2	0
Mixed – White and Asian	10	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	16	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	21	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	8	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	7	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	20	5	0
Black or Black British – African	2	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	2	1	0
Chinese	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	10	0	0

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

- This limited development of understanding of wider issues is also a consequence of unsatisfactory spiritual development. Although the school provides a system of assemblies and 'Thought for the day' the spiritual element is often either missing or underdeveloped. There is no daily act of collective worship. Students work well together in groups of diverse ethnicity and ability with little evidence of prejudice but many students have a limited understanding of the cultures and faiths of others.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	89.7	School data	0.8
National data	91.7	National data	1.1

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

- Attendance and punctuality are unsatisfactory. Overall attendance is below the national average, although the school is beginning to tackle this satisfactorily. Several students arrive late to school and to lessons, with no apparent sense of urgency.

Sixth Form

13. Students in the sixth form are extremely positive about their work and their studies. They value the opportunities provided by the consortium. They also value the care and guidance provided by their teachers, taking every opportunity to see them if they are having difficulty with their work. Many are highly motivated and very keen to succeed. Their concentration and engagement in lessons is very good; work and assignments are completed conscientiously and folders well-organised. The capacity of many students to study independently is very good. Their behaviour in lessons and around the school is also very good and they present valuable role-models for younger students. The school is starting to exploit this by the direct involvement of sixth form students in activities with younger students, but recognises that there is considerable scope for this to be extended.
14. Attendance and punctuality in the sixth form are satisfactory. Arrangements for students to sign in and out are sound, and they show a sensible attitude to getting to lessons on time.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is satisfactory. Sixth form provision benefits considerably from consortium arrangements with two local schools which broaden the range of courses available. Teaching is satisfactory overall, and is very good in the sixth form. The care, support and guidance of the students is given a high priority and effective links have been established with the school's partners.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, but are more effective in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form than in Years 7 to 9. Assessment of the students' work is satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school is starting to take action to tackle the lower achievement of boys in a variety of ways within the classroom.
- The new leadership team has placed a very high priority on improving teaching and learning.
- The most effective teachers have high expectations of their students and generate a rapid pace to learning.
- Assessment practice has improved since the last inspection, but is not yet consistent in Years 7 to 11 where it is not used by all staff to focus sharply on how well students are doing.
- Several of the qualities seen in the best lessons are those that are missing in others, resulting in unsatisfactory or poor teaching.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 161 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5 (3%)	37 (23%)	61 (38%)	44 (27%)	11 (7%)	3 (2%)	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. A considerable investment of time and resources is being put towards the priority of improving teaching and learning. The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last

inspection. More lessons are now taught well and fewer are less than satisfactory. Many staff consistently teach good and in some cases, very good lessons. However, the quality of teaching varies considerably across the school. Staff absence through long-term illness or maternity leave and recruitment difficulties have resulted in a relatively high proportion of inexperienced or temporary staff, and it is in their lessons where many of the shortcomings are to be found.

16. The best lessons are well planned and resources carefully prepared. The introduction of the Key Stage 3 strategy is influencing much of the better teaching. Teaching in these lessons is stimulating, grabs the students' interest and generates much enthusiasm. This was seen to particularly good effect in a well-structured Year 10 science lesson. Similarly, exciting teaching sustained the students' concentration right to the end of a rapidly paced Year 9 geography lesson. Many staff have developed a purposeful working atmosphere in their classrooms and manage the behaviour of the students with the minimum of fuss and effort. They have high expectations of the students' achievement and behaviour. Relationships here are particularly strong and productive. Teaching of students with special educational needs in withdrawal classes is also characterised by careful planning and the preparation of a range of suitable, challenging activities to ensure that the students work productively and make progress. Support staff are deployed well in subjects such as art and physical education, where they work effectively with class teachers to engage the students with special educational needs throughout the lesson.
17. Consideration has been given to the different ways in which boys learn and teaching staff are trying to adapt their teaching methods accordingly. Much of this work is in the early stages and it is not possible to evaluate its impact yet; however, there are signs of much greater engagement by boys with the learning process in several lessons. Shorter tasks with more variety are being utilised well and a clear indication given of the purpose behind a particular activity, the time available and what the expected outcome is.
18. Where teaching has weaknesses this often stems from shortcomings either in lesson planning or in understanding how to develop the learning of a particular group most effectively. Tasks, activities and teaching methods are inappropriate and do not match the needs of the students; often the objectives for learning are weak or vague. This leads to students either finding work too easy or not being able to understand. The subsequent frustration and poor behaviour that arises is not always successfully handled. There remain inconsistencies in the approach of many staff to managing the behaviour of students. This causes uncertainties about where boundaries lie, and is not helping students to understand how to make positive decisions about how to behave.
19. Effective assessment practice is developing in most subjects to monitor and track the progress of students. In a few cases, the students are involved in the process, giving them both a greater insight into how well they are doing and the opportunity to take responsibility for their learning. Information for staff about students with special educational needs is useful and relevant, guiding their lesson planning so that tasks and activities more closely meet the students' particular needs. There are also several very good examples of marking being used as a tool to help students to improve, but variations within and between subjects is limiting the overall effect. Much is now being done, under the leadership of the new deputy headteacher, to ensure that assessment is consistent in all subjects and has an impact on students' learning.

Sixth form

20. Much sixth form teaching is of a high quality and is a major factor in the good progress made by students. Lessons are challenging, demanding and generate much enthusiasm and considerable commitment from the students. Teachers have high expectations and plan carefully so that learning is consolidated and built upon from a secure base. They have a good understanding of the students' needs and an expert grasp of their subjects. This is seen in the

careful questioning and considered explanations of difficult concepts as they seek to find ways of helping the students to understand. Many lessons seen during the inspection exhibited these qualities. For example, stimulating teaching developed a sense of purpose and generated fluent contributions from students in a Year 12 English lesson analysing extracts from the work of Thomas Hardy. Similarly, highly effective teaching from a subject expert drove learning forward at considerable pace as Year 12 students in a mathematics lesson were introduced to differentiation from first principles. The students could hardly believe the progress they had made and how much they had learned during the lesson.

21. Assessment practice is more effective than in Years 7 to 11, and information is used well by staff to guide their planning of the next steps in the students' learning. Data is now being used to good effect to set targets for the students and to ensure that they have a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve. Day-to-day marking is generally thorough and, along with feedback from teachers during lessons, provides students with good guidance.

The curriculum

The school has a satisfactory curriculum in the main school, with good learning opportunities in the sixth form within the consortium. The range of enrichment activities is satisfactory. Accommodation and resources are sound overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher and senior leadership team have set in motion a thorough curriculum review.
- Careers education is well planned and effective.
- Students in Years 7 to 11 now have the opportunity to study two foreign languages.
- Provision for the teaching of ICT has improved, although access to computers in subject areas remains limited.
- A good range of AS and A Level courses is available in the sixth form.

Commentary

22. The school offers equal access to a range of curricular opportunities which suit the needs of most students and is to be extended from September 2004 with the introduction of drama in Years 7 to 9. Most of the issues highlighted in the last inspection have been tackled and the range and quality of courses have improved. For example, students can now study two modern languages from Year 8 onwards, and all now follow a short course in religious education in Years 10 and 11. Arrangements for ICT have improved, although in Years 7 and 8 they are still only partially satisfactory. However, from September separate ICT lessons will be provided for Years 7 to 9. Older students follow a newly introduced applied GCSE or Key Skills course in the subject.
23. The curriculum review has already ensured greater consistency in the ways in which teachers use long-term planning to improve coverage of their subject curriculum, particularly for Years 7 to 9. Departmental schemes of work follow a common format and are monitored by members of the senior leadership team. These schemes are also used to show how departments are responding to cross-curricular initiatives such as the Key Stage 3 strategy, citizenship and extending more able students. Citizenship is also taught to all students as a separate weekly lesson, although insufficient attention has been given to ensuring that objectives are covered to sufficient depth. Students in Years 10 and 11 have a reasonable choice of subjects. However, vocational subjects are not currently offered before the sixth form, although some will be available for Years 10 and 11 from next year. At the moment, a very small number of students benefit from the school's links with North Hertfordshire College and other work-related education. Plans are in place to develop these further. All students, on the other hand, benefit from the school's careers education. Advice, information and guidance are freely available and complement a successful work experience programme.

24. Involvement in extra-curricular activities is encouraged. During the week of the inspection students performed well in a public speaking competition. A few weeks earlier the Year 11 drama groups had taken part in the annual performance of a piece of theatre which they devised themselves. There are opportunities for trips abroad organised by the modern languages and geography departments. Students are frequently successful in many sporting activities. Most departments offer enrichment activities and many run revision or homework clubs. Gifted and talented students can attend a summer school and benefit from a good range of extension activities, some of which, like the art club, enable them to work alongside students from other schools. The English department makes effective use of designated funds to run Saturday classes which support literacy development.
25. The school is committed to ensuring that students with special educational needs are well supported in their learning. The learning support co-ordinator provides for their individual needs very effectively, although accommodation is cramped and facilities for storing information are inadequate. The learning support assistants have developed a body of expertise and work well as a team. There are good resources to support students' literacy but those for numeracy are underdeveloped and little use is made of ICT. Outside the learning support area students make satisfactory progress in most subjects.
26. Most departments are resourced at a satisfactory level but have inadequate immediate access to computers. This inhibits curriculum development in science. Mathematics and design and technology are also hampered by poor access to computers and there are too few computers in the library, which limits sixth form access to the Internet. In other respects the library is a well used resource and makes a significant contribution to the development of language and literacy across the curriculum. Accommodation varies but there is considerable room for improvement. Most, but not all, subjects are taught in specialist rooms and the science laboratories are poor. On the other hand, facilities for sport, food technology, music and drama are good and help to create positive attitudes to learning in the students.

