

INSPECTION REPORT

KIRKBY STEPHEN GRAMMAR SCHOOL and SPORTS COLLEGE

Kirkby Stephen

LEA area: Cumbria

Unique reference number: 112433

Headteacher: Mr David Keetley

Lead inspector: Graeme Clarke

Dates of inspection: 12th – 15th January 2004

Inspection number: 259401

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

© Crown copyright 2004

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

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 19 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll;	406
School address:	Christian Head Kirkby Stephen Cumbria
Postcode:	CA17 4HA
Telephone number:	01768 371693
Fax number:	01768 372387
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Hilary Mirrey
Date of previous inspection:	26 th January 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Kirkby Stephen Grammar School is an 11 – 19 mixed comprehensive school in Kirkby Stephen, in the upper Eden valley, to the South East of Penrith in Cumbria. It is well below average size, with 406 students on roll, including 74 in the Sixth Form. Students come from a wide rural area of 400 square miles. Socio-economic factors are below the national average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals in 2003 was 4.6 per cent, which is below the national average.

The buildings are mostly two storey, and were built in the 1950s. Some parts have been recently refurbished, but other parts are in urgent need of attention. The school gained the School Curriculum Award in 2000, the School Achievement Award in 2001 and 2002 and a Healthy Schools Award in 2003. It became a Sports College in September 2003.

Many students have below average attainment on entry. Nearly all students are of white British background and there are no students for whom English is not their first language.

About 7 per cent of students have special educational needs. This is below average, but the number with statements is close to the average. Pupils with special educational needs have predominantly specific learning, speech and language, or social and emotional difficulties.

The school has substantial links with community education service on a shared use basis, for example for family learning, community outreach, district community management and leisure and recreational courses and activities. Students are Involved in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, Young Enterprise, and the Rotary Youth Leadership Award Scheme.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1547	Graeme Clarke	<i>Lead inspector</i>	Special Educational Needs.
11041	Marvyn Moore	<i>Lay inspector</i>	
15485	Roger Butler	<i>Team inspector</i>	Religious Education.
15940	Norman Godfrey	<i>Team inspector</i>	Art.
8756	Pat Hanage	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics.
22906	Barry Hodgson	<i>Team inspector</i>	Physical Education; Information and Communication Technology.
19056	Graham Leech	<i>Team inspector</i>	English; Drama.
19043	David Lewis	<i>Team inspector</i>	Science; Chemistry.
30794	Gill Murray	<i>Team inspector</i>	History.
12336	Malcolm Overend	<i>Team inspector</i>	Geography; Citizenship.
24894	Clive Petts	<i>Team inspector</i>	Design and Technology.
24887	Yvonne Salmons	<i>Team inspector</i>	Modern languages.

The inspection contractor was:

VT Education Services Ltd
The Lanterns
Old Garden House
Bridge Lane
London
SW11

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

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	1
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS	6
Standards achieved in subjects and courses	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	11
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	19
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES	22
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4	
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	44

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a good school, which is fully inclusive with a caring ethos that is conducive to learning. Pupils have excellent and trusting relationships with adults. The recent award of Sports College status, good teaching in most subjects, good governance, and good leadership and management in key areas all make an important contribution to pupils' good achievement. The school is spending more than its income and gives only satisfactory value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The school has a significant budget deficit.
- Pupils achieve very well in Years 7 to 9.
- The school makes very good provision in English, science, art, design and technology, and for pupils with special education needs (SEN).
- The school places a very high value on seeking and acting on pupils' views.
- Excellent links with other local schools and education providers, and with the community, reflect the quality of continuity from one phase of education to the next, and also the access pupils have to extensive vocational opportunities, sport and out-of-school activities.

The school continues to be effective and has addressed all the issues raised in the last inspection report. Good progress made on priorities for improvement, including achieving the Sports College aims, is reflected in a clear development plan which is well monitored and reviewed. The Year 9 test results are now well above the national average because of the school's attention to raising attainment. Pupils receive very good support and guidance based upon good assessment procedures. The policy for teaching two modern languages in Years 7 to 9 has been changed, but has scope for further development. A weekly information and communication technology (ICT) lesson for all pupils has successfully dealt with the concern about inadequate provision in Years 10 and 11. Diligent use of individual education plans for pupils with SEN represents excellent progress.

Standards achieved

Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2001	2002	2003	2003
English	C	B	A	A
Mathematics	B	C	B	B
Science	B	B	A	A

*Key: A – well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E – well below average
Similar schools are those whose students have attained similarly at the end of Year 6.*

Year 11 and 13 results

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

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

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Pupils' achievement is good. Attainment is below the national average when students join the school and rises to well above average in statutory tests in Year 9. In 2003, it was well above the average of similar schools. The extent of this improvement shows that both progress and achievement are very good. Pupils' 2003 GCSE results were about the national average, but below the average for similar schools. The extent of improvement from Year 10 to 11 is average and achievement is satisfactory. Standards in the Sixth Form are above average and students achieve well. Achievement in lessons and pupils' work seen is generally good, except in modern languages where achievement is unsatisfactory. Throughout the school standards are average in literacy, and above average in numeracy. Information and communication technology (ICT) skills are average. Gifted and talented pupils achieve satisfactorily, and those with SEN achieve well. Girls attain more highly than boys in English in Year 9, and in mathematics throughout.

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Pupils are courteous, show good attitudes to school, and very good behaviour and commitment in lessons. Attendance is average and punctuality good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is very good. Teaching is good overall. In many lessons very effective methods and encouragement from teachers sustain pupils' involvement and lead to very good learning. Teaching is good in most subjects, and is very good or excellent in a third of lessons.

All pupils enjoy excellent access to activities, particularly in the arts and sports. They benefit from very good support, advice and guidance. This helps them to know clearly enough how they can improve, although less well in geography and ICT than in other subjects. Partnerships between the school and community are excellent, and good with parents.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good. The senior staff team provides effective management to promote achievement. Most heads of subjects lead and manage their departments well. The management of provision for students with SEN is a particular strength. Notably, strong pastoral leadership makes a major contribution to the ethos of the school. The headteacher gives good leadership. Governors have a high commitment to their school, and are very generous with time and active in giving their support. However, governors and the headteacher have not ensured that within the recent past the school operates within its budget. The school does not fulfil the requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus for religious education in Years 10 and 11.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents have confidence in the school and are pleased with the range of provision, standards achieved and the care their children receive. Some parents were concerned about the arrangements for reporting on their children's progress, and in response the school has much improved them. The school respects and acts on pupils' and students' views and the concerns they express through the pastoral system and the school council. Pupils and students are generally very satisfied and value the support and advice they receive.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- urgently complete and rigorously implement the strategic plan to bring spending back into line with income, and address the deficit in the budget;
- raise the quality of provision in modern languages, particularly in Years 7 to 9;
- co-ordinate the arrangements for improving Sixth Form students' study skills.

In addition, meet statutory requirements for religious education in Years 10 and 11.

THE SIXTH FORM AT KIRKBY STEPHEN GRAMMAR SCHOOL SPORTS COLLEGE

About 70 Sixth Form students study mainly for GCE and Vocational Courses. There are good links with the Appleby Heritage Centre.

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is an **effective Sixth Form**. Provision in history is very good. In most areas of the curriculum some students achieve very well. Although too many fail to gain a pass grade at AS Level in some subjects, A Level results improved in 2002 and were above the national average in 2003. Girls do better than boys. Good teaching, with more than one third very good, leads to good learning. Vocational Courses provided in conjunction with Appleby Heritage Centre extend the range of opportunities available to students. The Sixth Form is, therefore cost effective.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The inclusive nature of the Sixth Form, and good support for students, help many students to achieve well.
- Sixth Form students make a good contribution to the life of the school.
- Courses are not always well adapted to support the development of study skills appropriate to students' prior learning.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Good Students join the course in Year 12 with widely varying levels of attainment. They achieve well and, in 2003, two of the three A Level students gained the highest grades, A or B. Teaching is good, and students learn well. The subject is very well led and managed and the number of students choosing to study English is increasing.
Mathematics	Satisfactory Examination results vary considerably from year to year. Although some students gain the highest grades, too many failed to pass their AS Level examinations in 2003 because their study skills are under-developed. Teaching is satisfactory, and students make good progress in lessons. Overall, achievement is satisfactory.
Science	Good in chemistry Very good teaching and attitudes to the subject lead to very good learning in lessons. Examination results vary greatly from year to year, and although students often achieve well from modest GCSE grades, some fail to gain a pass grade in AS Level. The department is very well led and managed.
Humanities	Very good in history Achievement in history is very good in response to direct, energetic and well-informed teaching. Students' attainment is well above the national average and a significant proportion gain the highest grades. Leadership and management are very good, and the department has good links with partner institutions.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Good in physical education Good teaching and students' positive attitudes lead to good learning in lessons, but insufficient monitoring of students' work leads to satisfactory achievement overall. The department is well led and managed, and there has been good progress since the last inspection.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Students have access to very good advice, guidance and support. The school makes very good arrangements for the induction of students into the Sixth Form so that they are well prepared for the privileges and responsibilities of Sixth Form life. Regular monitoring provides the school with good information about each student's progress, and there are good procedures for giving them extra help in their studies. However, not enough is done in a co-ordinated way to improve students' study skills in the Sixth Form. Good advice is available on entry to higher education, and there is ready access to careers information. Excellent links with the community give students valuable opportunities and support to enhance their personal development. Tutor periods, assemblies and citizenship lessons contribute to students' personal development.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership of the Sixth Form is very good. The head of Sixth Form has a very clear vision for the place of the Sixth Form in the school, and communicates it well to his colleagues, creating a good sense of purpose, with high aspirations, in students and teachers alike. There is a strong commitment to creating an inclusive Sixth Form in which all students have the same opportunities and are equally valued, whatever their abilities or aspirations.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

For the most part, students are very positive in their views of the Sixth Form. They speak very highly of their teachers, who give them very good support, both academically and in their personal development. They report that the head of Sixth Form works very well with them to identify and resolve any problems that they may have. In particular, they greatly value the relationships they have with their teachers, based on mutual trust and respect, and the opportunities they have to take on responsibility for events within the school. They feel that the opportunities they have to voice their opinions give them a very good measure of ownership of a school of which they can be justly proud.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Pupils' achievement is good throughout the school. Standards are well above average in Year 9 tests, and above average in GCSE.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The extent of improvement from when pupils joined the school to taking statutory tests in Year 9 shows that they made very good progress and also achieved very well.
- Year 9 test results were well above both the national average and the average of similar schools.
- Pupils achieve well in most lessons throughout the school.
- Pupils with SEN achieve well but gifted and talented pupils are not achieving as well as they should.

