

INSPECTION REPORT

The Hemel Hempstead School

Hemel Hempstead

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117500

Headteacher: Mr Alan Gray

Lead inspector: Dr Kenneth C Thomas

Dates of inspection: 17 - 20 November 2003

Inspection number: 259378

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll;	1111
School address:	Heath Lane Hemel Hempstead
Postcode:	HP1 TX
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Ian Burton
Date of previous inspection:	9 March 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Hemel Hempstead School is an 11-18 comprehensive school with specialist Arts College status. There are 909 pupils in the main school and 202 students in the sixth form. This makes the school about the same size as most other schools with sixth forms. The school provides for pupils across the ability range, though attainment on entry is average overall. There are significantly more boys than girls in Years 9 and 10, but more females than males in the sixth form. The proportions of students with special educational needs and with a Statement of Special Educational Need are below average. Pupils with the highest levels of need mostly have specific learning difficulties (dyslexia) or emotional and behavioural difficulties. About four per cent of the pupils have minority ethnic backgrounds. Around 12 different minority ethnic groups are represented in the school and so there is no significantly large sub-group. While many of these pupils are bilingual, very few are at the early stages of learning to speak English. The most frequently spoken home languages, other than English, are Cantonese, Albanian and Thai. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
3390	K Thomas	Lead inspector	Psychology (sixth form); English as an additional language
14214	J Smith	Lay inspector	
27188	G Murray	Team inspector	English
17541	F Ashworth	Team inspector	Mathematics
30563	J Pentlow	Team inspector	Science; physical education (sixth form)
8052	K McKenzie	Team inspector	Information and communication technology; economics (sixth form)
20716	R Grogan	Team inspector	Religious education; history
30545	D Castell	Team inspector	Geography
15051	L Kauffman	Team inspector	Art and design
23308	J Morrell	Team inspector	Music
12001	A Goodier	Team inspector	Design and technology
27574	P Holliday	Team inspector	Physical education
32173	B Brown	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
19414	J Flisher	Team inspector	English (sixth form); theatre studies (sixth form)
6044	R Perkins	Team inspector	Mathematics (sixth form)
15079	T Boys	Team inspector	Physics (sixth form); special educational needs
19385	M Beale	Team inspector	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a **very effective school** and one that provides a very good quality of education for all pupils. The excellent leadership of the headteacher, with very good support from other key staff, ensures that pupils from all groups achieve very well. Standards are well above average at the end of Years 9 and 11, and average at the end of Year 13. Teaching and learning are very good throughout the school. The school provides very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Very good and often excellent teaching leads to very good achievement.
- Pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour make a significant contribution to the very positive and friendly ethos of the school.
- The headteacher's energy and clarity of purpose, with very good support from other senior managers, have secured a shared commitment to continuous improvement.
- The school has forged extremely effective partnerships with its parents and the community, which contribute to its success.
- Pupils derive great benefit from the school's excellent provision for the performing arts and outstanding range of extra-curricular activities.
- The school's procedures for identifying its strengths and weaknesses in order to plan for improvement are exemplary.
- The school has made significant improvements to the accommodation, but some aspects remain unsatisfactory and impede teaching and learning.

The school has made very good improvement since the last inspection in 1998. Standards have been maintained at a well above average level and achievement is very good. There is now more very good and excellent teaching. In addition the school has achieved specialist performing arts college status and the gold Artsmark and Sportsmark awards. Apart from the accommodation, all of the key issues identified in the last report have been tackled successfully.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average
For Year 11, similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9. For Year 13, 2002 is the latest year for which national comparisons are available, but reference is made below to results in 2003.*

Standards are well above average and **achievement is very good**. Standards in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are well above average at the end of Year 9. Standards at the end of Year 11 are also well above average and GCSE examination results have been maintained at this level since the last inspection. In 2003, the GCSE results were above or well above average in almost all subjects. Sixth form students achieve well. Standards in GCE A-level examinations in 2003 were consistent with those obtained in 2002, when they were average.

Pupils' and students attitudes and behaviour are very good. The number of fixed period exclusions is below average for a school of this size. **Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is very good**. Attendance and punctuality are good and very good in the sixth form.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. Teaching and learning are very good with much that is excellent. The quality of the curriculum is very good in the main school and good in the sixth form. Provision to enrich pupils' learning outside lessons is excellent. Pupils are provided with very good support and guidance. Parents show outstanding commitment to and involvement in, their children's education. Excellent links with other schools and the community enhance provision. Other than weaknesses in the accommodation for drama, physical education, design and technology, psychology and sixth form private study, there are no major shortcomings in provision.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management of the school are very good. The leadership of the headteacher is excellent and that of other key staff very good. The management of the school is very good. The school makes excellent use of evaluation information to identify strengths and tackle weaknesses. Governance of the school is very good.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are very pleased with the school. They express no major concerns and are particularly pleased with the quality of teaching and management of the school. Pupils are equally positive, although the questionnaire responses indicated a significant level of disquiet about bullying and behaviour. Inspectors agree with the parents' and pupils' positive views and found no evidence to support pupils' concerns. Indeed, during discussions pupils expressed surprise at some of the findings of the questionnaire.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- continue to press forcefully for improvements to the accommodation for drama, physical education, design and technology, psychology and sixth form private study.

THE SIXTH FORM AT THE HEMEL HEMPSTEAD SCHOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is an effective sixth form. Students achieve well and the very good quality of education they receive makes a significant contribution to their personal development. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. Examination results reflect the wide attainment range of students on entry in Year 12. The 2003 results were similar to the 2002 results, which were about average. Very good leadership and management together with very good teaching and learning underpin the very good progress that students make in the sixth form. The sixth form is very cost effective.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Very good teaching encourages students to develop as independent and critical learners and provides very well for students with special educational needs.
- Students have very good attitudes towards school and their learning, and provide excellent role models for younger pupils.
- Students are very willing to take responsibility and they make an excellent contribution to the life of the school.
- Very effective support, advice and guidance underpin students' progress.
- Excellent leadership in English, music and geography is having a significant impact on standards.
- Accommodation for private study and for the teaching of advanced courses in psychology and physical education is unsatisfactory.

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	Very good in English. Excellent management, students' positive attitudes and very good teaching are together making a significant impact on the improvement of standards.
Mathematics	Good in mathematics. Students achieve well because teaching is of good quality. Leadership and management are effective.
Science	Good in physics. Students have good attitudes to learning and respond well to good teaching.
Information and communication technology	Very good in information and communication technology. Students respond well to very good teaching and very well managed courses.
Humanities	Good in psychology. Students respond very well to good teaching and this contributes to the good progress they are making. Very good in history. Teaching is stimulating and standards are above average.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Good in design and technology. Students achieve well because teaching is good and the learning environment is stimulating.
Visual and performing arts and media	Very good in art. Students are enthused by very good teaching. Provision is enhanced by a dedicated sixth form studio. Good in theatre studies. Students respond very well to the very good teaching and wide range of enrichment opportunities in this rapidly developing department. Excellent in music. Enthusiastic and dedicated teachers strive unceasingly to

Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	raise standards and enable students to develop as mature young musicians. Very good in physical education. Enthusiastic teachers motivate students to work hard. This, combined with very good teaching and support, enables the students to learn very well.
Business	Satisfactory in economics. Following staffing difficulties the department is now suitably staffed and students are making good progress.

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

Sixth formers are provided with very good advice, support and guidance. The school successfully monitors and supports students while at the same time providing many opportunities for them to become independent young adults capable of taking responsibility for their own learning. This makes a significant contribution to their personal development.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management of this large sixth form are very good. The management of the head of sixth form and his deputy is centred on consideration for the individual. They have created an environment in which teachers willingly give of their time to help students develop their all-round skills and talents and in which students are keen to take responsibility. The students who comprise the executive group take a very active role both in running the sixth form and in representing its views. Through the very good links the school leadership has established with other schools, the range of courses available to students is being considerably extended, particularly in vocational areas.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students enjoy being in the sixth form. Although responses to the questionnaire were mixed, all students spoken to during the inspection were overwhelmingly positive about the school. They appreciate the staff's commitment to providing them with a varied and high quality education. They are happy in the school and value what it does for them.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

The school has maintained well above average standards in Year 9 tests and GCSE results since the last inspection within fluctuations from year-to-year. Achievement is very good in Years 7 to 11 and is good in the sixth form. Standards, from work seen during the inspection, are well above expected levels in Years 7 to 11 and above average in the sixth form.

- Most pupils make very good progress in Years 7 to 11 from average attainment overall on entry to the school.
 - Pupils of all backgrounds and prior attainment achieve equally well.
 - The school enables many pupils and students to attain high standards in tests and examinations.
 - Data is used very effectively to raise achievement by identifying where pupils might be falling behind so that action can be taken rapidly.
 - The achievement opportunities of some students are restricted by the solely AS and A Level range of options.
1. Achievement is very good in Years 7 to 11 because there is a very high proportion of very good and better teaching that inspires the pupils to do well. They show much commitment to their studies. They attend well and are given carefully focused support and guidance. The use by the school of assessment data to track the pupils' performance and identify potential underachievement is very sophisticated. This analysis is used particularly effectively to plan individual intervention, whether this is for those who are falling behind, for pupils with specific learning needs or for potentially high achievers who may need to be challenged more by their work.
 2. National Curriculum test results for Year 9 students were higher in 2003 than at the last inspection. The trend in the school's results had been below rising national results from 1998 to 2002; however, they improved significantly in 2003. The school just missed its very challenging targets in 2003, but even so most pupils made at least good progress from when they entered in Year 7. Results overall and in each of the core subjects were well above average and above results in similar schools. Not only did substantial numbers of pupils meet and exceed national expectations for their age, but also a small and a significant proportion achieved the very high Level 8 in mathematics. The gap between the performance of boys and girls has narrowed to such an extent that, with the exception of English, boys achieved better results than girls in 2003. The achievement of the few pupils from different minority ethnic backgrounds is comparable to that of their peers.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	36.2 (34.6)	33.3 (34.8)
Mathematics	38.6 (36.6)	35.3 (34.7)
Science	36.3 (36.3)	33.7 (33.3)

There were 183 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

3. The school is maintaining well above average standards at GCSE, although the trend over the last four years has been below the national trend. There was a peak in 1999, a fall for the next two years and then an improvement in 2002. The 2003 results show continued improvement and are well above average and well above similar schools. These results represented very good progress for most pupils from their test performance in Year 9, although the school did not quite meet its challenging targets for the proportion of pupils who achieved five or more A*-

C grades, but exceeded the average points score target. As at Year 9, a considerable number of pupils attain high standards as shown by almost a quarter of grades being A* or A. The gap between the performance of boys and girls at GCSE has been wider than at Year 9. With the exception of 2001, girls have achieved better results than boys and by a greater margin than nationally. The gap in performance in 2003 was wider than when the pupils took their Year 9 tests in 2001. Analyses of performance show that pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds are amongst the school's highest achievers at the end of Year 11.

- Results in English language and mathematics were well above average in 2003. They were also above national averages in science, art, design and technology, geography, history and ICT. By contrast, results fell in modern languages in 2003, significantly so in German, where they were below average. These results were unusual when compared with the previous above average performance of both French and German. The action taken by the school is already having a beneficial effect.

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	63 (64)	58 (50)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	94 (96)	91 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	98 (98)	97 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	41.1	36.9

There were 178 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

- The school is successful in its aim that all should benefit from the opportunities that it provides. As a result, there are no significant variations in the achievement of different groups of pupils. Although there are variations in the performance of boys and girls from year to year there is no overall pattern. The school carefully analyses progress against prior attainment and takes steps successfully to tackle any patterns emerging in each year group. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is good because procedures for identification and support are effective. They receive good teaching in subjects and very good support and guidance in the specialist special educational needs area. Pupils with English as an additional language achieve as well as others in their classes. They are given effective support, and an analysis of assessment data shows that their progress is comparable to others. The school also provides a wide programme of extension activities for pupils who have been identified as gifted and talented. They benefit considerably from these activities. These pupils achieve very well in their academic subjects and this achievement is enhanced further through the programmes.

Sixth Form

- The average point score per A Level entry rose slightly in 2003, although the overall results fell marginally from above average in 2002. Girls again achieved better results than boys. The year group was weaker than previous years, as shown by their GCSE results, and other factors also contributed to the overall fall. General studies had been dropped as a compulsory additional subject. Furthermore, staff recruitment difficulties disrupted economics teaching and lowered results. The school is also seeking to broaden the range of subjects taken in the sixth form to include more vocational elements. This is in recognition that an A Level diet does not suit all students given the open-entry policy to the sixth form. A small number of students sat AVCE business studies in 2003. All passed but with below average results overall.
- Performance in individual subjects has fluctuated, largely as the size of each cohort has changed. Some of the best results have been in geography, graphics, music, art and history. Results in physics, French and ICT were well below average in 2002, but improved in all three

subjects in 2003. Results in sociology, were well below average in 2002 and fell further in 2003. However, when students' GCSE results are taken into account, achievement in sociology was satisfactory.