Sixth form

27. The school is part of a post-16 consortium arrangement with the other two schools in the town and there is also a link with the local college for business studies. These very strong links enable the school to offer a good range of courses to advanced level students. Sixth form students generally feel that the course options suit their interests and aspirations. They see the consortium as a considerable advantage, enabling them to study courses that would otherwise not be available. Opportunities to study non advanced level courses at school are limited, but careful market research is leading to the introduction of a Level 2 qualification in ICT and business next year.
28. Level 2 courses are also offered in English, mathematics and science to provide students with another opportunity to achieve success at this level in these key skill areas. Much of the school's action plan for the sixth form focuses on providing greater opportunities for students to develop their wider key skills, such as working with others, problem-solving and improving their own learning and performance. Most students take the opportunity to broaden their curriculum through the AS and A Level general studies courses, although there is no provision for religious education. The school has also recognised the need provide a timetabled slot for a clearly defined enrichment programme.

Care, guidance and support

Support and guidance of the students is good. Day-to-day routines, care and welfare of students are well managed, but there are some inconsistencies in the management of behaviour, and several students do not feel their views are respected.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Care and welfare of students is well managed.
- There are good arrangements for transition into Year 7 and Year 12, especially for those with special educational needs.
- Careers education is very thorough and useful, though some sixth form students feel it is less helpful for those not going on to higher education.
- Behaviour management strategies are applied inconsistently by a significant number of staff.

Commentary

29. Teachers and support staff are committed and caring; they know each student by name and have a good idea of their needs and backgrounds. Students themselves confirm how well they were prepared for life at The Priory through a detailed and thorough transition programme from primary school, so they arrive with realistic expectations. Liaison with the co-ordinators for special educational needs in primary feeder schools is very good and a close interest is taken in students' welfare. The learning support department provides a safe and non-threatening environment; students and parents appreciate the care and guidance offered and the individual attention and support. Special educational needs staff know the students very well and are very good at responding to their individual needs using a range of appropriate strategies.
30. Throughout their time at school, students are given insight into work and careers, with a well-regarded 'Insight into Industry' day in Year 9 and carefully planned work visits and experience in Year 10. This allows many students to gain a clear picture of their strengths and weaknesses as well as future avenues for work and study.
31. Although staff genuinely try hard to nurture and support their students there are inconsistencies in the ways in which behaviour is managed. With certain staff there is never any misbehaviour in lessons; with others, often but not exclusively young, inexperienced, or new to the school, there is calling out, backchat and a lack of respect. The daily experience of a particular student may vary considerably depending on the teachers or subjects studied. This in turn generates some resentment as students feel that they are punished unfairly or that others 'get away with it'.
32. There is a school council, which meets regularly with representatives from each year group, but its remit is limited. Although they have introduced one or two changes, such as picnic benches and flower tubs, other students feel strongly that issues such as uniform and the punishment system have been non-negotiable. The net result is frustration and cynicism among those students who feel their views are sought but not valued, particularly as they move through the school. For students with special educational needs the situation is better. The learning support department has recently undertaken a survey of special educational needs students' opinions on what they like and do not like about their support. This has proved very successful in informing the department as to how more effectively to target it in lessons.

Sixth form

33. Care, welfare and guidance in the sixth form are good. Support and guidance is well managed, with the result that the majority of students stay on into the sixth form and largely feel they are on the right courses. They mostly enjoy sixth form life, especially good, expert teaching, and the more adult relationships with staff. Some of those with positions of responsibility feel they are not well used and their views are not taken seriously. Sixth formers give advice, and sometimes mentoring, to Year 11 students, so that it is relevant and appropriate. Students feel that they are helped to decide on university courses and to fill out UCAS forms. A good range of careers literature is made available as well as suitable software, although the view was expressed that the focus is very much on higher education and less on other avenues such as apprenticeships.

34. Sixth formers have the opportunity to help within school in a variety of ways such as mentoring Year 7 students and helping them read; they also help with homework clubs, showing round new parents and on residential trips.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Links with parents, the business community and other schools are good. Parents, carers and local businesses have a very favourable view of the partnership with the school, and there are good links through the post-16 Hitchin schools consortium.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Links with the local community are fostered well, especially those with other schools and colleges through the post-16 consortium.
- The majority of parents are very positive about the school's work.
- The new reporting system is giving much sharper information to parents about their children's progress.

Commentary

35. The school has developed a number of profitable links with local enterprises and companies, which are used well to enrich the curriculum. For example, local employers and members of the Rotary Club come in to help conduct mock interviews in Year 11, which students and staff regard as very valuable. The new business manager is proactive in forging links in support of the school's bid for specialist Business and Enterprise status.
36. Parents are mostly positive about the school's work; they especially praise the transition arrangements, teachers' high expectations and homework. They are confident their children are happy and making good progress. Views on the new reporting system are very favourable and it is clearly offering much more focused information about both achievement and effort. While the vast majority of parents work closely with the special educational needs co-ordinator, there are occasional instances of parents not doing so, for example in failing to attend review meetings. There is very good liaison with outside agencies, such as those of the local authority and the educational welfare officer.

Sixth form

37. Links with local schools and universities are mutually beneficial. Students are positive about life in the sixth form and most would recommend it to friends. Through the post-16 consortium, sixth form students have the opportunity to study some subjects at the other schools and to work alongside their students. Very comprehensive data is kept on all participants. There is, however, still a shortfall in vocational qualifications offered. Close links with local universities and colleges, such as the University of Hertfordshire and North Hertfordshire College, are helpful in focusing students on options available beyond school through study trips and day visits.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management of the school are good overall. The headteacher and other key staff provide good leadership. Governors fulfil their roles and responsibilities satisfactorily. The school is managed well and runs smoothly.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The appointment of a new headteacher has helped to focus the school on its shortcomings and on how they can be overcome.
- The new leadership team is a considerable force for change and improvement.
- The governing body has developed effective measures to identify the school's strengths and weaknesses, but there is scope for more involvement in shaping its future direction.
- The effectiveness varies with which middle managers are taking on an increasing leadership role and being held responsible for standards in their areas.

Commentary

38. All associated with the school recognise that it had reached a point two years ago where action was not being taken to tackle identified shortcomings. Some of the key issues from the previous inspection were still outstanding and standards were not rising. The appointment of a new headteacher has given much needed focus to the work of staff. He has started to move the school forward and has required some difficult but necessary decisions to be taken. The headteacher has carefully evaluated the school since his appointment. Strengths and weaknesses have been clearly identified and appropriate plans drawn up for the school's improvement. The focus now placed upon teaching, learning and raising achievement, particularly for boys, is starting to have an effect, although it is too early to establish if this is to bring about sustained improvement.
39. The roles and responsibilities of the members of the new senior leadership team are clearly defined and they have made a significant impact in a very short period of time. They ably support the headteacher in shaping the direction for the school and in ensuring this vision is consistently articulated to staff, students and parents. The new business manager post is a significant development and is one example amongst many of the commitment to reducing the administrative workload of teaching staff. The energy and drive of the leadership team are visible to all and they present very good role models for others through the quality of their teaching. Governors have full confidence in the headteacher and senior team to identify priorities and tackle shortcomings. Structures to monitor the work of staff have been introduced and are effectively implemented. Test and examination data is being used with increasing effectiveness at all levels to evaluate the impact of action taken. The performance of teachers is managed well and has been extended to non-teaching staff. The pace of change has been rapid since the arrival of the headteacher. Staff recognise that this has been necessary to move the school forward, but a few have found the pace of change daunting.
40. Middle management roles have changed considerably. Heads of department are now expected to take a much greater leadership role than previously. A few have adapted well while others are still coming to terms with their new role. Consequently, there are several inconsistencies in the implementation of whole-school policies. Not all middle managers are sufficiently skilled in monitoring and evaluation procedures. As such they are not fully effective in taking responsibility for standards in their areas and for identifying the steps needed to secure improvement. Leadership and management of the learning support department are good. However, links with departments are informal and the lack of a structure of communication and recording departmental needs does not always lead to the most effective use of learning support assistants in lessons.
41. A further significant change is that the chair of governors has focused the governing body and developed its role considerably over the last 18 months. The committee structure enables

governors to monitor standards and developments. Visits to see the school at work are enabling their expertise and understanding of the school to be developed in addition to helping to establish strong links with staff. Governors have sight of, and make recommendations about, aspects of the school development plan; however, they have not been sufficiently proactive in shaping the long-term strategic direction for the school. All responsibilities are met with the exception of a daily act of worship and providing teaching of religious education in the sixth form. Financial planning is secure and governors monitor spending carefully, ably assisted in this by the newly appointed business manager. A long-term financial plan has been prepared to show projections of income and expenditure. This is a valuable tool for the school as it negotiates its way through changes in the sizes of intakes to Year 7. Best value principles underpin and inform financial decisions and the school provides sound value for money.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	2,777,880	Balance from previous year	132,212
Total expenditure	2,721,858	Balance carried forward to the next	188,234
Expenditure per student	3,563		

42. There are clear and tangible improvements in the school, many of which have taken place over the last five terms. Plans for further improvements are entirely appropriate; however, in several cases they have not been in place for long enough to bear fruit. The school is moving in the right direction and has the capacity to improve further and quite rapidly under the current leadership.

Sixth form

43. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The headteacher's vision and sense of purpose for the development of the main school are having a good effect on the work of the sixth form. Systems for monitoring and evaluating the work of students are becoming more rigorous, with greater emphasis on the analysis of data to review progress and achievement and to set targets. Overall, the leadership and management provided by subject leaders are also effective. Connections between the sixth form and main school are increasing through recently implemented paired reading and mentoring programmes.
44. Good communication with consortium partners and effective day-to-day management ensure that arrangements work smoothly and to the benefit of students. These effective links also ensure that there is a sound strategic plan for future developments and that students at The Priory School continue to gain access to the widest range of opportunities possible. Students themselves feel well supported, value the access to subject and pastoral staff and welcome the guidance provided.
45. The sixth form is cost-effective and the leadership team is providing the necessary strategic direction to continue to raise achievement.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' GCSE English literature results improved in 2003, especially girls'.
- New schemes of work for students in Years 7 to 9 offer a more balanced and consistent curriculum.
- The department has begun to tackle the under-achievement of boys.
- Although lacking a head of department for almost a year, teachers are working effectively as a team to implement school and national initiatives for raising students' achievement.