Commentary

1. When they come into the school, pupils' standards of attainment are below average, especially in English. The National Curriculum test results at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were well above average overall and showed a year on year improvement that is above the national trend. They were well above the national averages for pupils gaining Level 5 and better in English and science, and above average in mathematics. Results were well above the national average for pupils gaining the higher Level 6 in all three subjects. Results in each of these subjects exceeded their targets set for 2003.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	35.9 (34.2)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	36.5 (35.0)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	36.1 (35.6)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 65 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

2. The overall averages of English and science results were well above those of schools where pupils had similar prior attainments, and above average in mathematics. English results at Level 5 and above were in the top five per cent of similar schools, and Level 6 science results were in the top five per cent. Boys perform less well than girls because girls' attainments in all three subjects are above the national average for girls whereas boys' results are closer to the national average of boys. Overall, pupils' achievement in the 2003 Year 9 tests was very good, taking into account their levels of attainment when they joined the school.

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	56 (46)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	94 (97)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	94 (98)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	35.6 (34.7)	36.4 (34.7)

There were 70 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. Overall, GCSE results are comparable with the national average, although a year-on-year comparison shows they lie below the national trend. The proportions of pupils gaining 5 or more A* to C and five or more A* to G grades are above the national averages. A higher proportion of girls than boys attain five or more A* to C grades. Results for five or more A*-C grades are at the average of those of schools where pupils had similar prior attainment at the end of Year 9 in 2001 although for the overall average points score they are below the similar schools' average. However, the extent of improvement from Year 10 to 11 compared with all other schools is average and this represents satisfactory achievement.
4. Results in individual subjects show considerable variations. The proportions of pupils gaining grades A* to C in design and technology and physical education were significantly above the national average compared with other subjects, but pupils in French and German performed less well by a significant margin. In all other subjects, the proportions of grades A* to C were not statistically different from the others.
5. Although the most able pupils do well, many do not attain as well as they could, and not enough of them gain the highest GCSE grades, A and A*. In art and physical education, the number of pupils gaining grades A and A* is above the national average, and the number of high grades is comparable with national figures in science and design and technology, but below in other subjects.
6. In contrast to recent test and examination results, pupils' achievement in lessons and work seen during the inspection is very good or good in several areas of the curriculum. In Years 7 to 9, achievement is very good in English and science, and good in mathematics, design and technology, history, drama, music, physical education and religious education. Achievement is satisfactory in all other subjects except French, where pupils are not attaining as well as they should. In Years 10 and 11, however, achievement is not as high in some subjects as in Years 7 to 9. It is good in English and satisfactory in science. Achievement continues to be good in mathematics, art, design and technology, history, and for non-examination pupils in physical education. Achievement improves in some subjects: pupils in examination classes in physical education achieve well, and in French they achieve satisfactorily. Throughout the school pupils with SEN and pupils with physical disabilities achieve well. In lessons and in work seen, gifted and talented pupils are achieving satisfactorily.
7. Standards of work seen in Year 9 during the inspection are generally similar to or better than national expectations. Attainment in Years 7 to 9 is above average in English, mathematics and science, as well as in art, physical education and religious education. It is about average in other subjects, and below average in French. Standards seen in Years 10 and 11 are also average to above average and reflect the results in GCSE examinations. However, except in one Year 7 science lesson, there is an absence of really high attainment, and a significant number of lessons were characterised by average standards of attainment.
8. Good teaching of language and literacy across the curriculum throughout Years 7 to 9 leads pupils to above average competence in English language and literacy skills, which represents very good achievement from a low baseline on entry. Pupils' skills in reading, writing and speaking are well supported because the national strategy for improving literacy is very well implemented in nearly all subjects. Pupils' competences in language and literacy in Years 10 and 11 are closer to average. Pupils' numeracy skills are above average throughout Years 7 to 11. The good basis developed in mathematics lessons prepares pupils well for the measuring and calculation skills needed for their work in science and design and technology, and for interpreting statistical evidence for example in geography. Pupils' ICT skills are about average in Years 7 to 9, but they achieve well in Years 10 and 11 to attain above national levels because they all follow an accredited examination course.

Sixth Form

Students achieve well and reach average standards of attainment.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Many students gain very good or excellent results in individual subjects, though group sizes are too small to allow statistical comparisons and there are big variations from year to year.
- A Level GCE results for girls are close to the national average overall, but boys' results are below average.
- Not all students have the necessary study skills to support them in gaining the grades they are capable of.

Commentary

9. Pupils' performance in their GCSE examinations is above the national average, and well above the national average in science. The school has a strong commitment to inclusion, however, and students come into the Sixth Form with a wider range of attainment than is normally seen. In particular, the number of students starting courses with grade C in GCSE is higher than usual. In 2002, 22 students entered for nearly 70 A Level and AS examinations. Girls gained an average points score equal to the national average, but boys were below average. Boys gain lower scores than girls nationally, but the difference is greater than is found nationally. Historical data is limited, but suggests that the performance of girls has improved more than that of boys in recent years.

10. In individual subjects, results have varied greatly over the last few years, reflecting small group sizes. Where good or disappointing results were gained, these were often as a result of the performance of very few students. For example, at A Level in 2002, results in biology, chemistry and geography were excellent, with two thirds of the grades awarded being A or B. In contrast, in the same year many students in AS Level biology, chemistry and mathematics failed to gain a grade at all, though there were some high grades.

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	92.3 (94.2)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	39.4 (32.1)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per pupil	272.3 (243.2)	253.1 (254.5)

There were 22 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

11. In lessons, work seen is close to the national average overall, though in English and mathematics work seen in lessons is sometimes below average. It is often above average in art, biology, and history.

12. It is significant that lessons in which work seen is above average are also those in which good or very good teaching lifts the level of engagement of students above the ordinary, prompting them to challenge themselves to discuss, evaluate, analyse, contrast, and to appreciate conflicting points of view. This observation is consistent with the distribution of prior attainment within the Sixth Form as a whole. Students whose attainment in GCSE is represented by high grades may already have acquired these skills, especially in relation to their coursework, whereas students with more modest prior attainment need a more structured approach to their advanced studies in order to succeed.

13. Achievement overall in the Sixth Form is good. Many students who come into the Sixth Form with a range of GCSE grades take to the higher levels of scholarship well and gain high GCE grades. Many others who gain relatively modest grades in GCSE and go on to gain AS or A Level grades in the range C to E are a testimony to the hard work and good or very good achievement of many students and their teachers.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils show good attitudes to school, and very good behaviour and commitment in lessons. Their attendance is average and punctuality good. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good throughout the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Pupils behave very well both in and out of lessons.
- Pupils' relationships with others are very good.
- The school sets very high expectations for pupils' conduct and works hard to achieve them.
- Incidents of bullying, racism and other forms of harassment are rare.

Commentary

14. Pupils behave very well both in and out of lessons. The school is an orderly and calm community where pupils relate very well to one another, and display a good level of confidence and self-esteem. Pupils know the high standard of behaviour expected of them by staff and respond accordingly. Break and lunch time are pleasant social occasions when pupils meet to discuss the events of the day and socialise well together. The inspection team were impressed by the courtesy shown to them by pupils, who were very keen to show them round the school, discuss their achievements and give their views on activities promoted.

15. Pupils interviewed during the inspection week indicated that they thought incidents of bullying were rare, but were dealt with effectively by staff when they occur.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
396	24.5	0

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

16. Procedures for dealing with exclusion are meticulous. Ten pupils were excluded for short periods during the previous year, all for good reason.

17. Pupils show good respect for the feelings, values and beliefs of others, and fully understand the principles to distinguish right from wrong. They are fully aware of the responsibilities of living in a community. Pupils show a good respect for their own and others' property. The school premises, computers, books and other equipment are treated with great care, for example there is a noticeable lack of graffiti and vandalism.

18. Pupils are pleased to take responsibility and demonstrate a willingness to be enterprising. All Year 11 pupils are appointed as prefects. Two pupils per class are elected to the Student Council, which is a lively body that meets regularly to discuss with staff improvements they feel could be made. As a result of their deliberations, benches for pupils' use have been provided, and the school meals system has been reorganised. Pupils organise charity days, show visitors round the school, and are appointed as duty helpers in the dining room.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year 2002-2003 (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	7.6	School data	0.4
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

19. Attendance is at the national average and is satisfactory. The school has recently revised its procedures for monitoring attendance and making contact with parents. These are now more rigorous after teething troubles with computerised administration.

20. Relationships between pupils, peer groups and staff are very good. Pupils with SEN are fully integrated into school life, and mix well with their fellow students. The harmonious atmosphere in school promotes pupils' confidence and self esteem well, and this has a positive impact on their achievement.

21. Assemblies, personal and social education (PSE) and citizenship, as well as a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities and whole-school study days, make a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Several subject departments contribute though this is not universally the case. Overall, the provision made by the school is good.

22. The provision for spiritual development is good. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on a variety of issues, attitudes and values and to examine the principles and beliefs that will guide them through life and help them to understand and respect other people's values and feelings.

23. Moral development is very good. There is a clear code of behaviour and opportunities in lessons to discuss moral issues such as human rights, the destruction of environments, bullying and responsibilities to others. Pupils are well aware of the difference between right and wrong.

24. The school sets high standards for pupils' welfare and promotes social responsibility through the school council, Youth Action Group, and service and contributions to school life and the local community. Co-operation and good relationships are a feature of the school. As a result the social development of pupils is very good.

25. Satisfactory cultural development is fostered by work in music and art, an understanding of other cultures in religious education and in citizenship, geography and history. Visits to Europe and elsewhere widen cultural horizons. Close links with the local community promote an understanding of pupils' own cultural heritage but opportunities to acquire a greater awareness of living in culturally diverse societies are limited.

Sixth Form

Students have good attitudes and behave very well.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Students make a good contribution to the pastoral work and life of the school.
- Students show a high commitment in lessons and work hard to achieve well, but have not developed as much responsibility for their own learning as they should.
- The school seeks and acts on students' views and students value this highly.
- Relationships between students, and with staff, are based on mutual respect and co-operation.

Commentary

26. Students are keen to take responsibilities, and they work well with the staff to promote good behaviour in the lower school and provide good role models for younger pupils. Although comparatively small in numbers, the Sixth Form makes a significant contribution to the pastoral arrangements of the school. Students greatly value the harmonious atmosphere in which they work.

27. In lessons, students are invariably committed to high quality learning. They have confidence in their teachers, and work hard to please them because they believe that this will lead to good learning. They take part well in discussions, and, in the best instances, gain a lot from them. They respect the views of others and listen respectfully when necessary.

28. Although students take a vibrant interest in school life and welcome opportunities to take on responsibility around the school and in the community, they are less good at taking responsibility for their own learning. Where teachers show them how to do this, they do it well, but in some areas of the curriculum, students see success in terms of completing a task rather than in terms of completing it as well as they can. Encouraging greater rigour in study is an area for development.

29. The school is at pains to canvass the views of all its students about the development and running of their school. It is a measure of the importance which the school places on this aspect of school life that weekly timetabled meetings are held between the senior students and senior staff of the school. Less frequent, but regular, meetings are held between students and governors of the school. These meetings, and the action the school takes following the discussions, do much to promote the harmonious atmosphere in the school, and satisfaction of students and their parents with the education provided.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is very good overall. Good learning stems from good teaching, a broad curriculum with very good opportunities for enrichment, very good support, advice and guidance, good relationships with parents and excellent links with the community and other schools.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Implementing the national strategy for improving teaching in Years 7 to 9 has led to rising standards in Year 9 tests.
- Well-planned lessons with varied and challenging activities lead pupils to work hard, both mentally and physically.
- Pupils in some classes do not achieve as well as they should when work does not match the wide range of ability.
- Regular assessments of pupils' work are used diligently in review and target-setting, but within subjects the use of assessment is inconsistent, and some pupils in Years 7 to 9 are unclear about how to improve.
- Teaching fosters positive relationships and good attitudes to learning and thereby contributes to the ethos of the school.