Standards in GCE A/AS-level and VCE examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2002

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	97.2	94.8
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	36.3	39.4
Average point score per student	255.9	263.3

There were 81 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year. Comparisons with national results in previous years are not available because of a change in the system of awarding points

- AS Level results in 2003 indicate that students in the current Year 13 are a higher-attaining year group. This accounts for inspection evidence that standards are above average in this year group and for the higher targets that are clearly achievable. Achievement is good in the sixth form overall. There is much challenging teaching and the students are highly committed to the courses and to their work. While assessment data is plentiful and staff know the students well, the use of this information to evaluate the progress of individuals is not as thorough as in the lower years. Furthermore, the courses available are not always entirely suitable for those students who enter the sixth form with relatively low GCSE results. These students are not able to achieve as well as others. This problem is recognised by the school and is one reason for its plans to introduce more vocational elements through a consortium arrangement with other local schools and the college of further education.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good throughout the school. The number of exclusions is below average for a school of this size. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is very good. Pupils' attendance and punctuality are good in the main school and very good in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Procedures for managing bullying and harassment are exceptionally effective.
- Pupils are committed to their studies and work very hard.
- Relationships between pupils and with adults are very good. This helps pupils to develop into confident and enthusiastic young people.
- Pupils enjoy taking on responsibility and participating in the wide range of opportunities available. They are very quick to use their initiative.
- Sixth form students make a significant contribution to the life of the school. They have very good attitudes to their work and are very capable independent learners.
- The attendance of sixth form students is very good and lessons begin punctually.

Commentary

- Pupils are enthusiastic about their learning and are very proud to belong to Hemel Hempstead School. Teachers provide very good role models and inspire their pupils to have very good attitudes towards school and towards their work. Pupils are conscientious and try very hard to produce their best work. Attendance was above the national average at the time of the previous inspection and this continues to be the case. Pupils' punctuality to school and to lessons has significantly improved and is now good.
- There are many opportunities for pupils to take an active part in the day-to-day life of the school and they respond with great enthusiasm. For example, they are keen to assume responsibility

for numerous areas of school life and a very large number participate in the very wide range of house and extra-curricular activities. Pupils' outgoing and confident approach makes a significant contribution to the school's lively and vibrant atmosphere.

11. Pupils like and respect their teachers, and classroom relationships are warm and mutually supportive. Pupils also get along very well with each other; they share ideas and resources amicably. Teachers have very high expectations of behaviour and pupils willingly comply. Their very good behaviour has a positive effect on the standard of their work and their learning. However, analysis of the pupils' questionnaire showed that well over half knew of incidents of bullying or racist abuse. The inspection team explored this issue with many pupils during the inspection. Although they said that such incidents do occur from time to time, they all agreed that the school attaches great urgency to such issues and deals with them very effectively. Inspectors agree with their positive views. Indeed, procedures for managing behaviour and all forms of harassment are exceptionally effective. Racist incidents are very rare.
12. The school is committed to ensuring that all pupils are in full-time education. Links with external support agencies, such as the Dacorum Education Support Centre, are very good. Pupils, who have been excluded, as well as those who are putting themselves at risk, receive very good support. The number of exclusions is low and this number has reduced further during the current school year. There was one permanent exclusion during the year preceding the inspection.
13. Provision for pupils' personal development through cultural, social and moral education is very good. These aspects feature strongly in the work of many subjects and in the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) course. An important part is played by extra-curricular activities and by the programme for assemblies and form tutor time which focuses on the school's core values. Pupils apply the principles that distinguish right from wrong and show very good respect for other people's feelings and opinions. They relate very well to adults and their peers, work confidently in pairs and groups, and are keen to contribute to class discussion. For example, very high levels of collaboration were seen in music, physical education and in English lessons. Pupils expect to be able to discuss their ideas and are developing well as members of the community. They have a good appreciation of their own and others' cultural traditions, which is fostered through visits and outside speakers as well as in lessons.
14. Provision for spiritual development is good. It was a key issue at the previous inspection. The school has made very good progress in actively promoting pupils' self-knowledge and spiritual awareness. Lessons seen in art, English, history and religious education were planned so that pupils could reflect on issues of belief and morality. This was seen, for example, in Year 11 studies of Nazi Germany. There is a well-established 'Thought for the day' programme in assemblies and form tutor time. The pupils' ability for such reflection is very impressive. However, there is inconsistency in the extent to which subject teachers and form tutors make use of the opportunities that arise.

Sixth form

15. Sixth form students are an impressive group of young people who are very active in the life of the school. The sixth form executive, comprising nine elected members from Year 13, is the official voice of the sixth form. They meet with the head of sixth form weekly, participate in some assemblies in the main school, organise social events, and the head boy and girl attend governors' meetings. Students take a major role in running the inter-house annual dance, drama, music and sporting competitions, are involved in peer mentoring, help to supervise younger pupils during break and lunchtime, act as 'buddies' to Year 7 pupils and run Mistletoe Day, a fund raising event which last year raised £1300. In Year 12, students all undertake community service, either within the school or in the wider community. These activities help students to develop into mature, confident and self-assured young adults.

16. Attendance is very good. Students are expected to undertake private study in school until the second term in Year 13 when they are allowed to take pre-arranged study leave. Lessons start on time because students enjoy their studies and value the very good experiences their teachers offer them.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is very good because teaching, learning, the curriculum, assessment, and support and guidance are very effective and promote very good achievement. There are no major shortcomings in provision other than some unsatisfactory aspects of the accommodation. Very good links with other schools and colleges enhance provision as does the excellent range of extra-curricular activities that not only contribute well to the standards attained but also to the enjoyment of school life. Links with the community are excellent.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are very good throughout the school and in the sixth form. Very good use is made of assessment information to help to maintain and further raise standards.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Since the last inspection the school has made it a priority to improve teaching and learning and has created an ethos that successfully supports this.
- Positive relationships and teachers' high expectations help pupils of all abilities to work hard and make very good progress.
- The principles of the National Key Stage 3 strategy are used to good effect in all years.
- Assessment is used very effectively to reinforce learning and show pupils how to progress further.
- Teachers' command of their subject and their high expectations are major factors in pupils' and students' enthusiasm for learning.
- The very good sixth form teaching encourages students to become active and independent learners.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 177 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactor y	Poor	Very Poor
22 (12%)	53 (30%)	68 (38%)	32 (18%)	2 (1%)	0	0

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

17. There is very little difference in the quality of teaching between different year groups. Teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection and is now consistently good or very good in almost all subjects. At the time of the last inspection the quality of teaching was good or better in almost half of all lessons; it is now good or better in eight out of ten lessons. In more than one in ten lessons it is excellent. Pupils and parents value the sense of purpose conveyed by well taught lessons and thorough assessment.
18. The school's commitment to identifying and promoting teaching strategies that encourage active learning is a policy that is rigorously pursued at all levels. A school focus on learning is maintained through regular review within departments. The practice of teachers observing one another's work in the classroom is well established, as is the sharing of ideas to improve teaching and learning. This evaluative approach to teaching complements teachers'

knowledge and enthusiasm for their subject and creates a very positive atmosphere for learning.

19. An interest in the business of learning is communicated well to pupils. Teachers often refer to the ways in which learning takes place as well as the content of learning itself. Teachers plan their lessons very well and explicit learning objectives are prominently displayed so that pupils can see where they are headed. This, together with other approaches originating in the Key Stage 3 strategy, makes a significant impact on pupils' motivation and does much to promote equality. As a result all groups of pupils achieve equally well. Lessons have a clear structure, get off to a brisk start and involve pupils through good quality oral work. In lessons where discussion is regularly encouraged, pupils are articulate about what they are learning, not just what they are doing. Independent learning is well developed by Years 10 and 11 and provides an excellent foundation for sixth form work.
20. There is much lively and stimulating teaching. Teachers use their subject expertise well to provide clear explanations and are willing to experiment with different learning strategies. Because of this, learning activities are well matched to pupils' needs and the pupils are fully engaged in most lessons. In the vast majority of lessons good progress is made because pupils rise well to learning tasks that extend them. Teaching of this quality was seen in all subjects and particularly in music, and in the excellent lessons observed in English, dance, drama, modern foreign languages, physical education, geography and design and technology. Gifted and talented pupils benefit from the enthusiasm and generally high level of expectations available to all pupils and are also offered a good range of enrichment activities.
21. Teaching for pupils with special educational needs is good in their normal lessons and very good when they are taught by specialist teachers. They also get good support from the teaching assistants. This ensures that they achieve well in relation to their past results. Pupils' individual education plans contain suitable academic and personal targets that help the pupils to make good progress in their learning.
22. Assessment is used very effectively to diagnose individual pupils' needs and to guide teaching and learning strategies. In English, music and physical education, the excellent quality of teachers' assessment of pupils' work, by which strengths and weaknesses are noted and targets for improvement are set, contributes significantly to the very good progress pupils make. In religious education, although pupils' work is assessed regularly they are not given enough information on how they can improve. In art and design, modern foreign languages, mathematics and geography, teachers are guiding pupils very effectively in the use of self and peer assessment. The very effective use of homework to consolidate and extend pupils' learning also makes a significant contribution to their progress and achievement.
23. The senior leadership team has made a significant impact on the quality of teaching. Training and opportunities for shared good practice have contributed greatly to the wider range of teaching and learning strategies now seen in the school.

Sixth form

24. Teaching in the sixth form is very good. During the inspection examples of excellent teaching were seen in English, geography, art, design and technology (graphics) and music. Using their subject knowledge together with some exciting and challenging approaches in the classroom, teachers engage students' interest and enthusiasm and ensure that they work productively and at full stretch. Students in their turn are well motivated and keen to do their best. They value the way in which teachers encourage them to think for themselves, to develop their own opinions and to become independent and critical learners. In many lessons, students demonstrate very good observational, analytical and evaluative skills because their teachers are skilled at probing and extending their knowledge and understanding. This was a strong feature of a Year 13 psychology lesson on the effects of alcohol on arousal and depression.

Another feature of lessons, observed during the inspection in music, physics, history, English and French, is the focus on teaching of specific techniques to gain high marks in examinations.

25. Assessment is used very effectively in the drive to raise standards. From feedback in lessons, through the marking of students' work and through the regular subject reviews, students are presented with a clear picture of their attainment, their minimum target grades, their strengths and where they need to improve.

Exemplary use of assessment in English

The recently appointed head of English has introduced excellent and consistent practice in assessment, which is recognised by students as having a major impact on the standards of their written work. All notes made in lessons and the ways in which these are organised are checked on a regular basis. Students are given cover sheets before each major written assignment, which explain exactly how the essay will be assessed. They have been taught how to begin their writing with a conceptual overview and how to use this to structure their essays and to write with clarity. Close marking then shows exactly where and how students have met the assessment objectives and precisely what they need to do to improve their next essay. One student summed up concisely the difference it had made to him: 'A year ago I couldn't write an essay. Now I feel I am an accomplished essay writer'.

The curriculum

The curriculum is very good in the main school and good in the sixth form. The accommodation is unsatisfactory. The curriculum is enhanced by an excellent range of enrichment activities.

Strengths and weaknesses

- The Key Stage 3 Strategy has had a positive influence on lesson planning in all subjects and in all years.
- The high quality of provision in sports and the arts has been recognised by the award of Sportsmark Gold and Artsmark Gold.
- The school has an active and innovative approach to the curriculum.
- Some subjects do not make enough use of the library and computer based resources to support teaching and learning.
- Some aspects of the accommodation for drama, design and technology, physical education and the sixth form are unsatisfactory.
- There is a good range of AS and A Level courses available to sixth formers.
- Sixth form students are very well prepared for further stages of education and employment by the emphasis on independent learning and the many opportunities to take responsibility.

Commentary

26. The school provides equal access to a good range of worthwhile curricular opportunities. The school is active in reviewing and developing the curriculum to meet the needs of its pupils and to raise standards across the school. As a result, curriculum provision has improved since the last inspection. This is seen in the successful bid for specialist Performing Arts College status and the recognition of the high quality of provision in the arts and sport, by the achievement of the gold Artsmark and Sportsmark awards. The curriculum provides a sufficiently wide and balanced range of learning opportunities to suit the needs and aptitudes of most pupils. Innovative changes to the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 enable all pupils to study an extra language and, in Years 8 and 9, dance and drama. Another positive feature is the fast track initiative that enables pupils to begin GCSE dance, languages and mathematics courses in Year 9. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 offers pupils a wide range of choices, including child development and economics, and most pupils take 11 GCSE subjects. The range of choices is augmented by opportunities to take GCSE courses in the performing arts after school. There is less choice for pupils who would prefer a more vocationally oriented programme. The school successfully provides ASDAN courses as an alternative to the GCSE range of options

and the curriculum for Years 10 and 11 is currently being reviewed with the intention of providing more vocationally oriented option choices.