Commentary

46. Achievement in English is satisfactory by Year 9, with all students in Years 7 to 9 now following a coherent and agreed programme of study. They are beginning to benefit from teachers' increased commitment to shared planning. Marking is mainly thorough and constructive and follows school guidelines on assessment and target-setting. The English team has also collaborated effectively to devise coherent schemes of work, which are far more stimulating and workable than the text books they previously followed. In the new schemes they have made specific attempts to ensure the interest of boys through careful choice of texts and topics. Teachers frequently emphasise the routines which will help students interpret questions correctly and produce clear answers in the tests. In short, there are various strategies now in place to improve students' performance in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 and work seen during the inspection confirms that these are beginning to make an impact.
47. In the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003, students' results were below the national average. They gained a lower percentage of Level 5 and above and made less progress from their results at the age of eleven than students in similar schools. Many more girls than boys achieved a Level 5 or above and students did less well in the English tests than in mathematics and science. In 2002, students had performed slightly better than this and, although results have remained below the national average, they have risen steadily over the last five years. At GCSE in 2003, the percentage of A* to C grades in English remained well below the national figure. No students were awarded an A*, although their success in attaining A and B grades compared quite well with the national picture. Girls did better than boys at GCSE by a wide margin, and particularly in English literature. The literature results represent very good achievement. They were much higher than they had been previously, almost equalling the percentage of A* to C grades gained by students nationally. The main reason for this was the clear improvement in results gained by girls, who out-performed girls nationally. At the time of the last inspection, literature results for all pupils, including girls, had compared unfavourably with national results.
48. Teachers in the English department work hard and know their students very well as individuals. Relationships between teachers and classes are mainly cordial and students are encouraged to work hard. Teaching is satisfactory overall. Marking and commentary on written work is detailed and constructive. Clear expectations are effectively conveyed from Year 7, in matters of personal organisation and behaviour, for example, and these were observed during the inspection both in exercise books and in lessons. Most students try to meet these high

expectations. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. They respond particularly well when teachers make good use of praise but also insist on active participation. Lessons in which boys are most motivated and successful are those which offer a good balance of teacher talk and student activity. In other lessons, opportunities for active learning are not always sufficiently promoted, with the result that too many students, but boys particularly, settle for compliance rather than energetic commitment to their own learning. Although the most able students are achieving their potential, others make limited progress because their independence is underdeveloped.

49. In most lessons students listen well to the teacher and to one another and answer questions competently. On those occasions when they are also encouraged to use extended talk, to devise questions or manage their own time, they rise to the challenge. These opportunities are limited at present with scope for further development. Students' lack of resourcefulness in reading for meaning was mentioned in the last inspection. This has been partially tackled by opportunities to meet a wider range of types of text in Years 7 to 9, although insufficient time is devoted to developing students' flexibility and stamina as independent readers. For example, the reading of poetry is confined to designated blocks of time in Years 7 to 9. In GCSE classes students can read for inference and justify their opinions. The more able have acquired an impressive vocabulary of literary terms. Standards of writing are satisfactory and students of all abilities in one Year 7 class responded well to the requirement to comment on the effectiveness of their language choices after writing a poem. Although a few students use word processing, there is little evidence of ICT being used to develop their learning in English.
50. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory, although the department is currently suffering from the difficulty in recruiting a head of English. Consequently, leadership is unsatisfactory as there is no plan for improvement and insufficient monitoring of the work of staff.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

51. Students' language skills are of an average standard. Most can adapt their writing to the demands of individual subjects and have adequate reading skills to access specialist subject texts. They answer questions with reasonable fluency, but in subjects where there are limited speaking and listening opportunities extended contributions are weaker.
52. The school does not have a fully developed literacy policy and currently lacks a literacy co-ordinator. Nevertheless, most staff make some attempt to support students' literacy. Displays of key words are found in most departments; in geography these are particularly effective as word mats which relate to specific topics. Several departments use writing frames successfully. All departments have considered students' literacy needs when creating or reviewing schemes of work. A paired reading scheme which links Year 7 students with sixth formers is working well. The library is welcoming and well resourced and makes an important contribution to literacy development through materials used in English lessons. The staff 'Reading Challenge' and the displays which link books and films also help to promote independent reading.

French and German

Provision in French and German is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Improved leadership and staffing are having a positive impact on standards, which are improving in French.
- Good teaching overall is ensuring good progress but there is some weak practice for which support is inadequate.
- Teachers' command of both languages is very good but they use too much English in lessons.

- Inconsistent written feedback to students impairs further progress.
- The three-part lesson plan is improving performance but the ends of lessons are insufficiently developed.

Commentary

53. The fact that the department now enjoys stable staffing and leadership has meant that standards in French are now above national averages. The German GCSE results in 2003 were particularly low as a direct result of staffing difficulties in the past. The department is now fully staffed with permanent, qualified linguists except for two days per week of one timetable which is taken by a supply teacher. Consequently, the achievement of students is now satisfactory in both languages in Years 7 to 9 and is good in Years 10 and 11 in French and satisfactory in German.
54. The department is well led by a good manager who has clear priorities for improving standards and who has already successfully tackled previous difficulties of students with special educational need and high achievers. The gap between boys' and girls' results is also narrowing. Major areas needing attention have been prioritised and developed so that there has been a focus on reading skills and a subsequent improvement in competence.
55. The department has been able to concentrate on improving standards by improving teaching, which is generally good. Teachers have very good command of the languages and a very good knowledge of course requirements. As a result, students on GSCE courses are very aware of their target grades and how to achieve them. This understanding is enhanced by the positive verbal feedback they receive in lessons. Less good progress is made in lessons where teachers use too much English so that students do not have the maximum benefit of as much practice as possible. A few staff do not understand the capabilities of their groups and so do not provide suitable tasks matched to ability. This in turn leads to poor behaviour and achievement. In such cases, the weaker teaching methods are not yet being sufficiently challenged or better methods formally developed. In spite of the very good verbal feedback, which is appreciated by learners, marking in exercise books is inconsistent between members of the team and is often not done regularly enough or with sufficient sharpness of focus. Careful planning results in clear progress in many cases, although the subject matter of the beginnings and especially the endings of lessons is not yet well enough integrated into the overall theme of the lesson to enhance learning. Although good work is done in a few classes with ICT, it is insufficiently used at present. Students have a major benefit in having regular contact with mother tongue speakers of the languages through teaching staff, foreign language assistants and visits abroad. This enhances their understanding and their own pronunciation.
56. The department has made very good progress since the last inspection in dealing with most of the key issues successfully and is improving standards and achievement as a result.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are rising and many students are making good progress.
- Able students are well catered for, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- Teaching is mainly good or very good.
- Classes taught by temporary staff are making less progress.
- Leadership of the subject is very good.

Commentary

57. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. The subject has moved from a position where progress and the majority of teaching were satisfactory to one where progress is good, particularly in Years 10 and 11, and the majority of teaching is good or very good.
58. Standards achieved in the national tests in Year 9 used to be well below national standards but they have risen steadily over the last four years and in 2003 they were slightly above the results of schools nationally. GCSE results have also followed an upward trend and are now comparable to schools nationally. Students do better in mathematics than in most of their other subjects.
59. Achievement is good overall. The majority of students are making steady progress for their ability in Years 7 to 9 and the most able are making very good progress. This is because mathematics lessons usually keep up a good pace, and no student is left with nothing to do. Teachers are adept at using questions to keep everyone involved and alert. They are very good at managing behaviour to avoid confrontation and to captivate the interest of potentially disruptive students. Standards are in line with the national average by Year 9 and by Year 11. In Years 10 and 11 the students, particularly boys, are maintaining a creditable rate of progress. This is particularly noticeable in the Year 10 statistics group because of the teacher's high expectations and because students are asked to make deductions and explain them. Students in this group have an impressive work rate and are making rapid progress.
60. Changes in staff due to unfilled vacancies have had a detrimental effect on certain groups despite the intervention of the head of department. The progress of these groups has been less consistent because supply teachers, having to cope with unfamiliar students and materials, often set too much work straight from the book and leave students to get on with it.
61. The experiences provided by the permanent mathematics staff are usually good or very good. Lessons start well and have plenty of challenging materials to keep students thinking, practising skills and explaining their answers. Homework is set every week and work is well marked, often with useful feedback to students on how to improve. Lower ability students are given a variety of short and attainable activities to motivate them; teachers are encouraging and willing to spend time on one-to-one explanations. This enables students with special educational needs to progress at a comparable rate to others in their classes. Teachers have a good relationship with their students and know them well. They use humour, interesting materials and a firm belief in their students' abilities to keep them working hard.
62. The head of department is well organised, knowledgeable and insists on high standards. She provides a very good role model for teaching. She is very aware of what is going on in her department and leads a capable team. The day-to-day management of mathematics is good but is less effective than it could be because of her heavy teaching commitment. Opportunities to team teach with new staff are rare and the impact of the numeracy initiative on other departments has not been monitored.
63. There is too little access to computers in mathematics, particularly in Years 7 and 8 when the fortnightly lesson has to concentrate on teaching the ICT curriculum rather than applying the ideas to mathematics. Problems with the technology reduce the amount of time students are able to participate in some of these lessons.

Mathematics across the curriculum

64. Students' competence in mathematics enables them to use it effectively in other subjects, for example when dealing with spreadsheets in ICT, formulae in science, graphs in geography or the precise measuring needed in design tasks. The lack of a school policy on numeracy means that calculation methods are not consistent across departments and opportunities for applying mathematical ideas are missed in other subjects, such as when looking at data on wartime conditions in history.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 were above the national average in 2003.
- The students achieve well because they are taught well.
- Leadership and management are good, with data being increasingly used well to focus and direct the work of the department.
- Poor accommodation and a lack of ICT resources are limiting learning.