Commentary

30. Throughout the school over three quarters of lessons seen were good or better. Almost three out of ten were very good or excellent and in them pupils learned and achieved very well. This proportion was highest in Years 10 and 11, where 4 out of 10 lessons were very good or excellent. Instances of excellent teaching in Years 7 to 11 led to excellent learning and high levels of achievement. Teaching was good in the Sixth Form, where the great majority of lessons, 9 out of 10, were good or better, leading to good or very good learning and achievement.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 107 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
4 (4%)	25 (23%)	56 (52%)	21 (20%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

31. Throughout the school, teaching is very good in science, art and design and design technology. It is satisfactory in modern languages and citizenship, and good in all other subjects. The higher proportion of very good lessons in Years 10 and 11 includes very good teaching in geography and ICT in addition to the subjects mentioned above.

32. The school has made a substantial investment in training to implement the national strategy for improving teaching in Years 7 to 9. This has led to clear improvement since the time of the last inspection, and also to rising standards in statutory Year 9 tests. There are further gains to make by consistently applying and extending the principles involved throughout the school.

33. Several very good features contribute to the most effective teaching. Of particular significance is the way teachers foster positive relationships and help develop pupils' behaviour and good attitudes to learning. This makes a major contribution to the ethos of the school. Appropriate and well-managed activities, together with a lively pace and good time management, encourage pupils' interest and involvement. Teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject. They also have a clear knowledge of pupils' potential from the school's comprehensive tracking and target-setting system, as well as from frequent informal discussion with each other. This leads to well-planned lessons, with a suitable emphasis on practical skills, varied, practical and classroom-based activities, and challenging discussions and questions. In turn, pupils work hard, both mentally and physically. However, the degree of challenge in activities is not always sufficient to extend the learning of gifted and talented pupils. Unsatisfactory features of teaching stem from work that does not match the wide range of ability in some classes, for example in some modern languages lessons, leading to pupils making slow progress and not achieving as well as they should.

34. Learning is effective and is consolidated by the ways in which teachers check and support students' understanding. Many teachers use questioning skilfully and well, for example in history at the beginning of each lesson to consolidate previous learning, and in mathematics to help them and pupils know where they need to do more work. All students, including those with SEN, make good progress in lessons when questioning, support and consolidation are related to clearly stated lesson objectives.

35. Flexible and well-planned programmes of individual or group teaching and in-class support meet pupils' specific needs very well and ensure all have full access to the learning of others. Provision for pupils with severe learning difficulties is excellent. Teaching assistants show a very good understanding of their social, educational, and personal needs and consequently these pupils achieve very well. In lessons, the capable teaching assistants provide effective support for a range of learning needs, and work very well with the subject teachers to plan their role effectively. In design and technology lessons, the workshop and food technicians enable pupils with SEN to achieve well. Where there is no in-class support, teachers' good awareness of the pupils' difficulties enables them to provide appropriate support materials and individual attention, as, for example, in modern languages.

36. Homework is often used well to support learning, but its use is not consistent because there are wide differences between subjects and teachers. It is used very well in art and design and design and technology and well in English, history, ICT, and in examination classes in physical education. Its use is satisfactory in other subjects, except for French in Years 7 to 9.

37. Overall, the quality of assessment is good. The school insists on regular assessments of work to track pupils' progress. Form tutors use the information diligently with pupils to review progress and set targets. However, the use of assessment information in subject departments is inconsistent. In science, art, design and technology and history, regular marking and constructive oral and written feedback inform pupils of their strengths and weaknesses, and provide advice and explanation of how they can improve. All too often, however, pupils do not have clear enough information for them to know how to raise their achievement. In several subjects, for example geography, ICT and physical education, assessments in Years 7 to 9 lack essential detail to help pupils because they do not use National Curriculum Levels clearly. Whilst pupils know what their targets are, they cannot explain how they can attain them. Arrangements for assessing pupils' personal development and progress in citizenship are under-developed. The individual education plans for pupils with SEN, which were a weakness in the last report, are now very clear and informative. Challenging but attainable targets set by the special needs department give pupils full awareness of their progress.

Sixth Form

Teaching is good overall and leads to good learning. Assessment of students' work is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- A very high proportion of lessons is good or better.
- Activities foster students' interest and involvement, and develop scholarship.
- Many courses do not systematically develop appropriate study skills.
- The value of accurate assessment is hampered by a lack of immediate feedback to students in a way that helps them improve.

Commentary

38. Teaching is good, with 9 out of 10 lessons good or better. Three out of every 10 lessons seen were very good. There were no unsatisfactory lessons.

39. In all subjects, teachers have good subject knowledge and plan their lessons well. They form good relationships with their students. They use a good variety of activities which capture and hold students' interest. Teachers adapt their style in lessons well to the needs of Post 16 students. For example the lively atmosphere in mathematics lessons leads students to enjoy learning. In history, very good teaching helps students become familiar with academic controversy. They comment on the views of professional historians and ask pertinent questions, giving due respect to arguments based on evidence. But group sizes are often small, and this limits the opportunities for students to learn from one another and places extra demands on their teachers.

40. The technical expertise required for essay writing, the building of arguments and reaching logical conclusions, is very precisely transmitted by teachers. Students value the teaching of examination techniques, which gives them academic confidence and security. These skills deserve wider currency because, very importantly, many students see the accumulation of notes as an end in itself.

41. Teachers are very supportive when students need help. The relatively high level of failures in some subjects at the end of the first year in the Sixth Form stems from courses which do not have sufficient structure built in from the outset to teach the study skills many students require. The monitoring of progress does not always pick up warning signs immediately. Assessment is accurate, and builds on national standards in most subjects, but feedback to students often waits until the end of unit or module tests.

The curriculum

- * The breadth of the curriculum is good.
- * Activities provided for curriculum enrichment, both within the school day and beyond it, are very good.
- * Staffing, accommodation and resources to meet the needs of the curriculum are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The curriculum offers a good spread of courses and subjects and is a testimony to the dedication and hard work of the teachers.
- Regular review of the curriculum has led to the introduction of new courses with considerable improvement in the quality of Vocational Education.
- The range of extra-curricular activities is very good and is appreciated by the pupils.
- Religious education in Years 10 and 11 does not fully cover the requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus.

Commentary

42. The school provides all pupils with a good range of worthwhile activities, which has been effectively extended since the previous inspection. The curriculum is planned to meet the needs of all pupils and contributes significantly to the standards being achieved in most subjects. However, there is only limited time available for pupils to experience a second foreign language in Year 8. The school effectively encourages curricular innovation. For instance, it takes a leading role in a consortium for the Increased Flexibility Programme to promote 14 - 19 curriculum opportunities, and in turn overall choice has been improved for older pupils. The consortium with the University of Central Lancashire and a private provider at the nearby Appleby Heritage Centre has developed access for a number of pupils into accredited vocational skills-based programmes.

43. The school offers a very good range of enrichment activities, with some outstanding elements, both within and beyond the school day. The wide range of educational visits, visiting speakers and curricular initiatives broadens pupils' experiences significantly. The school is particularly successful in developing sport and the arts. It is continuing to develop ideas to meet the needs of gifted and talented pupils. The extensive programme of extra-curricular provision is well supported by pupils and further enriches their educational experiences as they move through successive stages in the school.

44. Provision for pupils with SEN is very good. The school provides effectively for pupils with a range of learning needs and physical disabilities, as a result of the very good, informed supervision and guidance of the special needs co-ordinator (SENCO).

45. The school's belief in curricular innovation helps broaden choice for pupils. Furthermore, it encourages teachers to be receptive to new ideas. The school has been successful in managing change whilst ensuring standards remain high in most subjects. Pupils recognise that the school does well in helping them progress successfully with their studies. The school is successful in recruiting and retaining good teaching and support staff and this further helps to provide a stimulating curriculum, except for religious education. Here a staffing shortage has led to insufficient teaching in Years 10 and 11 to meet the demands of the locally Agreed Syllabus.

46. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory. There are variations in quality between departments. The outdoor sports facilities and the science, design and technology, art and mathematics areas are of high quality and provide very pleasant environments conducive to learning. The ground floor of the school is readily accessible to disabled pupils and visitors from the community. There are attractive up-to-date wall displays in corridors and classrooms. As at the time of the previous inspection, the library, the music practice room and the acoustics in the modern languages department are inadequate. The social and study areas for the Sixth Form are restricted. The use of the hall as a dining room prevents its use as a teaching area for much of the day. The quality of resources is satisfactory. The science, design and technology, geography and art departments are well equipped.

Sixth Form

The breadth of curriculum is very good. Staffing is very good; accommodation and resources are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The school makes considerable efforts to meet requests from students and in turn offers a very good range of opportunities, blending traditional academic subjects with vocational alternatives.
- A wide range of tutorial, course and out-of-school activities makes a notable contribution to students' personal development.
- Course planning to support students' study and key skills when they join the Sixth Form lacks a co-ordinated approach.

Commentary

47. The Sixth Form curriculum is centred upon a range of AS Level and A Level courses in the school, with Vocational Courses available at partner institutions, both schools and private sector providers, in the locality. In order to achieve this in a small Sixth Form, it is necessary to build considerable flexibility into the timetable and work closely with colleagues in other schools. The result is a curriculum that offers a very good range of opportunities, blending traditional academic subjects with vocational alternatives.

48. Students in the Sixth Form are fully involved in activities in the rest of the school and in the community. A wide range of sporting and cultural activities is available to them, as well as activities associated with particular courses, such as field trips. These opportunities, together with tutor periods and assemblies enhance the curriculum and make a notable contribution to students' personal development. However, the lack of a co-ordinated approach to developing students' study and key skills is a weakness in course planning to support students joining the Sixth Form with relatively modest GCSE results and competencies.

49. Sixth Form students with SEN receive very good support, for example in community studies and design and technology, where work is well adapted to suit students' individual needs. Pupils with physical disabilities have access to the school building at ground floor level.

Care, guidance and support

Provision for ensuring pupils' care, welfare, health and safety is good. Support, advice and guidance are very good. The school has excellent arrangements for involving students in the work of the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The school makes excellent arrangements for seeking pupils' and students' views, and it values and acts upon them.
- Relationships between pupils and adults are excellent.
- Induction arrangements for pupils are very good.
- Pupils have very good access to support, advice and guidance.

Commentary

50. The School has good arrangements for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety. The Child Protection Officer is well aware of her role, has attended recent training and has trained all other members of staff. The Child Protection Policy is in the process of being reviewed and updated, but does conform to the protocol and procedures of the area Child Protection Committee. The School has a dedicated first aid room; accidents are recorded well and regular health and safety audits are carried out by the local authority.

