

# **INSPECTION REPORT**

## **POYNTON HIGH SCHOOL AND PERFORMING ARTS COLLEGE**

Poynton

LEA area: Cheshire

Unique reference number: 111436

Headteacher: Mrs Sue Adamson

Lead inspector: Mr R C Drew

Dates of inspection: 2<sup>nd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> February 2004

Inspection number: 259390

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:	1718
School address:	Yew Tree Lane Poynton Stockport Cheshire
Postcode:	SK12 1PU
Telephone number:	01625 871811
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs K Farrar
Date of previous inspection:	October 1997

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The school is a very large 11 to 18 comprehensive with a large sixth form. It serves the town of Poynton, near Manchester, but since gaining Performing Arts College status has begun to receive pupils from a widening area. The overwhelming majority of pupils are white, few are eligible for free school meals and about half the national proportion of pupils have special educational needs. While a very small number use languages other than English as their mother tongue, none is at an early stage of language acquisition. All social and economic indicators show that by national standards pupils are strongly advantaged when they join the school and its sixth form. Prior attainment is well above average at the start of Year 7 and above average at the start of Year 12. The school has Investors in People, Investors in Careers, Sportsmark and Artsmark awards.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
7281	Robert Drew	Lead inspector	
9710	Elizabeth Burgess	Lay inspector	
4677	John Tomlinson	Team inspector	Geography
30899	Ken Boden	Team inspector	Design and technology and PHSE
18447	Ron Cohen	Team inspector	History Business studies (sixth form)
19586	Wendy Easterby	Team inspector	English
30427	Felicity Shuffle-Botham	Team inspector	Religious education
31100	Geoffrey Hunter	Team inspector	Mathematics
21785	Veronica Kerr	Team inspector	Science
10391	Valerie du Plergny	Team inspector	Music Drama
19404	Les Schubeler	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
17404	Judith Tolley	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
31649	Richard Marsden	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
31963	Malcolm Padmore	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
12972	Tony Weaden	Team inspector	Physical education
7222	Alan Watson	Team inspector	Citizenship
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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

In Years 7 to 11, effectiveness is good, with some very good and excellent features. Teaching, learning, behaviour and leadership and management are good, so that pupils, most of whom start with higher than average attainment, make good progress. The school gives good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Results at the end of Years 9 and 11 are well above average and achievement is good
- Teaching and learning are good, with much that is very good; support staff are very effective
- The leadership of the current acting headteacher is very good
- The school's sixth form has serious weaknesses [see sixth-form Annexe below]
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good, as is their attendance
- The overall impact of Performing Arts College status is very beneficial, improving provision and giving the school well-deserved prominence both locally and nationally
- Pastoral care and special educational needs support are good; extra-curricular provision is very good
- Links with the community are excellent and those with other schools are very good
- Governors have good knowledge of the school and ask challenging questions
- Assessment, marking and target-setting are used inconsistently across the school
- The curriculum for Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory
- Achievement in ICT in Years 7 to 11, apart from the minority taking the GCSE course, is unsatisfactory.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory
- The governing body does not meet its statutory duties in respect of ICT, religious education and the act of worship

### How the effectiveness of the school has changed since the previous inspection

Improvement in Years 7 to 11 since the 1997 inspection is satisfactory, with good improvement on broadening teaching and learning styles and upgrading of assessment systems, though these are not yet always consistent and effective. There has been too little improvement on ICT and religious education provision. The acquisition of Performing Arts College status has significantly broadened and improved provision, expanding already very good links with the community. In the sixth form beneficial trends are taking place in teaching and in achievement or 'added value', but overall improvement since 1997 is unsatisfactory. Standards of attainment have been too variable and for several years have not represented sufficient added value for students; leadership has not provided direction and action to counter the problem.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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.

**Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 11.** They build successfully on their high initial attainment and produce results in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9 that are well above the national average for all schools and at least as high as standards for similar schools. Work in Year 9

is well above average in modern foreign languages, history, design and technology, art and geography. Achievement is good in most subjects and particularly strong in dance, and satisfactory in English, religious education and music. In ICT, too little progress is made, because of limited opportunities to use it across the curriculum. By the end of Year 11, results are also well above the national average for all schools and match those in similar schools, sometimes exceeding them. Achievement is good, with pupils adding significantly to standards reached in Year 9. In dance and drama the added value is particularly high and GCSE results have been above average for several years in art, design and technology, English, French, food technology, physical education, religious education and science. Achievement is unsatisfactory for pupils studying ICT or religious education other than in the GCSE courses in these subjects. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well across Years 7 to 11. Gifted and talented pupils achieve satisfactorily, but specific provision for them is less well co-ordinated. Girls reach higher standards than boys; the gap is narrower than nationally in Year 9 and similar to the national one in Year 11.

**In the sixth form achievement is unsatisfactory.** Students enter Year 12 with better than average standards and their attainment at the end of Year 13 sometimes exceeds and in other years matches national standards. However, each year from 2000 to 2003 students collectively made less progress than they should have in a majority of subjects. In the current Year 13, standards of attainment and rates of progress in lessons are higher than recent results indicate; achievement in lessons is currently satisfactory. However, this marked improvement has yet to be fully confirmed by examination results and there is not the reliability in sixth form leadership or academic monitoring procedures to explain or replicate such performance.

**Pupils show positive attitudes and good behaviour** and attendance is better than average. Many are very positive and behaviour in most lessons and in the crowded corridors and dining hall is calm and mature. A small minority of lessons suffer from slight disruption. Pupils show good social and moral development and an above average cultural awareness. Spiritual development is satisfactory.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**Teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11 are good and much is very effective.** Teachers are consistently very strong subject specialists with good communication skills, enjoying very good relationships with pupils. Learning is also enhanced by most pupils' good attitudes to study. The degree of active involvement of pupils varies, though is better than at the time of the last inspection. Marking, assessment and target setting do not inform teaching and learning; practice is again much better than in the last inspection but still too inconsistent to be considered satisfactory. Teaching and learning are very good overall in drama, dance, religious education and personal, social and health education and good in all other subjects. In a very small minority of lessons, pace and the use of school discipline procedures are weak. The 11-16 curriculum is unsatisfactory. It has strengths in language provision and the performing arts, but offers too little vocational education and fails to meet statutory requirements for ICT and religious education. Care for pupils is good overall. Links with parents are very good and with the wider community are excellent, a great strength of the school.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership of Years 7 to 11 has been effective and the school is currently very well led by an acting headteacher. Management of this section is good, with many strengths and a few weaknesses. Governance of the main school is good and in some respects very good; in the sixth form it is satisfactory, having recognised and attempted to solve current problems.

The 11to16 sector has been led and managed well enough for sound improvement since the previous inspection. The beneficial changes to issues raised in 1997 have occurred relatively recently, and some still require further improvement. However, major gains have arisen from other management decisions, especially the successful bid for specialist school status. Leadership and management are excellent or very good in a few subjects, and good in many. Tutorial work, including the personal support and advice to sixth form students, is well managed and effective. Financial

management has been very good over many years. The school uses 'best value' principles satisfactorily to compare its performance and costs with those of other schools.

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

Parents and pupils express very positive views of the school. While they seek improvements in specific areas, over 90 per cent of pupils say they are pleased to be at the school and parents rate their children's happiness at the school equally highly.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- Establish effective leadership and management arrangements for the sixth form that promote strong, co-ordinated vision and action
- Urgently put in place assessment and marking practices that are consistent; in the sixth form especially, monitor these rigorously to ensure good collective action on students' academic progress towards their targets.
- Modify the curriculum for Years 10 and 11 to include more vocational provision
- Ensure gifted and talented pupils are consistently set challenging targets
- Broaden the sixth form curriculum to include a wider range of vocational and A level subjects so that the full range of students' needs is met by appropriate courses
- Take all possible steps to improve the inadequate size of sixth form study and social facilities, the school's main corridors, dining and library facilities and the poor decorative order of much of the premises.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Extend ICT provision in Years 7 to 11, religious education provision in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form and provide a daily act of worship
- Ensure that reports to parents make clear the strengths and weaknesses in the progress pupils make in each subject.

## THE SIXTH FORM AT POYNTON HIGH SCHOOL AND PERFORMING ARTS COLLEGE

The sixth form is very large with 360 students. Most join from Year 11 at Poynton School; a few transfer from elsewhere. Thirty A/AS courses and three AVCE courses are offered.

### OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is unsatisfactory. The standard of work seen during the inspection is above average and current teaching is very good. However, results have not been high enough for the calibre of students involved and added value has been unsatisfactory for too long. Systems of leadership and management are unsatisfactory and the sixth form has not made sufficient improvement since the last inspection. Cost effectiveness is satisfactory.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- A-level results from 2000 to 2003 have shown unsatisfactory overall achievement each year. Students enter Year 12 with above average standards but results at the end of Year 13 do not exceed national ones by a wide enough margin
- The quality of current teaching is very good, as are relationships between staff and students
- The arrangements for the leadership and management of the sixth form are unsatisfactory
- Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good; they have a positive view of the sixth form
- Achievement in the lessons of current Year 13 students is good and thus much better than in previous years
- Amongst the subjects given a focus during the inspection, there is excellent teaching in drama and standards are very high. Current standards are well above average in dance, biology and music
- Monitoring of academic progress lacks sufficient rigour and is unsatisfactory
- The curriculum lacks the necessary range of provision, with too many instances of poor matches of courses to students and, in 2002-3, unacceptable drop-out rates. In addition, it fails to meet statutory requirements for the provision of religious education
- Personal support and careers advice are good and 90 per cent of students enter the course of their choice on leaving school
- Accommodation lacks appropriate study, library and social facilities and is too small for the current numbers

***In accordance with the schedule 7 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000, I am of the opinion, but HMCI disagrees, that the school has an inadequate sixth form because it has significant weaknesses in rates of achievement and the effectiveness of leadership and management arrangements, and an unsatisfactory curriculum.***

### 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 are currently achieving. Not all subjects in the sixth form were inspected.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English language	Current provision is <b>good</b> . Teaching and learning are very good. Achievement by current Year 13 students is good. Added value in 2002 and 2003 was positive.
English literature	Provision is <b>satisfactory</b> . Added value in 2003 was negative. Day-to-day teaching and learning are currently very good; achievement over the course as a whole is satisfactory.
German	Provision is <b>good</b> . Year 13 students are achieving well, teaching is very good and the subject has shown positive achievement for several years.



Mathematics	Provision is <b>good</b> . Results are consistently above the national average, but added value is inconsistent. Teaching is good: staff are enthusiastic and well qualified.
Biology	Provision is <b>very good</b> , because day-to-day teaching and periodic assessment systems are very effective and enable students to make very good achievement.
ICT	Provision is currently <b>good</b> . Results in 2003 were below average, but teaching and learning are currently very good and students are achieving well. Added value in 2003 was negative.
Geography	Provision is <b>good</b> at present. Students achieve satisfactorily. Teaching and learning are currently good. Added value in 2003 was strongly negative.
History	Provision is currently <b>good</b> . Teaching and learning are very good; monitoring of students' progress is improving and enabling them to achieve satisfactorily. Results in 2003 were average. Added value in 2003 was positive.
Religious studies	Provision is now <b>good</b> . Teaching in the AS and A2 courses is currently very good. Achievement is satisfactory. Results in 2003 were average, but added value for 2002 and 2003 was strongly negative.
Design and technology	Provision is currently <b>satisfactory</b> . Teaching and learning are good and students are achieving satisfactorily. Results in 2003 were below average. Added value in 2003 was strongly negative.
Dance	Provision is <b>very good</b> . Teaching, learning and students' achievement are all very good. Added value for the last two years has been positive.
Drama	Provision is <b>excellent</b> . Standards are very high, teaching is excellent and students build well on their already very high standards from Year 11. Added value has been extremely positive for the last four years.
Music	Current provision is <b>very good</b> . Teaching and learning are very good and students are currently achieving well. However, added value in 2003 was strongly negative.
Art	Provision is <b>satisfactory</b> . Teaching and learning are satisfactory and students are achieving satisfactorily. Results in 2003 were below average. Added value in 2002 and 2003 was strongly negative.
Sports studies	Provision is currently <b>good</b> . Teaching and learning are good and students are achieving well. Added value had previously been negative for four years.
Business studies	Provision is <b>satisfactory</b> . Day-to-day teaching is currently good and learning is satisfactory. However, students do not consolidate their knowledge well and achievement is unsatisfactory. Results in 2003 were broadly average.

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*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

Overall the quality of advice and guidance based on the monitoring of students' achievements is unsatisfactory because assessment arrangements are ineffective. However, sixth form tutors show dedication and skill in counselling and supporting students and succeed in helping 90 per cent of their students gain entry to their preferred courses when they leave school. Tutors' work is

hampered by having too few opportunities to work with their groups and they are not provided regularly with an overall picture of how well their group is doing.

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

The arrangements for leadership and management are unsatisfactory. Students' collective results have shown too little added value each year from 2000 to 2003, though the amount of underachievement is declining. Not enough concerted remedial action has been taken. Some changes have been initiated by senior managers, but there remains too marked a separation of pastoral work from academic monitoring and curricular leadership, so that the sixth form lacks collective vision. There is no comprehensive sixth form development plan. As a result strengths exist in isolation, such as very good individual support for students, while related areas, such as academic assessment and target-setting, are far too variable. There are other consequences, all revealing a need for more systematic planning and practice: too little action has been taken by senior managers to promote good added value vigorously and consistently, or to develop a broad curriculum to match the full range of students' needs effectively; while many subject areas and individual teachers achieve excellence in their teaching, assessment and monitoring activities, the processes of co-ordination of these activities and spreading best practice are weak; recent improvements in aspects of sixth form provision have helped promote very good teaching and learning amongst current Years 12 and 13, but the systems to confirm and consolidate such benefits and to ensure continuing good achievement are not established.

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

Students' questionnaire responses showed that over 90 per cent are happy to be in the sixth form and feel they are well served by it. Those interviewed reinforced this very positive overall support. There is nevertheless strong dissatisfaction with the poor facilities provided and views about careers advice varied. Inspectors support students' opinions about accommodation and resources, but find that careers advice is better than average.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

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

Achievement in Years 7 to 11 is good and allows pupils to reach well above average standards. Achievement in the sixth form is unsatisfactory, though improvement is taking place.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- In Years 7 to 11 achievement is good overall
- Results are well above average at the end of Year 9
- GCSE results are well above national levels and achievement is good. It has been consistently positive in a wide range of subjects
- Across the school as a whole the contribution of the Performing Arts College to high standards and good achievement is very marked
- While standards in the sixth form are generally average or above, students' overall achievement has been unsatisfactory for some years
- Current Year 13 students are making good progress in lessons
- The achievement of middle and lower attainers at GCSE is particularly strong
- The proportion of the very highest grades at GCSE is lower than it might be
- In ICT and religious education, the standards reached by pupils not taking GCSE are below average

#### Commentary

- 1 Pupils make good progress across Years 7 to 11 and achieve well even in relation to their marked above average attainment levels. At the end of Year 9, as the table below shows, their results in National Curriculum test in the core subjects (English, mathematics and science) are well above the national averages for all schools. The additional learning and skills acquired during Years 7 to 9 are as great or greater than those made in equally advantaged schools. These trends are matched by the predominantly good achievement seen in lessons during the inspection. Achievement is good in the majority of other subjects and very good in dance. Achievement in English, music and religious education was satisfactory in the work seen by inspectors, needing greater rigour in the way assessment is used to raise expectations, and unsatisfactory in ICT, where coverage of the subject is too limited.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	36.5 (36.2)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	39.9 (38.7)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	37.4 (37.2)	33.6 (33.3)

*There were 264 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

- 2 GCSE results are well above the national averages for all schools and on most indicators show that further good achievement takes place across Years 10 and 11. Work seen by inspectors confirms that achievement overall is good. This success is due essentially to good, often very good teaching, and senior managers working with heads of subjects to ensure that overall targets are kept in mind at all times and action taken to meet them. It also owes much to the large number of subjects where leadership and management have been consistently successful in ensuring high standards. For instance, from 2000 to 2003 added value has been

positive every year in art, drama, English language, French, food technology, ICT, physical education, religious education and science.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	72.0 (77.5)	51.5 (49.9)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	90.5 (90.9)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	95.9 (96.0)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	42.1 (44.2)	34.7 (34.7)

*There were 293 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

- 3 The contribution of the Performing Arts College to high standards and good achievement in the school is becoming increasingly marked. Across the full age range of the school, courses in dance and drama are increasingly responsible for some of the highest levels of attainment, such as A\* grades at GCSE and A and B grades in the sixth form; music and the combined performing arts course are reaching similar standards in the sixth form. They have a disproportionate share of the excellent and very good teaching seen during the inspection and leadership and management are amongst the best in the school.
- 4 At GCSE, one of the school's marked successes is performance in terms of A\*-G grades. These indicate that middle and lower attainers reach far higher standards than might be expected at the end of Year 11 and that their achievement across Years 7 to 11 is consistently good. Analysis of examination data shows that the gains made by pupils with special educational needs, in relation to their capabilities, are particularly marked, confirmed by the very effective management of special educational needs in lessons and other support sessions. They make good gains in improving their reading ages, sometimes making up to three years' progress in one year, and in improving their spelling. Pupils with statements of special educational need make very good progress towards the targets set at their reviews. They achieve very well at GCSE and do much better than expected. They also make considerable gains in self-confidence, and take part in many social and sporting activities: for example, one pupil recently gained two gold medals in an international swimming competition.
- 5 While Year 10 and 11 pupils collectively make good progress in lessons and achieve well, the achievement of gifted and talented pupils is only satisfactory. The proportion of A\* and A grades at GCSE is above average, but not well above. In 2003 A\* grades were about 33 per cent better than the national level, when A\* to C passes were 40 per cent higher. Because the policy for gifted and talented pupils has only recently been developed and there is a lack of specific guidance for implementing it, the impact on curricular areas has been inconsistent, and the school's own monitoring has revealed a lack of progress in some areas. Gifted and talented pupils do not have access to a specific mentoring system, and there is a lack of clarity in communicating with pupils and parents about opportunities available. Staff training has taken place and strategies for enriching the curriculum have been devised, but as yet there is too little progress in implementing these strategies in the classroom. In a minority of subjects in the last few years, A\* grades have been dramatically better than average, being double or treble the national share in drama, dance, French, art and food technology. This trend, however, is not well supported across the rest of the curriculum.
- 6 The overall pattern of achievement for Year 10 and 11 pupils in religious education and ICT is unsatisfactory. Those who do not follow a GCSE course in either subject currently do not receive the legally required coverage through other subjects of the curriculum. The time allocation given to religious education is too small, while ICT provision across the curriculum is not systematically monitored and assessed.