Commentary

65. National Curriculum test results for Year 9 students have improved significantly since the last inspection. They are improving at a more rapid rate than the national trend and were above the national average in 2003. Girls performed a little better than boys in the 2003 tests, but there is no consistent pattern to the results by gender over the past five years. The proportion of students reaching Level 5 or above was higher than in schools where the students had a similar starting point in their National Curriculum test results in Year 6. The proportion of students reaching Level 6 or above was below average, however. Students at risk of not achieving the expected level in the Year 9 tests have been identified and formed into a teaching group to receive additional, focused support. This strategy has much potential for success.
66. GCSE results were not significantly different from the national average in 2003, although a relatively high proportion of boys did not study science in Years 10 and 11. Every student entered achieved a pass grade, but the proportion of the very highest grades, A and A* was relatively low. The proportion of students awarded an A*-C grade compared favourably with schools with similar prior attainment in Year 9. The department has identified the coursework component as a relative weakness within the results and is instigating a rigorous programme of improvement. The practice of rotating student groups around teachers to study different modules of work has also been identified as a factor limiting achievement and arrangements for next year are being reconsidered.
67. The standard of work seen during the inspection was in line with the national average in Year 9 and in Year 11. Teaching is generally good, with some examples of very good practice. Most lessons have clear and explicit objectives and teachers have planned a good variety of activities to enable the students to achieve them. Relationships are good, as are behaviour and attitudes, so students tend to focus well and apply themselves conscientiously to their work. Consequently learning is good and they make good progress in developing their skills, knowledge and understanding. There is a strong expectation that students work independently and take responsibility for their own learning. There is much use of individual mini whiteboards, as when Year 11 students were using them to balance chemical equations. This encouraged them to try ideas and to risk solutions. It also enabled the teacher to evaluate accurately their individual understanding. In a Year 10 lesson, the teacher required the students to reflect on how confident they felt about temperature changes during chemical reactions and to convey this by holding up differently coloured faces of a pyramid. This enabled the teacher to focus attention where most required, to pitch activities appropriately and maximise learning. Students with special educational needs are given suitable support and progress at the same rate as their peers.
68. Satisfactory improvement has been made since the previous inspection and the head of department has a clear vision for future development and sustained improvement. This is based upon an effective analysis of strengths and weaknesses. Measures which are likely to

enhance students' achievement further are already being introduced and there is good potential to maintain the rate of improvement. However, the condition and flexibility of the accommodation is limiting the strategies that can be used to secure maximum learning. Similarly there is little access to ICT resources to underpin learning routinely and students' do not use instruments to capture and analyse physical data as they should.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- All students from Years 9 to 11 have ICT lessons where they follow an accredited ICT course.
- Much teaching in discrete ICT lessons is very good and is good overall, resulting in students achieving well.
- There are planned opportunities for students to use their ICT skills in most subjects, but there is scope for more use, particularly in aspects of design and technology and in science.
- Additional ICT lessons for specific groups in Years 10 and 11 ensure that a very wide range of ability is well catered for.

Commentary

69. Timetabled ICT lessons begin in Year 9 and are taught by teachers with good ICT knowledge and skills. This helps to ensure that students make good progress in covering the National Strategy for ICT. Standards overall by the second term of Year 9 are average, as students follow an accredited Key Skills ICT course. Currently, progress in Years 7 and 8 is more variable because students have to rely upon learning their ICT skills in other subjects. This happens when computer rooms are available, or by using the small numbers of machines in some subject areas. By far the greatest overall use so far this year has been in geography. However, there is more scope for using ICT to enhance teaching and learning in many subjects. Although opportunities to use ICT are planned in all subjects, students can have different experiences and there is some variation in standards. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls in Years 7 and 8. In addition, support for students with special needs was more effective in lessons taken by ICT specialists but was satisfactory overall. In some lessons additional support materials were available. The school is tackling shortcomings in the curriculum in Years 7 and 8 by introducing ICT lessons for all students from September 2004.
70. In Years 9 to 11, where all students follow an accredited ICT Key Skills course, progress is good, and sometimes very good. Standards overall are above average. ICT provision caters for a very wide range of ability, from additional timetabled ICT lessons for lower-attaining students, to after-school sessions for a gifted and talented group following a GCSE course. In lessons seen, support for students with special educational needs was at least satisfactory. Teachers were generally aware of where additional support was needed and frequently provided additional guidance material ensuring all were included in learning activities. Teaching in a significant number of ICT lessons is very good. The timetabled ICT lessons are helping to increase students' confidence and competence in using computers. This in turn, is facilitating the use of ICT in other curriculum areas because teachers can concentrate upon subject content and don't have to teach ICT skills. Students are generally able to use appropriate ICT skills and access to computers is satisfactory. This ensures that students are also able to use ICT for subject coursework. Overall there was no significant difference in attainment between girls and boys although more boys attend the gifted and talented sessions. Computer projection facilities are very limited throughout the school, which reduces teaching options in most subjects.

71. Good leadership and management in the ICT department, and good support at senior management level are helping to consolidate the improvement in the use of ICT, which is in turn having a beneficial effect in most curriculum areas. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory; much of this has taken place recently since resources have increased. The curriculum has been mapped in detail to highlight opportunities for using ICT. The use of computer rooms is carefully monitored and analysed regularly. However, the graphs which illustrate and compare departmental use are not widely available. This limits future planning. Areas which need further attention are computer aided manufacturing in design and technology and the use of ICT to monitor and measure change in practical science activities. This is needed to ensure that student have opportunities to cover all of the required aspects of ICT in these two subjects.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

72. Provision for ICT across the curriculum is at least satisfactory in most subjects, except for English, mathematics, science and design and technology. The ICT department works closely with all curriculum areas to identify opportunities for using computers to enhance teaching and learning. The use of ICT rooms is monitored in detail and analysed. Graphs of subject usage are produced although these could be more widely distributed to increase awareness of overall use. The comprehensive data shows that all subjects use ICT although there is some variation between subjects and year groups. The use of ICT across the curriculum is satisfactory overall and good in some subjects such as geography and history. ICT resources have recently improved significantly in the music department. There are, however significant omissions in two subjects. In design and technology there is a lack of computer aided manufacturing equipment and in science ICT is not used to monitor and measure changes during practical work.

HUMANITIES

Geography, history and religious education were inspected in depth. Additionally, one lesson of **sociology** was sampled in Year 10. The group was studying the topic of educational achievement as part of their GCSE course, focusing on the differences between boys and girls' performance in school. The teaching was very good, enabling students to assimilate their own experiences into the theoretical framework of sociological research. All students achieved very well, with very good development of knowledge and analytical skills leading to above average standards for this stage of the course.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are well below the national average overall but the number of students attaining grades A* and A is above average.
- There has been good progress in extending the range of learning activities.
- Teaching and learning are very good in Years 7 to 9.
- There is insufficient monitoring of teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

73. The overall standard at GCSE has been consistent in recent years but there has been an increasing difference in the attainment of higher and lower-attaining students. This is partly due to the differences from year to year in the prior attainment of students choosing geography, but there is also a marked difference in the achievement of students of different

abilities during Years 10 and 11. In 2003, over a quarter of students attained grades A* or A as a result of challenging teaching and thorough preparation for the examination. On the other hand, there was considerable underachievement by a number of students with lower prior attainment. Strategies to raise the performance of these students have been identified but their application is not rigorously monitored. Students' work seen during the inspection confirms that standards overall in Years 10 and 11 are below the national average, although in line with expectations for the students taking the subject.

74. Students' achievement in Years 7 to 9 is very good. Standards are low on entry to the school but by Year 9 they are in line with the national average. At the higher National Curriculum levels there is no difference in the attainment of boys and girls; however, lower-attaining boys achieve less well than girls. The achievement of students with special educational needs is in line with other students. Standards in Years 7 to 9 have risen because of a greater emphasis on learning activities which provide greater challenge, actively engage students in enquiry work, and develop their thinking skills.
75. Teaching and learning are good overall and were very good or excellent in the majority of lessons seen in Years 7 to 9. No teaching was less than satisfactory although learning was unsatisfactory in one Year 11 lesson in which the teaching was directed at controlling challenging behaviour. In all other lessons, relationships in the classroom were very good so students were confident in contributing to lessons. Imaginative starter activities engage students' interest and they settle to work quickly. Students are well supported; marking is thorough and helpful, and assessment practice is very well developed.
76. The subject makes a very good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. For example, in Year 9 lessons on China students used excellent stimulus material produced within the department to evaluate how the media portray contrasting images of the country, and used role-play to consider the morality of its 'one child' policy.
77. Leadership and management are good and have brought good improvement since the previous inspection. The subject co-ordinator's vision for developing the curriculum is shared by the team of geography teachers. Resources are used effectively. Monitoring students' progress is efficient, but less attention has been given to monitoring teaching and evaluating its impact on learning, particularly in meeting the needs of the groups of students who are underachieving.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and learning lead to good achievement from entry to the school.
- Very good management of lessons leads to good student attitudes and a good atmosphere for learning.
- Good assessment and target-setting procedures mean that students are aware of their own progress.
- Insufficient use is made of the local environment as a teaching resource.

Commentary

78. In 2003, GCSE results were below the national average, and were below the results of other subjects in the school. However, for that particular group of students these results represented good added value from the end of Year 9. Results have been inconsistent from year to year, and are similar to the last inspection. There has been no clear trend between the results of boys and girls; in some years girls do better, in some years it is boys. In most years, many more boys than girls choose to take history and this imbalance may contribute to these

inconsistent results. Work seen during the inspection was of an average standard. High attaining Year 11 students have drafted some good coursework, showing an ability to assess and interpret historical sources and draw appropriate conclusions. The work of some lower-attaining students is more descriptive than analytical but the standard of presentation is good.