51. Relationships in the school are excellent. Adults relate very well to pupils. Pupils interviewed during the inspection week confirm that they know where to go to for help, support and advice if needed. In addition, a youth worker is available to offer counselling and help to pupils experiencing social or emotional problems that are a barrier to learning, and her work is much appreciated. The police service liaises well with the school and the Community Police Officer visits on a regular basis to give support to the personal, social, and health education and citizenship (PSHCE) programme.

52. Careers education through the PSHCE programme is very well complemented by the Connexions service, which the school uses well to give pupils very good careers advice. Guidance is enhanced by opportunities for pupils' work experience in areas that broaden their horizons, through mock interviews for employment and access to an annual careers convention.

53. Pupil's pastoral progress is diligently monitored. Heads of year and tutors hold regular meetings to discuss individual pupils' development. Pupils are well known to staff and the support offered to them is of a high standard because of an effective combination of formal and informal systems of monitoring, aided by the relatively small size of the school. Targets are discussed and agreed with parents to enlist their support on improving pupils' behaviour and academic performance.

54. Governors and teachers are very proactive in seeking, valuing and acting on the views of pupils. An excellent combination of approaches includes questionnaires, tutor-group discussions, face-to-face meetings and the school council, whose members are used effectively to obtain pupils' opinions. Pupils confirm that teachers listen to them and are sympathetic and empathetic to the views that they express.

55. Induction arrangements for pupils are very good. The school's primary liaison co-ordinator, who works very well with the Head of Year 7, ensures that pupils' transition from primary to secondary education proceeds smoothly. The SENCO works very closely with year heads to offer good support and help to pupils in the pastoral support programme. Progress records are kept by students and are carefully monitored by staff. Open evenings are arranged for parents and pupils in Year 6 of primary school to visit the school, and all Year 6 pupils visit the school for a day to gain a taste of life there.

56. The SENCO visits all feeder primary schools on a regular basis, and as a result of the comprehensive arrangements made by the school, pupils make an excellent start to their secondary school life. Pupils with SEN gain significantly in self-esteem and confidence because of the very good individual support and encouragement they receive.

Sixth Form

Care, guidance and support are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Good, timely information is available to students about opportunities available for study beyond Year 11.
- Tutors and subject staff know their students well, and give good support when needed.
- Teachers mark homework diligently, with useful comments for students, but they do not always take students' progress into account sufficiently when planning future lessons.
- Very good assessment and monitoring procedures provide the school with the required information to identify where help is most needed.
- Careers advice is very good, and students proceed with confidence to the next stage of study or into employment.
- Students are not supported well enough in developing the study skills they need in the Sixth Form.

Commentary

57. The school gives very good advice to students who are about to enter the Sixth Form. The school's own curriculum is flexible enough to meet most students' needs, and the good links with other institutions mean that students have good information about alternatives. Parents are involved in the decision-making process. Induction into the Sixth Form takes place at a stimulating residential course, through tutor periods and assemblies. Students say that they were well prepared for life in the Sixth Form and for the greater freedoms as well as the additional responsibilities associated with study in Years 12 and 13. They quickly form positive relationships with their tutors and subject teachers. They know where to go for help when they need it, and are confident that staff are monitoring their progress so that they can provide support when necessary.

58. Students' work is regularly assessed, and for the most part teachers give students useful information about how they can improve. More formal assessments are undertaken regularly, and there is a very good system for recording the outcomes centrally. Similarly good systems link assessment information to judgements about students' personal development, and study skills, across all subjects so that help, guidance and support can be given promptly when needed. Individual support is a strength of the Sixth Form, whether in response to subject difficulties, or to personal circumstances, or in relation to, for example, university entrance or entry to the world of work. The school gives high quality advice, support and guidance to members of the Sixth Form regarding careers and further study. Very good use is made of the Connexions service.

59. Although very good advice is generally available to individuals, based on effective monitoring, not enough is done to support the development of the skills students need for advanced study. As a result, students in some areas of the curriculum, but not all, learn how to write essays, how to evaluate evidence and to present a logical argument. Some students are already fluent in the use of computers, for example in writing spreadsheets or setting up presentations. However, the school does not do enough to help students, away from the limitations of a particular subject, to develop skills which could be well used in most Sixth Form classes. This aspect is a barrier to learning for some students, and is in need of further development.

60. Opportunities for students to shape the development of their school are excellent. The head of Sixth Form and the tutors are always ready to listen to their views, and an excellent system of meetings between students and senior staff is complemented by meetings between students and governors.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's partnerships with parents are good.

Partnerships with other educational providers and the community are excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The school gives very good information to parents about their children's progress.
- The school has excellent links with other educational establishments, schools, colleges and private-sector providers.
- The school has excellent links with the community.

Commentary

61. A quarter of parents responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire. More than four fifths feel the school treats their children fairly and that it encourages them to become mature. Almost all regard the school's arrangements for helping them settle in as good. The inspection findings confirm these views. A significant minority of a third of those who responded thought that they were not well informed through meetings about their child's progress. The school has acted on this concern and improved the arrangements.

62. The school's brochure contains clear and well-presented information. Regular newsletters are of a high standard. Good information is provided to parents whose children are moving into Year 10 or the Sixth Form. Well-written reports on pupils' and students' progress contain good information on a subject-by-subject basis, and give targets for improvement. The Governors' Annual Report to parents is comprehensive and factual and fully complies with legislation. The homework diary is a useful form of communication between home and school, but it is not exploited fully because of inconsistencies in use by all parties, pupils, parents and tutors. The school seeks parents' opinions over important changes envisaged (for example the length of the school day) but does not regularly canvas views to check parents' perceptions of progress.

63. The school holds an annual academic review day, when parents can discuss their child's progress with form tutors and agree learning targets. Additionally, an annual parents' evening for each year group, where subject teachers are available to speak to each parent, is now arranged. Specific helpful guidance is available for parents of Year 9 and Year 11 pupils about GCSE and Sixth Form options. The school values the involvement of parents in promoting pupils' progress. Parents are contacted by the school if there are any concerns regarding their child's progress. The mentoring scheme, for pupils in Years 10 and 11 who are falling behind in their studies, works well, and parents are fully consulted and kept informed of developments. Parents of pupils with SEN are fully involved in formal and informal reviews of their children's progress.

64. A small number of parents willingly help to support the school, for example in drama productions and concerts, escorting pupils on out-of-school trips and with school events. All parents are members of the Friends of the School Association, which has a small but effective committee. Successful ventures contributed funds towards the School's Sports College bid. Their efforts are much appreciated.

65. The School is an effective partner in many community activities. It is the local adult education centre for the area, and makes its buildings available to many community organisations on a regular basis. Many local businesses have financially helped the school to reinforce its Sports College bid. They support the school by providing activities that enrich the curriculum and give

mock interviews as part of careers education. Pupils contribute to community work, for example by helping at two old people's homes and supporting nominated local charities. Links with the local church are strong. Members of the community are regularly invited into the audience for school productions.

66. Links with other schools, colleges and education providers are excellent. Regular meetings with the headteachers of local primary feeder schools discuss matters of common interest. The school is an active member of the local secondary schools' consortium. The school has strong links with the Appleby Heritage Centre, which takes a number of pupils and Sixth Form students onto vocational courses. A useful consortium arrangement with the University of Central Lancashire provides pupils with accredited courses on agricultural subjects. As a result of the very good links forged by the school with higher and further education establishments, and the very good provision for the transfer of pupils, Sixth Form students are well prepared to continue their further education or entry to their world of work. The strong and effective links that the school has with other schools and colleges make an excellent contribution to the progress pupils make.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

- * Leadership and management overall are good.
- * Governance is good.
- * The leadership of the headteacher and of other key staff is good.
- * Management is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Governors have a high commitment to the school and know its strengths and weaknesses very well, but have not ensured that over the recent past the school operates within its budget.
- The headteacher, the relatively new leadership group, and the strong pastoral team make a major contribution to the ethos of the school.
- Most heads of subjects lead and manage their departments well, and some very well, and the management of provision for students with SEN is a particular strength.
- Best value principles are applied well, with opportunities for further development evident.
- The school does not fulfil the requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus for religious education in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

67. The school is well governed. The conscientious and dedicated members of the governing body are well led by a strong and experienced chairperson. They have the school's interests at heart, are keen to see it progress and give strong support. Governors rightly see their role as strategic. They share a clear vision with the headteacher for the development of *The Community School*, which they can realise through the recent award of Sports College status. Governors have clear priorities for developing the school. They challenge the headteacher and his staff to promote clear improvements in learning, for example through adopting effective approaches widely throughout the school.

68. Governors consider carefully the progress the school makes. The governing body has a very good understanding of the school as a result of a direct professional involvement with members of staff. The headteacher and his staff provide the governing body with regular reports on procedures, test and examination results, and progress. Other effective procedures enable governors to gain a very good awareness of the school. For example, over the course of a year they meet with representative pupils and students and gather views in an open discussion, and staff responsible for implementing policies report to them and identify improvements. Governors value highly the new structured process of self-evaluation in advance of inspection. By successfully

drawing upon their strengths of working collaboratively with the staff, they achieved a consensus on gauging accurately most aspects of the quality of education in the school. All statutory requirements are met, except for the absence of religious education in Years 10 and 11, which has been caused by problems in recruiting a suitably qualified teacher.

69. Financial administration is diligent, with day-to day control beyond reproach, and recommendations in a recent auditor's report are being acted upon. However, financial management is ineffective. Governors are only at the beginning of a strategic planning process to deal with the consequences for the school's income and expenditure of staffing levels and the declining number of school-age children in the locality. This has led to overspending and a significant shortfall in the budget because actions to address the issues have been neither prompt nor extensive enough.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	1,309,996.00	Balance from previous year	- 51,420.00
Total expenditure	1,449,556.00	Balance carried forward to the next	-158,864.00
Expenditure per pupil	3,660.00		

70. The headteacher provides good leadership. His commitment to the school and high aspirations are significant factors in promoting the school's ethos of a learning community committed to success for all. He leads and gives direction to a relatively new senior management team whose members are equally dedicated in promoting the aims and values of the school. The need now is to harness the collective strength of the senior team with that of the governors to address the budget deficit.

71. The management of the school draws strength from a systematic approach to quality assurance based upon taking stock of subject departments' procedures, seeking pupils' views and monitoring their work. Known as 'spotlight weeks,' these useful twice-termly checks provide information about the extent of pupils' improvement. The school improvement plan sets out Sports College aims, with priorities for developing teaching and learning, leadership, school culture and ethos, and partnerships. Although planning gives details of timescales, costs, measurable outcomes and review dates, it does not clearly indicate the impact of success and sources of evidence to gauge success. Reviews of progress take place periodically throughout the year, although the improvement plan is appropriately and closely linked to teachers' performance management, which has a clear annual cycle. Although the performance management arrangements are administered well, and objectives for students' progress relate specifically to school improvement priorities, the monitoring of teaching is not focused sharply enough upon pupils' learning and achievement to identify areas of development clearly. Both development planning and performance management aim to raise achievement, with some success, but at present they lack the full benefit of joint review. The investment in time is yet to be fully realised as senior staff recognise the need to act more methodically on the outcome of evaluations, and equally importantly, use the information to deal with issues arising.