## Sixth Form

- 7 Achievement in the sixth form is unsatisfactory. Results at A2 were broadly in line with national averages in 2003. Given the higher than average prior attainment with which students enter Year 12, these results represent unsatisfactory gains in attainment during their courses. Analysis of the value-added element in AS and A2 results for the last four years confirms that, most years since 2000, achievement has been unsatisfactory. Results exceeded national averages by a far greater margin at the time of the previous inspection but have fluctuated since then and overall have not risen to keep pace with national improvements.
- 8 Work seen by inspectors indicate that current Year 13 students are working to above average standards overall, indicating that improved teaching and several other recently introduced strategies may be having an effect. Current Year 13 students are making good overall achievement in lessons and in some subjects achievement is very good. This improvement is welcome, but, as yet, cannot be confirmed by suitably high examination results. Sound achievement has not been established as the norm for the sixth form and the school does not have comprehensive assessment evidence from which to make reliable and positive predictions. For the phase of poor achievement to end, the supporting conditions of good academic leadership, rigorous monitoring and consistent use of assessment and target setting need to be firmly in place.
- 9 The achievement of gifted and talented students in the sixth form is satisfactory. Assessment data is not, as yet, used extensively to monitor and advise students. Recent changes to students' requirements to attend school have been designed to increase their responsibility for managing their own learning. Their capacity for independent learning is supported in lessons. Those students intending to apply for Oxbridge places are given appropriate mentoring. Some curricular areas, for example design and technology, have well-established procedures for identifying gifted students, and seek to involve them in challenging activities outside the standard curriculum.
- 10 Against a background of underachievement, several subjects have consistently performed well and continue to stand out. For example, results in A-level drama, A-level dance and AVCE health and social care have shown consistently better than average gains by students during their courses each year since 2000. Amongst the focus subjects of the inspection, standards observed by inspectors were very high in drama, well above average in biology, music and dance and above average in many others. Standards seen by inspectors were average in business studies, religious studies and art.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	96.4 (97.5)	95.3 (94.1)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	39.0 (46.0)	43.8 (41.9)
Average point score per pupil	252.1 (281.1)	253.1(254.5)

*There were 145 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

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

Pupils' attendance is **very good**. Attitudes and behaviour, including the incidence of exclusions, are **good**. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is **good**

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- In most lessons, pupils and students are keen to learn and behaviour is good
- Attendance is well above the average for secondary schools nationally
- Pupils show a very good understanding of moral and social issues, especially through their work with the community.
- Sixth form students are very effectively involved in helping pupils in the main school
- Relationships throughout the school are very good
- Some lessons are disrupted by a minority of pupils

## Commentary

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	5.3	School data	0.1
National data	7.8	National data	1.2

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

### Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – African
Chinese
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

### Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1668	71	1
2		
11		
3	3	
1		
4		
7		
3		
1		
2		
9		
7		

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

- Attendance is improving and is well above the national average. Unauthorised absence is in line with the national norm. Procedures are only just being tightened to follow up first day absences. Punctuality is satisfactory, although movement is allowed for in the timetable.
- Attitudes to school and learning are generally very good at most times, as is behaviour. Pupils listen and concentrate well. In the best lessons, pupils of all ages show a capacity for excellent responses to lessons. In drama, Year 10 pupils developed excellent group responsibility and reliance, while Year 7 pupils concentrated hard and engaged in the expected activity with minimal off-task behaviour. Year 9 pupils engaged delightedly and diligently in a history discussion about black people in the United States of America, suggesting the kind of comments that might have been written as graffiti following Martin Luther King's famous

speech, "I have a dream...". Relationships are generally very good, and in a Year 8 music lesson pupils gave courteous and positive evaluation of others' performances.

- 13 However, a significant minority of lessons are disrupted by chatter and lack of concentration, and teachers do not always deal with such misdemeanours in a consistent manner. When silence is asked for, for example in assemblies, the response is immediate, but too often pupils need to be reminded how to behave. Around school, pupils are generally orderly, and their behaviour in the limited dining space is noteworthy. Unsurprisingly, in a school of this size, there is some bullying, but pupils feel that reported instances are dealt with appropriately and the school is largely free of intimidating behaviour. Permanent exclusions are very low; fixed-term exclusions are average and used appropriately as a 'cooling off' period, especially where violent or abusive behaviour is used. Procedures to re-integrate these pupils are firmly established and involve parents.
- 14 Pupils take good advantage of the school clubs and house events that are organised on a regular basis, and most play a full part in the life of the school. Inter-house competitions enable pupils to participate in extra-curricular activities that interest them, even though they may not have the ability to represent the school. Pupils relate well to each other and to teachers, and develop confidence and self-esteem.
- 15 Personal development is good. Provision for the spiritual and cultural development of pupils is good; provision for their moral and social development is very good. The school's commitment to community service provides very good opportunities for all pupils to recognise their responsibilities to others, and the creative arts in particular provide for their spiritual and cultural development.
- 16 The opportunities presented by the school's commitment to the performing arts enable pupils to develop confidence, self-esteem and an appreciation of the cultural development of their country. They have very good opportunities to work with professional writers and performers in school, and to attend public performances. As a consequence, their social skills are developing, and their own expectations of their work are rising. In a Year 10 class, for example, a group of pupils investigated different methods of portraying the tortured mind through the use of masks. The result was a remarkable piece of theatre, where the emotional charge stemmed directly from the intensity of their thought and effort.
- 17 The school's commitment to community service and its effective links with the community provide very good opportunities for all pupils to develop their sense of responsibility. Their involvement with young, disabled and elderly people enables them to make a real contribution to the lives of others. The use of assembly to enable pupils to perform for their peers is a positive move; however, pupils are not encouraged to support the performance through listening, and at times are discourteous. Assemblies, although sometimes reflective, are not always used to support the spiritual development of the pupils. As there is very little time for pupils to develop their own beliefs and values through religious education in Years 10 and 11, this is an area that is underdeveloped.

## **Sixth Form**

- 18 Attendance to lessons is good, but procedures for morning registration do not encourage students to develop a routine. Students are generally punctual to lessons.
- 19 Students have very positive attitudes to school and are keen to do well. They are fully involved in the life of the school, helping with house activities and acting as 'buddies' and peer counsellors. They participate in a wide range of community and other enrichment activities. Behaviour in the sixth form is very good. In the best lessons, students make maximum effort to succeed and meet teachers' high expectations of them, ask interested and intelligent questions and work together very productively. Students in a health and social care AVCE lesson

presented their joint coursework on euthanasia in a way that showed they had collaborated very well in researching and presenting their ideas.

- 20 Provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good. The opportunities for students to take responsibility for younger pupils in a supportive role are impressive, and as a consequence students develop confidence and self-esteem. In their work as peer counsellors and personal and social education trainers, they make a good contribution to the school. They support a wide range of clubs and activities, and are valuable in helping to organise the inter-house competitions
- 21 Students have a very good appreciation of right and wrong, and in many areas they are encouraged to consider a range of moral dilemmas. They consider different views of the issues before developing and voicing their own opinions. A very good example is where a boy used the medium of art to explore the issues around the war in Iraq. The performing arts courses provide a real opportunity for students to explore their feelings about the world about them. A dance lesson where students developed a series of movements to reflect the emotions and issues surrounding child abuse was deeply moving for observers and students alike. Although there are very good opportunities for the students to experience spiritual growth, there is insufficient time for students who are not following the religious studies course at A level to develop an understanding of the spiritual concepts inherent in religious belief.

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

### Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning in the main school are good and in the sixth form they are currently very good. Several subjects have consistently very effective teaching and learning and in none is the quality less than good.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The proportion of good or better teaching and learning is very substantial
- Teachers have very strong expertise in their subject
- Relationships are very good
- Pupils' attitudes to study are good
- In several subjects particularly high quality teaching and learning are sustained
- Current teaching and learning in the sixth form are both very good
- Use of marking and assessment, though improving, is not yet satisfactory
- The active involvement of pupils in lessons is more common than at the time of the previous inspection but still an inconsistent feature

### Commentary

#### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 230 lessons*

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
11 (5%)	55 (24%)	105 (46%)	53 (23%)	6 (3%)	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.*

- 22 There is a consistency about teaching and learning quality across the school which subjects and individual teachers sometimes exceed but rarely fall short of. In the main school, 70 per cent of lessons had at least good teaching and learning and this included just under 30 per cent in which the quality was very good or excellent. This shows that the essentials of expertise in

subjects, communication skills, pitching lessons at a demanding level and effective management of pupils are all well established and found with fair consistency across all subjects. Pupils' learning in lessons is good and often very good as a result and, cumulatively, they achieve well across Years 7 to 11. Unsatisfactory teaching, at three per cent, is rare, and reflects the very occasional failure of a teacher to use school disciplinary procedures early enough.

- 23 Teachers' knowledge of their subject is a particular strength and far fewer lessons than usual are taught by non-specialists. Teachers command well-deserved respect for how well they know their pupils and their skill at interpreting their subjects. In addition, the vast majority of teachers, mirroring the school's caring ethos, invest heavily in developing good relationships with pupils. Teachers treat them with respect and seek to listen to them and use their contributions well. Some lessons are highly successful because the staff are unusually adept at developing pupils' thinking. For example, a very well taught Year 10 science lesson placed most of the burden for learning on the pupils' ability to explain simple and complex aspects of the nervous system to each other. They did this in a well-structured sequence of tasks that distinguished uncertain ideas from secure knowledge and also helped define the questions that still needed answering. The teacher provided prompts rather than ready-made answers, pushing pupils to again investigate and learn for themselves.
- 24 The key contribution of pupils as a whole is their positive attitude to study. While there are exceptions, the vast majority are keen to learn and conduct themselves well, allowing teachers to focus on promoting understanding and not on keeping order. Pupils retain an inquisitive approach to much of their work; this strength is developed well by some staff, but not by all.
- 25 While the quality is good in most subjects, teaching and learning in some subjects are particularly successful. Across Years 7 to 11, the quality of both is very good in drama, dance, religious education and personal, social and health education. All are very well led and managed and exemplify, at a high level and in combination, many of the qualities seen elsewhere in the school: typically, exposition is authoritative, but not too lengthy; the onus to learn and find out is placed on pupils, with investigative tasks prominent; and pupils are involved in appraising their own work and that of others at various points in most lessons. In addition, these subjects are consistently good at letting pupils know the standards they are at, what they should be aiming for and how they can improve their performance.
- 26 This successful use of assessment is typical of the approach of some other teachers, but there is too little consistency across the school as a whole and sometimes within departments. Marking practice is being reviewed, but at present is too variable; confidence in formal teacher assessments in Years 7 to 9 is low. Shaping work to match the varied attainment of pupils in a lesson is typical of the very best lessons but is hard to detect in many others. Monitoring pupils' progress towards targets is broadly satisfactory and better than in the sixth form, but too many pupils remain unsure of the levels they should be working towards and the strategies they need to apply to get there. Similarly, while active involvement of pupils is an increasing feature and obvious in the very well taught lessons, it is limited on too many occasions and replaced by over-lengthy exposition.
- 27 The quality of teaching and learning for pupils with special educational needs is good. Support assistants provide effective help and encouragement, often maintaining good levels of concentration and engagement. In the best lessons, relationships between pupils and learning support staff are very good, and pupils try hard as a result. For example, in a lesson on improving pupils' study skills, they listened intently to what the teacher had to say, and were very keen to do their best. Very good learning was the result. In a small number of lessons, however, work is not well matched to individual needs, and pupils do not take as full a part in the lesson as they could.

## **Sixth form**

- 28 Teaching in the sixth form is currently very good. A higher than average proportion of very good and excellent teaching was observed during the inspection, mainly in several specific subjects. Common strengths include the consistently high level of specialist knowledge of teachers and the very positive attitudes of students to learning. In the very best lessons there is also an unusually close rapport between students and teachers which builds on several features: very good relationships as a basis; the teachers' encouraging of students to investigate independently, learn from each other and evaluate other students' progress; and the teachers' ability to welcome and develop students' ideas and suggestions. In some subjects, drama and biology for example, assessment is used extremely well by staff and students alike, but practice varies too much between subjects and even between teachers in the same department. While many aspects of learning are as good as teaching, students' learning is good rather than very good, because they do not have as clear a picture of the standards they are reaching, or the means to improve, as they ought. This is because longer-term setting and monitoring of targets is poorly co-ordinated and lacks consistency.
- 29 Collectively, sixth form teaching is currently ensuring good achievement in lessons amongst Year 13 students. However, the school's monitoring of sixth formers' progress cannot show with sufficient confidence that this will lead to high enough results at A level – standards which represent adequate or good long-term gain by these students. Systems to ensure the end of fluctuating standards and inconsistent added value have yet to be put in place.

## **The curriculum**

The curriculum does not provide adequately for the needs of all pupils. The Performing Arts College status has had a good effect, but in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form the curriculum is not broad enough and lacks a good range of vocational courses.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The personal, social and health education programme in Years 7 to 11 is very good, helping pupils to mature and develop their interpersonal skills
- Performing Arts College status promotes music, drama and dance very effectively and helps pupils to develop in confidence and skills
- There is a wide range of opportunities and activities in physical education, especially through the work in dance
- The work-related learning is good in the areas of hairdressing and Motor Vehicle Maintenance  
There is no planned ICT course for all pupils in Years 10 and 11
- There is insufficient time to cover the agreed syllabus in religious education in Years 10 to 13
- The opportunities for pupils in Years 10 to 13 are narrow and lack a good range of vocational courses

### **Commentary**

- 30 The curriculum is unsatisfactory, because it does not meet statutory requirements in Years 10 and 11. Too many pupils receive less ICT teaching than they should, and the time allowed for religious education is insufficient to cover the agreed syllabus.
- 31 In Years 7 to 9, the curriculum is satisfactory. All the National Curriculum subjects are taught and, unusually, all pupils participate in a well-planned dance course, adding to the breadth of the curriculum and extending the experiences of pupils.
- 32 The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is too narrow. Although the school has undertaken a thorough review of the curriculum, it has not yet developed enough vocational courses to provide a good range of opportunities for all pupils. The option system is clearly planned and

ensures that pupils have a range of GCSE courses. A large proportion of pupils continue with a foreign language, and the school's policy is to try to ensure that all pupils learn at least one language. The work-related learning for almost 30 pupils is very worthwhile and provides good progression into employment in hairdressing and motor vehicle maintenance for some pupils. Pupils taking these courses grow in confidence and maturity.

- 33 Individual subjects, for example physical education, modern foreign languages and science, do provide a broad curriculum within their own spheres. The Performing Arts College also draws together the impact of its component subjects and is making a very significant improvement to the curriculum and to the school experience of all pupils. The integration of dance, drama and music is established, although further work needs to be done to ensure the full integration of the music department, because of the natural separation of teaching rooms and offices. There are GCSE courses in dance, drama and music, and examination courses for students in Years 12 and 13. An exciting and recent development is the AS course in performing arts, which achieves the task of integrating all three subject areas into one course, aimed specifically at the all-round student.
- 34 The provision for performing arts overall is very good, because the teaching and learning are consistently of a very high order. Standards are rising from year to year. This work is achieved against the background of very good accommodation for dance and some music and drama, but there are areas still in use that are inappropriate and that make teaching and learning very difficult. It is a tribute to the staff and students that they work so hard to such good effect.
- 35 There are very good opportunities for enrichment. The school provides a very good range of extra-curricular activities, and many pupils enjoy this provision. The Performing Arts College status has the effect of strengthening the traditional extra-curricular roles of drama and music. There is a wide range of sports clubs for recreation and competition. The school makes very good provision to support learning outside the school day, with support classes, visits and residential trips.
- 36 Good improvements have been made in the provision of non-teaching and ancillary staff to support subject delivery. Through the process of remodelling, the school has been innovative with the 'workload agreement' and job descriptions, reducing the impact of tasks such as invigilation and enabling staff to concentrate on subject priorities.
- 37 The accommodation overall is unsatisfactory. Deficiencies remain, in spite of the substantial progress made since the last inspection. Areas for improvement have been prioritised and action taken. Some weaknesses identified at the time of the last inspection have been overcome. New buildings have greatly improved accommodation for the performing arts and science. However, large group sizes in some classes mean facilities are cramped. Despite good indoor space for physical education, the outdoor facilities are poor, with an all-weather playing surface and cricket wicket that are both unfit for purpose. There are no jumping pits available for teaching athletics. Despite the excellent work of the maintenance team, many teaching rooms are scruffy in appearance and present a 'tired' and uninspiring environment. Peeling paintwork in some areas detracts from the impression of a stimulating learning space. Some corridors present cramped conditions and increase opportunities for misbehaviour. Dining facilities are limited, and it is only the sensible behaviour of pupils, aided by constant supervision of staff, that enables lunches to be eaten in a relatively civilised manner. These factors combine to undermine the high standards being set across the school, and give the wrong messages to pupils regarding health and safety and respect for property. Successful management of the cramped buildings is dependent upon the extra vigilance and close supervision of the whole staff.
- 38 The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. There are currently no pupils needing additional support because their first language is not English. In the past, such pupils have been given effective support and the school has the expertise and procedures required to meet any future needs.