79. The standard of Year 9 work seen during the inspection shows good development of skills and knowledge from Year 7, and present Year 9 work is in line with expectations. Year 9 students were producing some effective work about life in the trenches in the First World War and most understood the importance of drawing their conclusions from reliable source material. One lower-attaining group, working on computers to select and evaluate sources of information from the trenches, was making particularly good progress. Literacy is adequate to meet the requirements of the work to be done, but opportunities to develop literacy in lessons are not always used well. Similarly, numeracy is not always used well. For example, a group was trying to make a decision about the adequacy of a soldier's rations in the trenches from a list giving weights in pounds and ounces, without the tools to make a meaningful conversion to metric weights.
80. Overall, these standards represent good achievement in all year groups from below average attainment on entry to the school.
81. Students with special educational needs are provided for by supportive worksheets and writing frames, and by extra teacher attention in group work. High-attaining students were seen to be given extra activities to challenge them. Overall the achievement of these groups of students is in line with that of their classmates.
82. Teaching and learning are good. In all lessons, good planning and organisation made very good use of the time available. Group and pair work developed the social skills of students, and they always listened attentively to each other and to the teacher. Moral and cultural themes are tackled through work on such topics as slavery and religious quarrels. However, there is no evidence of a positive spiritual element in the schemes of work or the teaching. Teachers have high expectations of effort and behaviour. Very good management coupled with good relationships produces a learning ethos that enables students to enjoy their lessons, so that they work hard and learn well almost without realising it. Work is assessed well through consistent marking practices and regular assignments, and teachers regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their methods in the light of the results of these assignments. Students keep their own record of progress and set their own targets using National Curriculum levels.
83. Good management ensures a well-resourced curriculum, although at present there is not enough regular use of the local environment as a historical source. Schemes of work have recently been re-written and opportunities to teach citizenship, literacy, and ICT are made explicit. Leadership is satisfactory, encompassing a team of several non-specialist teachers in Years 7 to 9. However, because of time constraints there is no formalised programme of lesson observations in the department in order to ensure consistent standards. Although strategies are in place to raise the attainment of boys, such as mixed-gender seating plans and more practical work tasks, there is insufficient evidence so far that these are having a positive effect on learning. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory, with improved standards of teaching, improved achievement, better schemes of work and better resources. With the good structures that are in place and the good standard of teaching, the department has the capacity to improve effectively in the future.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are rising especially at GCSE.
- The best teaching is lively, challenging and actively involves the students in their learning.
- There is a good emphasis on learning from religion.
- Analysed data is not used to focus on areas of improvement.

Commentary

84. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good. Students join the school with knowledge, skills and understanding that are slightly below the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education that the school uses and move to being in line with the expectations by the end of Year 9. The students are stronger on learning from religion and in giving their own views on topics and weaker on recall of facts about world religions. All students follow a short GCSE course in Years 10 and 11, and in 2003 obtained results in line with the national average. Results have improved significantly over the last three years. The achievement of the students following the GCSE course is good. Boys' results were lower than girls' in the 2003 assessments and examinations. This had not been the situation previously and the department is considering ways of tackling this. Students with special educational needs achieve at the same rate as other students and virtually all students obtain a GCSE grade. A small number of Year 10 students are following a full GCSE course and their current work is above average.
85. Teaching is good and consistent in all years. The best teaching is lively, challenging and has good pace that stimulates the students' interest and gets them involved in the lesson. Virtually all lessons encourage students to express their views, give reasons for their answers, apply their knowledge and give examples to show their understanding of issues. In several lessons there is an emphasis on developing the literacy skills of the students in reading aloud, extending their vocabulary and in general support but the use of differentiated materials is variable. Attitudes of the students to religious education are variable but generally good. All students are encouraged to participate and the good teacher-student relationships ensure that the students feel confident in expressing personal views. All of this contributes to the students' good learning. However, in a few cases the discussion is teacher-led and this limits the amount of student contribution; occasional poorer behaviour limits the contributions that are made by the students. There is a good assessment scheme, but this is not yet fully embedded in the work of all staff. Marking of the students' books gives positive encouragement but the use of constructive comments that enables the students to have a sharp focus on what is needed to raise their attainment level is variable. This is better in Years 10 and 11.
86. The good leadership and management of the department have secured good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have risen and the school now meets the statutory requirements for Years 7 to 11. There is a clear vision for improvement. There is stable staffing, and teachers are well supported; however, monitoring of staff to improve their subject-specific teaching skills is not carried out in a formal way. ICT is an area that is still developing, but recently the curriculum has not been enhanced by visits to places of worship. The short GCSE course can now be converted to a full course by after-school lessons in Year 10. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are rising, although boys are not achieving as well as girls; the quality of practical work is a particular strength.
- The quality of teaching is always satisfactory and often good and is a major factor in the good achievement and positive attitudes of the students.
- The assessment and tracking of students' progress have improved since the last inspection and students know their targets and attainment levels and how to improve.
- The use of computer-aided design (CAD) software is good, but the department has no modern equipment for computer aided manufacturing.
- The department is well led with a clear sense of vision, high aspirations and a focus on student achievement.

Commentary

87. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are in line with the national average throughout the department. They are particularly good in the computer-aided design module in Year 7 and in the Year 9 electronics module. Students demonstrate good making skills in all other areas. Design skills are not as good, particularly in the presentation of ideas in sketch form. This is largely because not all teachers ensure that students are taught to sketch in each of the modules. By Year 9, girls are well above national levels and boys are close to them. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are above average in each of the design and technology areas. GCSE results have risen since the last inspection to above national averages overall, with girls achieving higher results than boys. The results in electronics and textiles are very good, in food technology they are good, and in resistant materials they are sound. Students' language and mathematical skills do not inhibit their achievement in any significant way.
88. The tracking of students' achievement through the modules in Years 7 to 9 provides good evidence of progress. Good feedback by teachers to students consolidates this achievement. Girls make better progress because they complete their folios with more care than the boys. Students' achievement is good in Years 10 and 11. They make good progress in each of their options. Students' coursework is good, particularly in Year 11, in all subject areas. Their gains in knowledge and understanding of the subjects is sound. Their progress in making skills continues, but the biggest gain is their use of ICT in their coursework.
89. Teaching and learning are good overall. Modules are taught by specialist teachers who have good understanding of their subject areas. Lessons are well planned and organised. Teachers use a range of teaching strategies to encourage and motivate students. They provide good challenge and demonstrations of new techniques and support individual students well. Students much prefer practical work. The few lessons in which they appeared bored were theory lessons, where teachers did not create interest and develop learning sufficiently. Teachers meet the needs of students very well and support the learning of individual students well. Where teaching assistants were seen supporting the learning of individual students with special educational needs, their achievement improved enormously.
90. The head of department inspires and motivates the staff very well and has secured good improvements in provision and standards since the last inspection. The department know where they want to be and in most cases how to get there. The head of department monitors the work of colleagues and students regularly and is a good role model for others. He maintains a nice balance between control and independence. The schemes of work are good and this leads to good quality achievement in both key stages. The department meets health

and safety regulations controlling dust levels, and the use of extraction equipment meets the health and safety regulations.

91. The department benefits from good facilities. It has recently moved in to new food technology and textiles rooms. There is a good range of equipment for students to use throughout the department. Computer-aided design software is used well in Year 7, 10 and 11, but the department does not have computer-aided manufacturing equipment to fully utilise this software.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design and music were inspected in detail and some lessons of drama were also observed. **Drama** is currently a popular GCSE subject and will become a subject in its own right from September 2004 for Years 7 to 9. It already makes an important general contribution to students' skills and confidence in speaking and listening, and in some cases provides specific assessment information which can be used towards a student's English GCSE grade for speaking and listening. The drama department is very well led and the two teachers collaborate effectively to offer high quality learning experiences. Students display good motivation and enthusiasm in response to stimulating and well planned teaching. They rapidly acquire self discipline and learn to evaluate their own and their fellow students' work constructively. GCSE results in drama have been consistently high and in 2003 were well above the national average. The subject attracts students of widely varying abilities and all make very good progress. They meet their teachers' expectation that they will learn as a group and will support one another. The drama studio is a good working space and students use it responsibly. The subject makes a distinctive contribution to students' personal and social development.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Many students achieve well in the general art course because there is opportunity for individuals to develop their strengths.
- Students do not use sketchbooks well enough to record, develop, explain and present their ideas.
- Good relationships between students and teachers create a pleasant environment in the art department.
- The work of women artists, art from other cultures and opportunities for reflection do not feature sufficiently strongly in the curriculum.
- Computers are used but not sufficiently to develop ideas creatively.

Commentary

92. The percentage of students gaining A* to C grades at GCSE in 2003 was below the national average. However, girls achieved better than girls do nationally and boys achieved significantly worse than boys do nationally. The broad based art course was studied as an option mainly by girls and the graphics course was studied mainly by boys. According to work seen during the inspection, students in Year 9 are working below the level expected nationally. Students in Year 11 are working at a standard above average in the general art course and below average in graphics.
93. Achievement is satisfactory overall, including that for students with special educational needs. Students arrive at the school with varied abilities in art and many are well below average, with some below average. Slow progress is made in the acquisition of basic art skills and knowledge and understanding about the work of artists. The quality of this is variable across

the department, so that by the end of Year 9 many more are working just below average, with some high attaining students, who have been taught well, working above expectation. Some very exciting mixed media work in paint and pastel, inspired by Matisse, have been produced in Year 7. High attaining students in Year 9 show their good understanding of perspective in competent drawing of areas of the school from observation.

94. Several high attaining students in Year 11 general art classes demonstrate an ability to use clay well by making masks inspired by designs of tribal art from Africa and North America whilst others show lively and expressive work using paint, oil pastel and printmaking to explore diverse themes. Most students understand how to use shading effectively to make objects look three-dimensional in their drawing of figures, faces and artefacts.
95. The majority of students taking the general art course achieve well but achievement is unsatisfactory in graphics, even in classes which were observed during the inspection where there are many more girls than boys.
96. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall and varies from good to unsatisfactory. The greater proportion of unsatisfactory teaching was seen in graphics in Years 10 and 11. Teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 varies widely. All three teachers teach classes in Years 8 and 9 and teaching and learning varies from good to unsatisfactory. Staff instability at present affects many of these classes and they work in a room that is too small to accommodate them comfortably. In-class support is inadequate to allow all students to learn well in classes where there are as many as eight who have special educational needs. However, all teachers are art specialists with very good knowledge of their subject and they have good relationships with their students. Good planning with appropriate learning objectives that build on previous learning are evident in effective lessons. Pictures of artists' work, artefacts, live models and exemplar work from other students are used well and students learn well as a result. Inappropriate learning aims and failure to provide adequate stimulus to inform and inspire students' work are the main weaknesses in teaching and result in many students finding the work difficult and failing to learn well. In good lessons, teachers use verbal feedback well to inform students how to improve; however, marking varies across the department. The failure to use this strategically in graphics means that planning and teaching lack the necessary focus. This is resulting in unsatisfactory learning. Sketchbooks are not used adequately to develop, explain and present ideas. Attitudes of students towards their work are generally good, and they have a genuine desire to do well.
97. The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. The situation regarding standards, achievement and the quality of teaching and learning is the same in almost every respect since the last inspection, therefore, improvement since then is unsatisfactory. However, the present subject leader, despite having only been in post for half a term, has acquainted himself with data, has monitored the teachers in the department and has formulated some suggestions for making improvements. He has not had time to put these into practice or to see whether these strategies would be successful in creating a more effective team than operates at present.
98. The work of the art department makes a satisfactory contribution to the cultural development of students through looking at the work of artists informed by visits to major galleries. Artists are predominantly western European and do not feature among them any female artists or other cultures, other than Ancient Egyptian, in any depth. Three of the art rooms are spacious and pleasant and include a well-equipped pottery, but one is much smaller and lacks space for work and equipment storage and inhibited learning in lessons seen during the inspection. Computers are used regularly especially in Years 10 and 11 but not creatively enough to develop ideas.