72. The professional development of the staff presents a mixed picture in relation to raising achievement and standards. Very good arrangements for the induction of newly qualified teachers and experienced teachers joining the school ensure they have access to relevant support. A clear and systematic approach carefully aligns staff-training activities to areas of need that are identified through the school improvement plan and statutory performance management procedures. However, the evaluation of the effect of training is less thorough because it reflects immediate views more than concentrating on judging the effects after a longer period.

73. The school applies most principles of best value well to support improvement. It consults widely, for example using questionnaires and meetings to seek and act upon the views of parents, pupils and students. Performance data are thoroughly analysed to compare and identify differences

in the attainments between groups of students, and to make comparisons with similar schools. Care is taken to ensure value for money when obtaining goods and services. The school challenges itself to improve, for example in implementing its Sports College development plan. Joint working arrangements with Appleby Heritage Centre and neighbouring schools are developing well, and reflect an appropriate response to the challenge of providing a suitable curriculum for pupils who come from a very wide rural area.

Sixth Form

Leadership and management of the Sixth Form are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Leadership provides a clear vision and strategic planning, well aligned to the school's rural setting.
- The Sixth Form is fully inclusive.
- The lack of a co-ordinated approach to developing students' study and key skills makes it difficult for some to cope with the change to Advanced Level work.
- Effective management of subjects contributes to students' good achievement.
- Good information about students' performance is comprehensively analysed to review the quality of education in the Sixth Form.

Commentary

74. The leadership provides a very clear vision of what a good Sixth Form should be. The head of Sixth Form understands what students of this age need, and works with his colleagues to provide it. He gives very good support to students when they come into the Sixth Form. Students are successfully encouraged to be substantially involved with the rest of the school and with the community, for example through participation in Young Enterprise and with the Rotary Club. They are good ambassadors of the Sixth Form for the rest of the school.

75. The school's strategic planning reflects an excellent commitment to inclusion, and its aims and ambitions. The school's leadership has a good understanding of the problems of being a small school in a wide rural area and is working well with other institutions to provide a range of courses appropriate to students' needs, to increase group sizes, and to ensure financial viability. Further development of the links with the Appleby Heritage Centre and local schools, for example to exploit video conferencing, typifies the school's thinking for development.

76. The Sixth Form is effectively managed. The head of Sixth Form collates good data about his students, and translates them into good support, which students fully appreciate. Information is comprehensively analysed to review the quality of education in the Sixth Form. These good systems for assessing attainment through the Sixth Form, setting targets, and monitoring progress involve students with their tutors. As a result, students feel ownership of them and take them seriously. However, the management of these targets and their translation into schemes of work and lesson plans are not developed in all subjects as well as they need to be.

77. Middle management of courses and subject teaching is good, and very good in three of the five subjects which were the focus of the inspection. In turn, students, who come from a wide range of backgrounds at GCSE Level, achieve well. However, the lack of a co-ordinated approach to students' study and key skills development, especially in communication and ICT, leaves a significant number struggling to cope quickly with the change from GCSE work in Year 11 to the demands of Advanced Level study in Year 12.

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 **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Standards of attainment by the end of Year 9 are well above average and pupils achieve very well.
- Standards of attainment in English language by the end of Year 11 are above average.
- Leadership and management of the subject are very good.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Boys do less well than girls in Years 7 to 9.
- Standards of attainment in English literature by the end of Year 11 are below average.

Commentary

78. Standards by the end of Year 9 are well above the national average and the average for similar schools. There has been steady improvement from 2001 to 2003, more than is the case nationally. Standards in work seen during the inspection reflect the results in the national tests. Pupils are articulate and contribute enthusiastically to class discussion. They listen well to teachers and their classmates. Good reading skills enable pupils to find information in and respond to a good variety of texts, including material written before 1900. A good range of writing is produced, in a variety of forms for different purposes, and increasingly extended pieces are undertaken as pupils move up the school. Pupils' writing is generally careful, though girls write more correctly and in greater detail than boys.

79. Standards in GCSE English language by the end of Year 11 are above the national average and the average for similar schools. Standards in English literature are below average. Standards in both have improved steadily since 2001. Boys did better than girls in English language in 2003 but, overall, the difference in performance is small. Standards of work seen during the inspection reflect the examination results. Pupils listen well and make perceptive contributions to class discussion. They respond well to their reading, aided by the provision of a variety of analysis frameworks. Pupils produce a good volume of extended and well-organised writing. It is well planned and the quality of expression is improved by the process of drafting and revising. Many pupils make good use of ICT to improve the presentation of their work.

80. By the end of Year 9 achievement is very good. Standards of attainment on entry to the school are below average but results in the national tests are well above average. Boys do less well than girls, however. The most able pupils profit from the provision of additional tasks to extend them. Support in the classroom and arranging classes by pupils' ability in Year 9 enable pupils with SEN to achieve as well as other pupils. By the end of Year 11, achievement is good. Pupils with SEN achieve as well as other pupils through setting and a suitably modified programme of study. Very few pupils do not enter for both language and literature examinations.

81. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers are well qualified and experienced. Lessons are well planned with a good variety of challenging and well-paced activity that engages and stimulates pupils. Teaching in Years 7 to 9 follows the literacy strategy framework, consolidating pupils' knowledge and understanding of language. In Years 10 and 11, it pays close attention to GCSE requirements. Relationships in the classroom are good, with firm but friendly management that

encourages pupils to contribute. A good assessment scheme gives pupils helpful advice on progress, though there is some inconsistency of practice. Pupils are made familiar with the standards for National Curriculum Levels and GCSE grades, and points for the improvement of their work are identified.

82. Leadership and management are very good. The relatively new head of department has a clear vision and a commitment to raising standards. Significant progress has been made in moving the subject forward. Planning is good and staff have been brought together well, through regular meetings, to work as a team to a common purpose. A well-organised scheme of work has been developed to meet the requirements of the subject. In Years 7 to 9, however, although pupils use ICT effectively, there is not a programme of common tasks. Teaching and learning are monitored well and good records kept of pupils' progress. There is no formal programme of lesson observations.

83. Progress since the last inspection is good. Standards by the end of Year 9 have improved significantly and there has been steady improvement in standards by the end of Year 11.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

84. The teaching of language and literacy across the curriculum is good throughout Years 7 to 9, and satisfactory throughout Years 10 and 11. A good variety of strategies is in use. Departments reinforce the understanding and use of key subject vocabulary, monitor correctness of written expression and use active reading strategies. Pupils undertake a good range of writing tasks for different purposes, and frameworks help pupils to organise their ideas. There has been some emphasis on the importance of oral work, particularly in group activities. Book boxes are in use in form tutor time to encourage wide reading for pleasure. There is evidence of good practice, though monitoring of it is limited and currently the school has no full time literacy co-ordinator.

Modern foreign Languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- In Years 7 to 9, standards are below average, and pupils' achievement is unsatisfactory.
- Boys have poor attitudes to learning and underachieve in all years.
- Abler pupils in all years are insufficiently challenged in their learning.
- Schemes of work for Years 7 to 9 do not ensure that all pupils achieve well.
- Teaching and learning are good in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils with SEN achieve well.

Commentary

85. French is now the main language taught in the school except in the current Year 11, where German and French are taught equally. In 2003, the GCSE results in French and German were lower than in 2002. In recent years, results in French and German have been slightly below average, with no grades A* or A and few B grades. In 2003, boys performed less well in French than in any other school subject.

86. In the current Year 9, standards are below expectations. Pupils' writing and speaking skills are well below average, and in French, most pupils speak with very poor accents. By Year 11, standards have improved but are still below average; pupils can now express themselves in writing and speaking in basic French and German. In all years, pupils' listening skills are below average, but their reading skills are good.

87. Pupils' achievement is unsatisfactory in French in Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11, achievement is satisfactory overall. In all years, able pupils do not reach the higher language levels of which they are capable because of insufficient access to challenging foreign language texts and authentic speech. Boys underachieve in French. In the short time available for German in Year 8, pupils make good progress.

88. Pupils with SEN achieve well, owing to the very good guidance and support they receive. The use of ICT is satisfactory, but is not consistent enough to increase boys' motivation. Pupils' attitudes to learning are satisfactory overall, but many boys still have poor attitudes to language learning.

89. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Most lessons observed were satisfactory, with one very good lesson, and one unsatisfactory lesson. Teaching and learning are good in Years 10 and 11 because teachers link lessons clearly to GCSE requirements. However, in Years 7 to 9, teaching is unsatisfactory; schemes of work and teaching methods do not match the challenging range of pupils' language learning needs in the mixed ability groups, and the pace of learning is too slow. Teachers produce clear word-processed support sheets for pupils, and structure lessons well. However, they do not use the target language consistently in lessons and pupils have too few opportunities to develop personal language in speaking and writing. The lack of textbooks limits pupils' opportunities for home study. Marking and testing are thorough and regular. However, in Years 7 to 9, pupils are not supported by target-setting linked to National Curriculum Levels. Consequently, many pupils, especially boys, lose direction and interest in their learning.

90. Leadership is satisfactory and management is unsatisfactory. The head of department is hardworking; the brief German course and links with primary schools are successful. Standards are improving in Year 10. However, schemes of work for Years 7 to 9 require revision. Improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory. Standards in GCSE and in Years 7 to 9 have fallen, boys' achievement has deteriorated, and pupils' speaking skills are still weak.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Standards in Year 9 and Year 11 are above national averages and above average compared to similar schools.
- Teaching and learning are good; skilled questioning makes pupils think and encourages them to talk about mathematics.
- Pupils enjoy mathematics and work well together.
- Provision in Years 10 and 11 for the few highest attainers is not as good as that for other pupils.

Commentary

91. Standards in mathematics on entry to the school in Year 7 are average. There is a smaller proportion than expected of higher attainers. In 2003, results in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 were above average, and also represented good achievement when compared with similar schools. Results in national tests in 2003 are better than those in 2002. The difference in attainment between boys and girls generally reflects their relative standards on entry.

92. GCSE results in 2003 were above average, and better than those in similar schools, reflecting pupils' good achievement. There was a smaller proportion than nationally of the highest grades. This is partly due to the smaller proportion of high attainers than nationally. Boys did better than girls, reflecting their stronger performance at the end of Year 9.

93. Standards of work seen in Years 9 and 11 are above average. Pupils make good progress in acquiring a wide range of mathematical techniques and are able to apply them with understanding to increasingly difficult problems. Higher attainers develop better analytical and algebraic skills than other pupils. Lower attainers have a secure foundation in basic mathematical skills and can use them in straightforward problems.

94. Achievement in Years 7 to 11 is good. Nearly all pupils do better than expected from their prior attainment. Pupils are grouped for teaching with those of similar prior attainment. This is a key factor in their good achievement, as it makes it easier for teachers to make sure that pupils are aiming high. In Years 10 and 11, and especially in Year 11, teachers are working with a wide range of prior attainment in the top group. Teachers work hard to cover the additional breadth and depth of work required for the small number of pupils capable of reaching the highest grades. However, achievement for the few highest attainers in a year group is satisfactory, not good. Teaching assistants, smaller classes and well planned and structured teaching help pupils with SEN to achieve as well as other pupils.