27. The school makes very good provision for gifted and talented pupils, in particular for those with aptitudes in the performing and expressive arts, and sport. Many pupils take advantage of the excellent range of enrichment activities that the school provides, and standards are high. These activities are interwoven with the curriculum and are viewed by all as an integral part of the learning opportunities that the school provides. Very strong features of the extra-curricular programme are the dance, drama, music and sporting activities and competitions that are provided through the house system and organised by sixth form students. These make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning and personal development.
28. Pupils with special educational needs have full access to the curriculum. A number of pupils are withdrawn from lessons in order to concentrate on extra reading and writing. This is arranged so as to ensure that they do not miss the same lessons every week. Pupils at all stages on the school's list of pupils who have special educational needs are well provided for and the school's procedures comply with the Code of Practice. The co-ordinator and other staff use their knowledge of pupils' achievements in order to plan future targets; the individual education plans are reviewed regularly to ensure that targets reflect the progress made. The two specialist classrooms are open before school and at lunchtimes to allow pupils to undertake further study or to take part in extra-curricular activities. Pupils are encouraged to use this time to extend their normal school work; this helps them to progress faster. The support is also available for sixth form students and it helps them to improve the standards of their work. Because of the nature of the building, access for wheelchair users is difficult but the school is doing what it can to improve this.
29. Significant improvements have been made to the accommodation since the last inspection report. New teaching blocks have enhanced the ethos of the school and are well maintained, there is an ongoing programme of internal redecoration. The general cleanliness of the school has been improved because fenced footpaths have reduced the trails of mud brought into the buildings. The installation of CCTV has significantly reduced on-site vandalism. However, despite the best efforts of the school, there are still significant inadequacies in the accommodation and these have adverse effects on pupils' learning. The food rooms in design and technology are inadequate. The drama studio is dilapidated and does not provide a stimulating learning environment. Because of the poor state of the flooring in the boys' changing rooms, it is extremely difficult to keep the gymnasium clean. There are no showering and changing facilities for physical education staff and office space is inadequate. The toilet facilities in some areas of the school are below acceptable standards and there are not enough hard play areas. Improvement to the accommodation remains an ongoing priority in school improvement planning

Sixth form

30. Because of the size of the sixth form and the diversity of expertise within its staff, the school is able to offer a wide range of AS and A Level courses including less common subjects such as music technology, dance, psychology, sociology, ethics and government and politics. The school discontinued vocational courses this year because of a lack of demand. However, now that numbers of students staying on are increasing, there are some for whom vocational courses or a combination of GCE advanced courses and vocational courses would be more appropriate. To meet their needs, a consortium arrangement with other local schools and the college has been established. This will enable a much broader and cost effective range of subjects to be offered to students, including vocational courses.
31. Students' academic programme is well supplemented by an excellent range of enrichment opportunities. Many students participate in the Duke of Edinburgh scheme, and in the extra-curricular music, drama and sporting activities on offer. Topics relevant to young people such as driving, alcohol misuse, budgeting and cooking when away from home are tackled through

the life skills programme and the school is also reintroducing general studies this year through a series of conferences to take place next term. This provision will also meet the requirements for religious education.

32. Most subjects are taught in suitable accommodation but curriculum development and teaching strategies are constrained by unsatisfactory accommodation in drama, psychology, physical education and food technology. In addition, the space available for private study is completely inadequate, and there are times when sixth formers are hard pressed to find somewhere quiet to work. There are firm plans to begin work on a new sixth form block in February 2004.

Care, guidance and support

Arrangements to ensure pupils' care, welfare, health and safety have improved since the previous inspection and are now very good. The school provides very good support, advice and guidance and involves pupils and students very well in its work and development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The academic progress made by all pupils is very closely tracked and this helps them to make very good progress in their work.
- Well-planned and thoughtful induction procedures help incoming Year 7 pupils to settle quickly.
- Procedures for seeking pupils' views are highly effective and the school is very thorough in following up their suggestions and concerns.
- Pupils and students have very good access to impartial guidance and careers information when selecting their options for Years 10 and 11 and when they leave sixth form.

Commentary

33. Pupils are very well looked after during the school day. Rigorous monitoring of their academic and personal development helps to ensure that pupils receive high quality support and guidance. In order to meet the needs of pupils who are experiencing particular difficulties, the school works closely with a wide range of external social and health agencies. These include the Dacorum Education Support Centre, Connexions, and local counselling services. Their specialist support ensures that each pupil has ready access to advice and guidance that is tailored to suit his or her needs. Child protection procedures are thorough.
34. Liaison with contributing primary schools is close and pupils in Year 7 speak warmly of the support they receive. New arrivals are linked to a sixth form student and they are encouraged to seek their advice, should any concerns or worries crop up. In addition, students in the sixth form provide lunchtime 'drop-in' sessions for younger pupils who may want to discuss a problem or seek reassurance. Pupils in Year 7 say that these arrangements have helped them to settle in to their new school. However, they say that they would like to have more informal contact with their designated sixth form student so that they can get to know them better.
35. Working relationships between pupils and their teachers are very good; pupils particularly appreciate the way that their teachers are prepared to spend time with them, offering individual advice and help. In addition, pupils regularly review their own progress and set their own targets for improvement. As a result, pupils have a very good understanding of how they are getting on and know exactly what it is they have to do in order to improve the standard of their work. This motivates them to aspire to high standards for the future and contributes towards their very positive attitudes towards learning.
36. The school actively seeks pupils' views and recently commissioned a comprehensive external survey. This revealed some concerns about bullying. In order to investigate this further, the school subsequently circulated its own more detailed questionnaire to both pupils and parents. Pupils appreciate this and feel that it is indicative of the way the school responds to their concerns. The school council is well regarded and is responsible for administering specific

aspects of school life, such as the reward system that recognises pupils with outstanding attendance.

37. Teachers provide pupils with very good information about the courses they can follow in Years 10 and 11. In addition, pupils attend the annual 'Insight into Industry' day, and links with West Hertfordshire College are strong. Pupils are able to undertake vocational courses, although the number of places available is small in relation to the number of pupils who apply. Work experience placements at the start of Year 11 give pupils a very good insight into the world of work.

Sixth form

38. During discussions with students, inspectors heard very positive views about the advice available, both from subject teachers and from the head of sixth form and the careers staff. The very good retention rates and the fact that only one student left the school at the end of Year 12 last year are further evidence that advice given about sixth form courses is good.
39. Careful records are kept of students' progress and year tutors liaise with subject teachers to maintain an overview and catch any problems early. A review day to be held in November will allow each student a 15-minute monitoring interview with his/her tutor to review and discuss progress and achievement. Students applying for university receive good guidance and help with their applications.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's links with parents are excellent. Links with other schools and colleges are very good. Links with the community are excellent in the main school and very good in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of information provided for parents is outstanding. The school keeps them exceptionally well informed about day-to-day events, the curriculum and their children's progress.
- Parents hold the school in very high esteem and wholeheartedly encourage their children to do their very best. The school actively seeks their views and is very responsive to suggestions or concerns.
- Excellent links with the community make an outstanding contribution to pupils' personal development and to school improvement.
- Links with other schools and further and higher education providers enrich the curriculum and strongly support pupils' personal development.
- The links with other local schools are helping the school to plan a more diverse curriculum for sixth form students.
- Sixth form students make a significant contribution to the life of the local community.

Commentary

40. As part of the inspection process, parents were asked to complete a questionnaire that requested their views on numerous areas of school life. Analysis of their responses shows that they are pleased with almost every area of the school's work. A few parents expressed concern about the extent to which they are kept informed about their children's progress. Inspectors disagree; the quality of information the school provides for parents is excellent. From the moment their children arrive in Year 7, to the time when they leave at the end of Year 11, parents receive very comprehensive written and verbal information on all aspects of school life. Parents can also access general information through the school website, and teachers are always willing to see parents if they request a meeting. Parents also receive interesting newsletters each week and, in response to their requests, the school has recently introduced

termly reports that detail each pupil's progress. In addition, the school hosts an exceptionally broad range of meetings that address a wide range of key areas. For example, as well as learning about the various course options available in Years 10 and 11, parents receive excellent guidance on how they can help their children to revise, deal with examination stress and relax.

41. Parents are very interested in their children's education and they support them very well at school and at home. Links with parents of pupils with special educational needs are especially close and their attendance at review meetings is very good. By involving them so closely, the school creates a strong network of support. This helps to put pupils in a position where they are able to commit themselves fully to their studies and produce work that is well above the expected standard.
42. Parents are very pleased with the way the school responds to their suggestions or concerns. Inspectors agree; the school takes full account of parents' views and acts upon them whenever possible. For example, as well as amending the reporting process, the school recently responded to concerns over bullying by circulating a more detailed, follow-up questionnaire. This helped teachers to pinpoint where problems occur and to take appropriate action.
43. Activities organised by the school association are very well supported and significant sums of money are raised to provide additional learning resources and to help fund overseas trips.
44. The school's status as a specialist college for the performing arts creates many opportunities to engage and interest pupils, parents and the wider community. The extent of activities in music, drama, art and sport is excellent. For example, the two-day 'Music on the Moor' festival organised by the school attracted nearly 5,000 people. Other primary and secondary schools, alongside local dance schools, professional musicians, various ensembles and bands, helped provide many hours of music and dance. The school provides a very good selection of after-school classes for adults and pupils and is continuing to improve and extend what it offers. GCSE art, drama and dance are well underway and GCSE music is in its first year. It is planned to offer more general education sessions in future to help parents appreciate their children's school experience better.

Sixth form

45. The school has joined in partnership with other local schools and the college of further education to extend curricular opportunities for sixth form students.
46. All students in Year 12 perform some kind of community service, many in roles in the community, helping with cub and brownie groups, assisting in primary schools, visiting older people in retirement homes. These activities contribute to the life of the community and also to their own development as responsible citizens.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management of the school are very good. The leadership of the headteacher is excellent and that of other key staff very good. The management of the school is very good. The school makes excellent use of evaluation information to identify strengths and tackle weaknesses. Governance of the school is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher is providing inspirational leadership and a clear vision for the future of the school as a highly innovative and outward looking institution.
- Senior managers are very effective and ensure that the processes of evaluation and review are sharply focused and demanding.

- Governors take a strong strategic role and have a good working knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- Subject leadership is good or very good in all subjects. It is exemplary in English, geography and music.
- The head of sixth form, his deputy and twelve tutors together form a very effective team to support and monitor sixth formers' progress.
- There is not enough monitoring of the use of tutor time and its effectiveness.

Commentary

47. The headteacher's clear vision for the future development of the school allied to very effective procedures for monitoring and evaluating its work, is having a significant impact on the quality of education the school provides. This clear commitment to ensuring the highest possible standards in all areas of the school's work is shared by other senior managers. Performance and other management information is analysed systematically and used effectively as part of the procedures for reviewing the work of departments. Because of this the school has a very clear picture of its strengths and is able to plan efficiently to tackle weaknesses. Among the many strengths of the school is the willingness to promote leadership from within, for example through the attachment of heads of departments to the senior leadership team, and the open-mindedness and willingness to identify, adapt and apply good practice from a range of outside sources in order to ensure continued improvement. Other key staff share the headteacher's vision and work hard in their own areas of responsibility to achieve the school's targets. Subject leadership is excellent in English, geography and music, and good or very good in all other subjects.
48. The management of the school is very good. All of the key issues for action identified in the last inspection report have been tackled vigorously. There are no longer any weaknesses in senior management. Line management roles and responsibilities, from the leadership team to the other levels of management, are well understood and very effective in achieving consistency in standards and practices across the school. Performance management is fully implemented. A comprehensive assessment database has been established and excellent use is made of this information by the senior leadership team and heads of department. This makes a significant contribution to standards and achievement. The school improvement plan is comprehensive, contains appropriate targets and is closely linked to department plans. Planning for improvement in subject departments is generally good at all levels. Very good management of special educational needs enables staff to work very well together to ensure that provision is very good.
49. The school's financial management is very effective. It allows teachers to concentrate on teaching and seeks best value for money both in purchasing goods and services and in educational outcomes. All of the school's income is spent for the intended purposes.
50. Governors are very supportive of the school and carry out their statutory duties well. They are very clear about the nature of the school and keen to maintain its traditions, whilst supporting innovation and change. Governors work closely with the school and have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They fully endorse the principle of ensuring that the school provides for the needs of all groups of pupils. This provides the headteacher and senior leadership team with a great deal of confidence in planning new developments. Governors monitor the budget with care and as a result expenditure is targeted according to priorities in the school improvement plan.

Sixth form

51. The sixth form is very well led and managed and this is demonstrated by the high profile of sixth formers around the school. They are expected to be good role models for younger pupils and fulfil those expectations. The management of the head of sixth form and his deputy is centred on consideration for the individual, enabling each to grow and flourish as a valued member of

he community. The students who comprise the executive group take a very active role both in running the sixth form and in representing its views.

52. Several tutor periods were observed. The value of these varied but the best provided a good start to the day by giving an opportunity to discuss the theme for the week and allowing a quiet time for reflection. At present, there is not enough monitoring of this time to ensure that all tutors provide this kind of experience.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	3,565,413
Total expenditure	3,482,010
Expenditure per pupil	3,171

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	89,906
Balance carried forward to the next	173,309

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' high expectations and good relationships with their classes have a positive impact on pupils' learning.
- New schemes of work for Years 7 to 9 and thorough analysis of examination results have contributed to the rise in pupils' achievement.
- Boys have improved their examination performance in Years 9 and 11.
- Assessment is constructive and detailed so that pupils understand how to improve.
- The head of department provides excellent leadership, which is reflected in the attitudes of teachers and pupils.