- 39 Pupils value their lessons in personal, social and health education, because teachers are skilled and understanding. The provision is very good and is a strength of the school. The school helps to prepare pupils for life by providing opportunities to consider many relevant and controversial issues. Difficult topics are dealt with sensitively, and pupils are helped to develop appropriate skills. All pupils in Year 11 take part in a well-organised community service programme, and there is a good work-experience scheme.

## Sixth Form

- 40 The post-16 curriculum is unsatisfactory. Its narrowness means that while many students prosper on their courses, a significant minority do not, despite the best efforts of tutors and others offering support. The school's concern to be inclusive is entirely appropriate, but the range of AS and A2 options is more limited than in other sixth forms of this size and vocational courses are far rarer than in many highly successful sixth forms. The progression from AS to A2 is has limitations, for instance, when AS psychology and sociology that cannot be continued at A level. Students can chose from only two AVCE courses – in travel and tourism or health and social care. As a result, it is not possible to obtain the degree of close match between courses and students' aptitude that is desirable and too many struggle on courses for which they are ill suited. This factor is noticeable in mathematics, ICT, design and technology, sports studies and science subjects. These factors contribute significantly to the low added-value scores in several post-16 subjects.
- 41 There is good preparation for later stages of education and employment through appropriate visits, work experience and community service and this has enabled a very high proportion of student to proceed to the courses they have chosen after leaving school. However, the school has ceased to provide a key skills programme that would help to support many students in the transition from GCSE to more demanding individual work.

## Care, guidance and support

The procedures to ensure pupils' care, welfare, health and safety are **good**. The support, advice and guidance for pupils, based on the monitoring of their achievements and personal development, are **unsatisfactory**. The extent to which the school seeks to involve pupils in its work and development is **good**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Induction arrangements for pupils who join in Year 7 are very good
- Health and safety arrangements have improved since the last inspection and are now good
- Advice on careers and further study opportunities is very good in the sixth form
- Pupils have good opportunities to express their views
- Pupils are not sufficiently well informed about how they are doing
- The first session of the day is not used productively.

## Commentary

- 42 Arrangements for health and safety have improved significantly since the last inspection. Risk assessments for the school and for out-of-school trips are fully in place. Good procedures are established to deal with child protection issues, and staff are aware of their responsibilities in this area. Pastoral support, especially in Year 7, is good, but too little emphasis is placed on making the 15-minute registration period a meaningful session for personal development throughout the school.
- 43 Pupils have access to good advice and guidance, particularly on pastoral matters, from teachers and tutors, from the care assistant, and from trained sixth form counsellors. Identification and support for pupils with special educational needs are good, and their progress

is monitored very well. Support for pupils with statements is very good and well matched to individual needs.

- 44 Computerised personal records monitor some aspects of personal development, but pupils are given too little information about their academic performance, and many are unclear about how well they should be doing, or what to do to improve further. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 are largely unaware of the National Curriculum level at which they are working, and in Years 10 and 11 do not know exactly what grade they can realistically achieve in each of their GCSE subjects. Targets set with tutors on the review days are too general to ensure that all pupils, especially the most able, reach their full potential. Advice on options at Year 9, and for future careers, is generally good, although some Year 10 pupils are critical of the guidance they received.
- 45 Induction arrangements, especially for those who join from the local primary schools, are very good. Pupils at the feeder schools in Year 6 attend a residential weekend that includes teachers from the high school. There are many opportunities for pupils to visit the school before Year 7, and the exchange of data is well established. Units of work that are started in Year 6 for completion in Year 7 are being developed, but are not established in all subjects.
- 46 All pupils can contribute to school developments through the school council system. Each tutor group has occasions when pupils can make comments to contribute to council discussions, and the council has had some success in making changes to uniform and helping to tackle the litter problem. Pupils' views are sought in a number of subjects; for example, in physical education, pupils were interviewed and their comments informed subsequent actions.

## Sixth Form

- 47 Most students say that they received good guidance and support in choosing their subjects for study in the sixth form, and that teachers are very willing to provide advice. However, the range of courses is too narrow, and too many students are guided to inappropriate courses, resulting in failure or lower grades than the student is capable of achieving. Students are assessed using established national criteria, but there is too little discussion of the target grades, and students do not have a clear idea of whether, or how, they could achieve a higher grade. Careers advice is good, and students are generally well prepared for making appropriate choices for universities or entering the world of work.
- 48 Students are involved with pupils in the main school in a variety of ways, especially through helping staff organise house events. They contribute to the school council and have good opportunities to meet senior staff and governors to make their views known.

## Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The effectiveness of the school's links with parents is **good**. The quality of links with the local community is **excellent**. The school's links with other schools and colleges are **very good**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- The establishment of the Performing Arts College has helped to put in place an excellent range of links with the community and other schools, to their mutual benefit
- Links with local primary schools aid the smooth transfer of pupils and provide a range of learning opportunities that benefit both primary and secondary pupils
- Sixth form students continue to be involved with the local community
- Most of the information provided for parents is very good
- Parents have good involvement in the school and are very supportive
- Annual progress reports are unsatisfactory

## Commentary

- 49 Parents express satisfaction with the school, although there are some concerns about behaviour and about the arrangements for dining, which were criticised in the last inspection. Generally, parents see the school as one where expectations are high and pupils make good progress. They are, rightly, especially pleased with the arrangements made for pupils transferring from local feeder primary schools. A very effective group of schools smooths the transition of pupils; a residential week in Anglesey helps pupils make new friends and get to know staff before they transfer. In addition, a wide range of projects involves junior pupils with the high school and Performing Arts College, although transition units of work from Year 6 to Year 7 are not yet fully established in all the core subjects.
- 50 Information provided to parents is usually very good, and there are ample opportunities for parents to discuss their child's progress and help their child to make decisions about Year 9 options for GCSE subjects. A minority of parents expressed dissatisfaction with the progress review days; some of the targets set on these occasions are too broad-based to improve learning. Parents are justifiably unhappy about the reporting arrangements for individual subjects; the annual reports provide little or no information about what pupils have learnt and understood, and there is too little detail, both at the review day and at other times, for many parents or pupils to know what should be done to improve further. Information provided to parents of pupils who have special educational needs is good, and parental attendance at annual reviews is good and helps these pupils to make progress.
- 51 Parents contribute to school life by their attendance at events, and there is a thriving parents and teacher association that organises fund-raising and social events. Most parents ensure that their children attend regularly, and communicate well with the school, using pupils' planners.
- 52 The school has developed impressive links with the local and wider community, which make a strong contribution to pupils' personal development and their understanding of citizenship. All pupils undertake a work-experience placement in Year 10. In Year 11, pupils complete a module of community service as part of the personal, social and health education course. Two major companies in the area provide opportunities for work experience, as well as sponsoring the cluster of schools in the area. Local shops and businesses support parent and teacher association activities, and the local paper regularly features school news. Visiting speakers are a special feature of personal, social and health education lessons: for example, local magistrates explained the working of the local court and provided case studies for pupils to discuss. A number of local organisations use the school's facilities regularly.
- 53 The Performing Arts College has developed a very wide range of contacts and staged a number of performances and concerts with pupils from other secondary, primary and special schools. The music academy enables many young people to play together, and the orchestra has the benefit of a professional conductor from the BBC Philharmonic. Projects in both dance and drama have included workshops and performances with pupils from special schools; 'Friends for Leisure' brings together a group of pupils each week in the drama studio. Additionally, there are frequent visits to and from dance, theatre and music groups.

## Sixth Form

- 54 The excellent links established in the main school extend into the sixth form, and students take increasing responsibility for some of the work with external groups. Music students benefit from master classes with members of the BBC Philharmonic, and the company Zeneca holds science days for A-level students.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are currently satisfactory. The acting headteacher provides very good leadership. Management arrangements are satisfactory for the 11 to 16 section of the school, but leadership and management arrangements in the sixth form are unsatisfactory. Governance is good for the main school and satisfactory for the sixth form.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The current acting headteacher gives the school a clear, strong and very supportive lead
- Arrangements for leadership and management of the sixth form are unsatisfactory
- Many subjects are very effectively led and managed
- Governors have a better than average involvement in school life and a good knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses
- The school does too little to monitor teachers' use of performance data and the monitoring of action taken to meet improvement targets is unsatisfactory
- The curriculum does not meet statutory requirements regarding the provision of ICT and religious education

### Commentary

#### *Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003*

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	5,039,509	Balance from previous year	68,979
Total expenditure	5,136,071	Balance carried forward to the next	-27,583
Expenditure per pupil	2,974		

- 55 Overall leadership and management in the school are satisfactory. The school is currently led by an acting headteacher who has held this post for one term. Her leadership of colleagues and pupils is very good: it is highly professional, blending efficient organisation and clear thinking with a very supportive approach during the uncertainties of an inter-regnum and an inspection. Good staff morale has been sustained as a result. Several initiatives which were her responsibility as a deputy are currently having a beneficial impact, most notably work on teaching and learning strategies and a further range of measures to improve post-16 achievement, included in the 2002/3 school development plan. There has been little scope for the acting headteacher to make binding decisions on leadership and management of the sixth form, where arrangements remained largely unchanged during the term of office of the outgoing headteacher, despite the failure to solve the persistent problem of low achievement. Collectively the senior management team are only just beginning to provide the vigorous, strategic leadership required of them in such areas as monitoring, guiding whole-school assessment practice and analysing cross-curricular provision of literacy, numeracy and ICT.
- 56 Middle management is good overall. Many subjects are now well organised and impressively led: the quality is very good in science, religious education, dance and drama and is good in nearly all other departments. There have been several recent appointments in key subjects and some subject leaders have made useful attempts to improve internal assessment arrangements and widen teaching and learning styles. It is satisfactory in art and ICT. Year heads and tutors are effective and help ensure good continuity in pupils' personal development. Leadership and management of the provision for pupils with special educational needs are very good. There is a strong sense of purpose and teamwork among the staff, and the provision is very well organised. Procedures for identifying pupils with special educational needs are very thorough, and the individual education plans are well written and very thoroughly reviewed. The new Code of Practice is securely in place, and its principles and procedures are very well understood. The school has made sound progress in meeting the requirements of the Disability

Access Act 2001, and has plans in place to provide suitable access to the upper floor of the school.

- 57 The governing body's work with the 11 to 16 section of the school is good, and in the sixth form it is satisfactory. In terms of knowledge about the school and direct involvement in its activities, the governors are very effective. Financial monitoring and advice are of high quality. While technically the last financial year showed a modest over-spend, in reality the school had additional funds known by their local authority auditors to more than cover the amount. Governors are willing to challenge senior managers' decisions and to initiate ideas, and they have played a significant part in the successful pursuit of specialist school status and its attendant benefits. The efficiency of communications, efficient meetings structure and presence in school of key governors have allowed them to be far better informed about school matters than is common. Governors enquired at several points during recent revisions of the curriculum as to the adequacy of ICT and religious education provision; both fail to meet statutory requirements, but governors were assured otherwise by senior managers. The governing body also specified that the previous headteacher should ensure that weaknesses in sixth form achievement were solved by the time of the 2003 results. This obligation was not met, nor does a convincing set of proposals exist showing how the matter would be systematically pursued until solved.
- 58 At the time of the previous inspection, the school had little experience in formal monitoring of teaching, of the impact of assessment or of the role of middle managers. While very considerable improvement has been made on these fronts, the quality is unsatisfactory compared with schools nationally. Senior managers have begun subject-by-subject reviews that involve direct observation of lessons and analysis of pupils' work. These are good, but have so far affected only two departments. Performance management is effectively implemented, but again, without additional monitoring, it can allow the expertise or needs of staff to go unnoticed for too long. Assessment practice is excellent in places and confusing and underused elsewhere, so that the need for consistency, acquired by careful monitoring, remains.
- 59 Overall, the 11 to 16 section of school life has clear leadership, good management of subjects, good teaching and an established pattern of taking a whole-school view of setting targets and monitoring progress towards them. As a result, management oversees a successful learning environment in which pupils make good progress. Because provision for pupils with special educational needs is so well managed, they achieve as well as their peers and indeed have a better record of added value at GCSE. In the sixth form, leadership is weaker and although teaching is particularly strong, the lack of co-ordination in monitoring academic progress has allowed unsatisfactory achievement to persist.

## **Sixth form**

- 60 Leadership and management in the sixth form are unsatisfactory. The role of head of sixth form is defined in essentially pastoral terms and the post-holder is successful in providing areas of very good personal support and guidance for students. However, significant problems have persisted too long, especially in regard to the unsatisfactory achievement made by students in the sixth form. There is also a narrow curriculum and ineffective monitoring of students' academic progress. The sixth form is thus inadequate. This deficiency has developed because the key responsibilities such as setting the vision, providing challenging development plans and rigorous monitoring of academic progress are lodged not with the head of sixth form but with a range of senior managers, especially the headteacher, or spread across the full range of subject leaders, with no clear co-ordinating procedures. Most of these issues have been known to the school's leaders and managers, but comprehensive and radical action to correct them has not been taken.
- 61 The current acting headteacher, as a deputy, initiated an analysis of achievement problems in 2002/3, which led to several measures being adopted. The school development plan did not

persist with this focus, nor set up monitoring procedures to measure whether improvement was on course. However, some benefits are clearly having an impact, especially in terms of the school's policy of earlier examination entry and in the teaching styles and assessment procedures used by a growing number of staff. The sixth form's inclusive approach is commendable, but requires a wider curriculum to ensure a consistently good match of student to courses. Group sizes are generally good and contribute to satisfactory cost effectiveness.

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

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

### ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

#### English

Provision in English is **good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average, and pupils achieve well overall
- Teaching is good, leading to good behaviour and attitudes from pupils
- Good management has identified problem areas and begun to effect improvements
- Targets are not used to encourage learning, and progress is not tracked systematically enough
- There is some underachievement among higher attaining pupils in Years 7 to 9, where assessment is not used to ensure that work is suitably matched to attainment
- Pupils experience difficulty in understanding Shakespeare, because they are not introduced to his works early enough

#### Commentary

- 62 Results of the national tests in Year 9 are well above average, and have been so for the past three years. They are average when compared to pupils' prior attainment. Not enough pupils attain the highest levels.
- 63 Standards of Year 9 work seen during the inspection were well above average. Many pupils attain standards higher than the national expectation. Most pupils achieve well, but some of the highest attaining ones do not do as well as they should, because assessment is not used well enough to identify the different levels of attainment in a class, and, on occasion, these pupils are doing work that is too easy for them: therefore achievement is satisfactory, rather than good. For example, in a Year 8 lesson, all members of the group did the same work on the apostrophe of possession, when some had no need for this. In a more successful lesson, the highest attaining pupils in a Year 7 class were given suitable work, studying a broadsheet newspaper with more difficult language while other pupils studied a tabloid. Higher attaining pupils write accurately and use a wide vocabulary, but their writing lacks variety of sentence structure. They read well, but lack precise knowledge about language. Pupils are not introduced to Shakespeare until Year 9, which means that they find the language very difficult to understand. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are good. They listen attentively and work co-operatively in groups.
- 64 Results in the GCSE examinations are well above average in English and English literature. Looking at results in comparison to prior attainment, they were better in 2002, when they were well above average, than in 2003, when they were average. Girls did far better than boys in 2003. Pupils do about the same in English as in their other subjects.
- 65 Standards of Year 11 work seen during the inspection were well above average. Pupils achieve well in Years 10 and 11 and, overall, achievement is good. Pupils speak confidently. Reading standards are high: higher attaining pupils show perceptive understanding of themes, for example in *Snowdrops*; lower attaining pupils show understanding and personal response. Written work by all but the lowest attaining pupils is accurate. Some movingly written monologues used effective stylistic devices. Girls do better than boys, but by no more than is found nationally.

- 66 Pupils with special educational needs achieve well. The use of 'float' groups allows greater focus on their individual needs, and they benefit from the smaller group sizes.
- 67 Teaching and learning are good overall: the quality of teaching ranges from excellent to satisfactory. Teaching and learning are better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. Teachers have good subject knowledge, resulting in pupils showing interest and being engaged in lessons. Methods are varied, with lots of group work and interactive discussions. Many lessons work to clear objectives, so that pupils know what they are doing and why, and the best lessons end with lively activities that reinforce what has been learned. Teachers manage their classes effectively, so that pupils are well behaved and responsive, joining in activities such as 'spelling football' with enthusiasm. Although marking usually diagnoses strengths and weaknesses, assessment is not well used, especially in Years 7 to 9, to encourage learning. Target setting and the tracking of pupils' progress, so that effective intervention can be made where necessary, are just beginning.
- 68 Leadership and management are good. Areas that need improvement, such as lack of consistency in the delivery of the programmes of study and unsatisfactory use of assessment, have been identified, and work has begun to effect improvement. Monitoring of teaching and of the curriculum is developing. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. Standards have improved, but the department lacks cohesion, and some teachers lack experience in the effective use of the National Literacy Strategy.

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

- 69 Standards of literacy are well above average. Pupils read widely and are encouraged to write in a variety of ways. Speaking and listening skills are good, and pupils regularly use discussion to explore ideas. Important words are usually introduced carefully, so that pupils use technical language well, but this is not always the case, and not all subject areas display words clearly on walls to help pupils spell accurately. Literacy errors in work are often not corrected.
- 70 The school has had several useful training days on how to develop literacy across the curriculum, but resulting practice is inconsistent. The policy on literacy lacks detail, and there is a lack of monitoring to ascertain what is happening and how pupils could be helped more effectively.

### **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

Provision in modern foreign languages is **good**.