95. Teaching and learning are good. A team of specialist teachers uses a broad range of lively teaching styles to get pupils involved and interested in mathematics. This is a big improvement since the previous inspection, especially in Years 7 to 9. Classroom routines are very well established so pupils know the standards of behaviour and hard work expected of them. Teachers use questions well to find out what pupils know, and where they need to do more work. This questioning also encourages pupils to talk about their work; they are articulate and use a wide range of technical vocabulary accurately. Pupils work hard and work well with other pupils. They are learning to look at their work critically and to find out where they are making mistakes before asking for help from the teacher.

96. The very good curriculum leadership of the head of department has had a positive impact on the ethos and direction of the subject. Improvements in teaching styles are an example of this. The Key Stage 3 strategy is also a factor in this change. Good management is shown in the analysis of performance data to identify areas where more work is needed.

97. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. Standards have risen and teaching has improved.

Mathematics across the curriculum

98. Pupils' numeracy skills are above average and this helps them to make progress with work in other subjects. They receive a good grounding in skills in mathematics lessons and this is good preparation for use across the curriculum. Pupils have the required calculation skills for their work in science and can use statistics well in geography when interpreting evidence collected in their coursework. In design and technology, their skills in estimating and measuring make a good contribution to the quality of their final products.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Pupils enjoy learning about science, work hard, and make good progress.
- Teaching is at least good in Years 7 to 9, and is very good in Years 10 and 11. Pupils who have SEN are very well supported.
- Although teachers usually respond well to pupils' individual needs, the most able are not always supported as well as they could be.

Commentary

99. When they come into the school, pupils' levels of attainment are below average. Very good teaching helps them to learn very well, so that by the end of Year 9, their results in the National Curriculum tests are well above average. Many more pupils than usual reach Level 6, and several reach Level 7. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is therefore very good. In Years 10 and 11, many pupils continue to do well, but the highest attaining pupils do not always do as well as they could. GCSE results are therefore similar to those seen nationally, and achievement is satisfactory.

100. Work seen in lessons generally supports these observations. Throughout the school, teachers make sure that lessons capture pupils' interest, so that they produce good work. For example, in a Year 11 lesson on pyramids of biomass and energy transfer, the teacher illustrated the ideas by reference to farming practices used locally. This helped pupils to understand the quite difficult ideas involved, especially when they were so well supported in answering examination questions on the topic. In Years 7 to 9, pupils' work mirrors the very good achievement seen in recent National Curriculum tests, and in Years 10 and 11 there are signs that pupils are now doing better than indicated by their GCSE results over the last few years.

101. Teaching is very good overall. Nearly all lessons are at least good, and some teaching is very good or excellent. Challenging discussions are a feature of nearly all lessons, and teachers make sure that all pupils' views are respected: this gives them confidence, and helps them to enjoy their lessons. Teachers are very good at challenging pupils to think carefully about what they are studying, often making the work more relevant by discussing the place of science in our lives. Pupils who have SEN are very well supported so that they can participate fully in the work of the department and their achievement is similar to that of other pupils. However, especially in Years 10 and 11, the highest attaining pupils sometimes find the work quite easy. Although teachers do their best to support them, for example by setting them more difficult questions than the rest of the class, more could be done to challenge them at the highest level and to help them to gain the highest GCSE grades.

102. Leadership and management of the department are excellent. The head of department has a very clear vision of how her department can continue to progress, and a very good departmental development plan sets out her aims. Her monitoring of the work of the department is excellent. All members of the department contribute to its development. This makes for a high level of unity of purpose in the department and means that pupils gain a consistent and developing view of science throughout the school. Teachers assess pupils' work regularly, and explain carefully to them how they can improve. Much of the accommodation has been recently refurbished and teachers make good use of the resources available.

103. There is clear evidence of improving test and examination results since the last inspection. Good accommodation and resources and imaginative schemes of work make a growing contribution to pupils' experiences in science. Monitoring of the work of the department is now excellent. Overall improvement since the last inspection is, therefore, good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in ICT is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is very good.
- There are very good relationships between teachers and pupils, and pupils have very positive attitudes towards the subject.
- There is insufficient use of National Curriculum Levels in teaching and in the assessment of pupils' work in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- All pupils in Years 10 and 11 take an accredited course.
- Too many changes in staffing from one year to the next result in a lack of continuity.

Commentary

104. Pupils aged 16 in 2003 gained grades in business and communications GCSE A*-C range below the national average. However, this was a new course being piloted with only a small cohort of pupils. Standards of work now seen in Year 11 are above national levels. Pupils make use of a wide variety of skills learned in previous years to complete projects. These are very well used for the 'Rhegged' project, in which pupils make extensive use of word processing and desktop publishing to produce good quality portfolios.

105. Standards of work seen in Years 7, 8 and 9 are in line with national levels. In Years 7 and 8 pupils develop a range of skills in the use of word processing, desktop publishing, slide-show presentations, spread sheets and data bases. Some particularly good work in Year 7 with spreadsheets, where pupils are learning how to use formulae to work out VAT, is well developed in Year 8, where pupils use more complex formulae. Here, they produce a range of charts and are beginning to understand the modelling capabilities of spreadsheets. In Year 9 pupils use their skills to complete short projects, showing a satisfactory level of competence and understanding in the use of computer software to reach expected standards.

106. Throughout Years 7 to 9 pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Achievement is good in Years 10 and 11 as pupils reach a higher standard than that seen nationally. They make effective use of their knowledge and understanding to produce good project work. Pupils with SEN make particularly good progress and achieve well. This is because of the in-class support they receive from teaching assistants, and because teachers prepare work matched to pupils' abilities.

107. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge, and plan lessons well, making effective use of the three-part lesson structure. There are very good relationships with pupils, who work very hard. They are responsive to teachers, which has a positive affect on their learning. However, there is insufficient use of National Curriculum Levels in teaching and assessment in Years 7, 8 and 9 to help pupils understand how well they are doing, and what they need to do to improve. The well-selected GCSE course for pupils in Years 10 and 11 is particularly well taught. Lesson preparation is very good, with clear objectives. Lessons are very well paced, with a variety of group and individual tasks so that the pupils make good progress. The plenary sessions at the end of lessons are very well conducted, and powerfully reinforce and consolidate learning.

108. There is good management of the department, with a vision and commitment to raise standards. Teachers in the department, and in other departments are particularly well supported. However, a lack of stability in the department, with a number of staff changes over the past few years, has meant considerable time being committed to training for initiatives such as the Key Stage 3 strategy.

109. There has been good progress since the last inspection.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

110. All pupils in Years 10 and 11 take an accredited course. There are now more opportunities for ICT skills to be used in other subjects. This is good in art with effective use of digital imaging, and very good in design and technology both in teaching and in pupils' use of ICT for projects. There is a growing demand by all departments to make use of ICT, and this is being met by the purchase of laptops and projectors. However access to computer rooms is limited, although the planned additional room should go some way to meeting the demand.

HUMANITIES

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Good teaching results in good learning.
- Assessment procedures are effectively used to the benefit of individual pupils.
- Teachers manage pupils well and ensure that they are fully involved in lessons.
- Gifted and talented pupils are not always stretched.
- Access to ICT is restricted.

Commentary

111. Standards at the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11 are average. Given the low attainment of most pupils when they enter the school, this represents good achievement. Standards seen during the inspection, particularly in Year 10, are higher than the 2003 GCSE results would indicate. Pupils with SEN in all year groups make equivalent progress because of the extra support given by class teachers and teaching assistants. Gifted and talented pupils in these mixed ability classes do not always achieve as well as they should. Boys do not always achieve as well as girls and strategies have been developed to improve their literacy skills. The department is well aware of the link between good literacy skills and achievement in history. Pupils' historical vocabulary is extended by the use of technical terms such as *trebuchet*. There is an element of reading and writing in every lesson. Pupils are learning good historical skills such as the analysis and use of evidence. After studying World War I recruitment posters, pupils in Year 9 are able to discuss propaganda and its use. Year 11 pupils explain the circumstances in which the National Health Service was established and the concept of care 'from the cradle to the grave'.

112. Good achievement is the result of good teaching and learning in all year groups. As a result of direct, confident teaching and varied activities, pupils' interest is sustained and their attention held. Teachers are particularly adept at using vivid video clips to illustrate specific points they wish emphasise. Effective questioning at the beginning of each lesson consolidates previous learning. Teaching is energetic and a fast pace is set. The reinforcement of learning at specific intervals throughout lessons ensures that pupils are not left behind. Teachers give a strong lead, but pupils are given opportunities to show what they can do. Their opinions are welcomed but must always be supported with evidence. A strong concentration on examination techniques is designed to raise GCSE grades. Assessment procedures are effectively used so that pupils know how to improve their work. As a result of this careful instruction, pupils feel secure and respond well to the high expectations of their teachers. Good learning also results from pupils' enjoyment of the subject. Year 8 pupils studying Armour through Time are delighted to try on chain mail and helmets, but they are equally prepared to work out the chronological order of the artefacts.

113. Both the leadership and management of the department are very good. The head of department is progressive and forward-looking. Positive attempts have been made to address weaknesses at the time of the previous inspection and progress is very good. A stable teaching team has been established. Teachers plan collaboratively and share good practice. Marking is now diagnostic. The department is committed to raising pupils' achievement and to ensuring their enjoyment of the subject.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The quality of teaching is good.
- There is an effective focus on skills, practical work and pupil participation.
- The head of department is hard working, knowledgeable and fully aware of the department's strengths and weaknesses.
- Standards in Years 10 and 11 have fallen.
- Systems of pupil monitoring and assessment are not as effective as they could be.

114. Attainment at the end of Year 9 is in line with the national average. It is better in Year 9 than in Years 7 and 8, partly because work lacks detail and there are gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding in those years. In Year 9, good use of examples adds detail and pupils have a greater understanding of topics and higher order concepts such as sustainability. GCSE results have fallen since the last inspection and attainment is below national and school averages. Currently in Years 10 and 11 good teaching is helping pupils to raise standards and add value to their knowledge and skills.

115. From below average attainment on entry to the school, achievement by age 14 is good overall, particularly in Year 9, during which learning skills improve, more detail is added to work and pupils are more actively involved in learning. This includes those with SEN who are well supported by teachers and teaching assistants. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is much improved from that of recent years and is now at least average or above, especially for pupils with SEN and those with higher levels of prior attainment. Boys and girls achieve equally well.

116. Standards in geography are rising. Pupils are making greater progress than previously because teaching is good and often very good. Lessons are well planned, and include a variety of strategies to interest, motivate and actively involve pupils in learning, and to teach them to work independently and to improve geographical knowledge understanding by co-operating with colleagues. A focus on skills and practical work, including fieldwork, successfully prepares younger pupils for work in later years. Adequate and varied resources are used well and ICT is increasingly important. Pupils are industrious, enthusiastic participators and enjoy many lessons. Marking is regular but assessment is not sufficiently systematic and fails to link attainment to National Curriculum Levels or to influence teaching and set pupil targets.