Commentary

53. Throughout Years 7 to 11 pupils are making very good progress and achieving high standards in response to lively and rigorous teaching. In the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003, they gained results that were well above the national average and considerably higher than results in 2002. The percentage of pupils gaining Level 6 and above increased significantly. Using the information they gain from thorough marking, pupils are encouraged to set themselves targets. This raises their aspirations and is reflected in work seen during the inspection, as well as in examination results. Boys performed especially well. Although their results were not as high as girls', reflecting a national trend, the gap between boys and girls was the lowest it has been over several years. The department has recently reviewed both the content and the learning strategies used with Years 7 to 9, making a decisive impact on pupils' motivation and self-confidence.
54. In the GCSE examination a similar picture of improvement emerges. Results in English language have been consistently above the national average over the last three years but in 2003 this progress accelerated. Three-quarters of all those entered gained grades A* to C and there were many more A* grades than previously; from being below the national average for the highest grade, pupils here were now above it. In English literature, results in 2003 were well above the national average, whereas in the previous year they had been below. As in Year 9, boys improved their performance in relation to girls and in comparison to boys nationally. This was particularly noticeable in English literature, where twice as many boys gained grades A* to C in 2003 as in 2002.
55. This positive picture is confirmed by work seen during the inspection. Most of the teaching is good or better and some of it is excellent. When the teaching is stimulating and challenging pupils respond with impressive enthusiasm and energy. In lessons in Years 7 to 9, pupils display good attitudes to their work, their teacher and to one another. They arrive very promptly for lessons, are mainly business-like in approach and make good use of their time. Many have extensive vocabularies and most are courteous listeners. Pupils with special educational needs and those who are at an early stage of learning English are well supported. Boys are responding well to the recently re-designed schemes of work and make frequent contributions in discussions. All pupils are benefiting from the consistency and imaginative approach of the shared planning which now characterises the English department. Although the curriculum for Years 7 to 9 is broad and coherent, there are opportunities for the development of a wider range of work involving ICT and for greater use of the library and individual reading. Some

teachers are particularly successful in using drama techniques and other active learning approaches to increase pupils' skills of interpretation.

56. In Years 10 and 11 pupils make very good progress and display mature attitudes towards their work. Teachers' extensive subject knowledge and enthusiasm, especially for literary texts, often provide an inspiring model for pupils. In the very best lessons, pupils display a high degree of independence and mental agility in response to fast-paced and challenging teaching. They have acquired a considerable body of background information about the texts and writers they are studying. Higher-attaining pupils are able to use this confidently, both in discussion and in writing. Independent learning approaches are now well established in GCSE classes.
57. The head of the department's positive and energetic leadership and strong management skills have made a decisive contribution to rising standards in a relatively short time span. She has effectively addressed all the areas for improvement identified during the last inspection by working on several fronts at once. Her imaginative and highly organised approach to planning and resourcing the curriculum for Years 7 to 9 has improved the consistency of learning experiences for all pupils while effectively stimulating boys to be more committed and successful learners. In promoting an ethos, which supports self-evaluation and shared planning, she has strengthened a team of able teachers and laid the foundations for further improvements.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

58. The school has responded positively to national initiatives to support pupils' literacy development and keeps under review the effectiveness of its policy. All teachers were involved in reviewing their practices and producing materials to help the development of pupils' writing. The literacy co-ordinator offers staff practical support in the form of resources which share good practice, for instance in developing pupils' discussion and groupwork skills, as well as their reading and writing. He also monitors regularly the impact that the school's approach is having on pupils' work in the classroom. The impact of the literacy strategy can be seen in some but not all subjects. In geography, for example, pupils display good discussion and presentation skills, write confidently in a range of styles and use technical language with confidence; teachers promote literacy in their work as well as subject knowledge. History provides many good opportunities for varied writing, for extending pupils' reading skills and for regular group discussion. Some departments, such as art and more recently science, use the library to develop research skills. In mathematics, support for developing pupils' literacy is less active and not consistent.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in both French and German have been well above national averages in recent years, although a dip occurred in 2003.
 - Very good teaching results in pupils achieving very well at all levels of ability.
 - Teachers demonstrate excellent knowledge and modelling of language, but do not make enough use of these skills in the classroom.
 - The department has adopted the three-part lesson structure with considerable success, but the starting and summary sessions are weaker aspects of some lessons.
 - The imaginative use of resources inspires very good pupil response and participation.
 - Not enough use is made of ICT to support teaching and learning.
59. With very few exceptions, all pupils study two foreign languages from the beginning of Year 8 and they maintain standards, which are well above national expectations in both French and German. Although standards at GCSE were in line with national averages in French and just

below in German in 2003, this represents an anomaly in the overall trend, which has shown a considerable rise over recent years. The department has already addressed the reasons for the fall, and has put in place strategies to remedy the situation for future years. Standards at the end of Year 9 have consistently remained well above national levels.

60. These very high standards are a direct result of very good teaching. Teachers generally use their excellent command of both languages to model ideal answers so that pupils then achieve very well because they know exactly what is required. Excellent teaching seen during inspection was characterised by enthusiastic presentation, challenging tasks at a level suited to pupils' ability and imaginative use of a wide range of resources. Pupils are therefore able to respond with confidence and develop very good relationships with each other and their teachers. They trust teachers to mark work thoroughly and provide some excellent targets for improvement, which in turn lead to clear progress. Less successful and even unsatisfactory teaching and learning takes place when these strategies are not employed, or where there is too much English used or a lack of challenge allows pupils to perform at a level below their capabilities. Where the lesson is delivered with a sharp introductory activity, a well planned main task and a summing-up which relates directly to the objective, pupils have a sense of their own progress and really enjoy their work. However, when the teacher does not share the reasons for learning they do not channel their energies in as purposeful a way. If the end of the lesson is rushed, the sense of satisfaction of learning is much reduced.
61. All members of the department are committed to the continued improvement of pupils' performance. They are well led by a skilled linguist whose vision and direction ensure that pupil need is always at the forefront of departmental developments. Clear analysis of results and very good monitoring of teaching and learning mean that best practice is shared for the learners' benefit.
62. Practice in modern language lessons has a very beneficial impact on pupils' literacy skills in English as well as in the foreign language because learners are guided into considering how language in general works and how they can formulate rules for themselves. The very good extra-curricular work includes a wide range of trips and visits and an excellent 'superstars' club, which make a positive impact on the pupils' acquisition of knowledge and skills. ICT enhances these same skills to a limited extent but the department is aware of the need for improvement here. Progress since the last inspection has been very good.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well above the national standards.
- Most pupils have positive attitudes to learning and enjoy the challenges they are set.
- Very good teaching enables pupils to achieve well.
- Pupils with special educational needs are very well taught in small groups.
- There is not enough use of ICT to support teaching and learning.

Commentary

63. The very good standards noted at the last inspection have been maintained, with some fluctuations reflecting the different nature of each group of pupils. Last year, pupils in Year 9 did extremely well in the national tests and those in Year 11 also did very well with virtually all obtaining grades in the A* to G range. About two-thirds of pupils obtained the higher A* to C grades, which is well above the national average. Inspection evidence shows the standards of pupils presently in Years 9 and 11 are well above the levels expected for this stage in the course.

64. The test and examination results represent very good achievement. The achievement of upper ability pupils is particularly good, for example, the top set in Year 10 started the GCSE syllabus last June and are now tackling confidently higher level algebra and trigonometry. This results from a combination of the pupils' own enthusiasm and the very good teaching they receive. Pupils with special educational needs are achieving very well because of very good teaching and extra support from teaching assistants. There is no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls.
65. There are two areas where pupils are not making as much progress as they might. The first is in mathematical writing. Pupils do not have enough practice at writing down their mathematical thinking, either for recording their ideas and deductions during an investigative exercise or when drawing conclusions from graphs and charts. Pupils do have opportunities to draw conclusions, such as when analysing data about deaths from AIDS in different regions of the world, but the oral discussion was not followed up by written conclusions. Secondly, there are areas of mathematics where the use of ICT can greatly enhance understanding, for example when comparing graphs of equations or manipulating variables in an equation to test the predicted effect. The lack of use of ICT deprives pupils of some powerful aids to thinking and interesting ways to practise methods or test recall.
66. Teaching is very effective and based on the lesson structure promoted through the Key Stage 3 Strategy. Because lessons have clear learning objectives, pupils know what they should have achieved by the end of the lesson. Learning is consolidated by a concluding plenary activity. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are keen for pupils to succeed. This is communicated to pupils who respond with their best efforts. The very good relationships between teachers and pupils are underpinned by good humour and much encouragement. The emphasis on strategies to promote thinking in many lessons, rather than rote learning and following set methods, increases the intellectual challenge and depth of understanding. The department has improved the variety of teaching strategies since the last inspection so that most lessons have a good mix of learning activities. However, in a few classes the atmosphere is too individually competitive for groupwork to succeed. The obstructive or boisterous behaviour of a minority of pupils slows progress in a small number of lessons.
67. The mathematics department is well led. The head of department provides a good role model for teaching. A particular strength is the use of assessment information to track pupils' progress and to intervene when pupils are not reaching their potential. Homework is used effectively to consolidate and extend learning; it is marked regularly with helpful comments on how to improve. A particularly successful curriculum innovation has been the GCSE early entry of some pupils in Year 10. These pupils achieved their target grades and are now benefiting from an ASDAN course in financial management. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

Mathematics across the curriculum

68. Standards of numeracy are well above average. The work done in mathematics gives pupils confidence to apply their knowledge in other subjects. Pupils have a good command of number facts and are able to tackle numerical calculations in different situations. The National Numeracy Strategy has been implemented well within mathematics, and other subjects have incorporated strategies to support the systematic development of numeracy in their schemes of work. There is very good practice in geography and good use is made of mathematical skills in the teaching of ICT.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching is contributing to above average standards and pupils' very good scientific knowledge.
- New subject leadership is having a positive impact.
- Not enough emphasis is placed on scientific investigative work to promote pupils' scientific thinking.

Commentary

69. Results of national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were well above the national average. As these pupils entered the school with broadly average standards in science, their achievement at the end of Year 9 was good. These results are similar to those in mathematics and English. Virtually all pupils obtain a GCSE grade in the A* to G range. In 2003 the proportion of pupils who obtained the higher A* to C grades was well above the national average. This was similar to their results at the end of Year 9 and so represents satisfactory achievement. Pupils did slightly less well in science than the average in their other subjects. This resulted from the underachievement of a number of pupils in the double award examination and partially due to the low marks recorded in the coursework element. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well and there is no significant difference in the achievement of girls and boys. These results are similar to those at the time of the last inspection
70. Inspection evidence shows work in all years to be above the expected levels. Strengths are in pupils' scientific knowledge but comparative weaknesses are in investigative and practical skills. Good relationships, behaviour and attitudes make positive contributions to the good progress pupils make in lessons. Pupils work well individually and when working in pairs and groups. The emphasis on the accumulation of knowledge leads to pupils being too dependent on the teacher in some lessons. Lesson starter activities tend to be used to recap facts rather than stimulating pupils' thinking. This inhibits the development of pupils' inquiry skills. This also happens when questioning is used to draw out factual information rather than encouraging pupils to develop lines of thought. The lack of emphasis on investigative science restricts the development of pupils' practical skills. Homework is used effectively to support the work done in lessons, with guidance on where pupils can research additional information. Pupils' work is marked regularly and good emphasis is given to the appropriate use of technical language. This supports the development of pupils' literacy skills very well. Numerical skills are also applied effectively. Increasing use is being made of ICT to support teaching and learning.
71. Effective leadership and management, with a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the subject, are already having a positive impact. The new scheme of work for Years 7 to 9, places increased emphasis on the development of investigative skills, and the benefits of this are seen in Year 7. A new approach is being taken to the GCSE coursework and this is giving greater emphasis to experimentation. A determination to tackle weakness underpins a strong commitment to continued improvement. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology is **very good**.

- Standards at the end of Year 9 are above average and at the end of Year 11 they are well above average.
- All pupils follow an accredited ICT course in Years 10 and 11. This ensures the effective development of the ICT skills of all groups of pupils.

- The leadership and management of the ICT department are very effective.
- The large number of non-specialist teachers in Years 7 to 9 makes leads to some inconsistency in the quality of teaching and learning.
- Limited capacity on the computer network makes it difficult to store examination coursework.

Commentary

72. Standards in the GCSE ICT examination have improved significantly from about average in 2002 to well above the national average in 2003. All GCSE entrants passed. There was little difference between the performance of girls and boys. The ICT results were also above the school average. This represents very good achievement for many pupils. Inspection evidence indicates that standards achieved by the end of Year 9 are above average.
73. By the end of Year 11, standards are well above average because of very good teaching and a range of courses that are well matched to pupils' attainment levels. The experienced team that teaches these courses is adept at coping with the needs of groups of pupils who are taking different examination courses, although taught in the same lessons. Gifted and talented pupils are encouraged to attempt appropriately challenging tasks and pupils with special educational needs are well supported. Students' abilities and aptitudes are matched appropriately to the full or short GCSE examination courses. Some are encouraged to take a GNVQ qualification and for a small number there is a more general ICT skills qualification. This very good range of provision is well supported with very good resources. Pupils are skilled at using resources on the school network and more widely on the Internet. More able pupils are encouraged to support other members of the class when appropriate. This is usually done to good effect and the benefit of all concerned. Teachers make good use of computer projection facilities although there are few interactive whiteboards available.
74. Because of the large numbers of pupils taking the different examination courses, assessment procedures are particularly systematic and used to very good effect. Pupils know how well they are performing and what they need to do to improve on their different courses. The very effective leadership and management of subject are instrumental in the success of the ICT department. However, the limited storage capacity on the computer network makes it difficult to manage the large amounts of examination coursework effectively. Improvement in ICT provision since the last inspection is very good and the department has the capability to continue the improvement in standards.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

75. The current number of computers for use by students is slightly below average for a school of this size but plans to increase the number are well advanced. Pupils show a satisfactory level of competence in the way in which they use ICT to support their work in other subjects. Good use is made of ICT in physical education, music, modern foreign languages, design and technology, and art in Years 10 and 11, but not enough use is made of computers in mathematics and religious education. Access to computers outside lesson times is good particularly in the learning resource centre. Pupils make very good use of computers at lunchtimes and after school to carry out research activities and to enhance the presentation of coursework.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at the end of Year 9 are above average and at the end of Year 11 they are well above average.
- Pupils' achievement is very good in all years.
- Leadership and management are excellent and having a positive effect on standards.