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

- Standards throughout the school are very good
- Good leadership of the department means there is commitment to further improvement
- Teaching is good and enables pupils to achieve well
- Assessment procedures are not used well enough to show pupils how to improve
- The number of pupils who continue to study a foreign language beyond Year 11 is low

#### **Commentary**

- 71 GCSE results are well above the national average in all three languages, French, German and Spanish. Girls perform better than boys. Teacher assessment at the end of Year 9 shows that standards are well above the national average.
- 72 In Years 7 to 9, achievement is good. Pupils develop a very good foundation in their use and understanding of the foreign language. They acquire a very good knowledge of grammar, and apply it well to produce very good written work. Speaking skills are very well developed in

situations controlled by the teacher, but pupils are less confident when required to respond to questions spontaneously.

- 73 Pupils continue to achieve well in Years 10 and 11. By the end of Year 11, pupils work to high standards. Their ability to use extended language in both writing and speaking is well developed.
- 74 Teaching and learning are good throughout the school. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. They plan their lessons well and help pupils to develop their language skills through a wide range of appropriate activities. A lively pace in most lessons sustains pupils' interest. Teachers set an appropriate challenge to pupils by using the foreign language extensively in lessons. However, not enough is done to encourage pupils to use the foreign language in everyday classroom exchanges whenever they can. Teachers contribute effectively to their pupils' literacy development by encouraging them to think about patterns in language. As a result of staff absences, there are some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. Where teaching support is available, it is used well and makes an important contribution to the learning and achievement of pupils with special educational needs. Not enough use is made of ICT to help pupils to develop their language learning. Some of the accommodation is inadequate for classes with 30 pupils: the cramped conditions limit the activities that can be offered and have a negative impact on pupils' learning.
- 75 Leadership and management of the subject are good. The recently appointed head of department has a clear vision for the development of modern foreign languages in the school. Effective monitoring has begun and there is a shared commitment to raising standards further. Daily organisation is good and procedures are clear. The Key Stage 3 Strategy has been successfully implemented. Assessment procedures do not inform pupils how to raise the level of their performance.
- 76 Improvement since the last inspection is good. All pupils now study a foreign language throughout the school, and standards have risen. However, the number of pupils who continue to study languages after Year 11 is disappointingly low.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The pupils make good progress and attain well above national standards, because they are well taught
- Good leadership and management play a major part in the department's success and improvement, but there is still some inconsistency in teaching and marking
- Assessment is not being used as effectively as it should be to inform individual pupil targets or to help pupils to improve their work further

### **Commentary**

- 77 National test results at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were well above the national average, and well above those for similar schools. Boys performed better than girls. Over time, results have continued to be well above average, improving at a rate in line with that seen nationally.
- 78 GCSE results in 2003 were well above average, compared with those in all schools and those in similar schools. The pupils showed above average improvement from their individual performance in the Year 9 national tests two years before. Over time, results have remained well above the national average. Girls performed marginally better than boys.

- 79 Pupils' work, seen in lessons and exercise books during the inspection, for the most part reflected this very strong position. Achievement is good, with higher and average attaining pupils substantially improving their algebraic skills. By Year 9, most pupils can solve linear equations with the unknown on each side of the equation. All areas of the National Curriculum for mathematics are covered, and pupils display no weaknesses in one area as opposed to another. In Year 11, 70 per cent are on track to obtain a grade C or better in the GCSE examinations next summer, with scarcely any in danger of not gaining a grade of some sort.
- 80 Teaching is good overall, so that the children learn well. Teachers are knowledgeable. All have been trained to teach mathematics, including one recently appointed to fill a vacancy arising at Christmas because of promotion to another school. Lessons are well paced, with the pupils responding well to the teachers' expectations that they will behave and do their best in class. In fact, the good and often very good behaviour of the pupils is a significant factor in their achievement. As yet, pupils are not as aware of their current standing in relation to national benchmarks as they should be, nor are they receiving clearly stated, measurable, short-term targets for improvement. There is therefore room for improvement in these areas.
- 81 Some teaching is very good, as in a very lively lesson on finding the surface area and volume of cuboids and cylinders. Good and thorough preparation, and very good analytical use of question and answer, combined with humour, meant that the pupils thoroughly enjoyed themselves and learned better as a result. Other lessons seen were, however, workmanlike and unimaginative, so although pupils learned, the experience was not always as exciting as it could or should have been. Just one lesson was deemed unsatisfactory; it lacked pace and did not enable the students to make enough progress.
- 82 Provision for pupils with special educational needs is enhanced by creating smaller group sizes in lower sets. Where they were seen, teaching assistants were effective and well informed and shared their enjoyment of their work with the pupils. Overall, these pupils achieve as well as their peers in relation to their various levels of ability.
- 83 Literacy standards are above average, and quite sufficient to enable the pupils to read and understand their work. Development of literacy could be better supported, however. Teachers are careful when introducing and explaining new vocabulary, but do not always use the vocabulary lists on the classroom walls effectively when doing so. Nor do they follow a regular routine for correcting spelling and grammar.
- 84 The department is well led by a very capable mathematician, who has an excellent vision of how the department should be. She is a very good classroom teacher and commands the respect of the team as a whole, including those who are her senior in years and, in some cases, in status. Teachers are encouraged to observe each other as an aid to improving performance. Departmental meeting time is used very well for staff development; this good use of the time is made possible by a very effective system of departmental bulletins dealing with routine issues.
- 85 In spite of these strong features, efforts to improve consistency and to share good practice in lesson delivery and in marking pupils' work have yet to prove as effective as they need to be if standards are to rise higher. The department recognises these as areas for development, and enhanced monitoring arrangements are now in place to ensure that progress is made. There is also a clear recognition that evidence gained from observing lessons and from what is already sharp and critical analysis of examination results must be used more effectively, so that clearer targets for improvement can be set for both teachers and pupils.
- 86 There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Standards are still well above national averages. Pupils' skills in ICT are much better developed. The departmental website, providing information on schemes of work and links to other mathematics-related areas, as well as encouragement to contact teachers by email for extra help, is a useful innovation. There is a positive thrust to developing the pupils' thinking skills, as is evidenced by the use of the

Cognitive Acceleration through Mathematics (CAME) teaching programme in the lower school and the large number of students who enter the national mathematics challenge competitions.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

- 87 Pupils demonstrate mathematical and numerical skills that are above average, and good enough for them to be able to gain access to the other subjects. Graphs and co-ordinates are effectively used in geography. In history, the pupils use timelines with understanding and had a range of statistical tools to employ when analysing data concerning those who died at the battle of the Somme.
- 88 Teachers have received training in how to incorporate teaching of mathematical ideas into their lessons, but this training has not been sufficiently followed through. There is, for example, no handbook on numeracy across the curriculum, giving examples of where number work can be introduced. Nor is there a school policy for numeracy. In some departments there is good practice, for example the use of GANT charts to plan work in design and technology, but this is not generally the case.

### **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **good**.

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

- Standards are consistently well above the national averages, are rising steadily and show good achievement by all pupils
- Very good leadership and management are bringing about rapid improvement
- Good teaching is resulting in most lessons being stimulating and having effective learning
- Pupils' opportunities to learn through experimental and practical science are very good
- Although much improved, the assessment of pupils' progress is not yet being used to set motivating targets for individuals
- Lack of modern equipment and of appropriate access to computers is limiting pupils' experience of using ICT directly to study science

#### **Commentary**

- 89 Results in the tests taken at the end of Year 9 have been consistently well above national averages for several years. Standards have been rising steadily since 1999. Similarly, results in GCSE examinations have been, and remain, well above national averages, and show improvement year on year. Girls do better at GCSE than boys, but the gap is narrowing. Evidence gathered during the inspection indicated that the upward trend is being maintained.
- 90 Pupils enter the school with levels of attainment that are well above the national average. The maintenance of these high standards shows at least satisfactory achievement by all pupils, and better achievement by a significant proportion. In 2003, for example, almost twice as many pupils gained A or A\* grades in GCSE than was seen nationally, and a higher percentage gained a pass grade. Overall, this represents good achievement from Years 7 to 11. Observation of lessons and analyses of test results showed good achievement by all the present pupils, including those with special educational needs. Boys' progress in Years 10 and 11 is accelerating, partly as a result of changes to the curriculum; if this trend is maintained it should result in a further rise in standards.
- 91 Teaching and learning in four out of every five lessons observed were good or better. Very good relationships between teachers and pupils were evident in all lessons. Teachers treat pupils with unfailing respect, and pupils respond to this evident care by behaving very well and working hard. This very positive climate for learning is most evident when pupils are doing practical

work. The resources provided by skilled and dedicated technicians are of a very high standard; pupils clearly appreciate the stimulating (sometimes exciting) learning opportunities, and take full advantage of them.

- 92 Underlying these successful lessons is an increasingly sophisticated approach to planning. The best lessons have very clear learning objectives that are shared with pupils, followed by lots of activities that require pupils to work out concepts for themselves. The last part is devoted to activities that enable teacher and pupils to assess how much has been learned. Pupils find this evidence of success very motivating, and teachers use the information well, planning to revisit a topic if learning has not been secure. All these features were evident, for example, in Year 8 pupils learning about combustion, Year 11 pupils studying the periodic table and Year 13 chemistry students starting an in-depth study of 'redox' reactions. These lessons were not only effective but also very stimulating, and thoroughly enjoyed by pupils.
- 93 Very good leadership is evident in high morale and excellent teamwork. Teachers and technicians work closely together, with mutual determination to improve the quality of provision. There is an honest, accurate and shared analysis of the department's strengths and weaknesses, which is forming a strong basis for future development.
- 94 The following recent developments and responses to national initiatives exemplify very good management:
- The rapid and effective introduction of the National Strategy for Science Education
  - The introduction of a new GCSE course that is resulting in improved achievement, particularly by boys
  - Procedures used to assess attainment have been completely overhauled. The department now has a detailed and accurate database that is being used to monitor pupils' progress and the effectiveness of teaching
  - Opportunities for teachers' professional development have been improved, and a positive climate established for monitoring teaching and sharing good practice
  - Accommodation has been significantly improved
  - A new initiative has established close links with the feeder primary schools, and is starting to improve the continuity of science teaching between Years 6 and 7
- 95 Teachers are not yet sharing the outcome of long-term assessment with individual pupils, nor using the information to set personal targets. Pupils are not therefore gaining the motivation that comes from recognising their own success, realising what they need to do to improve and setting themselves ambitious targets.
- 96 Despite teachers' expertise and enthusiasm, the use of ICT to enrich the learning of science is unsatisfactory. Lack of specialist equipment, such as data-loggers that can monitor temperature or pulse rates, and too little appropriate access to computers limit pupils' experience to watching occasional demonstrations by teachers.
- 97 Since the last inspection, there has been good improvement. Standards have risen, teaching is better and pupils' achievement has improved. The potential for further improvement is very good.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

The overall provision for information and communication technology is **unsatisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There is good teaching in dedicated ICT lessons
- The work of teachers using ICT is well supported by technical staff
- Pupils have good attitudes to learning

- Very good results are attained by those pupils taking the GCSE course
- The time allocation for discrete ICT in Years 7 to 9 is half the nationally recommended hours, and as a consequence achievement is unsatisfactory; this weakness is compounded by poor cross-curricular provision
- Year 10 and 11 pupils not taking GCSE receive inadequate ICT provision

## **Commentary**

- 98 The 2003 teacher assessments of pupils' attainment in National Curriculum ICT, giving National Curriculum levels above national averages, were too high. Standards of attainment in the classroom are around the national average.
- 99 Pupils follow a course in Years 7 to 9 that complies with National Curriculum requirements. However, achievement in Years 7 to 9 is unsatisfactory, because there is inadequate time for dedicated teaching of basic skills – less than half of the national recommendation. Added to this, cross-curricular ICT is patchy and unplanned, and contributes little to overall achievement. Curricular provision in Years 7 to 9 has historically been delivered by separate departments, with the ICT department contributing some courses. The introduction of the National Strategy for ICT has led to the ICT department playing an increasing role, and they bring expertise and knowledge of the subject that are required to improve attainment.
- 100 GCSE pupils make up around one third of pupils in Years 10 and 11. Those who do not follow a GCSE course are taught ICT within the PHSE programme but this does not adequately cover the required range of skills and applications: as a result their attainment is below average and their achievement is unsatisfactory.
- 101 Results in the GCSE ICT examinations in 2003 were well above national averages, continuing a trend of high attainment over a period of years. Achievement among this group of pupils is very good, and this is reflected in the attainment observed in the classroom. Pupils have a well above average knowledge and understanding of the areas required by the syllabus. They apply what they learn very well in their projects, which feature well-developed skills of analysis, research and evaluation. Pupils develop a good knowledge of topics such as the Data Protection Act, and a very good awareness of the social and moral impact of ICT on society.
- 102 Teaching and learning are good in the GCSE courses. Teachers have good subject knowledge and share this effectively in the feedback they give, both in marking and in lessons. Preparation for lessons is good. Good use is made of technology, such as data projectors and interactive whiteboards, to engage and stimulate interest. Relationships are generally good, and even when pupils are uninterested, they behave well and are generally respectful and biddable. Teachers do not always make the most of opportunities to develop pupils' thinking skills through use of techniques such as mind mapping. Teachers are applying the methods outlined by the National Strategy for ICT, but these are not yet fully embedded.
- 103 The management of ICT in the school is satisfactory. The post of head of department is presently shared by two people while the position is advertised. There has been insufficient progress since the last inspection in the development of cross-curricular ICT.

## **ICT across the curriculum**

- 104 The provision for cross-curricular ICT in the school is unsatisfactory. Although some teachers in some subjects make very good use of ICT to support learning, there is no systematic programme of cross-curricular ICT. Not all subjects deliver the National Curriculum requirements for their areas. There is no whole-school scheme of work to co-ordinate the delivery of ICT through the range of subjects, and this remains patchy and open to duplication of effort.

## HUMANITIES

### HISTORY

Provision in history is **good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average
- There is good teaching from a committed team of teachers
- Pupils learn well and achieve well
- Assessment and monitoring of pupils' achievement are not yet sufficiently rigorous
- The highest achieving pupils are not always fully stretched

#### Commentary

- 105 Pupils' attainment at entry is well above national levels. At the end of Year 9, teacher assessments and work seen in class and in pupils' notebooks continue to show levels well above national norms. Pupils are particularly adept at the skills of historical empathy, and combine those skills effectively with imaginative independent work. For example, in their studies of the civil rights movement in America in the 1950s and 1960s, pupils constructed a paper wall in class, made up of the 'bricks' of segregation laws, and then covered that wall with graffiti expressing their feelings about segregation. The contents of the wall were then used as the basis for a poignant and effective discussion. Pupils make good progress and achieve well.
- 106 Standards of attainment at the end of Year 11 are well above national norms, both in examination results and in work seen. Pupils develop the skills of source interrogation for revision purposes. For example, Year 11 pupils, in advance of an internal test on the history of medicine, effectively reduced a wide range of information to a clear chronological and factual account of the significant contributions to medical advancement, which could be used as a guide for revision. Achievement is good. Boys and girls achieve similarly. However, pupils' achievement is affected by the lack of access to ICT.
- 107 Teaching is good overall, and occasionally very good. Teachers have an obvious love for the subject and this enthusiasm is strongly communicated to the pupils, providing a firm basis for learning. In the best lessons, teaching is imaginative and leads to high levels of interest. In those few lessons judged to be only satisfactory, teachers do not always pursue the most challenging tasks for gifted pupils, and do not always have the appropriate management skills to deal with the more disaffected pupils.
- 108 Pupils' learning and attitudes reflect their teaching. Pupils learn well, and the vast majority engage happily and diligently in their work. Accommodation is adequate. Display is excellent and creates an ambience conducive to learning. Resources are satisfactory, although there is a lack of access to ICT that affects pupils' independent learning.
- 109 Leadership is very good. Management is good. The head of department has produced a range of documents that effectively underpin much of the work of the department. She is aware of the need for more rigorous targeting and monitoring of pupils' performance, and to encourage the highest possible levels of attainment by gifted pupils.
- 110 There has been good improvement since the last inspection, particularly in the area of imaginative teaching to encourage independent learning.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have high expectations and this encourages pupils to achieve well
- Pupils' learning is supported by creative and active methods of teaching
- Teachers and pupils enjoy their lessons, and this raises the level of achievement
- Marking does not inform pupils of how they may improve their work
- Split classes contribute towards a lack of continuity and development that handicaps some pupils
- In a minority of lessons, mundane and mechanical tasks provide little challenge and do not support understanding

### Commentary

- 111 GCSE results in 2003 were well above the national average. Achievement is good and the trend is upwards. There is no significant difference between how boys and girls achieve, although more girls than boys are following the course.
- 112 Standards in Year 9 are above average. Pupils have a good grasp of the key features of the major world religions and the duties that underpin them. Opportunities for analysing why such rituals take place is limited in some groups, and questions of how, rather than why, are prevalent. Pupils identified different arguments for and against the existence of God, and made simple personal judgements that they supported with a statement. Higher attaining pupils considered the philosophies in more depth and demonstrated good understanding of them. Work is usually well presented, and pupils take pride in the display of posters and diagrams. Where pupils have the opportunity for reflective writing, as in Year 7 poems on light and dark, they display sensitivity and imagination. Opportunities are limited, however, and the main differentiation between higher and lower attaining pupils in written work is in presentation, spelling and grammar, rather than content. It is therefore clear that higher attaining pupils are not always adequately challenged, and there is limited opportunity for them to demonstrate a higher level of understanding. Despite the lack of differentiation, the teaching methods support pupils with special educational needs. Achievement overall is satisfactory; however, it is affected by the use of two teachers for one class in some cases, reducing the opportunity for continuity and development of ideas across lessons.
- 113 Standards in the statutory religious education course in Year 11 are average. Pupils rely on knowledge gained in the earlier years, as there is insufficient time or continuity for them to develop their understanding as they mature. Due to the lack of any accreditation for the work they do, many pupils do not strive to understand or question. Teachers work hard to interest and involve pupils in relevant and interesting topics, and as a result pupils achieve well in individual lessons. Over time, however, achievement is unsatisfactory compared to pupils' potential.
- 114 Standards in the GCSE course are well above average. Pupils displayed a good grasp of the key features of Judaism and the practices that affect the lives of believers. Higher attaining pupils explained the significance and symbolism of Jewish artefacts in the synagogue, and evaluated their importance. Lower attaining pupils identified and described the artefacts, but did not analyse their use. Pupils achieve well when they undertake independent research that prompts them to think about why people worship as they do. Their coursework is well written and clear, and in many cases demonstrates a good grasp of the focus question. In work on marriage, higher attaining pupils identified not only the details of the ceremony, but also the religious significance of its elements, for example of declaring vows before God. They organise well-balanced arguments that demonstrate understanding of different views of religious

observance, for example of Shabbat, and present their own opinions. Lower attaining pupils present relevant information, but do not analyse it or use evidence to support their judgements.