Music

Provision in music is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Large numbers of students participate in the wide range of extra-curricular activities and instrumental provision.
- Resources and ICT provision are much improved.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, but expectations are not high enough for all students in Years 10 to 11.
- There has not been sufficient support for developing teaching styles.

Commentary

99. The music department provides a growing number of opportunities for students of all abilities. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are around the national average. In Years 10 and 11 results have been above the national average, with good value added, but a minority of students under perform. Students come to the school with a wide range of attainment but by Year 9 achievement by most is satisfactory. All abilities are supported well. Students show good skills in performing and listen with some appreciation of technical features. Composing is improving but targets need to be more rigorous. Boys and girls perform equally well. During the inspection, students showed the confidence to use their musical abilities and much evidence of progress was seen.
100. The standard of teaching is satisfactory, but there is scope for the application of a wider range of teaching methods. Lessons are well planned and show good subject knowledge. Students are well managed, relationships are productive and good use is made of resources. Student motivation was weak in a few classes. The standard of learning is improving with good assessment procedures in place. Not all activities are appropriate for the age of the students. For example, a Year 8 lesson creating sound effects did not extend to moods or emotions and an opportunity was missed to link with graphic scores.
101. Considerable progress has been made since the last inspection with improved resources and work ethic. The present head of music has been in post for less than 18 months. The department is developing well with strong leadership. Many students experience the enjoyment of music. The use of ICT supports the department and the new computer room provides opportunity for students to compose using a variety of software packages. New schemes of work are being developed linked to National Curriculum targets but this needs to be extended to all units and re-examined for appropriateness.
102. Many students take part in extra-curricular activities which include a jazz band, a string group, a wind band, a junior choir and rock groups. Concerts take place twice a year and are well supported. The groups have an impressive list of engagements and last year recorded a CD to promote the music department. The numbers receiving instrumental tuition are well above the national average, although cross curricular links are less well developed.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are very good with a clear vision for the development of the subject and high expectations of students.

- The assessment and monitoring of student progress is thorough, clearly linked to the National Curriculum and informs lesson planning.
- Teaching and learning are very good and students have very positive attitudes, they achieve very well by the end of Year 9 and GCSE results continue to improve.
- The curriculum arrangements for teaching in Years 10 and 11 are unsatisfactory.
- The provision of extra-curricular clubs and teams is very good.

Commentary

103. The recently appointed head of department has made significant and effective improvements to the teaching of physical education. There is a clear vision for developing the subject and high expectations of students in terms of participation, performance and attitude. Appropriate schemes of work for each activity have been designed which provide a clear structure for teaching. These are clearly referenced to the National Curriculum and assist in monitoring the progress and attainment of students. There is an innovative and effective system in place for monitoring teaching and providing feedback to the head of department on strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement. Staff are deployed effectively to maximise particular strengths and work co-operatively to provide a consistent approach to teaching and in monitoring and assessing student performance. As a consequence, all students, including those with special educational needs, can be supported appropriately in lessons and make progress over time.
104. Teaching and learning are very good. Knowledgeable and enthusiastic staff teach well prepared lessons which are well-structured, brisk and authoritative. Lively students are handled very well with teachers channelling student energies into productive participation. All students are kept on task throughout lessons. As a consequence, students achieve very well by the end of Year 9 and are generally in line with national expectations but with many talented students able to perform with a consistently high level of personal and team skills. GCSE students' results continue to improve and were just above the national average in 2003.
105. The level of achievement in a Year 7 volleyball lesson was outstanding with a combination of enthusiastic, expert teaching and students' positive attitudes ensuring all understood court positions, most could 'set' and serve consistently and several were able to 'spike' the ball with power and accuracy. In a very good Year 9 basketball lesson where students were being assessed, a mixed ability group was expertly handled by the teacher in a very well organised lesson involving three separate games and the productive use of a sixth form student to lead one of the groups. A large Year 10 group worked productively in a stimulating lesson on the effects of exercise on the heart, where the teacher expertly combined theory teaching, practical activities and the use of ICT.
106. The single period of physical education for students in Years 10 and 11 who are not taking the GCSE course is inadequate for activities to be studied to sufficient depth. However, the provision of the many excellent extra-curricular clubs and teams provides opportunities for students of all abilities to participate in sport and for the most able to extend their skills development. As a consequence, many talented students have gone on to win representative honours. Accommodation is good, with the dedicated physical education classroom providing an excellent learning environment for theory lessons. However, the barrier which extends down the length of the sports hall adversely affects teaching of lessons, particularly those with large classes. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

107. No subjects were inspected in detail in this area, although one lesson of **business studies** was observed. This was taught well. The teacher's clear explanations and well prepared materials ensured that all students in this mixed ability class made good progress and achieved well. Despite reluctance on behalf of some to participate fully in the lesson, the teacher's patient questioning included all in the activities and they were able to gain an

understanding of the basics of employment law. The lesson was also characterised by very good student-teacher relations.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

108. Citizenship was inspected in detail and some lessons of personal, social and health education were also observed. Personal, social and health education, careers and citizenship are taught as part of a rotational arrangement for one period each week in all year groups. A Year 8 lesson on first-aid was taught well. This was a well-constructed session by a teacher with a good level of expertise who consolidated and developed the students' skills well. Another lesson in Year 11 on study skills was satisfactory as the students learnt about revision strategies.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- An audit has been carried out and all strands of citizenship planned, but the expected input from other subjects is not happening consistently.
- The subject leader has identified the main areas that need attention and is starting to ensure that action is taken to tackle shortcomings in the present provision.
- Citizenship is not having a significant impact on the students' personal development.
- Teaching of individual lessons is well organised but the limited time available militates against developing themes in any great depth.

Commentary

109. Students' achievement throughout the school is unsatisfactory at present for several reasons, largely stemming from the relatively late start made in planning to implement National Curriculum requirements. The school is at a point that it might have been expected to reach a year ago if preparations had started effectively once requirements had been published. National Curriculum requirements are met, although some areas are still developing. In particular, the strand that requires students to develop skills of participation and responsible action is not sufficiently embedded. For example, there is a school council, but this works very much to an agenda set by the school and members do not feel that their contribution has an impact on the work of the school.
110. The school has adopted a model where citizenship is taught partly in a carousel with careers and personal, social and health education, as well as through identified topics in other subjects. An audit has been carried out to identify where other subjects contribute to aspects of citizenship. These have then been built into and clearly identified in subject schemes of work. However, there is no link between these and topics being covered at a particular time in citizenship lessons. Students are also not always alerted when a particular lesson in a subject might have a citizenship element. In discussion, few students can identify topics covered in other subjects where reference was made to citizenship. Consequently, their experience is quite fragmented and standards are below those expected by the National Curriculum.
111. The teaching of discrete citizenship lessons within the personal, social and health education and careers rotation is good, but this is not sufficient to make up for shortcomings elsewhere. The teachers have a good command of the material and plan interesting lessons that employ a variety of activities. Role-play and a discussion based on a video excerpt were two methods that gained the students' interest and provoked creative responses. The students mostly find these lessons interesting but only develop a superficial understanding of topics because insufficient time is available to explore issues in depth. Citizenship units only account for a small proportion of the time devoted to the carousel arrangement. Furthermore, teachers only

take classes for short units covering a few weeks and are not able to build up the relationships needed to explore some quite challenging issues.

112. The model adopted by the school requires much tighter monitoring of the contribution of individual subjects than is currently the case. The subject co-ordinator has identified many of the main priorities for improving provision, such as introducing a rigorous assessment system. She is providing sound leadership. However, her role is not sufficiently developed to ensure that subject teachers fulfil their requirements as part of the citizenship programme. One final consequence is that citizenship is not playing the part it could potentially in promoting the students' social and moral development.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002.

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	7	0	33.2	57.1	81.6	15.7	33.2
Business studies	5	0	31.7	60.0	89.1	16.0	35.4
Geography	5	0	36.4	60.0	88.3	18.0	36.3
Sociology	9	11.1	33.6	88.9	83.7	31.1	33.8

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	6	33.3	48.7	100	96.1	76.7	85.1
Biology	6	33.3	36.3	100	91.6	76.7	74.1
Business studies	6	33.3	32.8	100	96.4	76.7	76.5
Chemistry	5	80.0	45.9	100	94.0	96.0	81.1
English	8	37.5	36.5	100	98.3	85.0	80.1
General studies	24	37.5	29.1	79.2	90.1	63.3	69.3
Mathematics	6	33.3	52.2	83.3	93.3	66.7	84.7
Sociology	7	57.1	39.6	100	95.4	82.9	79.1

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English was the subject of a focused inspection and lessons were sampled in French and German. No student in the **German** class and only one student in the **French** class were from The Priory School. Both teaching and learning were very good in the lessons seen; students made good progress and maintained high standards. Staff supported and inspired them to manipulate language at a high level and they clearly enjoyed rising to the challenge.

English

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A Level results in 2002 were above average.
- The teacher responsible for the course has high standards and is aware of priorities for development.
- Teachers and students are less confident about the language element of the combined course than about the literature.