Commentary

76. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are above average. The percentage of pupils attaining National Curriculum Level 6 or above in Year 9 is well above average for both boys and girls. The difference in standards between boys and girls has been reduced since the last inspection because of steps taken by the department to raise the performance of boys. Teachers have high expectations and extend pupils so that in recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of pupils attaining the highest grades at GCSE. Over half of the pupils attained grades A* or A in 2003; over 90 per cent of boys and girls attained A* to C grades. Discussions with Year 11 pupils about their coursework showed that they have a very secure understanding of the process of enquiry, are able to evaluate their methods very well and have a high capacity for independent study. Consequently, some of their investigations are of a standard usually only seen in the sixth form. The support provided for pupils with special educational needs is very good so that these pupils also achieve very well.
77. The quality of teaching and learning was very good or excellent in over half of the lessons seen during the inspection. A major factor contributing to pupils' achievement and confidence is the excellent support provided by the variety of methods used to assess their levels of geographical understanding and to measure their progress. These methods include peer assessment, so that pupils can learn from analysing the work of their classmates, and very thorough marking by teachers so that pupils are clear how to make further progress. Pupils work very well in lessons because teachers plan to involve them in a variety of active learning tasks. Because of this lessons have a brisk pace and pupils respond well to the enthusiasm of their teachers. Learning is reinforced by very effective starter activities, which also stimulate pupils' interest. Pupils commonly described the subject as interesting and enjoyable; however, the number of pupils choosing to take geography in Year 10 has been slightly lower than average, especially since the options choice was broadened.
78. The subject makes a strong contribution to developing pupils' literacy skills. Writing frames are used effectively and pupils are given many opportunities to talk in small groups and to the class. Very good use is made of pupils' numerical skills, including the effective use of statistical tests. Pupils are confident in using ICT for research and presentation. They use it well when handling data, such as in Years 8 and 9 following local fieldwork on microclimates and rock weathering.
79. Teachers work very closely as a team, sharing the head of department's commitment to maintaining high standards and her vision for further improvement. There is a strong culture of self-evaluation throughout the work of the department, supported by the excellent monitoring of teaching and learning. This has ensured that improvement since the previous inspection is very good. It is seen especially in the development of teaching and learning strategies, the performance of boys and the increase in the number of pupils attaining high grades in National Curriculum assessments and the GCSE examination.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

- Highly effective teaching employs a wide range of methods, promoting very good learning.
- Pupils are achieving examination results above the national average.
- Enthusiastic leadership and supportive teamwork make this a strong department that is always seeking to improve its performance.
- History is a popular subject and pupils are highly motivated to meet the targets set for them.
- There are good opportunities for pupils to visit historical sites.
- There are not enough common assessment tasks to ensure accurate measurement of pupils' attainment in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

80. GCSE results were around the national average in 2001 and 2002. They rose dramatically in 2003 to well above average. Girls did better than boys but the gap between them narrowed significantly compared with previous years. The current performance of pupils in Year 11 and the quality of their coursework indicate that they are maintaining above average standards and achieving well. Most pupils are highly motivated. They keep detailed, well presented notes and research information thoroughly. Many of them went to Munich with the school last summer and visited a former concentration camp, which had a profound effect on their study of Nazi Germany. Teachers' expert knowledge and expertise mean that pupils develop good examination technique, benefiting from detailed feedback on essays. They are raising their performance above the minimum GCSE target grades expected of them. Pupils show good ability in using a wide variety of historical sources to examine past events and have a critical appreciation of the usefulness and reliability of the evidence placed before them.
81. Teacher assessments of pupils' work in Year 9 indicate above average standards with no significant difference between boys' and girls' performance. This represents good achievement in the subject over Years 7 to 9. Inspection evidence confirms these standards but there are no common assessments of pupils' attainment during the autumn term in Year 9 that would establish accurately pupils' progress. Teachers develop pupils' writing well, using a range of styles from reports of conditions in the early factories and workhouses to eyewitness accounts of the change from domestic to factory based industry. Pupils use historical evidence appropriately in their writing and are competent at testing its validity for possible bias. Teachers encourage pupils to find out information themselves, which develops their enquiry skills well.
82. Teaching has improved since the last inspection to include a wider range of learning strategies that actively engage pupils. The result is that pupils are developing good historical skills and are enthralled with the narrative of Britain's heritage. Discussion in pairs and small groups is a regular feature of lessons. Teachers are highly effective class managers, promoting good working relationships and providing the right level of challenge to foster historical thinking. Thorough marking of work, giving positive feedback on how to improve, is a strong feature of assessment, but there are too few common assignments to monitor pupils' progress accurately in the full range of history skills. Visits to historical sites, such as the Year 9 visit to the battlefields of the Somme enrich the curriculum and contribute to the high level of pupils' interest in the subject. The department takes every opportunity to encourage the use of ICT, but restricted access to computers prevents it being used more frequently in lessons.
83. Very good leadership and management of the subject ensure that the talents of individual teachers are used for the benefit of all, through sharing ideas and contributing to the department's rich collection of teaching materials. Non-specialists are well supported. Examination performance is carefully analysed and effective action taken, as the recent, marked improvement at GCSE shows. Teachers' enthusiasm for the subject provides the

spur for regular review and improvement of teaching, which has ensured good progress since the previous inspection.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

- All pupils follow a GCSE short course in Years 10 and 11 and achieve well above average results.
- Highly effective teaching on the GCSE course makes maximum use of lesson time to prepare pupils for the examination.
- Leadership is innovative in its development of the curriculum.
- End of module tests are well designed to determine pupils' attainment, but the day-to-day marking of their work is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

84. It is school policy to enter all pupils for the GCSE short course in religious education on the basis of one lesson a week without homework. In this context, the results are outstanding, rising from above average in 2002 to well above in 2003. Girls' results were significantly better than boys but the latter were still above the national average. This success has been achieved by focused teaching that concentrates on the essential knowledge and understanding required, balancing time for discussion with individual note-taking. Standards in work seen by Year 11 are above average overall. Note taking is done well. Pupils keep a detailed record of topics covered and work quickly to keep up with the fast pace of lessons. They make good progress on the course and are achieving well. Pupils articulate their views well in discussion and show good understanding of Christian and Jewish teachings on moral issues.
85. The system of assessment in Years 7 to 9 relies on end of unit assignments, which are geared to measuring pupils' levels of attainment. As they are made towards the end of term, there was little evidence of assessment in pupils' books at the time of the inspection. This is too late to leave it, if regular reporting of interim levels of attainment is to be accurate. The opportunity to assess Year 9 pupils on the basis of their imaginative writing on the life of a Buddhist monk was missed. The work showed reasonable understanding of the religious life; girls' accounts tend to be more detailed than boys. Pupils have a good understanding of religious ceremonies marking important stages in life. Their early project work on marriage in different religions shows competence at researching information, using reference books and the Internet. Overall, attainment is average and pupils' achievement is satisfactory.
86. Teaching is consistently good by the two specialists on the GCSE course, where appropriate emphasis is placed on making sure that pupils understand religious teachings on moral and social issues, through clear exposition and group discussion. Expectations are high for pupils to work quickly, noting information and expressing their views; pupils apply themselves conscientiously to their work. Good teaching is promoting pupils' spiritual development effectively by raising philosophical questions about meaning and purpose from the first term in Year 7. Good progress has been made to bring formal assessment into line with National Curriculum levels but marking is inconsistent. Teachers pitch the work at the right level for pupils in the ability sets but there is not enough matching of tasks to cater for pupils with special educational needs and higher attainers in the mixed ability classes. The absence of homework in Years 10 and 11 means that pupils do not get regular practice at answering GCSE type questions, but examination techniques are developed well in later stages of the course.
87. Imaginative leadership and good management have improved the standing of the subject and its contribution to the spiritual and moral development of pupils. The initiative to create a Zen garden in the middle of the school has provided a place for spiritual contemplation at appropriate times in the curriculum. Partnerships with local Christian youth workers and visits

to local churches and temples are used effectively to enrich pupils' experience of religion. There has been significant improvement since the previous inspection, notably in the high standards achieved at GCSE and in curriculum development.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision in food, textiles and graphics is very good.
- Teachers have good subject expertise and an enthusiasm for the subject, which results in responsive and motivated students.
- Accurate assessments of pupils' work in Years 10 and 11 are used well to guide teaching so that all groups of pupils achieve well, but in Years 7 to 9 there are inconsistencies and information is less well used.
- Significant improvements have been made to the accommodation and to the provision of resources, but some aspects remain unsatisfactory and impede teaching and learning.

Commentary

88. Standards in the department, as judged by teacher assessments in 2003, were above the national average at the end of Year 9. The proportion of pupils who obtained GCSE A* to C grades at the end of Year 11 was also above the national average. Achievement is good as a result of teaching and learning that is satisfactory or better in Years 7 to 9 and good or better in food, graphics and textiles in Years 10 and 11. Leadership and management are good enabling the department to make good progress since the last inspection.
89. Inspection evidence shows standards in Years 7 to 9 to be consistent with nationally expected levels rather than above. Pupils are achieving higher standards in their making than they do in their designing. Teachers' assessments are often too high. This leads, on occasions, to learning activities that do not match the individual needs of all pupils. Assessment practice is inconsistent and does not provide pupils with short-term goals related to National Curriculum levels, so pupils are not certain of the standard of their work and how to improve it.
90. The quality of work seen in Years 10 and 11 indicates that pupils achieve very well in food, graphic products and textiles because they are more sophisticated in their designing and making than they are in resistant materials. In the most effective lessons, time is used well and the teachers' expert subject knowledge and skills engage, support and challenge pupils to do well. All teachers prepare pupils well for their examinations.
91. The accommodation for food technology is unsatisfactory and impedes teaching and learning, and there are also weaknesses in textiles and resistant materials. There have been improvements in the provision of ICT, particularly in graphics, with enhanced facilities for computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture (CAD/CAM). However, other teaching rooms have restricted access to specialist ICT equipment, and this affects the breadth of experience in other subjects.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

92. Dance and drama were lightly sampled during the inspection.
93. The **dance** department is part of the performing arts faculty in its first year of operating as a separate specialist department. Dance is a popular subject offering opportunities for

examination work to a substantial number of pupils. Standards and achievement are very good. In 2003, all pupils gained GCSE grades in the A* to G range, with one-third gaining grades in the A* to C range. Teaching and learning in the one Year 9 lesson and one Year 11 lesson were excellent. Schemes of work are innovative, and continuous assessment is used very effectively to guide all levels of planning. Pupils' attitudes are excellent and they respond with vigour and enthusiasm to the demanding challenges that are set. Dance makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development and to the social and cultural life of the school. There is a wealth of extra-curricular activities including out of hours GCSE classes and numerous production and presentation evenings. Pupils have many opportunities to see the work of professional dancers. The department has recently been selected as a link school by the Royal Academy of Dance for the initial teacher training of their students.

94. **Drama** is part of the performing arts faculty and taught as a separate subject in Year 7 and as part of the performing arts curriculum in Years 8 and 9. It is an increasingly popular subject at GCSE. An after-school GCSE class is open to adults and to pupils from other schools. Standards and achievement are very good with a high proportion of pupils gaining A* to C grades in the 2003 GCSE examination. Two lessons were observed in Year 8, one in Year 9 and one excellent lesson in Year 10. By Year 9, pupils have covered a wide range of skills, conventions and varieties of theatrical experience. Their work in lessons shows that they are able to select from a good repertoire of knowledge. Teachers have high expectations, and pupils show discrimination in evaluating their own work and that of others. Pupils enjoy drama and appreciate the scope it offers for self-expression, self-discipline and teamwork. Most pupils make rapid progress in GCSE classes because teaching is both challenging and supportive. This was particularly evident in the Year 10 lesson. An excellent range of extra-curricular activities indicates the importance of the subject for pupils' creativity and self-esteem. These activities emphasise the contribution made by drama to the life of the school and to the local community. The subject is led by an enthusiastic and talented head of department who offers an excellent role model to a large team of teachers. Although the drama studio is a good working space, the other places where drama is taught are unsatisfactory.

ART AND DESIGN

Overall provision for art and design is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching inspires freedom of thought and creativity.
- The GCSE course is an increasingly popular option choice and standards are rising.
- Assessment is well used to guide teaching and support learning, but pupils are not clear about the standard of their work in Years 7 to 9 because National Curriculum levels are not shared with them.
- Very well planned educational visits broaden pupils' understanding and art appreciation.
- Not enough use is made of ICT in Years 7 to 9.
- Two-dimensional and three-dimensional work is enhanced by stimulating resources.