- 115 The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers use active learning and creative tasks to help pupils become involved in lessons and, through their enjoyment of the activity, achieve well. In the best lessons, well-informed teachers have high expectations and encourage debate and reflection through the use of careful questioning. They ensure that pupils develop their responses and support their opinions with reasoning. They make good use of visiting experts to enhance the understanding of pupils and to enable them to gain confidence through their enquiries and discussions. Teaching is less successful when teachers deliver information that the pupils simply record, and where pupils are required to make short-answer responses that do not direct them to think about what they learn. Drama and drawing are used well to enable pupils to assimilate knowledge and reflect on what they have learnt. Observation of these activities enables teachers to assess pupils' understanding. Marking, although encouraging, does not inform pupils about what they can do to improve their work, and there are few formal assessments to enable teachers or pupils to monitor progress. The school operates a two-week timetable: where groups in the lower school have lessons bunched in the same week, or where two teachers share responsibility for a class, this results in a lack of continuity and achievement is reduced. Classes learning from one specialist teacher show a significantly higher level of achievement.
- 116 Leadership and management are very good. The department has a clear commitment to raising achievement and an enthusiasm for the subject that is conveyed to the pupils. Good planning supports the work of non-specialist teachers and encourages the involvement of pupils. After a period of marked staff turnover there is now a strong team of teachers who share a determination to raise standards.
- 117 The department is making the best use of wholly inadequate time for religious education in Years 10 and 11. Teachers are working hard to ensure that pupils are supported in their spiritual and cultural development; however, it is not possible to develop pupils' appreciation of the role of religion in society today, or the significance of belief on the actions of individuals or nations, in so little time. Despite identification of this deficiency in the last report, pupils are still being deprived of their statutory right to a religious education. As a consequence, progress since the last report is unsatisfactory.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

Provision in geography is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The high standards in GCSE examinations are the result of good teaching and well-motivated pupils
- Fieldwork in Year 11 is of a high standard and develops the skills of pupils
- Pupils in Years 7 to 9 make good progress because of the well-planned curriculum
- The leadership of the department is good, providing clear guidance and motivation to a well-established team of specialists
- There is a clear action plan to address the issues of pupil progress
- The progress of pupils in Years 10 and 11 in recent years has been unsatisfactory
- The assessment system in Years 7 to 9 does not help pupils to learn
- Not all lessons challenge the most able boys; therefore the proportion of high grades is too small

## Commentary

- 118 Pupils' standards of attainment on entry to the school are above average. Results at the end of Year 9, in teacher-assessed attainment tests, are well above average. Analysis of pupils' work and lessons observed confirms these high standards. The majority of pupils have a good sense of place and can describe the locations they are studying and identify some of the key characteristics. Pupils with special educational needs produce carefully drawn maps and diagrams. The higher attaining pupils are aware of the impact of physical phenomena on human beings, and this was explored through imaginative writing and in poems on hurricanes.
- 119 Pupils' attainment in GCSE examinations is very high. More boys than girls achieve grades A\*-C, but a higher proportion of girls achieve grades A\* and A. The trend over the last four years is for an increasing proportion of pupils to attain grades A\*-C. Most pupils become skilled at geographical enquiry. They carry out a variety of high-quality surveys, both human and physical, and have well-developed practical skills. They use a variety of techniques for analysing their results, and many reach sensible conclusions. Their high standards are achieved through collaboration and co-operation in lessons. A Year 11 lesson on earthquakes was an example: pupils worked sensibly together in pairs to compare plate boundaries.
- 120 Pupils in Years 7 to 9 make good progress. They extend their knowledge and develop skills through well-planned work that uses the National Curriculum but includes appropriate local material. The Year 7 lessons on Manchester Airport encourage pupils to use their skills to understand local issues. In recent years, the progress of pupils in Years 10 and 11 has been less than satisfactory, even though standards are well above average, but current GCSE groups are benefiting from revised teaching that includes a greater focus on examination technique. Their progress in lessons is satisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to their peers, but the higher attaining pupils are not challenged enough.
- 121 Teaching is good. The staff of the department are very experienced and make good use of their local knowledge and knowledge of examinations to support pupils. Teachers are willing to try new approaches and the work, using a thinking skills approach, is beginning to extend pupils' learning. Relationships are very good and teachers and pupils show mutual respect. There is good class control most of the time, and this enables the development of a purposeful learning environment that helps pupils to establish good study skills. There is good use of ICT to support pupils' learning, but this is not yet assessed. Self-assessment has recently been introduced to encourage pupils to take more responsibility for their learning, but it is too early to evaluate its success.
- 122 Teachers have begun to modify work to match the needs of individual pupils, but this is at an early stage of development. The lower attaining pupils are well supported by individual teachers, although there is little in-class support. Where there are support assistants, they make a substantial difference to the learning of individual pupils. Assessment does not yet take sufficient notice of National Curriculum requirements. Marking is inconsistent and uses the inadequate humanities faculty scheme, although new assessment units are being introduced in Years 7 to 9. There is no effective target setting and tracking system to help pupils to know how to improve and to challenge the more able.
- 123 The new head of department provides good leadership and the department is well managed. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

## TECHNOLOGY

### DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results in food, textiles and resistant materials have been well above average
- Good teaching overall leads to good achievement for pupils in these areas
- Pupils have good attitudes towards the subject
- Good support for pupils with special needs enables them to achieve well
- Standards in graphics and systems and control are not as high as in other areas, representing unsatisfactory achievement
- Some teaching methods are not sufficiently varied or flexible to meet the needs of all pupils in mixed-ability groups

#### Commentary

- 124 Teachers assess pupils as achieving standards that are well above average at the end of Year 9, reflecting improvement in the quality of pupils' work and in methods of assessment since the last inspection. In work and lessons seen during the inspection, however, standards were judged to be above, rather than well above, average. Based on pupils' average ability in design and technology on entry to the school, this represents good achievement. There is clear progression throughout Years 7 to 9, and this is recorded well in pupils' folders in food and textiles. Pupils are introduced to a good design methodology and develop the beginnings of good skills in independent research and analysis. Colourful and creative work in textiles is made carefully and with good practical skills. It is recorded in well-laid out, well-presented folders. There is equal emphasis on good craftsmanship in resistant materials areas, but pupils do not always record their design work in the same systematic and careful way. Lower attaining pupils and pupils with special educational needs benefit from the practical nature of the work and achieve well. For example, using a computer graphics package has transformed the work and motivation level of one pupil with special educational needs. In general, however, pupils do not use ICT extensively at this stage.
- 125 GCSE results in 2003 were well above average. Comparative figures, however, show that pupils do not achieve as well in technology as in many other school subjects. The comparatively poor performance of pupils in graphics and systems and control negates the better figure for pupils in food, textiles and resistant materials. There is now greater consistency and continuity of teaching in graphics and systems and control, but there is still some way to go before standards match the potential of pupils, and achievement in these areas remains below expectation. In systems and control, some higher attaining pupils are able to use complex formulae to calculate resistance values, but many lower attaining pupils do not understand the basic concepts and components of electronic circuitry. In work and lessons seen during the inspection, standards were above average in food, textiles and resistant materials, and achievement in these areas is good. GCSE folders contain good examples of testing and experimenting, and research from a variety of sources; they are well presented, with a good balance of hand-drawn and computer-generated graphics. Some higher attaining pupils reach very high standards of practical work in, for example, resistant materials and textiles projects. Where pupils use ICT, it enhances the quality of their work. In general, pupils have good literacy skills and are able to write extended descriptions and evaluations of their work.
- 126 Overall, teaching and learning are good. There is some satisfactory teaching, but no unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Where teaching is good, teachers have very good subject knowledge, have established good working relationships with pupils and make clear what their objectives and expectations are. Consequently, most pupils learn in a structured and positive

atmosphere. Where teaching is only satisfactory, explanation of lesson objectives lacks clarity, resulting in a lack of purposeful activity and some pupils not being fully engaged with the work. In some instances, teaching methods are not varied or flexible enough to cater for the needs of all abilities in the group, and this is reflected in pupils' mildly off-hand attitudes. Teaching is monitored, but this has not been specific enough to rectify the underachievement in some areas.

127 Leadership and management are good. The team leader has a clear vision for the subject and has brought about improvements in the way technology areas work together to create a unified image. Improvements in assessment procedures now provide a better picture of pupils' attainment and progress but, as with some other departmental systems and procedures, there is not yet complete consistency in their application across all areas. The curriculum for pupils in Years 7 to 9 provides a broadly based technological experience. For pupils in Years 10 and 11, the curriculum is enriched by the inclusion of child development and the opportunity for pupils to acquire alternative qualifications through certificates of achievement in food and textiles. A motor vehicle maintenance course, in conjunction with a local college of further education, is of benefit to a group of pupils who might not have gained much from a full GCSE course. Extended opportunities for gifted pupils are good, and pupils have achieved success in a variety of local and national design and technology competitions. Lack of liaison with primary schools causes some repetition of work during Year 7. Major improvements in accommodation have rectified some of the issues raised in the last inspection, but one food technology area still needs upgrading. Resources are adequate, but some hand tools in resistant materials need replacing.

128 Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

### **DANCE**

Provision in dance is **excellent**.

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

- Achievement across Years 7 to 11 is very good
- Standards in GCSE are consistently well above average
- The extra-curricular programme is a very strong feature

#### **Commentary**

129 The majority of pupils, both boys and girls, in Years 7 to 9 are attaining above average standards of performance, often well above what might be expected for their age. The majority of pupils made good progress in understanding how contrast contributes to interesting dance composition, developing safe lifting techniques and use of props in their dances. These and other skills relating to choreographing dance pieces are well developed by Year 9, accompanied by an understanding of the need for 'quality' in performance.

130 At GCSE all pupils achieve well, with an impressive number gaining A\*-C grades last year. Results are well above national averages for the subject. Standards of work in theory lessons are good, with the majority of pupils showing a good understanding of energy systems, building on previous learning in science. The development of techniques, choreography and theory appreciation is very good. Students are also well advanced in using technical dance terminology. The majority of pupils are also confident in transferring performance skills into different contexts. By Year 11, the majority of pupils have developed a substantial range of dynamic qualities in their work, and use these to enhance performance and interpret text as a stimulus for movement. Written work is indicative of pupils' academic potential, and the majority

have detailed, well-organised files and can relate theory to practice. Achievement across Years 7 to 11 is very good.

- 131 Many pupils extend and refine their skills further in the comprehensive programme of extra-curricular dance activities; some take the opportunity to perform in projects both locally and at the highest level. Students from the school are often seen taking a lead in developing dance in partner institutions, such as the recent very successful project with a local special school.
- 132 Teaching is generally good, with the majority of it very good. Teachers have an excellent command of their subject. They know their pupils and have high expectations. Appropriate objectives, planned progressions that move pupils on through challenging tasks and insistence on quality in their dynamics are evident in the very good teaching. Teachers who provide excellent role models often offer inspiration by demonstration. Work is assessed regularly and pertinent feedback on how to improve is available. However, there is less evidence of pupils having specific targets and being aware of them.
- 133 Leadership and management of the department are very strong. In Years 7 to 9, all pupils enjoy the opportunity to develop dance over three years. Although they often work in single-sex groups within lessons, there is clearly equality of access and opportunity for boys and girls. The inclusion of dance from other cultures is a significant feature. As well as teaching aspects of movement, the work on Indian dance in Year 8 served to raise cultural awareness in a predominantly white community. Although the subject has been thriving for a number of years, the new specialist status and facilities have provided further scope for development, and there has been significant development since the last inspection. The work of the dance team offers a beacon of excellence in the school.

## **DRAMA**

Provision in drama is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very good teaching leads to good learning
- Examination results continue to improve
- Very good leadership and management ensure that the curriculum is broadly balanced and enhanced by considerable extra-curricular activity
- Pupils rapidly develop very positive attitudes to their learning
- The assessment procedures are unhelpfully cumbersome

### **Commentary**

- 134 Results in the recent GCSE examination were well above average, which represents very good achievement during the pupils' time in school.
- 135 Pupils enter the school with a broadly average set of knowledge and skills. By the end of Year 9, their understanding of dramatic tension, its purpose and construction, is above average, as a result of work done on forum theatre. By the end of Year 11, pupils achieve very well, attain standards well above average and thoroughly understand what they do. In their mask work, they show acute awareness of placing on stage for maximum and specific effect. They all thoroughly understand the need to work together efficiently and harmoniously.
- 136 Pupils develop very positive attitudes to their learning from the outset. They are very well taught overall, and they respond in a mature and thoughtful way to the wide range of opportunities and challenges put before them. They are wholehearted in their efforts, and are enthused by their results. Teaching is extremely well informed, friendly and rigorous. All pupils are regularly reminded of what they know, and what to do to improve, although the system of assessment currently being trialled is too cumbersome to be really effective. Pupils with special educational

needs or those who are talented all achieve at the same rate as everyone else. The hallmark of the teaching and learning in this department is the delight taken in experiment, trying things out and discovery. This approach has a significant effect on the examination results and on the maturity of the pupils.

- 137 The department is very well managed. There is a real team spirit amongst the staff. Very good progress has been made since the previous inspection, towards the development of the performing arts faculty.

## MUSIC

Provision in music is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils now benefit from a very broad and relevant curriculum, including very good extra-curricular provision
- Very good teaching leads to good learning
- Examination results are now improving
- Good leadership provides a clear vision and practical basis for the musical partnership between the school and the local community
- Assessment and evaluation procedures are well used and effective
- A very positive climate for learning is created and maintained by the teachers
- Some of the accommodation is still inadequate and inappropriate

### Commentary

- 138 Results in the most recent GCSE examination were above average, illustrating the positive impact of the new management.
- 139 There is a very wide range of musical ability among the pupils as they come into the school – overall, it is just about average. By the end of Year 9, pupils understand the construction of chords, and used them to accompany the polka melody from *Wallace and Grommet* to an average standard. By the end of Year 11, pupils have achieved well, and they understand the need for rehearsal, practice and performance. They experience music from a wide range of styles and cultures, including Gamelan music and composition in the ancient and haunting Aeolian mode. By the end of Year 11, pupils' practical skills are generally well developed. Their compositional skills are rigorously developed, with a particular care for individual skills and preferences. Some tracks from the CD of last year's GCSE entries are a delight to hear, as they illustrate a thorough understanding of the business of making music.
- 140 Teaching and learning are good. All pupils are regularly reminded of what they know, and what to do to improve. A very positive climate for learning is created and maintained by the teachers. All teachers have expert knowledge, and lessons are very well planned and prepared. Pupils often work in groups or pairs, and careful and precise use of question and answer is made to test and extend knowledge and understanding at pupils' individual levels. All teachers give very good attention to the use of specialist language and to developing an awareness of just how much they use numeracy in their work. Pupils with special educational needs achieve at the same rate as others. Talented pupils achieve very well. Instrumental lessons, concert and jazz bands and string and wind ensembles all benefit many pupils. The music academy is of particular benefit to younger players who will come to the school in due course, as is the teaching in local primary schools by the head of department, which is already having a significant effect on the standard of instrumental playing and musical experience evident in the current Year 7.

- 141 The department is well managed. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection, although some of the accommodation is still inadequate and inappropriate. Very good progress has been made in the last 18 months.