Commentary

113. The school offers a combined course in literature and language at AS and A Level which suits the interests of students and has succeeded in recruiting a good number of boys. Numbers of students have often been low but are steadily rising. Results have fluctuated over recent years with students' average point score above the national average in 2002 and boys performing well. Results were less impressive in 2003, although most students' performance in English matched their results in other subjects.
114. Students achieve well. Teaching is sound and the students are highly motivated to succeed. Observation of class and written work suggests that current students' attainment is at least average. By Year 13 they write with control in a variety of contexts and demonstrate a knowledge of their set texts. In lessons they ask relevant questions and are not afraid to challenge their teachers or one another to seek clarification. In Year 12, students respond well to structured tasks but are more comfortable with the kind of conventional literary analysis which builds on their GCSE work. When required to apply new concepts from their study of language they are less confident or resourceful. There was some evidence from one Year 13 lesson that they continue to need more support in the area of applied language study. The students responded best during the week of the inspection when teaching was pacy and challenging or when they were given responsibility for group investigations and feedback.
115. Most students are positive and enthusiastic about the subject in lessons and in conversation. Year 13 students are clear about their achievements and understand how to make further progress because they receive regular and constructive feedback on both written work and performance in class. In a lesson preparing them for the comparative paper, students were very effectively motivated and supported by rigorous teaching which helped them explore the complexities of each writer's presentation of character. A good balance of teacher and student talk enabled them to extend their understanding of writers' techniques and to develop their confidence as presenters and questioners.
116. Since the departure of the head of English the teaching of A Level has been effectively managed by one of the A Level team, although leadership is unsatisfactory because there is no clear direction for the improvement of the subject. The teachers work hard and work well together but there is scope for them to continue to develop and share their knowledge in the field of language study.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

117. Levels of literacy in the sixth form are good. Students make good use of the library for independent research and readily draw on information from the internet as well as using books and magazines to broaden their studies. Most A Level students write accurately and in a range of styles. They participate willingly in discussions, listening carefully to one another's opinions and often challenging these constructively. They are confident speakers in both informal and formal situations.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The students respond well to the high expectations of their teachers and have a strong commitment to their studies.
- Assessment is used well as a tool for planning work, monitoring the students' progress and setting achievable but challenging targets.
- The teachers in the team are readily accessible to help students who are having difficulty with any aspect of the work.
- Students are prepared well at GCSE so that they start in Year 12 with a secure grounding in the basic skills needed to be successful.

Commentary

118. Achievement in both mathematics and further mathematics is good. Students make good progress and many exceed the standards that might have been expected from their GCSE results. A Level results have been in line with or better than the national average in recent years, with the exception of 2002 when they were well below average. Results improved considerably in 2003 to well above the 2002 national average. Variations from year-to-year are because of differences in the prior attainment of different groups. Standards currently in Year 13 are above average overall. Several students are on course to achieve the highest grades in both subjects as the results of modules already taken show. Standards at AS Level in Year 12 are more widely spread. Several students are highly competent. They have settled very well into the demands of the course; however, a small number are struggling with some of the concepts.
119. Students have received a solid grounding in many of the basic techniques that are needed at the start of the AS Level course. This enables them to tackle the demands of the course with confidence, even if some report how daunting they found the first few weeks. Algebraic manipulation is secure and the students are able to tackle the solution to problems in a clearly set out and logical approach. This is seen particularly in pure mathematics work such as calculus, and also when tackling problems in mechanics. Staff mark work carefully and give some useful guidance on how techniques can be improved. This is then seen to influence the students' later work. However, it is not always clear that students mark and correct questions that they have tackled in class.
120. Mathematics provision is well led and managed. Teaching staff work well as a team and have been successful in maintaining, and in some years improving standards since the last inspection. The main shortcomings in recording and tracking the students' progress have been tackled successfully, and are one of the factors accounting for their good achievement. Regular assessment of their work through unit tests means that teachers have a very clear picture of how well the students are doing and what they need to do to improve. This enables them to plan work to move the students forward as rapidly as possible, while ensuring that any who struggle are given support.

121. The students report that they feel challenged and stretched by their teachers, a factor that was evident in the lessons observed during the inspection. Teaching is good overall and often better than this. Staff are expert in the subject and have a good understanding of how to develop new concepts and consolidate them in the students' learning. Lessons are structured carefully so that the application of new ideas and the solution of problems are integral to the activities and tasks set. ICT is used as appropriate, such as when sketching graphs or solving problems by numerical methods.
122. The students also find very helpful the availability of teachers for consultation and guidance if they are having difficulty with the work. Many regularly avail themselves of this or work together outside lessons. This high level of commitment and strong drive for success is a further major factor in their good achievement. Work set is conscientiously tackled and folders are well organised, supporting their revision of topics.

Mathematics across the curriculum

123. The students' skills are able to support their learning in a wide range of subjects, although there is no plan or policy for these skills to be developed elsewhere. A small number of sixth form students are taking a key skills course at GCSE level in mathematics in an attempt to improve their grade. Standards in this group are well below average overall, although the lesson on algebra observed was taught well and the students tried hard.

SCIENCE

Biology was inspected in detail and lessons were also observed in chemistry. Two lessons of **chemistry** were seen, one of which was good. Students are competent in carrying out practical work safely and they can apply their knowledge to related situations. However when applying the knowledge in new or more complex contexts many require more support.

Biology

Provision in biology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The above average standards at A Level.
- Students are encouraged to play an active part in lessons and this helps to consolidate their learning of difficult concepts.
- Teachers often fill in answers rather than encouraging students to give full oral answers to questions.

Commentary

124. The A Level examination results in 2002 were above the national average and were at a similar level in 2003. This level has been maintained over the last three years. The results in the AS examinations in 2002 were below the national average, but the results in 2003 were better. Overall the AS Level results are generally more variable but the majority of students obtain or exceed grades predicted by their previous levels of attainment.
125. Achievement is good in both Years 12 and 13. The standard of work, seen in folders and in lessons, of the current Years 13 students is above average and that of Year 12 is average. Year 13 students were seen coming to terms with muscle contraction at a molecular level and looking at brain structure linking their knowledge to particular diseases. They are able to use key words to construct an answer to a particular question. Year 12 students were seen presenting their own research of dietary deficiencies and studying the human genome project.

A small number of these students are still in the process of adapting to the more in-depth demands of AS Level work. All students appreciate the support and help that is given to them.

126. Teaching is good and this is resulting in students making good progress. Very good subject knowledge of teachers, evident in their lesson planning and in the answers to students' questions, enables students to understand difficult concepts. The good challenge combined with the frequently active role taken by students such as when presenting work to their peers and applying information in a variety of examination-style situations also consolidates their learning. At times the teachers tend to fill in the answer rather than use developmental questioning which means that students are missing opportunities to develop their analytical and thinking skills that relate to examination techniques. Teachers have very good relationships with students who respond very well to the challenging teaching and are motivated to read around the subject and develop their independent learning skills. The use of questions linked to the examination requirements is ensuring good learning and enabling students to identify their own areas of weakness. Currently there are few visits linked to the biological courses and so students are missing out on enhancement opportunities.
127. The leadership and management of the department are good. There is a clear vision for moving the subject forward and a clear evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the subject has been made. Links have been made with a local company and plans are under way for more visits and outside lecture opportunities for the students. Since the last inspection the levels of attainment have risen significantly from being poor to above average and achievement is good. This represents good improvement.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

128. Information and communication technology (ICT) was not inspected in depth, although the use of ICT in subjects was evaluated. The use of ICT in sixth form courses is satisfactory overall, although there is scope in most subjects to use ICT more frequently to enhance teaching and learning. Some good presentation work was seen, particularly in geography. The Internet is used effectively for research in most subjects, although more use could be made of external resources for research, particularly in sociology. There is a great deal of autonomous use of ICT by students in all subjects. Access to computers is satisfactory for students but access to computer projection facilities is very limited and there is a very small number interactive whiteboards in the school. This deficiency restricts teaching options and limits access to a wide range of valuable teaching resources.

HUMANITIES

Geography and sociology were inspected in detail. One lesson of sixth form **history** was sampled, in Year 12. Students were studying life in the Soviet Union between 1928 and 1941 as part of their AS Level course. The teaching was good, with students benefiting from the teacher's excellent subject knowledge and the development of specialist vocabulary. Students achieve well, mastering a wide body of knowledge since the course began. Standards are in line with expectations for this stage of the course. In recent years the number of students following AS and A Level courses has been too small for meaningful statistical analysis of results. However, A Level students in 2003 achieved results that were in line with expectations according to their GCSE results, and AS Level students achieved results that were below expectations.

The school does not meet the statutory requirements of providing **religious education** for all students in Years 12 and 13. The Year 12 students have a three-hour module of religion and ethics within the general studies course, but this is only a fraction of the time required. The school is discussing plans to improve this situation.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at A Level are variable from year to year.
- Teachers have a very good command of the subject and of the requirements of the course.
- Students are very well supported and achieve well.

Commentary

129. Students who take geography in the sixth form have a wide range of prior attainment in the subject, including students who have not studied it at GCSE or have gained below grade C. The small numbers who have taken the A Level examinations in recent years also accounts for the variation in results. Results in 2002 were below the national average but in line with expectations for the students who took the examination. Results in 2003 were higher than in previous years; students did at least as well as in their other subjects. Standards attained in the AS Level examination in 2002 were below average but results were overall higher than in the other subjects taken by these students.
130. Overall, the achievement of students currently in the sixth form is good. The work of students in Year 13 is more in line with the national average than the disappointing results in the AS Level papers in 2003 would suggest. They are achieving well in Year 13 because of their positive attitude and the very high level of support from their teachers. Standards in the Year 12 class are above average; students are sustaining the very good achievement made during their GCSE course.
131. Teaching and learning are good. A strong feature of the teaching is the attention paid to examination technique from an early stage. In one lesson, students were given access to the examination board's marking criteria which they applied first to sample answers and then to their classmates' homework essays. Students were able to make a critical appraisal of the answers and indicate the level of response with a high degree of accuracy. Teachers stress links between different units of work in preparation for the synoptic paper. Good planning provides a challenge for students. They respond by showing a high capacity for independent research and good powers of evaluation. This was seen in an impressive ICT slide-show presentation by two students in a lesson in which the class were sharing their research into the impact of humans in cold environments.
132. The relationship between students and teachers is very good. It underlies the very effective support and guidance provided by the teachers which students identify as a great strength of the subject. They appreciate how accessible the teachers are and the time they give to students. Work is marked thoroughly and feedback to students is very helpful, particularly in physical geography. The arrangements within the consortium of schools work very well for students taught at The Priory School. The Year 12 group includes three students from each of the other two schools; the whole group has integrated well and students from all three schools played an equal part in the lesson.
133. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. Leadership and management are very good and contribute to maintaining good achievement by students. Assessment information and other data are used very well to monitor students' progress, and thorough analysis of examination results helps to plan teaching.