Commentary

95. Although pupils enter the school with varying experiences in the subject, they rapidly gain skills and confidence because schemes of work are carefully planned and sketchbooks are used effectively to record ideas. As a result pupils achieve well through Years 7 to 9 and reach standards that are above average by the end of Year 9. This good achievement is maintained through Years 10 and 11 and the vast majority of pupils reach or exceed their predicted GCSE grades. Results in the 2003 GCSE examination were above average.
96. In Years 10 and 11 pupils extend their understanding and art appreciation. They complete interesting studies about artists of their choice and learn to use a wide range of materials that

enable them to experience two-dimensional and three-dimensional work. Thought-provoking visits to museums and galleries enable pupils to see the work of prominent artists, and pupils talk enthusiastically of the impact this has on their own work. Most pupils use their sketchbooks well, but some find it difficult to manage the quantity of work required by the GCSE course. Time is given to drop-in art clubs; the additional GCSE group (where parents are also able to study GCSE art) gives many pupils the opportunity to extend their work. Many gifted and talented pupils make very effective use of this time to experiment in their artwork.

97. Teaching and learning are good. Lively and innovative teaching methods engage pupils and encourage them to think about the influence of well-known artists, their use of colour and shape and to explore different cultural influences in their work. Well-planned peer-assessment, self-assessment and teacher feedback stimulates pupils to experiment with different ideas and to share success. Pupils with special educational needs derive much benefit from discussions with their peers. Pupils' work is regularly marked, but not enough use is made of National Curriculum level descriptions in Years 7 to 9 to indicate the level of their work and the criteria for higher levels. Girls are more productive than boys and this is reflected in their performance in the GCSE examination. The vast majority of pupils are well-motivated, and teachers manage their classes well. The effective use of ICT enriches the work of the GCSE groups in Years 10 and 11, but not enough use is made of ICT in Years 7 to 9 as a tool to extend learning.
98. The head of department provides very good leadership. The department has developed a very good art library, including videos and artefacts that are used effectively to stimulate creativity. The department has made good progress since the last inspection.

Music

Provision in music is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The vision and determination of the head of department provides pupils with a broad range of musical experiences.
- The excellent knowledge, commitment and expertise of the music staff are having a significant impact on standards.
- The very high standard of extra-curricular activities is helping to raise the profile of the school.
- The revised curriculum and excellent teaching result in pupils participating eagerly in enjoyable well-structured lessons.
- Excellent relationships between teachers and pupils help to promote excellent learning.
- The requirement to teach some Year 8 and 9 classes twice in one week with no lesson in the next is having a negative impact on standards.

Commentary

99. Teachers' assessments in 2003 show that the attainment of the large majority of pupils was well above average by the end of Year 9. The proportion of pupils attaining A* to C grades in the GCSE examination was also well above average and consistent with the results achieved in 2002.
100. Inspection evidence shows that standards at the end of Year 9 are above national expectations or better. As standards on entry in Year 7 are variable, the standards at the end of Year 9 represent very good achievement. Pupils have regular opportunities to work with ICT and this is having a positive impact on the achievement of many of the musically less talented pupils. Standards in Years 10 to 11 are above expectations, and these also represent very good achievement.

101. Teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 are very good. They are excellent in Years 10 to 11. Teachers have excellent knowledge of the subject and spare no effort to ensure that all pupils receive worthwhile musical experiences. In a large majority of the lessons observed, pupils were totally engaged throughout the entire lesson because of the interesting nature of the activity and the effectiveness of the teaching. Lessons are thoroughly prepared and resourced to cater for pupils of all musical abilities. Consequently all pupils with special educational needs who attend music lessons without extra support make good progress. Provision in lessons for the more musically talented pupils is very good. Very good relationships with the pupils were observed in all classes. This encourages pupils to participate purposefully with the intention of improving their results. Further opportunities for the more musically talented are offered in the form of a broad range of instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities.
102. The leadership and management of the subject are excellent. Since the last inspection a new head of department has been appointed and the issues of the last inspection thoroughly addressed. The curriculum has been completely revised to incorporate ICT as an integral part of lessons, and to make provision for the new GCSE and A Level courses. Assessment and monitoring procedures are now excellent. Standards have risen and the number of pupils involved in instrumental lessons has increased. The accommodation is excellent and resources very good, although there is a need to broaden the range of multicultural instruments available. Regular extra-curricular activities are preparing for a large number of events both in school, the locality and in Prague.

Physical education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is very good and the Key Stage 3 Strategy has been fully implemented across all year groups.
- The behaviour and attitudes of pupils towards physical education are very good.
- The knowledgeable and enthusiastic head of department provides very good leadership and sets high expectations for pupils and teachers.
- The provision for extra-curricular activities is excellent and provides further opportunities for all pupils to develop their skills and participate in sporting activities.
- The subject's contribution to the citizenship programme is excellent.
- The accommodation for physical education is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

103. Striving for continued improvement, high expectations and the enthusiasm of the subject team permeate all of the department's activities. Students' attitudes, participation and behaviour are very good because they respond positively to the high level of commitment shown by their teachers. This is reflected in the 2003 GCSE examination results, which were well above average. All pupils gained grades in the A* to G with two-thirds obtaining grades in the A* to C range. However, pupils did not achieve as well in the GCSE theory paper as in other elements of the examination. A contributory factor here is that theory lessons are taught in several classrooms and it is not possible to create a stimulating specialist learning environment. Many talented pupils achieve success at district and county level in a range of sports and the achievement of pupils with special educational needs is comparable to that of their peers.
104. Achievement is very good and standards at the end of Year 9 are well above the expected levels. All lessons observed during the inspection were good or very good. In a Year 7 basketball lesson, the range of challenging and imaginative learning activities were clearly linked to lesson objectives and promoted very good levels of achievement. The very good quality of teaching in a Year 8 gymnastics lesson encouraged pupils to create imaginative

partner balances and to execute them with very good control. In all lessons, pupils develop constructive and sensitive evaluation skills because of the opportunities that are provided to evaluate their own and other's performance.

105. All pupils in Years 10 and 11 follow a GCSE course, which they enjoy very much. They are well motivated and committed to achieving good grades. In games lessons, teachers provide very good support and guidance, and this promotes high levels of confidence. Teachers employ a variety of methods to challenge and extend pupils of all abilities. Starter and plenary tasks fully engage and motivate pupils and evaluative techniques are varied and stimulating. Teachers provide excellent role models for pupils. Assessment is very thorough and used to guide planning at all levels. In addition, the very effective use of ICT enables pupils to enhance their evaluative skills.
106. The head of department provides very good leadership and his clear commitment to continuing improvement is shared by all staff. The department works closely with its partner institutions, particularly the primary schools from which pupils are drawn. The opportunities for gifted and talented pupils are very good and there is an excellent range of team and community links for all age groups. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. However, the accommodation remains unsatisfactory because it has an adverse impact on teaching and learning. The condition of the boys' changing room is unsatisfactory as are the changing facilities for teachers. The departmental office is inadequate and there is a lack of storage space. General cleaning and maintenance remain as major concerns.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

107. **Citizenship** was sampled. Because of the structure of the two-week timetable it was not possible to observe any life skills lessons, which incorporate citizenship and PSHE, during the period of the inspection; none of the lessons seen in other subjects had citizenship as a specific focus. A very thorough audit of provision has taken place. Opportunities for covering the knowledge and understanding strands of the National Curriculum are present in Years 7 to 9 through other subjects and the life skills programme; for example, lesson plans seen for a Year 9 geography lesson related the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights to global inequalities through pupils' study of the fashion industry. In Years 10 and 11, a range of other activities supplements coverage of citizenship objectives through the option subjects. For example, all pupils in Year 10 had attended a Law and Order day in the local courts in the week prior to the inspection. Assemblies and form tutor periods also contribute to pupils' knowledge and understanding of what constitutes good citizenship. However, some subjects have yet to incorporate citizenship learning objectives into their schemes of work, and where they are, they are not always made explicit to pupils in lessons. This is a weakness. Nevertheless, enquiry and communication skills are very well developed across the curriculum.
108. The school provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils to participate in responsible decision-making. These include elections for the school council using the transferable vote, and a wide range of charitable activities. The school council provides a meaningful opportunity for pupils to contribute to school policy-making. For example, pupils made a significant contribution to the school's discipline and bullying policies. The assessment planned for Year 9 involves pupils' self-assessment of their involvement in the school and wider communities, as well as their knowledge and understanding of issues. This needs to be extended to all year groups along with arrangements for assembling a record of each pupil's progress.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 12 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

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

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	5	100	90	0	43	32.0	39.0
Drama	4	100	n/a	0	n/a	27.5	n/a
Economics	7	71	86	0	42	18.6	37.0
English literature	3	100	n/a	0	n/a	26.5	n/a
Design and technology	7	57	89	14	32	17.1	35.7
General Studies	77	70	79	14	26	22.7	30.0
Geography	8	88	88	25	36	33.8	36.3
German	2	100	n/a	50	n/a	35.0	n/a
Government and politics	4	100	n/a	75	n/a	42.5	n/a
History	3	100	n/a	33	n/a	40.0	n/a
ICT	6	83	78	17	21	30.0	28.5
Mathematics	16	93	74	31	34	35.6	31.3
Psychology	14	64	83	29	33	23.6	33.6
Physics	5	60	62	0	36	14.0	34.3
Religious studies	5	100	91	20	29	28.3	37.9

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	8	100	96	13	49	80.0	85.1
Biology	4	100	n/a	50	n/a	70.0	n/a
Chemistry	3	100	n/a	33	n/a	86.7	n/a
Economics	22	100	96	46	46	81.8	83.1
English literature	21	100	99	52	44	83.8	84.3
Design and technology	8	100	95	30	36	82.5	76.5
French	7	100	96	29	46	66.0	83.0
General studies	12	92	90	25	29	68.3	69.3
Geography	20	100	97	50	41	87.0	80.9
German	2	100	n/a	50	n/a	90.0	n/a
Government and politics	7	86	n/a	43	n/a	71.4	n/a
History	22	100	97	55	41	90.0	81.2
ICT	8	100	89	0	22	55.0	64.1
Mathematics	7	86	93	43	52	85.7	84.7
Music	8	100	96	25	42	79.0	82.2
Physical education	16	94	95	31	30	81.3	73.2
Psychology	8	88	94	50	39	75.0	77.7
Physics	14	64	93	14	43	61.8	76.6
Religious studies	10	100	96	38	44	85.0	82.2
Sociology	12	100	95	8	40	60.0	70.1
Theatre studies	8	100	98	25	42	82.5	82.9

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English was inspected in detail and French and German were sampled. Provision in both **French** and **German** is very good. Teachers have excellent command of both languages and provide very good linguistic models. They use the languages imaginatively to motivate and challenge students to produce work of an extremely high standard. Students' response is also very good, demonstrating interest, fluency and a commitment to all aspects of learning about the language and culture.

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Dynamic and forward-looking leadership and management by the recently appointed head of department have been instrumental in the very good improvement made in the last year.
- Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers' enthusiasm and excellent subject knowledge engage and enthuse students who are therefore very keen to learn and do well.
- Outstanding practice in assessment is having a major impact on the improvement of students' achievement.
- The analysis and use of performance data are exceptionally effective in identifying strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning and in informing planning.

Commentary

109. In September 2002, when the current head of department took up post, A Level results had been at or below the national average for three years, with students in 2002 performing significantly less well than in their other subjects. The 2002 AS results were severely affected by the fact that some prose coursework assignments had been ungraded by the examiner. Her response to these results has been rigorous and focused and, as a consequence, the same students entered for A Level in 2003 all achieved at least a pass grade, with 37.5 per cent achieving Grades A and B. The AS results in 2003 showed a massive improvement on the previous year's results with all 20 students passing and over half gaining the higher grades. These results represent good achievement and reflect recent improvements in teaching and learning, curriculum and assessment. Not surprisingly, the numbers taking English in Year 12 have increased to over 60, both because of the improved results at GCSE and because of the reputation of the subject in the sixth form.
110. During the inspection, students were eloquent in their praise of the quality of teaching and of the support they receive. Teachers have very high expectations and the intellectual level of discussion in lessons demonstrates how well students respond to these demands. They are encouraged to think for themselves, to have their own opinions, to test hypotheses against others' ideas and to explore alternative approaches to texts. In a Year 12 lesson on *Lear*, students had devised short dramatic presentations exploring the theme of sight and blindness and embedding some lines from the play. This was a typically imaginative approach to the topic, and in the ensuing evaluation students demonstrated very good insight into how their recent study of *Oedipus Rex* had increased their understanding of *Lear*.
111. A further outstanding element in teaching is the excellent and consistent practice in assessment, which is recognised by students as having a major impact on the standards of their written work. For each essay a cover sheet explains exactly how it will be assessed. Students have been taught how to embed a conceptual overview into the introduction and how to use this to structure their essays and to write with clarity. Close marking then shows exactly where and how students have met the assessment objectives and precisely what they need to do to improve their next essay.