## **ART AND DESIGN**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are well above average
- Teaching and learning are good, and pupils achieve well as a result
- The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' cultural development
- Pupils' knowledge of assessment is rather patchy, and they are not all sure how well they are doing, or how to improve
- The pace in a small number of lessons is too slow

### **Commentary**

- 142 In the GCSE examinations in 2003, results were well above average. In recent years, results have consistently been at this level. Both boys and girls did better than their national averages. Pupils generally do as well in their art and design as in most of their other subjects.
- 143 In Year 9, standards are well above average, and this is confirmed by the school's teacher assessments. Pupils' achievement is good, and they make good gains in skills, knowledge and understanding in this subject. Their colour work is bright and lively, and in one lesson seen they created intricate designs based on a study of Celtic art. They went on to develop these into three-dimensional boxes, which were richly decorated with tissue paper, string and metallic paint. Chalk and charcoal work was vigorous, and pupils used the materials well to achieve strong tonal contrasts.
- 144 In Year 11, standards are well above average, and pupils continue to achieve well. Colour work continues to be a strength, and pupils create lively collages based on the shapes seen in a collection of musical instruments. Their work in low relief is well made, and they use cool blues or warm browns to produce harmonious effects. Sketchbooks are used extensively, for drawing and for gathering research, although pupils' approach to experimental work is rather hesitant and lacks confidence.
- 145 Teaching and learning are good. In the best lessons a wide variety of materials and methods are available, and pupils are encouraged to develop their work in individual directions. For example, in a Year 11 lesson, pupils worked in paint, collage, pencil and oil pastel, on a variety of scales. They were encouraged to follow their personal strengths and interests, and build on them to create quite different work in a wide variety of styles. As a result, interest levels were high, pupils were active, and good learning was the result. However, in a small number of lessons, the pace is slow, pupils chat too much, and there is not enough for them to do. These lessons restrict learning to a level that is no better than satisfactory. In addition, pupils' knowledge and understanding of assessment are rather patchy, and they are not all sure how well they are doing, or how they can improve.
- 146 Leadership and management are satisfactory. A sound development plan outlines strategies for improving standards, and the quality of teaching and learning is regularly monitored. However, more needs to be done to improve teaching and learning in the weaker lessons.
- 147 Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Standards have been maintained at a level that is well above average, and results have consistently been well above average in recent years. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual and cultural development, by encouraging pupils to reflect on their experiences, and often by studying the

art of other cultures. The accommodation for the subject, however, is cramped, and too small for the size of many groups, so pupils cannot easily spread out their research work, and surfaces quickly become cluttered.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement across Years 7 to 11 is good
- Standards in GCSE are consistently well above average
- The extra-curricular programme is strong
- Assessment of pupils on entry is currently not taking place
- The objectives of specific units of work are not always clear or shared with pupils

### Commentary

- 148 Standards of work by pupils in Years 7 to 9, seen during the inspection, were generally above average in a range of games and gymnastics. The majority of pupils exhibit a variety of skills in football and rugby, often accompanied by technical accuracy. While some lack controlled execution, others are at an advanced stage and perform confidently in games. In gymnastics, pupils understand the need for quality in their performance and show a range of ideas; girls perform paired balances with poise and control, while boys develop and refine shapes in aspects of 'flight'. Girls are generally less ambitious than boys in their choice of movement. All pupils move apparatus and equipment safely and efficiently. There are a significant number of strong swimmers who benefit from the swimming programme. Achievement across Years 7 to 9 for pupils as a whole is good, where units of work allow pupils to pursue an activity to some depth. However, principles of play across groups of games are not always fully understood, and clearer objectives for units of work are not always explained to pupils.
- 149 Standards in core physical education by Year 11 are above average, with many pupils achieving well in netball, trampolining and badminton. Some individuals show very high standards of performance. Across Years 10 and 11, achievement in core physical education is good, because the programme allows pupils to pursue activities in depth over two years, as well as to develop areas such as water fitness. The opportunity for some to gain accredited awards, such as the Junior Sports Leader Award, enhances their ability to officiate and organise.
- 150 Pupils achieve well at GCSE, with an impressive number gaining A\*-C grades last year. Results are well above national averages for the subject. Standards of work in theory lessons are good, with the majority of pupils showing a good understanding of energy systems, building on previous learning in science.
- 151 Achievement across Years 7 to 11 is good. The incidence of non-participation is minimal. Overall, provision for sport is good. A significant number of boys and girls develop and refine their skills in the strong extra-curricular sports programme. There is a comprehensive programme of activities that provides rich opportunities for a large number of pupils to engage in internal or external school competition. Many clubs exist, both for pupils who just wish to participate and those who wish to compete. However, timetabling arrangements mean that too many pupils do not receive the National Curriculum expectation of two hours of physical activity each week.
- 152 Teaching is generally good, with examples of very good practice. Across Years 7 to 9, teaching is very good where there are challenging objectives and a brisk pace, and where good assessments enable teachers to help individual pupils. In Year 9, teaching is very good when it sets realistic tasks for the different abilities within the group, as in the gymnastics lesson where

pupils rose to the challenge of developing shapes in the air, and were then challenged to extend this by using trampettes and springboards to assist flight. Across Years 7 to 11, learning of practical skills is good, but there are missed opportunities to develop understanding by drawing attention to principles of attack and defence in games. Distinctive features of the teaching are the good command of subject knowledge and the healthy balance of individual, small-group and whole-class activity. Teachers offer good role models, and on occasions offer inspiration by demonstration.

- 153 Leadership and management of the department are good. There is a reflective culture and a desire by the teaching team to review practice and seek improvements. The policy of setting in games and the establishment of an in-depth programme, as well as widening experiences in Years 10 and 11 through award courses, are extending pupils. The use of assessment is weak and no baseline assessment on entry is available to monitor progress. Although good use is made of some very good indoor facilities, there are some serious inadequacies that adversely affect teaching outdoors; the 'all-weather' surface and artificial cricket wicket are unfit for purpose and the poorly drained playing field lacks appropriate jumping facilities for athletics. There has been good improvement since the last inspection, with an overhaul of the curriculum and component units of work. In turn, this has led to the development of award-bearing courses in Years 10 and 11.

## **BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES**

### **BUSINESS STUDIES**

Results in 2003 and standards of attainment by the end of Year 11 are above national and local averages, but below those of the school generally. Achievement is satisfactory. Teaching is good, but learning lags behind teaching because students, several of whom are lower attainers, do not always apply themselves in class.

### **VOCATIONAL COURSES**

The school runs AVCE courses in health and social care and travel and tourism. These were not focus subjects, but were sampled. Health and social care lessons seen had satisfactory teaching. Pupils make good progress, are encouraged in independent learning and attain standards in line with national norms. In travel and tourism, teachers have good subject knowledge and pupils make satisfactory progress

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

### **CITIZENSHIP**

The overall quality of provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

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

- Overall standards are below average, because coverage is incomplete
- Leadership shows many strengths and the discreet teaching of citizenship follows a very stimulating programme.
- There is a clear understanding of the importance of the subject
- Pupils feel involved in the life of the school
- Citizenship is not yet fully embedded into the other subjects of the curriculum
- Assessment procedures are insufficiently developed

## Commentary

- 154 Overall standards are below average. Although many features of the programme of work are good, some subjects responsible for covering citizenship topics do not fulfil their obligations adequately. By the end of Year 9, pupils effectively address issues that increase the knowledge and understanding they need to become informed citizens. For example, lessons on anti-social behaviour, racist attitudes, democracy and equal opportunities encourage pupils to accept a responsible role in society. These lessons are complemented effectively by visiting speakers, including magistrates and members of the support services. The pupils have a positive attitude to the school council, recognising it as a good example of democracy working in the school community. By the end of Year 11, the substantial majority of pupils are able to understand the key elements of what it means to be a good citizen, within the school and in the wider community and society. Through such events as Holocaust day and Industry day, pupils develop skills of enquiry and communication. Standards in the sixth form are above average: students actively participate in the local community and accept considerable responsibility when working in local hospitals, care homes and primary schools. Their participation leads to accreditation in the AQA Unit Award Scheme.
- 155 Teaching is satisfactory overall, with some good lessons. Citizenship is effectively delivered through tutorials and is written into the scheme of work in humanities. However, in such subjects as mathematics, science and geography, opportunities to teach citizenship have been identified but do not actually happen. The best lessons, particularly those in which citizenship is offered within other subject areas, such as personal, social and health education and religious education, are characterised by good planning and clear objectives. In these lessons, the citizenship element is clearly identified and explained. A teaching strength is the sensitive way in which teachers handle controversial issues. For example, in one well-taught lesson dealing with relationships, boys and girls clearly recognised the key factors in harmonious relationships. In a lesson taken by two visiting magistrates, pupils worked effectively in mixed gender groups to examine two case studies, developing their decision-making skills. Another strength of teaching is the use of a range of teaching styles, which encourages the pupils to participate in lessons. Senior pupils involved in community projects and work experience write their own reviews.
- 156 The citizenship curriculum is being developed, and an audit of all subjects is underway to identify opportunities to teach citizenship. Monitoring and assessment procedures are inadequate. Inter-department communications are not fully established, and links with colleges and outside support services and agencies are not sufficiently strong.
- 157 A visit from a drama group, 'Warrior Square', highlighted issues concerning refugees for Year 7 pupils. Events such as Cultural Diversity day and Holocaust day effectively extend pupils' understanding beyond the school community. The school council intranet site provides very good communication throughout the school.

## PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION

The overall quality of provision in personal, social and health education is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management of the subject are very good
- Teaching is good
- Pupils feel involved in the life of the school
- The programme is well planned and supported by appropriate resources
- The school has very good links with the local community

## Commentary

- 158 Overall standards are in line with national expectations. By the end of Year 9, pupils have a good understanding of relationships, drug education, alcoholism and aspects of personal hygiene. For example, a lesson on racist attitudes and the relationship between drug abuse and anti-social behaviour stimulated lively discussion and provided a valuable opportunity for pupils to consider the views of others. By the end of Year 11, standards are good. Pupils have a well-informed understanding of sex in the context of relationships. They make good progress in understanding issues concerning homelessness and solvency abuse. Lessons are frequently supplemented by visiting specialists. Standards in the sixth form are very good, with students making an important contribution to the school and the local community. For example, through the Millennium Volunteers scheme, sixth form students offer one-to-one, peer-group counselling on issues related to bullying and drug misuse; the counselling offers significant benefits to both the students and the pupils they counsel.
- 159 Overall, teaching is good, involving a large number of tutors and teaching staff. There is a clear and informative scheme of work, with appropriate materials and resources to support the pupils' learning. As a consequence, lessons are well planned, well researched and supported by a good variety of tasks and techniques. For example, in a well-taught lesson, thinking skills were designed and used to develop mental agility. The subject is well organised and managed. For example, there is an extensive programme of placements for pupils in Year 11 who are involved in environmental work, nursery and primary schools, special needs units, and work with disabled adults and the elderly. Pupils value the placements, because they feel valued and are able to take on responsibility. This scheme is well regarded within the community and by the pupils, who are excellent ambassadors for the school. Sixth form students are involved in an extensive programme of work-based learning, in which they assess their work in terms of participation and achievement, leading to an accredited award in the AQA scheme.
- 160 The leadership and management of personal, social and health education are very good. Although the time allocation has been reduced since the previous inspection, standards have been maintained and a unit award accreditation has been introduced. Pupils are sensitive to their own responsibilities and have supported a large number of charities such as Operation Christmas Child, Macmillan Cancer Care and the Well Spring Kitchen in Stockport.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

### *Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses 2003*

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art	22	100	96.5	27.3	50.2	70.9	87.5
Biology	28	100	96.4	60.7	39.2	92.9	78.6
Business studies	16	100	98.7	31.3	36.8	83.8	80.1
Chemistry	21	100	97.6	71.4	52.4	98.1	84.9
Computing	16	100	95.6	18.8	24.5	65	69.5
Dance	5	100	98.6	60.0	44.9	88	83.9
Design and technology	9	100	97.8	0	35.0	60	77.9
Economics	10	100	98.9	50.0	52.0	84	88.3
English language	31	100	99.4	41.9	36.3	85	80.9
English literature	31	100	99.5	22.6	46.5	74	86.5
French	4	100	98.8	50.0	51.5	90	87.6
Geology	6	83.3	N/A	33.3	N/A	60	N/A
Geography	4	100	98.7	50.0	44.5	90	84.0
German	2	100	98.4	50.0	47.9	80	84.8
History	38	97.4	99.0	47.4	44.6	79	84.6
Mathematics	37	100	96.7	62.2	55.6	91.9	88.8
Further mathematics	6	100	N/A	83.3	N/A	107	N/A
Music	3	100	98.8	0	38.9	60	81.1
Physical education	19	100	98.0	26.3	30.9	74	75.2
Physics	16	100	96.7	12.5	44.6	68.8	81.7
Religious studies	12	100	98.8	33.3	46.7	78	85.6
Spanish	2	100	98.3	50.0	50.2	90	86.9
Theatre Studies	34	100	99.5	58.8	40.1	94.7	83.6
Leisure and recreation (AVCE)	2	100	88.1	0	15.0	80	57.9
Travel and tourism (AVCE)	8	100	90.0	0	19.5	60	62.2
Health and social care (AVCE)	27	100	93.2	39.6	22.3	86	63.5

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

### ENGLISH LITERATURE

Provision in English literature is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Present standards are above average, and students are on track to achieve the targets set by the school

- Students are motivated and stimulated by very good teaching
- The course is well planned, with good course coverage
- In previous years, students have not added sufficient value to their attainment on entry to the course
- Too little use is made of targets to encourage learning, and of assessment to track progress

## Commentary

- 161 A-level results were average in 2002 and 2003. All students gained grades A to E, but fewer than expected gained the top grades, given their level of previous attainment. After careful monitoring, by subject managers, of the causes of underachievement, a comprehensive handbook has been produced, clearly setting out course coverage, encouraging variety in teaching methods and placing emphasis on delivery to the objectives of the examinations. The handbook has substantially improved standards. Achievement had been unsatisfactory, but is currently satisfactory; this is demonstrated by the AS-level results of 2003, which were well above average, with half the students gaining grades A or B, and almost all achieving the targets set by the school. Male and female students performed equally well.
- 162 Standards of work by current students are above average, with many working at the level required to obtain the highest grades. Students analyse text perceptively, making sophisticated comments on how authors create effects through language and structure, for example, in various prose and poetry extracts about World War I. Students' fluent use of technical vocabulary increases the clarity of their arguments. Written work is coherent and well structured, showing understanding of a range of critical opinions. Valuable research on the Internet has enhanced understanding, for example of Year 12 students' awareness of the way Shakespeare portrayed women in *Hamlet*. Lower attaining students know their texts well, but make fewer points, and lack clarity and depth of understanding, especially of form and structure.
- 163 Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have very good knowledge of literature, which they communicate with enthusiasm. As a result, discussion is stimulating, leading to good progress in students' analytical ability and appreciation of their texts. It also leads to reasonably extensive reading around the subject. Visits to the theatre and other places of interest also develop students' understanding. Very good variety of methods, actively involving students, encourages independence of thought and gives students the confidence to formulate their own opinions. In a Year 13 lesson, for example, where different groups analysed different areas of the literature of war, students showed great interest in each other's findings, and learnt a lot from each other as well as from the teacher. This way of teaching shows great improvement on previous, more didactic teaching styles. Constant reference to assessment objectives and frequent timed work prepares students well for examinations. Very good marking makes students aware of their strengths and weaknesses, but assessment is not used sufficiently to monitor progress. Target setting is not well used to encourage learning.
- 164 Recent leadership and management are good. The course is now well structured, and teaching and learning are monitored better than has been the case in the past. The new examination courses have been introduced successfully. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good, although much of it has been very recent. Standards have improved, especially the percentage of passes at grades A-E, and are set to improve further.

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Provision for English language is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average and students achieve well

- Very good teaching inspires students and prepares them well for examinations
- Carefully monitored coursework, with clear deadlines and helpful teacher intervention, helps students produce good personal investigations
- Targets are not used effectively to encourage learning, and progress is not tracked systematically enough

### **Commentary**

- 165 A-level results were above average in 2003. They have been variable for the past three years, ranging from well above average to below average. Students usually gain at least the grade of which their prior attainment suggests they are capable. AS-level results in 2003 were good, with many students gaining the highest grades, and all gaining at least a grade E.
- 166 Standards of work by current students are above average. Female students attain more highly than male students. Achievement by both male and female students is good. Students develop awareness of how language works, systematically and quickly. They assimilate technical terms early on, and use them effectively as the course progresses. They speak fluently and confidently, and discuss productively in small groups, developing each other's ideas. They are lively, enquiring students, able to think independently and originally, but also appreciating the direction and advice of their teachers. Year 13 students, for example, were able to think of snappy, effective captions for photographs during a lesson on editorial writing techniques. Higher attaining students produce coherently developed essays, showing detailed analysis, for example of changes in language over time. Average attaining students make logical, well-supported points. Lower attaining students are less confident, but show sound knowledge of the effects of language. They do not show enough depth of understanding in their analysis.
- 167 Teaching and learning are very good. Very good subject knowledge and understanding of examination requirements provoke keen interest from the students. Teachers use a variety of interesting methods to develop and reinforce learning. Year 13 students, for example, came to a sharper understanding of children's language development by making a presentation to an audience of young parents. Students produce good personal investigations, because these are carefully monitored, with strict deadlines and helpful teacher intervention at regular intervals. Students use computers regularly to support learning, and have many useful handouts from teachers. Very good marking makes students aware of their strengths and weaknesses, but assessment is not used sufficiently to monitor progress. Target setting is not used effectively to encourage learning.
- 168 Leadership and management are good. New courses have been successfully introduced, and there is good communication between the staff teaching the course. Teaching, learning and the curriculum are monitored satisfactorily. Standards have improved since the previous inspection, especially in the numbers of students gaining grades A-E.

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

- 169 Students' communication skills in writing and speaking are above average. Students use technical vocabulary with fluency and accuracy, especially in music, drama, ICT and history. They express ideas clearly. Research skills are also good.
- 170 The school does not provide specialist lessons in communication, but in many subject areas regular opportunities are provided to explore ideas through discussion and group work. Students' written work is not always corrected for technical accuracy.

## MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

The focus subject was German, but French was also sampled, where overall provision is good. Numbers are small. Standards are above average, especially in the understanding of spoken and written language. Teaching is generally good, but students' speaking skills are underdeveloped.