117. The department is very well led. The head of department knows where improvements are needed and has prioritised a programme of development to raise standards and achievement. Good support for teaching is given to non-specialist teachers through lesson plans and the departmental handbook. Their work is monitored and assessments cross-moderated. Overall the department is well managed and prospects for the future are good.

118. Since the previous inspection pupils have become more independent learners. A greater use is being made of ICT and current evidence suggests that the fall in standards has been arrested. Overall improvement is therefore satisfactory.

Religious education

The provision in religious education is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The school currently fails to provide sufficient religious education for pupils in Years 10 and 11 to meet the requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus.
- Leadership and management of the department are both very good.
- Much teaching in the department is very good and quite innovative.
- New assessment procedures help pupils to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of their own work while benefiting from discussing the work of their classmates.
- There is no use of computers in this subject area.

Commentary

119. Because of unforeseen staffing difficulties, the school has not been able to appoint a suitably qualified teacher. Hence it has not been possible for the school to meet the statutory requirement to provide religious education to pupils in Years 10 and 11. The school intends to rectify this situation for the next academic year but it means that provision for religious education, which is otherwise good, must be judged unsatisfactory.

120. In Years 7 to 9 pupils, achieve well in their lessons, and by the end of Year 9, are working at standards above those generally seen nationally. In Year 9 lessons seen during the inspection, pupils were able to discuss not only aspects of Sikh religious practice but also its symbolic meaning and its relationship with fundamental principles of the Sikh tradition.

121. Written work, particularly in the end of unit assessments, sometimes shows pupils' ability to apply the teachings of religious traditions to their own lives. Pupils are encouraged to use drawings and diagrams to express themselves. This allows those whose written work is less well developed to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of topics covered. Pupils are sometimes given structures for producing written work and this helps them to write about what they know, and to show their understanding and their ability to formulate and express opinions.

122. Teaching is good, with some very good features. They use a wide range of teaching methods, and this variety helps to engage pupils' interest. When coupled with sound subject knowledge, the combination of the two leads to good learning. In a Year 9 lesson on Christian prayer a number of artefacts were used, including candles and incense, and modern evangelical worship music was played. This both attracted pupils' interest and helped them to appreciate a range of practices within different parts of the Christian tradition. A Year 8 lesson on Buddhism allowed pupils to experience meditation and then discuss it. The department has found it difficult to introduce the use of computers into classroom work and this is something for it to address. The introduction of systematic peer assessment is an exciting innovation that should be further developed. The use of information about pupils' primary school attainments, and progress in other subject areas, to set targets for achievement in religious education is another area that should be further developed.

123. The curriculum followed by pupils in Years 7 to 9 meets the requirements of the Cumbria Agreed Syllabus. Pupils spend most time learning about Christianity but also do units of work on Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism. Resources for teaching the subject are fairly sparse, and some are quite dated, but books, videos and particularly artefacts have been carefully chosen and cared for. They enable the subject to be well taught, and to make a clear contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school's geographical situation constrains interaction with a range of faith communities but the department is investigating ways to overcome this difficulty.

124. Religious education is very well led and managed. The head of department is highly committed and very effective in ensuring that there is a vision and direction for developing the subject over time whilst ensuring effective day-to-day management. She has been particularly adept at supporting and utilising an unqualified colleague in ways that maximise the contribution he is able to make.

125. There have been a number of improvements in the provision of religious education since the last inspection, particularly the attainment of pupils by the end of Year 9 and the quality of written work.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- High standards are achieved by boys in GCSE examinations.
- There is good achievement across all ages and all material areas.
- Well-motivated pupils work close to their full potential, as a result of very good teaching.
- Very good leadership and management underpin high quality teaching.
- The application of higher order graphical and evaluative skills needs more rigour.

Commentary

126. Standards at GCSE are very good in all material areas. In 2003 just under half the pupils entered achieved in the range A* to B, with over three quarters of boys achieving in the range A* to C. Results compare very well with other school subjects. The standard of work seen in Years 10 and 11 was consistently good in all material areas. Pupils of differing capabilities achieve well. Pupils demonstrate and apply their design skills to a range of demanding briefs. Making is thoughtfully planned and pupils demonstrate confident, skilled and safe practice using a range of hand and machine tools, and appliances. As a result final products are accurately made with good attention to finish. However, they do not use graphical and evaluative skills with sufficient rigour to reach higher standards.

127. Standards of work seen at the end of Year 9 are in line with national expectations. This represents good achievement as pupils arrive in school with a limited range of technological experience. Pupils of all abilities develop design ideas competently and are able to thoughtfully analyse and evaluate ideas. Good use is made of edited internet material during research. Technical knowledge and understanding is being extended with systematic experience of computer aided design (CAD) and computer aided manufacture (CAM). Standards of construction are consistently good. The rate at which design ideas are generated and analysed in Years 7 and 8 is slowed by weakness in graphical and annotation skills.

128. Teaching and learning are very good. Pupils acquire skills and techniques in both design and making through well planned, skilful exposition and demonstrations. Lessons are purposeful and well matched to pupil needs. Relationships between teachers and staff are excellent. Pupils are successfully encouraged to follow their own interests in Year 10 and 11 coursework. Students with SEN are well supported. Questioning is systematically used in lessons but requires greater intellectual challenge to extend innovative technological thinking. Creative problem-solving skills need to be methodically nurtured. Marking and assessment are thorough and provides very good feedback and encouragement for improvement.

129. Leadership and management are very good. There is a clear curriculum vision and a strong determination to achieve the highest possible standards in all areas. All staff know what they are working towards and there is an excellent commitment to teamwork. Effective strategic planning and development have successfully improved the quality of accommodation and resources. A reflective, self-critical approach results in continuous improvements in practice. Classroom performance is effectively evaluated but needs to be better supported by specialist training. Very good technical support is provided in all material areas.

130. Progress since the last inspection has been good. Shortfalls in curriculum provision, standards at the end of Year 9, and manufacturing accuracy have been successfully addressed.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art was inspected in full as part of the inspection, and lessons in drama and music were also sampled.

Art

Provision in art is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Standards are improving for all pupils because of very good teaching which sets high standards.
- Achievement from Year 7 to Year 11 is good.
- The very good relationship between teachers and pupils creates a very good learning partnership that enables all pupils to play an active part in their own education.
- The leadership and management of the department are excellent, demonstrating a clear vision and sense of purpose, which is realised in the high standards being achieved.
- Assessment is extremely effective in providing pupils with achievable targets and the knowledge to understand how they can improve.

Commentary

131. By the end of Year 9 standards are above average. Standards continue to improve because the pupils have access to a wide range of materials and experiences. They respond well, profess to enjoy the subject, and progress is good. Achievement for all pupils is good because teaching offers a wide range of creative opportunities and promotes independent learning, and the pupils enjoy the challenges on offer. By the end of Year 9, skills have developed in powers of observation through drawing and pupils have experienced painting, printing, sculpture and the use of mixed-media techniques. Standards in Years 10 and 11 continue to improve and achievement for all is good, because good teaching and the positive attitude of the pupils raise their knowledge and understanding, together with improvements in their craft skills. The analysis of work indicates that GCSE grades should exceed those previously achieved and be above the national average.

132. The quality of teaching is very good and pupils' interest is high. Lesson planning is very effective, delivering challenge and choice for all pupils. Relationships are very good, often excellent, based on mutual respect. A significant number of pupils in all year groups mentioned that art was one of their favourite subjects because lessons are interesting and teachers are very helpful. The personal development of the pupils is improving because they are encouraged to develop opinions through discussion, share ideas and assist in the distribution and collection of materials and equipment. Language skills are improving because key words are introduced into most lessons as part of the school's literacy policy. Most pupils are articulate when discussing their work and many understand and use technical language. Opportunities for the promotion of numeracy are limited but concepts of scale, proportion, symmetry, perspective, area and volume are introduced. References are made in all lessons to the work of significant artists and cultures in

order to raise creative and visual appreciation and develop critical thinking. A small number of computers, a digital camera, scanners and some art related computer software are available in the department and opportunities for using them are planned into the schemes of work. Homework is set regularly and is used effectively as preparation or reinforcement for lessons.

133. The management of the department is excellent. Department documentation is very well organised, providing a clear structure for the present and future development of the subject. Work is marked regularly and constructive oral and written feedback is given, informing pupils of their strengths and weaknesses and providing advice on how to improve through the revision of targets. The subject meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. Accommodation is good, providing the pupils with a pleasant and attractive environment in which to work. Displays of work in the classrooms and the public areas within the school generate interest and demonstrate good achievement in all year groups. Resources are generally good and used effectively to provide a wide range of opportunities for all pupils. A good range of enrichment activities is available to stimulate interest. Overall, improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Drama

134. Drama is established in the curriculum as a separate subject in Years 7 to 9, and as a GCSE option in Years 10 and 11. It is a popular GCSE option with a greater proportion of pupils taking it than is the case nationally. Provision is good overall and makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development and the life of the school.

135. Standards by the end of Year 9 are above average. Pupils participate with enthusiasm and without inhibition in lesson activities. They are familiar with the vocabulary of the subject and the requirements of behaviour in lessons. They listen carefully and follow instructions without difficulty. Pupils in Year 8 are able to perform a great variety of physical and oral improvisations with little hesitation. Pupils in Year 9 show good listening skills in identifying a range of sounds, and good imagination in creating their own to build up a 'soundscape'. Relationships in the lessons are good and pupils work very co-operatively. All pupils are able to participate in class activities irrespective of levels of ability, and achievement is good.

136. Standards by the end of Year 11 are below average. Results in the GCSE examination in 2003 and previous years at grades A* to C are below the national average. Achievement is, however, good. Pupils with a wide range of ability choose the course but all are able to participate and contribute. They are familiar with the format of playscripts and can read and prepare them for performance. They work co-operatively in groups and with their teacher, showing interest.

137. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned, based on a detailed programme of study which develops drama skills progressively. Pupils respond well, stimulated by lively, enthusiastic and well-informed teaching. Good accommodation for drama enhances pupils' experiences and the subject makes a useful contribution to their personal and social development. The success of the 'Bloody Bones Company' drama productions makes a valuable contribution to the life of the school.

138. Progress since the previous inspection is good. The good standards of achievement reported have been maintained and there is a history of successful school productions involving many pupils.

Music

139. Two lessons in music were sampled, and discussions were held with the head of department. All pupils in Years 7 to 9 study music. Examination classes leading to GCSE music take place in Years 10 and 11 when there is sufficient demand. A dedicated group of peripatetic teachers support the many pupils who learn to play musical instruments. Some pupils reach high standards in Associated Board examinations. School concerts and teatime recitals are a feature of the school calendar.

140. In the lessons seen, pupils responded well to the enthusiasm of their teacher, though their standards of attainment on entry are below average. A group of Year 8 pupils showed good achievement when they learned to clap a samba rhythm in 'harmony', maintaining the pulse of the music whilst clapping independent rhythms. A video recording of a recent school concert demonstrated the enthusiasm of the musicians and dancers in the school, and the contribution that school music makes in the community.