Excellent teaching in English

A Year 13 class were studying *The Wide Sargasso Sea*, a novel by Jean Rhys, which offers an imaginative commentary on the life and character of the mad wife in *Jane Eyre*. They had spent the previous three lessons in groups devising collages to present in visual form their interpretations of the novel's themes, symbols and motifs. During this lesson they examined each other's collages and devised questions that interrogated the different interpretations. The imaginative and open nature of the task enabled students to explore and deepen their own responses to the text and led into lively and sometimes heated discussion. One student, with only modest achievement at GCSE, took a major role and was able to express some very perceptive and intellectual ideas with confidence. The discussion ranged over topics including madness and the role of women in 19th century England and contributed well to students' personal development. The teacher's skill was evident in the way she had set up the lesson but then felt able to step back and allow students to take over.

112. Add to these strategies the exemplary use of performance data to identify strengths and weaknesses in attainment and teaching, and the example of her excellent teaching and it is clear that the head of department has effected much improvement in a short time. This now dynamic and forward-looking department is well placed to make even further improvement.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

113. Standards of literacy in the sixth form are generally good. Although the key skill of communication is not taught separately, most subjects take seriously the need to develop language and literacy skills in lessons. For instance, students are expected to make presentations in general studies, government and politics and German. There is good emphasis on subject-specific language in physical education, psychology and English and in most subjects students' files are checked regularly to ensure that notes taken in lessons are of good quality.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well because teaching is of good quality.
- Teaching and learning are good, especially the way students are encouraged to participate in lessons.
- ICT is not used enough by teachers or students.
- Leadership and management are effective in maintaining a common approach to teaching.
- Students' written work is presented very methodically and accurately.

114. A Level mathematics results in 2002 were average, but with a small number of candidates. Results in 2003 fell slightly but significantly more students completed the course. AS Level results were also average in 2002. The small number who entered the AS examination in 2003 achieved good results. The current Year 13 group of students is working at the expected standards for this stage in the course. They have made good progress during the course because teaching is effective. For example, students have markedly improved their algebraic skills as a result of the thorough grounding in, and particular attention to, this aspect of the work.

115. Teachers have secure knowledge and understanding of the subject and plan lessons very effectively so that students acquire skills, knowledge and understanding steadily. The department has adopted the three-part lesson approach from the National Numeracy Strategy to very good effect, incorporating a starter activity, a main theme and a plenary. A particular strength of the approach is the significant move away from a lecturing style to one that draws heavily on the students themselves. Teachers routinely encourage students to present their solutions to the rest of the class and lead resulting discussions. Students gain significantly in confidence and are keen to make sure that they fully understand the material. Teachers are

consistently precise about the correct use of mathematical terminology and the way in which students' answers are presented. As a result, students produce good written work that is easy to follow and enables them to revise effectively when required.

116. Leadership and management of the department are good. Teachers are enthusiastic and strongly committed to raising students' standards of attainment. Teachers share most sixth form mathematics lessons; they work effectively as a team, taking account of topics completed by others, so that students make smooth progress. Teachers are readily available outside lesson time to help students with any difficulties. The tracking of students' progress through the two-year course is good, such as in the use of target A Level grades. Students' standards and achievement have been maintained successfully since the previous inspection. The use of ICT remains inadequate. Although teachers use graphical calculators effectively there is too little use of computer software or the Internet to enliven teaching and expand students' horizons.

Mathematics across the curriculum

117. Students are very well equipped with a range of mathematical skills and use them confidently to help them make good progress in other subjects. They show well above average competence, such as when drawing graphs and working with vectors in physics, when calculating atomic mass and chemical equilibrium in chemistry, and when working with scale and perspective in art and design.

SCIENCE

118. Physics was inspected in detail and chemistry and biology were sampled during the inspection. In **chemistry**, recent A Level examination results have fluctuated, with the 2003 results being below expectations although the current students are working at a level in line with expectations. In the lessons seen teaching was good. Students were developing their practical skills in following an experimental plan but opportunities for individual experimental design were limited. Recent examination results for **biology** have not been as good as predicted, but the new staff responsible for the course have already modified and improved a number of aspects. In the biology lesson observed teaching was good. After carrying out an experiment to show genetic modification a discussion arose on the ethical issues surrounding the topic.

Physics

Provision in physics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well because the teaching is good and they have very good attitudes to their work; consequently the standards in the current students' work are above average.
- Students enjoy the subject, making it a popular choice at A Level with increasing numbers. This is because the course is well organised and taught by a team of knowledgeable subject specialists.
- The computer equipment in the department is inadequate for A Level work so there are few opportunities for students to use it to improve their learning.

Commentary

119. Standards in the 2002 A Level examinations were well below average but this was not typical of previous years and the 2003 results were much improved, with over one-third of students gaining grades A and B. This compares well to previous national averages. More than 80 per cent of students passed the examinations in both years but a small number did not achieve a

pass and this affected the average points scores achieved. The standards seen during the inspection are above expectations in Years 12 and 13; most students are achieving in line with or above predictions based on their prior attainment. This represents good achievement. There are no significant differences in the achievement of different groups.

120. The teachers know their subject well and they use their expertise to organise the course effectively to meet students' needs and to ensure that students have very good records of work that they can use for revision. This, together with students' very good attitudes to work, allows them to learn well and make good progress. The work is challenging enough to extend the highest attaining students. Practical work is also planned and organised well to meet examination requirements; however, there are few opportunities for students to develop their investigative skills so standards are not as high in this aspect of practical work. Students have good mathematical skills and this enhances their work in physics, but they have very few opportunities to develop their skills in using computers because the equipment is inadequate. Students' work is marked effectively, although the style of marking varies between different teachers so that some marking is more useful than others in helping students to understand A Level requirements. All the teachers use questioning effectively to encourage students to think more deeply about the subject; this helps them to make good progress in developing their understanding of key ideas.
121. The department is well led and managed, with a clear focus on preparing students for examinations so that they can attain the results they are capable of. Examination results are analysed so that past performance can be evaluated and students can be given target grades. This has helped to improve performance. The teachers work effectively as a team but there is a need to complete the review of schemes of work so that a consistent approach can be taken to all the units. Improvement since the last inspection has been good, with improved achievement and staffing. A departmental library has been established to help students with their private study.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching at both AS and A Level is at least good and often very good.
- Assessment is very thorough and used well to help students improve.
- The management of the courses is very effective.
- The timetabling of the sixth form courses does not ensure that students are able to derive the most benefit from different staff expertise.

Commentary

122. Results in the A Level examination in 2003 demonstrated a very good improvement over the previous year when they were well below average with no passes at the higher Grades A and B. The 2003 results are similar to the 2002 national average. AS Level results are also much improved and all candidates attained at least a pass grade. These results at both levels represent good achievement for the students concerned. Female students attained higher grades than male students at A Level reflecting the national trend.
123. Standards seen in lessons and in students' portfolios are consistent with national expectations, although some good work was seen in Year 13 and some very good work in Year 12. Students on the AS course bring a good grounding in ICT skills from Year 11.
124. Learning is good and often very good when teaching is very good. The very effective teaching is based on schemes of work that are well planned and have challenging practical tasks. These are backed up with the development of a good knowledge and understanding of

appropriate theory. Regular and thorough assessment ensures that students are well informed about their progress and know what they need to do to improve. Assessment is used very effectively to help both staff and students plan future work. This has been a key factor in the improving standards attained by students. Lessons are characterised by good relationships. Students are very willing to share their knowledge and expertise during practical sessions in a collaborative and productive working environment.

125. The growing success of this subject is based on very effective leadership, management and teamwork. Teachers make the best use of their expertise in different aspects of ICT teaching as far as possible, although current timetabling does not allow for full advantage to be taken of the diverse expertise within the department. There are no computers specifically designated for sixth formers. Year 12 and 13 students usually have to work in rooms where main school ICT lessons are in progress (with inevitable distractions) during their private study when they are working on practical homework tasks and examination coursework.
126. There were no sixth form ICT courses at the time of the last inspection. The provision for sixth form ICT examination courses has developed successfully in recent years and has the capacity to improve further.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

127. Students in the sixth form have good ICT skills. A high proportion of students have attained GCSE ICT in Year 11 and there is good use of ICT by students for coursework and homework. There is some use of ICT facilities in most sixth form subjects but access for whole classes is limited. There is very good use in the design and technology department and good use in art. The use of ICT in the sixth form physics course is unsatisfactory. The learning resource centre is well equipped and very well used by sixth form students when it is available. However, there are no dedicated sixth form ICT facilities and students frequently have to move around the school looking for vacant computers in ICT lessons. This can be time consuming and does not necessarily provide an ideal working environment if whole-class teaching is in progress.

HUMANITIES

128. History and psychology were inspected in detail. Geography, ethics and philosophy and government and politics were sampled. Results in **geography** at A Level are consistently above or well above the national average. In 2003 over 90 per cent of students attained Grades A or B. One student was awarded the Royal Geographical Society's national prize for his work in the examination. Achievement is very good. Teachers pass on their enthusiasm to students and provide excellent support so that students learn with confidence. Very good teaching consistently promotes active learning and independent study.
129. The **ethics and philosophy** course was introduced in 2000 and the first two sets of results have been around the national average. Students now in Year 13 achieved similar results at AS level and are making good progress helped by well-organised teaching and enthusiastic engagement in discussion, supporting each other's learning well. In the **government and politics** lesson observed the teacher's very good command of the subject and insight into politics fostered good learning and very good attitudes from students.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Academic standards are high and students achieve well.
- Stimulating teaching enthuses students and equips them with the skills for independent learning.

- Leadership and management of the subject are very good, assisted by strong teamwork.
- The breadth of specialist subject knowledge in the department means that students are offered a wide range of courses for A Level studies.
- Students are not reading widely enough to interpret the significance of historical sources within the context of historical writing and scholarship.

Commentary

130. Standards at A Level rose from being above average in 2001 to well above the national average in 2002, when they were the best in the school. Male students did better than females, although both performed above the national norm. Results in 2003 fell; however, all students passed and 28 per cent gained Grades A and B. This represented good achievement by these students to reach their target grades.
131. The work of students currently in Year 13 is above expectations and they are achieving well. This is the result of expert tuition by teachers, expounding the subject with great enthusiasm and monitoring students' files and essays closely to guide their progress. Students speak highly of the detailed feedback they receive, both written and verbal, that is helping them improve their standard of work. In particular, they are receiving tutorial assistance with bibliographies and approaches for their individual choice of coursework investigation. All students have thorough, well-organised files that are formally reviewed by teachers on a regular basis. They have developed a high standard of essay writing but do not make enough reference to the views of historians. Similarly, students' handling of historical sources is good but they have difficulty setting them in the context of historical writing about the issues to which they refer. Teachers challenge students with this level of scholarship and expect them to read more widely around the subject, providing bibliographies. Year 12 students are already expected to prepare in advance of lessons, so that learning can be maximised by informed discussion. The result is stimulating lessons and rapid progress in acquiring the skills of advanced study.
132. The quality of teaching is very good, characterised by enthusiastic exposition of the subject and great expertise in preparing students for examinations over a number of years. What makes it so stimulating is the use of a variety of learning styles, often involving group work, to enable students to think issues through for themselves. Individual tutorial guidance through detailed feedback on work is particularly effective in raising standards and working relationships are conducive to promoting high achievement. Access to a good supply of reference books and the Internet in the school library and the opportunity to attend history conferences add to students' understanding of scholarship in the subject.
133. The work of the department is guided by a clear philosophy of broadening students' historical experience through a range of courses in medieval and early modern history, rather than further study of twentieth century courses taken for GCSE. It is an ideal preparation for higher education. Leadership provides an excellent role model, shared by the teaching team, spreading enthusiasm for the subject and exuding learning. Astute evaluation of the department's performance and continued development of sixth form teaching methods have ensured good improvement since the previous inspection. High academic standards have been maintained, as has the subject's popularity and high status in the sixth form curriculum.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership has established the subject as an increasingly popular option choice.
- Students are achieving well because teaching is good and they are well motivated.
- Students are provided with very good support and relationships are very good.

- Very good assessment procedures keep students well informed of the progress they are making.
- Too many classrooms are used for the teaching of the subject.
- The workload of the subject leader is too heavy because he carries too many management responsibilities within the school

Commentary

134. The subject was introduced in the sixth form in 2001. The 2002 AS Level results were close to the national average for the proportion of students obtaining a pass grade, but below for the proportion of students obtaining the higher A or B grades. The 2003 A Level results of this cohort of students were similar to the results obtained at AS Level. The 2003 AS Level results rose above those obtained in 2002, with a higher percentage of students obtaining pass grades. Results to date have been broadly in line with predictions based on students' GCSE grades and represent satisfactory achievement. The standard of work seen during the inspection in both Years 12 and 13 is above expected levels for this stage of the course. The good progress students are making is linked to very effective subject leadership. This is because the subject is carefully planned to ensure systematic coverage of the subject and the careful monitoring of students' progress. Improvement since the subject was introduced is very good.
135. Students in Year 12 are quickly gaining a basic understanding of key concepts and ethical issues in psychological research. In Year 13, students show a sound grasp of psychological principles and issues. Students show a high level of enthusiasm for the subject. In their written work, female students display the ability to develop arguments and to evaluate different types of evidence. These qualities are less evident in the work of male students.
136. The overall quality of teaching is good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and students respond very well to teaching methods that promote independent and collaborative learning. Work is assessed constructively and students have a clear understanding of what they need to do in order to improve. Very good relationships underpin a strong commitment to success and continued improvement in the subject. However, too many lessons are taught in too many different rooms. This has an adverse impact on teaching and learning and on student motivation. The head of department is also head of physical education and has extensive extra-curricular commitments. This is too heavy a workload, particularly as student numbers are rising.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum is enriched through industrial and museum visits, special events such as Designers in Residence and technology competitions.
- Relationships between staff and students are very good
- The support, advice and guidance given to individual pupils enabling them to improve their designing and making are very good
- Significant improvements have been made to the accommodation for graphic products but some aspects remain unsatisfactory and impede teaching and learning in food technology and textiles.