### GERMAN

Provision in German is **good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at AS and A2 levels are above average
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and teaching is lively and engaging
- All students have the opportunity to visit Germany
- The use of assessment to raise standards is inconsistent
- The numbers taking German are very small

#### Commentary

- 171 Examination results at both AS and A2 levels have been above average in recent years. The highest attaining students regularly attain A grades, and no student in recent years has achieved a grade lower than E. Students' results in German are broadly in line with those they achieve in other subjects. Numbers taking German are very small, however, and comparisons with national averages are not valid. There has been no rising or falling trend over the years. Although the pattern varies from year to year, overall more girls than boys take German and achieve the highest grades, in line with national trends.
- 172 Unlike the general pattern in the sixth form, achievement in German has been good for several years, with A-level results showing positive added value in both 20002 and 2003. This trend is sustained in current lessons. Students cover a good balance of listening, reading, speaking and writing in their course of study, and they achieve well. They benefit from regular conversation classes with a native German assistant teacher. Teachers themselves have a very good command of German, and use it to good effect to provide a model for students and to develop students' listening and speaking skills. They expose students to lively and relevant topics that are of social and cultural interest to their age group. Students speak very highly of the individual help teachers give them, often in their own time, and of the lengths to which teachers go in order to find interesting material. Students make good use of the Internet to support their learning, and benefit from German magazines, tape recordings and other resources that are available for them to use independently. Homework of a varied and appropriate nature is set regularly. Work is regularly and conscientiously marked, and students are clearly aware of areas where they need to improve.
- 173 Teachers tailor their lessons to meet the needs of individuals, in the light of information gained from week-by-week marking. However, further use of assessment to promote students' learning, including setting examination-based targets for improvement, is not consistent: the effectiveness of assessment depends on individual teachers and students and does not reflect a coherent policy across the sixth form. In other respects, the subject is well led and managed. The subject leader is an able practitioner and is very well aware of the subject's strengths and weaknesses, as well as of the wider issues facing post-16 languages nationally.
- 174 Every student is given the opportunity to take part in a visit to Berlin, providing cultural enrichment, as well as the opportunity to practise language skills in an authentic setting.
- 175 Given the size of the sixth form, the numbers taking German are very small. Students say that German is perceived as difficult and, as a result, despite strenuous efforts on the part of the

German teachers, students who would benefit from studying the language in the sixth form are deterred from doing so.

## **MATHEMATICS**

The school offers courses leading to mathematics and further mathematics at AS and A2 level. The students study a combination of applied and pure mathematics, mechanics, statistics and decision mathematics. There is a re-sit course for those studying A level in other subjects who did not achieve a grade C in GCSE mathematics in Year 11. About a dozen students chose to retake GCSE this year, and classes were made available for them during the Christmas term. About a third of these were successful in gaining a grade C in the November examinations.

Lessons were seen and work scrutinised for students on the A-level courses, and representative samples of students were interviewed to gain their views of the provision made for them.

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- A2 level results are above the national average, because of good teaching and good student attitudes
- Recruitment to mathematics is very healthy, because the students have enjoyed their work in Years 7 to 11 and have performed well at GCSE
- In recent years, too many students, having embarked on the A-level course, have failed to gain a grade at AS-level

### **Commentary**

- 176 A-level results in 2002 were above the national average. 2003 results were similar, reflecting a pattern of good results over time. There is no significant difference in the results achieved by boys compared to those achieved by girls. The results usually compare favourably overall with what might be predicted from the students' performance in the GCSE examinations they took two years before.
- 177 AS-level results present a less favourable picture. Higher attaining pupils at GCSE go on to good levels of success. Some students, however, are admitted to advanced mathematics courses in the sixth form having studied the intermediate rather than the higher-level paper for GCSE, or having obtained only a grade C. In recent years, many of these students have not been able to rise to the required standard, and have failed examinations at AS-level. In 2003, one in four students completed a year of study but obtained no qualification at the end of it. Recognising this situation as unsatisfactory, the department has taken action. Students with lower GCSE grades are offered enhanced induction arrangements, in the shape of extra tuition and work to do during the summer holidays. Most have availed themselves of this opportunity, but are still finding it hard to come to terms with the work. Nevertheless, their current standards of work indicate that most of them should be successful this summer, provided that they continue to make the necessary effort.
- 178 Recruitment into the sixth form for mathematics is very healthy. There are currently well over 70 students in Year 12 classes and almost 30 in Year 13. Students said that they chose mathematics because they had enjoyed taking the subject at GCSE, and are continuing to enjoy the work and the challenge it presents.
- 179 The standard of work seen during the inspection confirmed that standards are above average overall. Students taking the further mathematics option are all in line for high grades in the summer and have already gained provisional offers at university. Most are looking to study mathematics-related courses. Almost all students in Year 13 have a good basic grasp of their work; they can, for example, manipulate algebra to simplify results and apply the rules to

differentiate products and quotients in the calculus. Higher attaining students can apply the necessary techniques to solve problems with trigonometric identities, whereas weaker students sometimes need guidance. Year 12 students cover the full range of attainment, from those who are finding the going hard to those who are likely to achieve the highest grades. Setting on the basis of prior attainment for pure mathematics is proving of substantial value. Higher attaining students are enabled to press on and are confident in applying basic calculus to problems such as finding the least amount of cardboard needed to make a box of given volume, while lower attaining students are improving their ability to manipulate algebra with confidence when, for example, solving quadratic equations by completing the square.

- 180 Teaching is good, so the students are improving their understanding of the various aspects of mathematics well. Lessons are carefully prepared and well presented, providing the right level of pace and challenge for students of all abilities. The teachers are all experienced and well qualified. All of the sixth form teaching seen during the inspection was good or very good, and the students said that teaching was always very good as far as they were concerned. Skilful use is made of discussion and question-and-answer techniques to ensure that students understand. Most teachers also take care to see that the students have good, clear, accurate notes from which they can work on their own, outside of lessons.
- 181 There is room for improvement in terms of assessment and the use of individual target setting to help raise standards further. There are examples of very good practice in using model answers and very clear marking schemes demonstrating how examination questions should be answered, but these are not replicated across the department. Students are not required to do enough short-term timed tests marked to examination standards, and so do not appreciate the importance of answering under pressure early enough in their courses. All work is checked through, usually in class with good support from the teachers, but the students, although encouraged to do so, are still not annotating and correcting their answers carefully or fully enough.
- 182 The students feel very well supported by their teachers. They feel free to approach them when they are in difficulties. They particularly enjoy lessons in which the interactive whiteboards are used. They say how much clearer this makes geometrical and trigonometric work in particular.
- 183 The mathematics department is well led and managed. The teachers are enthusiastic about their mathematics, as well as very knowledgeable. A reflection of their commitment is that they give their time very generously outside of lessons, at break, lunchtime and after school, to provide extra tuition whenever students ask it of them.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

- 184 In general, the students' skills in mathematics are well developed, and there was no evidence to suggest that their academic progress is limited because of difficulty experienced with numerical or graphical concepts. On the contrary, in several subjects, such as geography, skill levels observed were good or very good. In design and technology, students measured and machined work in metal to make components matching industrial standard tolerances. The fact that the school does not offer a course in key skills and has no policy for numeracy across the curriculum is not, therefore, having an adverse effect of any significance on the students' work.

### **SCIENCE**

The focus subject was biology. Chemistry and physics were sampled, lessons observed, students' files examined and results analysed. In 2002, results were below the national averages in chemistry and achievement was unsatisfactory. In 2003, chemistry results improved, and achievement was good. As a result of very good teaching, leadership and management, the improvement evident in 2003 is being maintained. In physics, results have been variable. In 2002, they matched the national averages and showed satisfactory improvement. In 2003, achievement was unsatisfactory. Good

teaching and management are effecting improvement. Most students are achieving well and if the present rates of progress are maintained, performance should match that of 2002.

## **BIOLOGY**

Provision in biology is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Excellent leadership and management are effecting rapid improvement in all aspects of the provision
- Very good teaching is resulting in increasingly independent and effective learning
- Standards are rising and students are achieving well
- Very good technical support is ensuring that students benefit from a rich variety of experimental and practical work
- Numbers of students opting for AS-level and continuing on to A2 are large and rising
- The large size of some of the classes, in both Years 12 and 13, is limiting the amount of individual tuition and support that teachers can provide
- Lack of specialist equipment and appropriate access to computers is limiting the extent to which ICT can be used to enrich learning

### **Commentary**

- 185 Over the last two years, over 70 students have taken the A-level examination and only two have failed to achieve a pass grade. In both 2002 and 2003, results were well above national averages. Evidence gathered during the inspection – observation of lessons, examination of students' work and test results – confirmed that these standards have been maintained. Results at AS-level have been of a similarly high standard, with a very small proportion failing to complete the course or failing the examination.
- 186 Comparison of individuals' results at A level with their performance at GCSE shows good achievement in 2002 and satisfactory achievement in 2003. A full analysis of achievement in 2003 revealed that higher attaining students exceeded expectations, whereas lower attaining students did not fulfil their potential. This realisation resulted in immediate changes to the curriculum and teaching methodology, which are proving successful. In the present Years 12 and 13, the majority of students are in line to exceed expectations based on their performance at GCSE, and none are falling below their expected level. This good achievement is shared by students of all levels of attainment, and by boys and girls.
- 187 Teaching and learning are very good. The basis of teaching is exceptionally good planning. Every lesson has a wide variety of activities that engage students in active participation, and which emphasise understanding as well as the acquisition of knowledge. The resources to support learning, such as models, guidance papers and practical apparatus, are of a uniformly high standard. All these features were evident in a very good lesson on genetic engineering, in which students were required to model the process and then construct their own lexicon giving the meanings of all the technical vocabulary. The final activity asked them to demonstrate their grasp of the topic, showing the security of learning. Students' recognition that they had mastered a difficult piece of work was clearly motivating and a real boost to self-confidence. Relationships between teachers and students and among the students themselves are very good. All lessons have an atmosphere of shared commitment and pleasure in the success being achieved. Students are leaving the school as independent, self-confident young people, well prepared for the demands of higher education.
- 188 Excellent leadership and management have established high morale and a very strong ethos in this large department. All six teachers who share the responsibility for the several classes work together as a mutually supportive team, sharing ideas and good practice. The schemes of

work, which include innovative teaching methodology, underpin a very good curriculum and ensure full co-ordination of parts of the syllabus covered by different teachers. The use of assessment to monitor learning and to take effective action when weaknesses are detected is exemplary. Students are given constant feedback on their performance, with clear guidance on how to improve. Where appropriate, teaching is modified, as exemplified in the effective responses made to the detection of underperformance by lower attaining students.

- 189 The growing popularity of the subject has resulted in some of the teaching groups in both Years 12 and 13 becoming very large (one group in Year 13 includes 17 students, and two of the Year 12 classes contain more than 20). In these groups, experimental work is seriously compromised. It is impossible for some practical exercises to be done simultaneously, which disrupts the proper sequencing of work. The amount of personal tuition, for example detailed responses to homework, is inevitably limited.
- 190 Despite staff enthusiasm and expertise, the use of ICT to enlarge learning opportunities is unsatisfactory, due to lack of specialist equipment such as data sensors and insufficient numbers of computers.
- 191 In recent years, there has been good improvement and the potential for further gains is very good.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

The provision for ICT in the sixth form is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching and learning are very good overall
- Relationships between teachers and students are good
- The management of the A and AS-level courses is good
- Results in the past have been well below average, partly because of a policy of low entry requirements and partly because students have not made the progress they should have
- The subject is not popular with girls, and too few of them opt for it

### **Commentary**

- 192 AS and A2 level results have been below national averages over a period of years, because some students have been accepted on courses despite low attainment in GCSE ICT in Year 11, or, where ICT GCSE has not been taken, across the core subjects. A-level added value for the past three years has been negative. The achievement of the current Year 13 in their lessons, however, is good. This improvement on previous years is largely due to better development of knowledge and study skills at GCSE by this cohort, and to teaching that features more rigorous assessment, which is used to target areas for improvement. An example of this is an increased emphasis on programming in Year 12, which prepares students better for the Year 13 project work.
- 193 By Year 13, pupils are making good progress in lessons and attaining above average standards; they are using programming languages to create some challenging programs, including a basic Internet messenger service. Their knowledge and understanding of hardware and software issues, required by the examination syllabus, are good. Year 12 students are making satisfactory progress overall; they are using pseudo code to develop solutions to the tasks set. Achievement by Year 13 is good.
- 194 Teaching is very good. Teachers have a real enthusiasm for the subject and convey this well to students, engaging and motivating them. Their subject knowledge is very good, and this is especially evident in lessons that involve programming. Teachers use question and answer

very well to test understanding and to encourage extended responses. Students are prepared well for examinations. Relationships between students and teachers are very good. The latter make themselves available for advice and support. The programming club also helps to forge productive working relationships.

- 195 The management of sixth form courses is good. The teacher responsible since September has a very clear view of what needs to be done to improve performance in examinations, and has instituted a number of measures that are already improving practice. The number of girls who opt for ICT is very low, due to the narrowness of the sixth form curriculum. There has been satisfactory overall improvement since the last inspection.

### **ICT across the curriculum**

- 196 The provision of cross-curricular ICT in the sixth form is poor. Few subjects make much use of the medium to advance learning in their area. Although an ICT extension course is offered, uptake is poor and few students attend. There is no key skills course to give students secure knowledge of applications they are likely to meet in the wider world.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **GEOGRAPHY**

Provision in geography is **good**.

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

- In 2003 over half the students achieved AS-level grades A or B
- In 2003 half the students achieved A-level grade A
- The teaching is good in the sixth form, because the teachers are experienced and enthusiastic
- The head of department provides clear guidance and has a vision for the development of the subject
- In recent years there has been some underachievement of students at A level
- The sixth form groups are almost exclusively boys

#### **Commentary**

- 197 The results in GCE A-level examinations in 2002 were above the national average. The results were high in 2003, but the group was too small to make any reliable comparisons.
- 198 Many more boys than girls take geography in the sixth form. Progress has been unsatisfactory, because too many of the boys have taken the line of minimum effort for adequate returns. Added value has been negative for the last four years. However, the department has taken steps to improve the situation, and in recent years there has been less underachievement. The current Year 12 and Year 13 students are well motivated and are performing well. Year 12 students are making good progress in lessons, because of their enthusiasm and interest. Year 13 students are making appropriate progress, even though they are often quiet and unresponsive in class. These recent improvements are not yet well enough established to confirm the improved trend.
- 199 Year 13 students have been stimulated by the high-quality fieldwork in North Wales and have produced some excellent work, analysing till deposits and examining glacial features. Year 12 students have a good understanding of Central Place Theory and are able to relate this to real conditions through studies of Cambridge and the Dutch polders.
- 200 Teaching is good throughout the sixth form, and members of staff provide professional guidance and demonstrate their own expertise and experience in geography. As a result,

numbers of students are rising, and most continue from AS to A2 level. The provisional numbers for 2004 are encouraging.

## **HISTORY**

Provision in history is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There is very good teaching by subject specialists with very good subject knowledge
- The department is putting in place strategies to combat underachievement
- Leadership is very good and management is good
- Assessment, targeting and monitoring of students' work are not sufficiently rigorous
- Students do not read sufficiently widely around the subject
- There is a lack of access to ICT facilities to aid independent learning

### **Commentary**

- 201 Standards of attainment at entry to the sixth form are well above national averages. Results in 2003 were broadly average. Current work seen in class and in the students' files shows levels of attainment that are generally above national norms. Although lower attaining students' essays are descriptive or narrative rather than analytical, most students' work displays an understanding of the questions, and the application of some analysis in an attempt to provide balanced answers. The work of the highest attaining students is often mature and analytical, and those students make sound judgements, consistent with the evidence used by them in their work.
- 202 Current achievement in lessons, therefore, is satisfactory. However, until 2002, there was considerable underachievement and many of the underpinning causes of that underachievement are still extant. In particular, procedures for monitoring, targeting and assessing individual students' progress are still not sufficiently embedded and need deeper and more rigorous application.
- 203 Teaching is very good. A similarly strong subject profile of teaching applies throughout the sixth form; teachers' knowledge and expertise are recognisable strengths of the department. Their expertise is augmented by a commitment to the students, shown by the additional classes they offer after school for revision purposes. Students' learning, although good overall, lags behind the teaching, because students do not read sufficiently widely around their subject and are too often inclined to be passive recipients rather than active participants. Students' lack of independent research is exacerbated by inadequate access to ICT facilities.
- 204 Leadership of the department is very good. Management is good. The head of department has a very clear vision for the future advancement and strengthening of the subject. To this end, she has already successfully initiated effective strategies such as student file checks and expectations sheets, which clearly delineate departmental expectations of students' work and attitudes. She is aware of the need for even more rigorous monitoring of the key elements of assessment and targeting of students' work. She is a very good role model of commitment to continually improving standards. In all this, she is effectively supported by her colleagues.
- 205 Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

Provision in religious education is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers' good knowledge and understanding support clear delivery and explanation to students
- Good relationships in the classroom are enabling students to be mutually supportive yet challenging
- Active learning methods are enabling students to grasp difficult abstract concepts
- Students do not have enough practice in the use of assessment to enable them to understand the requirements of the examination marking criteria
- Students do not reinforce what they learn in lessons by applying it to examination questions on a regular basis

## Commentary

- 206 Evidence from the inspection suggests that results in 2004 are likely to show a big improvement on the results of the previous two years. Results for 2002 were poor, following a change in syllabus and unresolved questions about marking. The syllabus was changed back in 2003; however, that year the students in Year 13 had to complete the course they had started. Results in 2003 improved and are similar to the national average, though for the high calibre of student involved, this still represents poor added value.
- 207 Standards of work seen during the inspection in the sixth form are average. Achievement in lessons is currently good. Students are developing a secure understanding of the different ethical theories, and apply them to a variety of situations and moral dilemmas, such as environmental issues. In a lesson seen, they applied Hedonic calculus to identify their judgements, and higher attaining students obviously understood the ethical arguments they were applying. Their study of the synoptic gospels was secure and they were developing a good grasp of theological concepts, such as 'prophecy', and applying them to the gospels. In essays, students demonstrate understanding of the various arguments for the existence of God. They write clearly and fluently, although there is limited independent explanation of the merits of the different arguments. Students achieve a high standard in class when, with the guidance of their teachers, they are happy to take the lead in their work and debate together, challenging assumptions and striving to explain concepts to the group. They receive very good support from their teachers, in the form of structured question sheets that identify the focus questions of the lesson. Although they use these well in class as guides, they do not always complete them at home or use enough detail to ensure that they are useful for review and revision at a later date. Some students who elect to join the course are not as well suited as their peers, and so do not achieve as well as they might. As a consequence, the results in the AS-level are not as high as they might be, and a significant number of students do not continue on to A level.
- 208 The quality of teaching in the sixth form is very good. As a result of this teaching students flourish, and develop the confidence to debate and challenge their colleagues and the teacher. The very good relationship between staff and students raises achievement; in one lesson, students were observed moving into the role of teacher and responding to questions posed by their peers. Lessons are well planned and their good subject knowledge enables teachers to give clear and succinct explanations about challenging material. Creative activities are used to help students to grasp difficult abstract concepts. At times, achievement within class is higher than is evident in some written work. Although students have ample time to discuss the theories studied, they have much less opportunity to develop understanding through written explanation. Essays are well marked, with supportive advice, but too few are set to monitor accurately the progress of the students or to identify areas where understanding is superficial. Students do not have enough practice in the use of assessment to develop a clear understanding of the examination marking criteria.
- 209 The leadership and management of the subject in the sixth form are good. Students are well guided through a coherent course, and opportunities to attend conferences and hear high-quality speakers support their achievement. Teachers are developing their own knowledge and

understanding through additional study, and this is enabling them to deliver a high-quality course. Results have improved since the last report; however, the sixth form as a whole does not receive its statutory entitlement to a religious education.