Sociology

Provision in sociology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are consistently above the national average.
- The quality of teaching is very good, leading to very good learning.
- High student motivation leads to good achievement.
- Few male students are attracted to the courses.

Commentary

134. Standards are above national expectations. A Level results have been consistently above the national average for the past three years. AS Level results were above the national average in 2002 and rose in 2003. These high standards are reflected in the work seen during the inspection, with students achieving above their target grades based on GCSE results. Very few students drop out of the course once they have started, and most continue from AS Level to A2. There are no consistent differences between the results of male and female students. However, the numbers of males opting for the subject has been very low in comparison to females. This means that the male perspective is not always well represented in class discussions, an important feature of some sociological topics.
135. No students appear to be held back by weak literacy or ICT skills and all students, whatever their prior learning in the subject, are achieving well. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good. High expectations ensure that students are well challenged by their work.
136. Because of the excellent subject knowledge of their teacher and the interesting way this is conveyed, students amass a wide body of knowledge in a comparatively short time and can hold coherent discussions evaluating the influences and perspectives of the leading schools of sociological thought. Lessons are characterised by a buzz of interest and effort. Students can analyse and present new information through diagrams, notes and essays. Their approach is mature and perceptive. They can draw effectively on past learning and their own background knowledge, such as in a Year 12 lesson about gender bias in educational achievement.
137. The students have extremely positive views of the subject and the progress they are making. Many of them chose to study sociology because they see it as being useful in a wide range of proposed careers, others because the subject holds general interest for them.
138. The small sociology department is well managed by the co-ordinator with good planning and documentation in place and records kept of students' progress. Leadership is satisfactory; although there is ample informal liaison, monitoring and self-evaluation of the teaching in the department is not yet carried out formally. So far there has been no concerted effort to balance the proportions of male and female students taking the subject. As sociology was not reported on in the previous report there is no evidence on which to base a judgement about improvement.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Product design

Provision in product design is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students design and make work is of a high standard particularly at AS Level.
- The improved teaching and learning in the department has had a major impact on standards and student achievement.
- Teaching is always good or better.
- Assessment and guidance are very good.

Commentary

139. The numbers of students taking the course and their standards on entry have varied from year to year. Subsequently, the results have varied. AS Level results for the past three years have been above average. High grades have been achieved by most students with very few being ungraded. A Level results do not follow the same pattern. The 2003 A Level grades were above average; six of the ten candidates were awarded A or B grades. In 2001 the grades were similar to 2003, but in 2002 they were poor. The reason for this was that students were allowed to enter the examination even though their coursework was not up to standard.
140. The standard of work of the current students is above average overall. Students make good use of ICT in their course work and their design folders are usually of a high standard. The A Level product studies are good with good research, product history and manufacturing details. The main coursework projects at both A and AS Levels are completed very well. There is a good range of individual projects with captures the interest of the students. Every design folder has a well-written and detailed design brief and detailed specification that highlights the main design requirements. All students have detailed time plans, and preliminary research is usually good. Whenever possible, students are encouraged to visit outside centres to gain first-hand knowledge of product design and manufacturing. Initial ideas are often very creative. These are then discussed and modified appropriately before proceeding to computer-aided design and a working drawing. Drawings are good and contain good detail with material specifications.
141. Teaching and learning in both courses are overall good. Teaching is always well prepared and encourages students to think for themselves and work independently. Most students work to and beyond their predicted grades. Teachers give very good guidance to students and support their progress very well. They are themselves knowledgeable and have high expectations and students respond well. Concentration levels are very good. The students work well outside of lessons and take pride in their work. They work well together and on their own. They discuss their ideas well and are critical of their own work. They use ICT well and have good commitment to the completion of their coursework.
142. Good departmental leadership and effective management have made a major impact on improving provision over the last three years so that progress since the last inspection has been good. Expectations of what students can achieve have risen. Planning has improved and the use of assessment data is now good. Feedback to students on progress is good.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- High quality personal attention enables students to develop individually.
- Very good student attitudes contribute positively to their learning.
- Work journals are not used adequately to record, develop, explain and present ideas.
- Assessment for students in Year 12 lacks the detail necessary for them to know more precisely how their strengths and weaknesses relate to examination criteria.

Commentary

143. Groups in recent years taking art at A Level have generally been small, usually less than ten. Standards in national examinations have ranged from well above average in 2000 to below average in 2003. National comparisons are difficult when numbers are so small, but many students last year did not achieve grades as high as expected.
144. Students in Year 13 are working below average whilst students on the AS course in Year 12 are working at a broadly average standard. The small group of students taking a GNVQ foundation course are working below average.
145. Achievement is good overall. Year 13 students are achieving well in relation to the grades they gained at AS, including one student who did not take art at GCSE. This is as a result of consistent good teaching, where students have individual attention and are guided to explore and develop their strengths, enabling them to produce very different responses to similar themes. Several high attaining students show good quality research from observational sources. They relate this to artists' work and produce original, multimedia work in response.
146. Achievement is good for some high attaining students in Year 12 and satisfactory for most. This is due to a quality of teaching and learning which varies between good and satisfactory, with the very good attitudes of students contributing to their learning. All the students taking AS Level gained high grades at GCSE and have good technical skills, shown in skilful drawings of hands, flowers and vegetables and in various studies in paint and pastel. Because students are encouraged to work on pieces of paper in preference to journals, presentation does not chart the development of ideas progressively. Annotation of work and the ability to make connections between their own and other artists' work is also underdeveloped. Achievement is satisfactory for the GNVQ foundation students, most of whom did not study art at GCSE. They experience working in a variety of materials and enjoy their course.
147. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. The current subject leader has been in post for half a term. The quality of leadership and management of sixth form courses is good. Visits to major art galleries both in London and Paris feature in the course and inform and inspire students' work. There is an opportunity to work in a variety of media in both two and three-dimensions including printmaking and photography. Computers are used to aid research but not creatively enough to develop ideas. The number of students continuing to study to A Level after the year of AS Level has been good and recruitment into the present Year 12 is more than has been usual. Student progress is tracked and data is now being used to set targets for achievement and inform achievement.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

No subjects were inspected in detail in this area, although a lesson in **physical education** was observed. This very good Year 12 AS Level lesson was pacy and stimulating with the teacher expertly linking the key anatomy and physiology concept 'centre of mass' to a range of sports. A combination of practical activity, targeted questioning and relevant work sheets, as well as students' positive attitude to the lesson ensured that learning was very good and that the students achieved well. Numbers of students for the course have risen recently and the subject now provides a popular option as part of the sixth form curriculum. There are currently no timetabled periods for sixth formers to participate in sport. However, they have opportunities to use the facilities, participate in several school teams, and several students assist with teaching and coaching younger students. For the latter, the department is planning to introduce courses to accredit this worthwhile and much appreciated sixth form activity.

BUSINESS

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The department offers a good range of courses to suit students with a wide range of aptitudes and abilities.
- Teaching is very good overall particularly in the AVCE course.
- There has been some inconsistency in examination results with a reduction in higher grades at A Level but a significant improvement at AS Level.

Commentary

148. In the AS Level business and economics course, results were below average in 2002 but improved significantly in 2003 and are likely to be above average when comparative figures are published. All candidates passed the examination. Results in the business and economics course at A Level in 2002 were in line with the national average. There was a decline in 2003 as there were no A or B grades, but all candidates passed. Results at A Level represent good progress for many students. Examination results in the GNVQ business foundation course in 2002 were about average for the small number of candidates, and they improved for a slightly larger group in 2003. There are no Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education course (AVCE) results for previous years.
149. Work seen during the inspection in lessons and in students' portfolios, indicates that standards at A Level and AS Level are currently good overall. Teachers have taken positive measures in terms of closer monitoring and in the provision of additional support, to ensure consistency in results. The good performance of last year's AS Level students is being built upon effectively in the A Level course. In the AVCE course, which is now running in Years 12 and 13, the performance of students in Year 12 is currently about average but Year 13 AVCE performance has developed well and is now good. The current attainment of students taking the GNVQ foundation course is average. This course is being replaced with an intermediate level course next year in response to past performance and an analysis of demand within the sixth form consortium.
150. The students are achieving well. Teaching is very good overall, and some excellent teaching was seen at A Level. This resulted in an excellent response from students who were highly motivated and very well focused on their work. They were perceptive and able to discuss economics and business concepts at a high level using current examples to illustrate their arguments. Teaching in the department results in very good learning. Students are kept well informed about their progress in both oral evaluation and detailed written diagnostic feedback in

their portfolios. Portfolios are carefully kept up-to-date and very well monitored by the department.

151. Good leadership and management ensure that the wide range of courses are effectively and efficiently managed, that courses are well planned and that staff work well as a team. In order to respond to changes in demand and improve the curriculum offered by the department, significant changes have been planned to facilitate closer links with the local college and to provide the GNVQ course a more appropriate level. Students are encouraged to take part in extra-curricular activities and competitions. Entry into national business and economics related competitions have resulted in continued success in recent years reflecting the commitment of students and the outward looking nature of the department. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

A considerable number of students take general studies at AS Level and a substantial number follow this through to A Level. It is one of the contributory factors in many students gaining an above average total point score at A Level. A satisfactory Year 12 lesson was observed on how the media influence public opinion. The group was lively and well-informed, having a reasonably good knowledge of current affairs. The teacher asked some interesting questions and pushed the students to justify their answers, although some contributed little.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school	3	4
How inclusive the school is		4
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	4	4
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	4	4
Overall standards achieved		4
Students' achievement	3	4
Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		4
Attendance	4	5
Attitudes	2	4
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2	4
Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		4
The quality of education provided by the school		4
The quality of teaching	2	4
How well students learn	2	4
The quality of assessment	3	4
How well the curriculum meets students needs	3	4
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		4
Accommodation and resources	4	4
Students' care, welfare, health and safety		3
Support, advice and guidance for students	3	3
How well the school seeks and acts on students' views	4	5
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		3
The quality of the school's links with the community	3	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3	3
The leadership and management of the school		3
The governance of the school	4	4
The leadership of the headteacher		3
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).