Commentary

137. Students are inspired by the good teaching and the environment in which they work so that they achieve well. The leadership and management of key staff have enabled good progress since the last inspection.
138. The numbers of students studying at advanced level is rising with the introduction of textiles and food technology. Results at A Level were above average in graphic products in 2002 and were maintained in 2003. The expertise of teachers with commercial and industrial backgrounds creates a very good working atmosphere that makes learning realistic and stimulating in terms of designing for real human need. Teaching in all subjects stretches students very well and challenges them to think carefully. Most students are able to make excellent use of ICT such as sophisticated computer-aided design software to model their ideas.
139. In the work seen in lessons and in the samples of work that were analysed, standards are above average in graphics and textiles but there was not enough evidence from the newly established food technology course to make a judgement. Teaching is relaxed, enthusiastic and very stimulating in Years 12 and 13 building on the main school experience in terms of the encouragement of independence and personal responsibility. Effective mentoring through challenging, rigorous and mature discussions with individuals about their work is the basis for very good design development.
140. Students enjoy the opportunity to be analytical and critical about their designs and the work of others through group reviews of the design process and the theoretical aspects of the courses. Design portfolios show that students are tackling their assignments well with greater attention to detail. They make good use of the support materials provided by teachers and by their own researches, usually on the Internet or from the visits they make to industry, design exhibitions and museums.
141. Each subject area is well led and there is a clear focus on raising achievement. The development of courses in food and textiles is hampered by poor accommodation and insufficient access to the specialist range of resources required to promote learning at the highest level.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and design

The provision in art is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are improving because of high-calibre, specialist teaching.
- The new art studio inspires students to be creative and confident in their work.
- Opportunities to visit galleries in Europe as well as London extend cultural understanding.
- Very good resources underpin student personal research but there is not enough use of ICT.
- There are no vocational courses in art and design.

Commentary

142. Art and design is offered at AS and A Level but, despite a very good equality of opportunity policy, there are no vocational courses to meet the needs of a wider range of students. Results in the 2002 A Level examinations were average. In 2003, results showed a significant improvement with over 70 per cent of students gaining the higher Grades A or B. This

represents very good achievement. The numbers of students opting for art and design has doubled and retention rates are good.

143. The quality of work in students' portfolios confirms the very good achievement. Exciting sketchbooks show resourcefulness and flair. Many students have found ways to combine personal interests with their investigations, adding depth and sensory experience to their ideas. The excellent art studio is a flexible area, with students able to visit and work freely because the studio is dedicated to their work. Students feel this has had a substantial and positive impact on the quality of their art. Large-scale pieces dominate student's individual booths, while research and trial pieces punctuate the wall displays to demonstrate development. Students feel that challenges in art in the main school prepared them well for the rigours of the advanced course. Lack of computer hardware and software in the studio constrains the added dimension of enhancing images using computers.
144. Teachers are practising artists and their passion for the subject engages and enthuses students. Very good assessment works successfully because students know their views are valued. The quality of experience from visits as well as lessons is very good, enabling them to make confident critical judgements because of their wide ranging knowledge and understanding. During a Year 12 lesson on the concept of negative space students were challenged to think about space in and around a pile of stools. Students felt the process was difficult and that they were unsuccessful until they saw their first pieces trimmed and mounted in an instant wall display and were able to recognise the quality of what they had produced.
145. Leadership and management of the course are very good. Students benefit from enthusiastic and highly motivated course leaders. The inspired refurbishment of the art department has created a very exciting working environment for the sixth form and also raised the aspirations of pupils lower in the school who see the sixth form at work.

Drama and theatre studies

Provision in theatre studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching of theory through practical application leads to good achievement.
- Outstanding extra-curricular opportunities and the school's status as a specialist performing arts college considerably enrich students' experience.
- Students secure and trusting relationships with teachers allow them to take risks, and explore and push back the boundaries of what they can achieve.
- Standards of written work are not as high as in practical work because not enough attention is paid to teaching students about the specific forms of writing required.
- Some of the accommodation for drama is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

146. At the time of the last inspection drama and theatre studies had just been introduced as an A Level subject. Since then, the school has achieved status as a specialist performing arts college and the facilities and opportunities available to students have increased significantly. Results in A Level examinations have been at the national average for the past two years and this represents good achievement given students' prior attainment. Numbers opting for the subject have increased, and plans include the introduction of a vocational performing arts course to broaden the subject's appeal. This constitutes very good improvement since the last inspection and good management.
147. A major concern is to address the disparity between results in the practical and theory elements of the course. Because they perceive the subject as essentially a practical one, students are unwilling to spend time on writing, but lower marks on the 'Text to Performance'

paper adversely affected results at both AS and A Level in 2003. Focused teaching is now taking place to help students to gain confidence in the type of writing needed, but this needs to be built into the course earlier.

148. The quality of teaching and learning in lessons is very good. A particularly good feature is the way in which skilled teachers enable students to deepen and extend their knowledge and understanding of the theory of drama through practical work. In a Year 13 lesson, the teacher led students through a series of exercises which, surprisingly, used a fairy tale and a *Winnie the Pooh* story to teach about Brecht's alienation theory and his use of captioning. During this entertaining and absorbing session they made very good creative and imaginative effort and learned much about how theatre can be used to achieve political ends. Further strengths are the way in which students are expected to plan, devise and develop their own work, and the use of continuous assessment to give immediate feedback on how to improve work. Self and peer assessment are important elements in this.
149. Factors in the department's success are the overwhelmingly positive attitudes of students and the excellent range of extra-curricular opportunities that enrich and deepen students' experience. However, accommodation for drama is unsatisfactory. The distance between the three spaces makes it difficult for the head of department to support and monitor inexperienced teachers and two of the rooms are too large and public for the intimate and experimental nature of drama.

Music

Provision in music is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The excellent organisation of the sixth form curriculum meets every student's needs.
- The excellent care and support given by teachers raise standards and enable the students to develop as mature young musicians.
- The very high standard of extra-curricular activities gives students many opportunities for extending their performing skills.
- Excellent relationships between teachers and students help to promote excellent learning.

Commentary

150. Results in AS level examinations in 2003 were very good with all three students achieving A grades. Results in AS music technology in 2003 were also very good with the two students achieving one Grade A and one Grade B. A Level results in 2003 were similar to those achieved in 2002, which were below average although all students passed and two obtained Grade A or B. This represents very good achievement when compared with students' attainment on entry to the school and their GCSE results. The numbers of students taking music examinations in the sixth form is growing, with 16 in Year 12 taking either music or music technology.
151. The high standards in AS examinations in 2003 were reflected in work seen during the inspection both in lessons and in students' work. This is due to the excellent teaching and the effort students contribute to their own learning. Year 13 students are confident in their use of musical knowledge during discussion and are experienced instrumental performers of a high standard. In the lesson observed, the music of Phillip Glass was being analysed with a view to completing the examination composition questions in minimalist style. The two Year 13 music technology students had completed a composition using ICT to accompany a clip from a film. They were observed confidently discussing the merits of different shapes of sounds (attack, decay, sustain and release), and the need to split one line of keyboard music into four different string parts for ease of sound manipulation. In Year 12, students have made a good start to the AS level course. In the lesson observed they were exploring the first movement of a

Shostakovich string quartet in which they discovered how the composer had used a musical version of his own initials as the basis for the whole movement. It was not possible to visit a Year 12 music technology lesson, but sufficient progress has been made for the class to undertake the responsibility of recording the Year 13 recital concert.

152. The quality of teaching and learning is excellent. All lessons are underpinned by a determination on the part of teachers that students should be independent and experience as broad a range of music and knowledge as possible. The teachers are always ready to challenge students with probing questions and to extend learning from their own excellent knowledge of the subject. The three teachers act as excellent role models, able to provide musically performed examples or computer demonstrations when appropriate. More often they will enable the students to discover their own examples through skilful questioning and encouragement. Students value the very helpful marking, which clearly identifies areas for improvement. Teachers make every effort to ensure that students are able to perform to their highest possible level.
153. The excellent leadership and management is another contributory factor in promoting high standards. The head of department is highly efficient and has built a team of like-minded teachers, dedicated to enabling students to achieve very high standards. The current academic provision in the sixth form is well established and the recently acquired computers and recording studio means that a performing arts course will also be added in 2004. A very broad range of extra-curricular activities helps to develop the students' already advanced instrumental skills. At one of the rehearsals attended, two students were very creditably playing the solo parts in Bach's double concerto for violin and oboe accompanied by a string orchestra made up of pupils and students.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students benefit from different staff teaching different aspects of the course.
- The enthusiasm of the staff stimulates the students' interest.
- Very good individual support is based on the strong relationships between students and teaching staff.
- The accommodation for A Level physical education is unsatisfactory
- There is no physical education available to students in the sixth form who are not taking an examination course.

Commentary

154. Results over the last few years have fluctuated. They were above average in 2001 and 2002 but fell slightly in 2003. Most students obtain grades predicted by their previous levels of attainment and do better in physical education than in their other subjects. This shows good achievement at A Level. The subject is rising in popularity with 24 students in Year 12.
155. Very good teaching is resulting in current students making good progress. Lessons are lively and challenging with a range of methods used by teachers covering the different modules. Students appreciate this variety and feel that it enables them to clarify the differences between the topics. The current Year 12 students have made a good start to the course and their work, along with that of Year 13, is above expectations at this stage in the course. The quantity and depth of work completed by the students are very good. Teachers give very good support to students in the transition from GCSE to AS studies. They continue to help students to achieve

well by giving freely of their time, even during students' study leave. The enthusiasm of the staff encourages the students to work hard, stimulates their interest and develops their motivation.

156. There are a variety of opportunities for students to participate in enrichment activities, mainly linked to physical activities. Opportunities to develop students' examination techniques were not taken in a few of the lessons seen. In these lessons the teacher provided answers rather than asking supplementary questions and making students think more deeply about their work. The current situation of not having a theory base for physical education means that too many different rooms are used for lessons. Staff minimise the impact of this but they and students are never able to leave work for follow-on activities and it is impossible to use display material as a teaching aid. This is inevitably affecting the work. Access to ICT facilities is limited and so work requiring these is mainly set for homework.
157. The very good leadership and management provide a vision and commitment to building on what has already been achieved and to improving standards further. All physical education teachers are excellent role models, which the students recognise. Physical education is not available to students not taking an examination course and so the fitness emphasis of the main school is not maintained in the sixth form. The positive aspects mentioned in the last inspection report have been maintained and consolidated and the number of students taking the subject is continuing to rise. This represents good progress.

BUSINESS

Economics

Provision in economics is **satisfactory**.

- An experienced economics specialist is in post after a period of staffing instability.
- The work of the department is well planned and organised.
- The confidence of Year 13 students is growing with the stability that has been achieved.
- There is not enough use of ICT for data analysis and presentation.

Commentary

158. Current standards in economics are average. Results in A Level economics in 2002 were average with all students gaining at least a pass grade. However, there was a significant decline in AS grades, which fell as staffing difficulties began to have an adverse impact upon standards. In 2003 the cumulative effect of the staffing problems resulted in a steep decline in A Level results. In the AS Level examinations there was a discernible improvement over the previous year and all students passed. This improvement reflected the appointment of an economics specialist during the second half of the course.
159. Inspection evidence from lesson observations and students' work indicates that current attainment is consistent with expectations. In Year 13 there is a wide range of attainment in evidence but standards are improving. Students' achievement is good, particularly in Year 13 where students have made good progress in relation to their grades in the AS examination. This is a result of hard work on the part of students, who are increasingly confident about their ability to apply their knowledge of economic theory and concepts, and the additional classes provided by the department to make up for time lost last year.
160. Students are responding to the stability now prevailing in the department. Teaching seen was never less than satisfactory but more often good at both AS and A Level with well-planned work in briskly paced lessons. Students are benefiting from increased opportunities to work in groups and make class presentations, which they do with more confidence as their knowledge and understanding increases. They are taking more responsibility for their own learning. Assessment is appropriate and is helping students to make progress. Students do not have

enough opportunities to use ICT for the analysis and presentation of information in class work and coursework, although whole-class access to computers can be difficult.

161. Planning and day-to-day management of the department are effective. Overall improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory although this was set back significantly by the recent staffing difficulties from which the department is now recovering. The department now has the capacity to improve further.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

162. **General studies** is currently offered as an optional subject at A Level. Results in 2002 were average but fell back significantly in 2003. The subject was sampled during the inspection. In the one lesson seen, teaching and learning were very good. Students were given opportunities to research major scientific discoveries in order to practise their communication skills by presenting their findings to the class. During the current school year general studies is being re-introduced through conference days as a compulsory course, which will include students' entitlement to religious education.
163. A **life skills** course is taught to all Year 12 and 13 students for one period per week as part of their general education. There was no opportunity to observe the course being taught during the inspection.

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

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