## **ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING**

### **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

The focus of this inspection was AS and A2 design and technology, product design, but food technology was also sampled. Provision in food technology is satisfactory. Examination results and comparative data show that students have not performed to their full potential. Evidence from work and lessons seen during the inspection indicates that current students in both years are working at average standards. Teaching is good and students are very positive about the value of the course.

### **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY (PRODUCT DESIGN)**

Provision in product design is **satisfactory**.

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

- Teaching is good and teachers have high expectations of students
- Some students attain very high standards of design and craftsmanship
- Teachers show a high level of commitment to developing students' technological capability
- Gifted students are given good opportunities to extend their work to high levels
- Some students are accepted onto the course without due consideration of their suitability, and consequently achievement by these students is unsatisfactory
- Some students do not manage their own time and learning well
- Curricular and examination arrangements do not allow for alternative accreditation for students with different aptitudes

#### **Commentary**

- 210 Examination results have been below average for the last two years. Prior to that, they compared favourably with national averages. In 2003, no student gained the higher grades of A and B, and consequently the comparative data indicates below average achievement. The comparatively poor performance can be attributed to a number of factors:
- Initial difficulties with the change to the new AS and A2 examination system caused some loss of momentum in a successful and well-established course
  - The school experienced particular problems with the syllabus chosen
  - Lack of rigour in selecting students for the course resulted in some incompatibility with course requirements
  - Some students had poor time management skills.
- 211 Some progress has been made in rectifying these weaknesses:
- Teachers now have greater knowledge and experience of guiding students through course requirements
  - A recent change of examination board has resulted in a more appropriate course for students
  - There are plans to change the advice given to prospective students and apply more rigorous entry requirements
- 212 However, strategies for developing students' time management skills and capacity for independent learning have still to be developed.
- 213 Standards of work by current Year 12 students are above average. Students have a good background knowledge of materials and practical processes. This knowledge, together with good verbal and written communication skills, enables them to engage in mature discussion at an advanced level. For example, in one well-taught lesson, students discussed the types and

uses of modern composite materials, and were able to offer examples of how these affect our everyday lives.

- 214 Standards within the current Year 13 group are highly variable. Some students are working to high standards of design and craftsmanship, and their achievement is good. Others, however, are not supporting their practical work with sufficient design and development, and do not have sufficient knowledge of, or involvement in, their own learning. For example, some students had no awareness of what caused their poor AS-level results, and were thus unable to form a plan of action to correct them. Some students admitted that poor time management had contributed to their poor AS-level grades, and yet were still unsure of deadline dates or target grades for A2 work. Evidence from inspection indicates that students will improve on their disappointing AS results, but that achievement for the group as a whole is only satisfactory.
- 215 Teaching is good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and high levels of personal skill and craftsmanship. They have high expectations of students, enthusiasm for the subject and a strong commitment to helping students do well. This good teaching leads to good learning in lessons, but learning over time is less secure for those students who do not consolidate the information through independent learning. Assessment procedures are thorough, but the use of assessment information to monitor progress in the medium and long term and to inform students is not satisfactory, because it is not targeted precisely enough towards those students who find it difficult to work independently. Procedures for identifying gifted students are good, and strategies for promoting their interests are well developed. Strategies for developing independent learning skills among those students who are not so gifted are an area for development.
- 216 Many students have positive views of the help and advice they receive. Many intend to pursue design-related studies in higher education, and they value the experiences that this course gives them. Higher attaining students devote a lot of time and commitment to their coursework, over and above normal lesson times.
- 217 Leadership and management are good. Staff expertise is deployed well, and good teamwork provides mutual support. Resources are used well, including utilising the skills and expertise of former students now pursuing successful careers in design and technology. The curriculum offered is narrow and does not meet the needs of all students. No alternatives to standard AS and A2 courses are available. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

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

### **PERFORMING ARTS**

The inspection focus subject was drama, but sampling of music, music technology, dance and the integrated 'performing arts' AS course also took place.

The Performing Arts College status is contributing very effectively to sixth form provision, not only for those on its courses but through its productions to the school experience of all pupils and students. The integration of dance, drama and music is established, although further work needs to be done to ensure the full integration of the music department, because of the natural separation of teaching rooms and offices. The range of examination courses for students in Years 12 and 13 is good and an exciting and recent development is the AS course in performing arts, which achieves the task of integrating all three subject areas into one course, aimed specifically at the all-round student.

## DRAMA

The quality of provision in drama is **excellent**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The students attain standards far above average, because the quality of teaching is consistently excellent
- The quality of leadership is excellent, and has already provided a secure basis for rapid and extensive development of drama as an integral part of the performing arts faculty
- Students reach very high levels of attainment
- Very positive relationships in the department result in students taking responsibility for their own learning

### Commentary

- 218 Results in the 2003 AS and A2 level examinations were well above average, maintaining the trend achieved by the department over recent years. Students have consistently achieved well in examinations, adding successfully to already high GCSE attainment and recording strongly positive added value in all years from 2000 to 2004. In lessons seen, standards were also very high. Students showed excellent understanding of stagecraft and interpretation of character. Their ability to reach staging of a scene from the germ of an idea – such as their work on *Timberlake Wehrtenbaker* – shows great ingenuity and a rigorous intellectual discipline. Written work shows real understanding of theatrical technique.
- 219 Teaching is excellent, and learning is very efficient. There are very strong and positive relationships between staff and students. The result is a sense that teachers and students are together engaged on a voyage of discovery. Teaching is characterised by excellent subject knowledge and acute knowledge of students' individual learning styles. A very powerful sense of morality and of the need to work together runs through the work of the department. They also have a lot of fun and demonstrate that discipline and enjoyment can be compatible.
- 220 Leadership within the department is excellent. There are very good schemes of work, an ethos of hard work and commitment, high standards, and excellent subject knowledge. The continued integration of drama with dance and music, as an outcome of the Performing Arts College status, represents very good improvement since the last inspection.

## Music

Very good provision for music in the sixth form is leading to increasingly high standards in both AS and A-level examinations. The standard of composition is particularly high, showing understanding and inventiveness and a due sense of the listener. The quality of teaching and learning is often excellent. Students work very well together and put a very high value on the subject knowledge of their teachers. Some of their performances are of a very high standard. All students work hard, mostly because they are enjoying what they do.

### Music technology

Very good provision is made for music technology, at AS-level only at the moment. The course will not be available to A2 candidates until 2005. The standard of attainment is very high, and has been so consistently for the last few years. Teaching and learning are very good. Students enjoy their work, and are enabled and encouraged to be experimental within the constraints of the space and the examination syllabus. Fortunately, the course attracts small numbers at the moment – if there were any more the accommodation and resources would be seriously lacking.

## Performing arts

The new AS-level course in performing arts is a direct result of the creation of the performing arts faculty. This synthesis of dance, drama and music shows every sign of being a very successful course, with high results and levels of achievement. Students who take this course show themselves to be mature, thoughtful, responsible and capable of working extremely well with each other.

### Dance

In the sixth form, students are assured performers, and the dynamics of their movement suggests that they will gain top grades. In recent cohorts, the percentage of students gaining A grades has been impressive. The number taking the subject at AS-level shows a dramatic increase. Students are very strong in leading and teaching movement phrases to one another. Written work is generally detailed and well organised, showing appropriate research skills in such aspects as physiology and dance notation. However, presentational skills, when speaking, are less well developed. Many pupils extend and refine their skills further in the comprehensive programme of extra-curricular dance activities; some take the opportunity to perform in projects both locally and at the highest level. Students from the school are often seen taking a lead in developing dance in partner institutions, such as the recent very successful project with a local special school.

Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have an excellent command of their subject and have very high expectations of their students. Appropriate objectives, planned progressions that move pupils on through challenging tasks and insistence on quality in their dynamics are evident in the very good teaching. Teachers who provide excellent role models often offer inspiration by demonstration. Work is assessed regularly, and pertinent feedback on how to improve is available.

## ART AND DESIGN

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Current standards of work have improved, and are better than recent examination results
- Colour and composition work is strong
- Work in sculpture is vigorous and exciting
- In some lessons there is not enough pace, and a lack of a sense of urgency
- Students do not draw often enough from observation to develop fully their skills in recording what they see

### Commentary

- 221 Results in the A-level examination in 2003, though an improvement on those of the previous year, were nevertheless below average. Results have varied in recent years, and are usually below average. Students generally do worse than expected, considering their GCSE results, and added value at A level has been strongly negative in three of the last four years. In the AS-level examinations in 2003, results were above average, and students generally did as well as expected, considering their GCSE results.
- 222 Standards are above average in Year 12 and achievement in lessons is satisfactory. Mixed media work, using paper, wire and string, is delicate and subtle, achieving a wide range of decorative textures and shapes. Three-dimensional work is lively, and students create small sculptures from scrap materials, based on spiral forms and labyrinths. These are developed into bold drawings, further exploring the shapes and forms. Students use sketchbooks well, for research and for developing their ideas, although their experimental work is a little hesitant.

- 223 Standards are average in Year 13 and students' achievement in lessons continues to be satisfactory. They use ICT well to record from still-life objects, distorting images to produce very attractive and unusual effects. Composition and colour work become increasingly complex: students develop ideas based on the study of cubism into impressive work in low relief. However, they do not work very often from observation, and as a result their skills in recording what they see are not fully developed.
- 224 Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the best lessons, methods and materials are interesting and exciting, and there is a good level of challenge in the tasks set. For example, in a lesson on sculpture, students used withies, wire and string to create free-standing sculptures, which explored the shapes seen in spirals and labyrinths. They had to try hard to make complex shapes in three dimensions, creating delicate spirals and twisted forms. Students' interest and engagement levels were high, and good learning was the result. However, in a small number of lessons there is a lack of a sense of urgency, the pace is too slow, and unsatisfactory learning can be the result.
- 225 Leadership and management are satisfactory. New assessment arrangements have recently been introduced, and students now work in a wider range of materials and processes. These measures have helped to improve the standards seen in the school, to a level that is better than recent examination results. However, improvements need to be sustained for students' achievement to be secure in the future.
- 226 Improvement since the previous inspection is unsatisfactory. In recent years, results have been too low, and students have usually not achieved as well as expected. Although recent standards in the work in the school have shown improvement, they have not yet recovered to their previous level.

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

### **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

Provision in physical education is **good**.

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

- A and AS-level physical education is available, as well as other enrichment opportunities in sport
- Some students underachieve at AS and A level
- All students gained A-E grades at A level in 2003
- Student research and presentational skills are limited

#### **Commentary**

- 227 Standards in the work of Year 12 and 13 students observed during the inspection were above average, and their current achievement in lessons is good. While a significant number of students have gained A-E grades, with an appropriate number of A and B grades, the overall attainment at AS and A level over recent years indicates that some of the students are not gaining the grades of which they are capable. Apart from in 2002, there has regularly been slight underachievement in recent years. Students show appropriate knowledge and understanding of physiological and psychological factors affecting performance, and their ability to make links with previous learning is generally sound. In a Year 12 session, students were working on the topic of skill acquisition and the significance of different theories, and linking them to their own sporting experience. With promptings from the teacher, they were able to make appropriate connections. In Year 13, students showed a positive approach to learning about comparative issues and sport in the USA. Some showed valid insights into the influences and features affecting the development of football in that culture. Students endeavoured to draw on personal experience to relate theory to practical examples. However, some students do not

read around the topic independently, prior to teaching sessions. Research skills of some students are weak, and they lack experience in the key skill of presenting findings, making them over-reliant on teacher input. The approach to work at this level by a significant number of students is too passive.

- 228 Achievement at AS and A level reflects the amount of independent work put in by individual students; those who rely exclusively on the teacher underachieve. On the Community Sports Leader Award course in Year 12, students are making good progress in learning how to plan and devise skill circuits. Their achievement on this course enables them to make contributions to the wider sporting life of the school.
- 229 Teaching is generally good, with examples of very good teaching. Teachers provide a range of interesting tasks to engage students. Subject knowledge is good, and this enables teachers to provide stimulating examples to illustrate their teaching. In the very good sessions, pace is maintained throughout and questions are directed at individuals, always encouraging the link between theory, practice and previous learning. In some very good teaching about the structure of the heart and the path of blood flow, the teacher knew her students and was able to direct questions appropriately in order to enhance learning and test their knowledge of the topic. Teachers' expectations of their students are generally high. However, insufficient demands are sometimes put on students to learn independently, in the form of either preparatory or follow-up work, which leads to students being unable to present and disseminate relevant topics well. The adoption of a research culture, in which students are expected to independently research specific themes and provide evidence from the media relating theory to practice, is underdeveloped. Little use is made of extension tasks for the higher attaining students. Teaching on the Community Sports Leader Award Course is good and students are expected to lead sessions appropriately.
- 230 Leadership and management of the programme at sixth form level are good overall, with effective co-ordination and strong leadership in a large department. However, there are some inconsistencies in the rigour with which written work is assessed and the provision of feedback. There has been steady improvement since the last inspection. The Community Sports Leader Award is an important development. There is also a recreational physical education programme available, and students are encouraged to find a place for physical activity in their programmes. Some sixth form students make an invaluable contribution to the extra-curricular programme, not only through representation in competitive sport, but also by assisting teaching staff in coaching and administrative duties.

## **BUSINESS**

### **BUSINESS STUDIES**

Provision in business studies is **satisfactory**.

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

- Standards of attainment at entry to the sixth form are above national averages
- Good teaching is given by a dedicated team
- Leadership of the subject is good
- There are very good relationships between teachers and students
- Students underachieve in the sixth form
- Accommodation and resources, particularly ICT resources, are inadequate
- A lack of wider and in-depth reading around the subject impacts on students' performance in both class work and examinations
- Monitoring and assessment of individual students' performance are not yet sufficiently rigorous

## Commentary

- 231 Results at A2 are only in line with national averages. Since students join this course with standards which are above national averages, despite the absence of the sixth form's highest attainers, such results indicate unsatisfactory achievement. The standards reached by current students, as seen in lessons and in their written work, are also in line with national averages. Students' projects and written work are interesting, and are, for the most part, professionally presented. Students confidently use a wide range of business terminology and demonstrate clear understanding of important business concepts. The strength of the students' class work is their basic understanding of the subject matter and the steady accumulation of knowledge. However, students are not yet sufficiently confident with analysis, interpretation and evaluation of data, and these are still relative weaknesses.
- 232 Current achievement remains unsatisfactory and students do not make the expected progress. There are many identifiable reasons for this. Students' progress is hindered by the lack of wider and in-depth reading around the subject, partly because additional interests outside school impact on the time they can devote to learning. Accommodation is unsuitable for the large groups, and students have too little access to ICT facilities.
- 233 Against this background, teaching is good, and sometimes very good. In the best lessons, teachers have excellent rapport with students, and their expert subject knowledge underpins discussion and lends clarity to the explanations provided. Lessons are carefully planned, and effective use is made of case studies and other activities, to allow students to apply and extend their learning. Students are very well supported academically. However, in those lessons judged to be only satisfactory, a tendency to over-provide such help for the students is partly at the expense of ensuring that they have enough practice in the skills that will enable them to become more independent learners.
- 234 Generally, students respond well in lessons. Their attitudes are mature and they sustain interest. A small number of higher attaining students maintain intellectual rigour and show evidence of wider reading. Too often, however, students are happy to be passive recipients rather than active participants in their own learning. This means that, too often, students' learning lags behind teaching.
- 235 Leadership is good. The head of department gives very effective and very efficient leadership to the subject. He has a clear vision for the future of the department, which sensibly encompasses plans to strengthen both the academic and the vocational aspects of the department's provision, to meet the wide and differing needs and aspirations of future cohorts of students. Management is satisfactory. The head of department is committed to high standards and high achievement. However, detailed assessment, targeting and monitoring of students' performance, and swift action taken on the basis of the data, are not yet sufficiently rigorous.
- 236 Business studies has made satisfactory progress since the time of the previous inspection.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
<b>The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>
How inclusive the school is		3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	5	4
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	4	3
<b>Overall standards achieved</b>		<b>3</b>
Pupils' achievement	5	3
<b>Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities</b>		<b>3</b>
Attendance	3	3
Attitudes	2	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		3
<b>The quality of education provided by the school</b>		<b>4</b>
The quality of teaching	2	3
How well pupils learn	3	3
The quality of assessment	5	5
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	5	5
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		2
Accommodation and resources	5	5
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		3
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	5	5
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		3
The quality of the school's links with the community	1	1
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	2
<b>The leadership and management of the school</b>		<b>4</b>
The governance of the school	4	3
The leadership of the headteacher		2
The leadership of other key staff	5	4
The effectiveness of management	5	4

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