141. Resources for music are unsatisfactory. The range of acoustic instruments is limited, and keyboards are of low specification. There are no appropriate facilities for using computers for composition.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical Education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Teaching and learning are good.
- There are very high standards and very good achievement in GCSE.
- Pupils have very good attitudes and work hard in lessons.
- There is very good provision of extra-curricular activities, and high standards are achieved.
- Units of work are too short to ensure good progression in some activities.
- National Curriculum Levels are not used sufficiently in the assessment of pupils in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

142. Pupils achieve standards in the subject above those typically seen nationally. In Years 7 to 9, pupils demonstrate high levels of competence particularly in games. In GCSE standards have risen over the last three years, and in the 2003 examinations, 85 per cent of the pupils gained A*-C grades against a national average of 55 per cent. Pupils in Year 10 and 11 core physical education have skills and understanding above those seen in schools nationally. In all years there are particularly high standards in hockey and rugby. In Year 7, pupils develop basic passing, receiving and tackling skills. These are well developed and by Year 9 pupils make effective use of these skills as they become more aware of team play and tactics. In Years 10 and 11, pupils play better-organised games, as they are more knowledgeable about rules and team play, and use higher-level skills. Pupils taking GCSE have a satisfactory understanding of the theoretical aspects of physical education. They know the difference between aerobic and anaerobic exercise and recognise how these energy systems are used in different sports.

143. Pupils' achievement in the subject is good. Coming in at an average level in games and gymnastics, pupils reach above nationally expected levels in Year 9. Achievement is good in Year 7, particularly in dance. In the early stages of a unit of work, pupils create short sequences based on a football theme. Pupils with SEN achieve highly as they are very well supported by teaching assistants, and fully included in lessons. In Years 10 and 11 there is very good achievement by pupils in GCSE.

144. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge, which is well used to give detailed explanations and demonstrations, leading to good learning by pupils. Lessons are well planned and prepared with challenging practices suitable for pupils of different attainment levels. Pupils are interested in the subject; they respond well to teachers, with whom they have good relationships. Pupils take charge of their own warm up at the start of lessons, and the plenary sessions at the end of lessons are well used to reinforce learning. Some units of work are too short to ensure good progression and little use is made of National Curriculum Levels to help pupils understand how well they are doing and how they can improve.

145. Leadership and management are good. There is a vision to develop the subject further by achieving Sports College status. The department have a commitment to providing a very good range of extra-curricular activities, and are very well supported by other teachers in the provision of table tennis, girls' soccer and rugby, and running clubs. Standards are high and there are good opportunities for all pupils, including the gifted and talented, to play at higher levels for district and county teams. Since the last inspection there has been good progress. Standards remain high, teaching is good, pupils have very good attitudes and achievement is very good in GCSE.

146. The school is now in its second term as a Sports College. Targets set are now being met, and good progress is being made. The appointment of an additional teacher is improving the quality of the curriculum through dance in Years 7 and 8, and Junior Sports Leader Award in Year 10. Teachers have received training in the use of ICT in the subject although the impact of this is limited at present. The appointment of a School Sports Co-ordinator will further extend the good work being done at present with two local primary schools that have physical education lessons at the school. The plans for improving the accommodation are underway with the development of a dance studio. However, the range of activities for both the school and local community remains limited because of the lack of sports hall.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Personal and Social Education

Provision in PSE, and in citizenship, is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Very good programmes of work are available for each year group.
- Centrally prepared lesson plans and resources support teaching very well.
- Effective use is made of links with the community and visiting speakers.
- There is too little formal assessment of pupils' work.

Commentary

147. Standards of attainment are similar to those found nationally. Pupils have an adequate knowledge of a wide range of topics, including equal opportunities, safety, fitness, personal organisation, government, careers, the environment, sex, relationships, HIV/Aids, drug awareness and parenting skills. Contributions are made to careers education, decisions about the future and preparation for work experience. Overall achievement is satisfactory, though indifferent presentation of pupils' work, gaps and incomplete work suggest that personal education is not taken seriously enough.

148. Learning is effectively enhanced by opportunities to take part in the many extra-curricular activities that the school provides; to gain from the expertise of visiting speakers and presenters, and to contribute to the community and to charities.

149. Teaching is always satisfactory, often good. Centrally prepared lessons with accompanying resources and worksheets are provided by year heads to support form tutors who teach the weekly lesson. Aims are clear; pupils are encouraged to participate and share experiences. Lessons have an element of humour and pupils are responsive to topics they feel have direct implications for them.

150. Personal and social education (PSE) is well organised and managed by heads of year, who meet with tutors to discuss general progress. However, systematic assessment of personal development is unsatisfactory. The progress of pupils is assessed informally in preparation for reports but there is no evidence of the formal assessment of pupils' written work, standards of attainment or progress at other times during the year.

Citizenship

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Arrangements to establish and meet the requirements of the National Curriculum are very good.
- Leadership is very good. It is enthusiastic and sets high standards.
- No systems are in place to assess the attainment and progress of pupils.

Commentary

151. Little documentary evidence is available to accurately judge the standards achieved in citizenship. Limited content in pupils' folders suggests that attainment is satisfactory both in Years 7 to 9 and in the GCSE short course. Mock examination papers in Years 10 and 11 indicate that standards are about average but there is no comparative information from previous years to indicate trends in attainment over time.

152. Only one discrete lesson of citizenship was observed during the inspection. In it, teaching was very good and pupils displayed a good understanding of human rights issues. Learning was very good. Pupils effectively communicated well-held views on a range of human rights issues but listening skills were less well developed. Limited evidence from pupils' work indicates that teaching for the short GCSE course is at least satisfactory and that learning is good. Pupils have a sound knowledge of the law and legal processes and effectively express opinions on legal issues. They plan and deliver a public presentation well and competently evaluate the duties and responsibilities of employers and employees during work experience. Learning is enhanced by visits from outside speakers and developing links with the community.

153. Leadership of this new subject is very good and effective systems have been set in place to track contributions to the subject by other departments. The teacher in charge has planned very well, devised an effective programme of study and is seeking to ensure that pupils' entitlements are fully met. Some evaluation has led to changes in organisation but there has been no systematic assessment of standards or pupils' achievement in Years 7 to 9. A firm foundation has been laid on which to build for the future.

154. Since the previous inspection, programmes of citizenship have been introduced as required by the National Curriculum. These provide support for pupils' personal development by contributing to PSE.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

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

Level 3 GCE AS Level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
English		No subject was taken by more than four students					
Mathematics							
Chemistry							
History							
Physical Education							

Level 3 GCE A Level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
English	5	100	99	0	43.7	68.0	84.3
Mathematics		Fewer than five candidates					
Chemistry	5	100	94	80	45.9	108.0	81.1
History	9	100	97	33	41	100	81
Physical Education		Fewer than five candidates					

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English was the focus of the inspection, but a Year 12 lesson in media studies was also sampled. It is a popular option, with 17 students in the group. They showed good recall of the lifestyle magazines they have studied and many contributed readily to class discussion. They recognise the quite cynical manipulation by the publishers of the mainly female market. Standards are broadly average. Attainment on entry to the course is wide, but all students should gain a grade.

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Attainment in the A Level examination in 2003 was above average.
- Teaching and learning are good, because students are known well and their capacities understood.
- Relationships in the classroom are good so students are confident in contributing.
- Numbers in teaching groups have fluctuated, and have generally been small.

Commentary

157. Judgements on standards in the GCE AS and A Level examinations are difficult since the numbers of students involved are small. Results vary year on year. Thus, in 2003, attainment in A Level was above average, with three students gaining the highest grades A and B, in contrast to 2002 when attainment was below average with no student gaining a high grade. In 2003 attainment in AS was below average, with no student gaining a high grade, in contrast to 2002 when attainment was above average and four students gained the highest grades.

158. There is a wide range of attainment on entry to the course. Generally it is, at best, average. Students' achievement is good, however. In individual cases, progression from GCSE through AS to A2 is mostly at least satisfactory and, in many cases, good. The take up of students from AS into A2 is good and very few have not continued. All students entered are successful in gaining grades and some have gained the highest grades. English has been particularly successful this year in recruiting students into Year 12, with seventeen in the AS group although there are only three in the A2 group.

159. The standards of work of students by the age of 18 seen during the inspection reflect the examination results and are broadly in line with national standards. Students demonstrate, both in class and in written work, the capacity to read and respond to literature texts with perception and in detail. Students in Year 12 showed good knowledge and understanding of *The Handmaid's Tale* in class discussion. They shared their ideas confidently with the teacher and their classmates and took their own detailed notes. Students in Year 13, having undertaken research on the life of Keats in preparation for the study of his poetry, commented thoughtfully on the material. They showed that they had researched conscientiously and were comfortable in sharing their ideas. Students' written work demonstrates a good range of reading experience. Essays are well planned and use an appropriate range of vocabulary. Students use evidence from the texts studied to support their answers and are accustomed to referring to critical material, both from books and the Internet, to inform their writing.

160. Students find the course interesting and enjoyable; they like the exchange of ideas in class discussion. Having different teachers sharing the teaching adds interest through different approaches and attitudes. They feel they have responsibility for their own work and are quite independent learners.

161. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and understanding and match lessons to students' needs. They know the students well. Lessons are appropriately demanding but students are comfortable in their relationships and so respond well, working with interest in a good-humoured atmosphere. Students are well supported with a range of information sheets, extracts from the work of critics, and very clear information about the courses and the standards for assessment. Students' work is very thoroughly and helpfully assessed with clear guidance for improvement. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. Teaching is equitably shared and there is good co-operation to ensure standardisation and the diligent delivery of the requirements of the courses.

162. Progress since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Good standards of achievement have been maintained and the number of students taking English has increased.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

163. Language and literacy skills across the curriculum are satisfactory. Students are attentive to teachers and their peers and exchange ideas freely in class discussion. They are able to respond to the variety of texts they study and take detailed notes. Their writing is informed by good research including the Internet.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Students enjoy mathematics; the numbers opting for AS study are increasing.
- Skilled questioning from teachers encourages students to think and to talk about their work.
- Many students have not developed the necessary study skills to reinforce and consolidate their learning outside lessons.
- Teachers have not structured work outside lessons sufficiently well for some students.

Commentary

164. The numbers studying mathematics are small, but increasing. Standards on entry, and those reached in examinations, fluctuate each year due to the changing nature of each cohort. In 2002, all students passed GCE AS Level and all students taking A Level examinations received higher grade passes. In 2003, only one in five passed AS Level and there were no A2 students. As numbers increase, more students with a weaker mathematics background are choosing to take these courses. On entry to the course, standards for many students in Year 12 are well below average. Students' enjoyment of mathematics is shown by the very good retention rate. Standards of work seen during the inspection are below average. The numbers are too small for analysis of any significant difference in standards due to gender.

165. Students in Year 12 can use a number of techniques to analyse and interpret grouped data. Students understand, and can competently use, a wide range of mathematical notation new to them this year. They can solve problems related to normal distributions, but some need prompting with the more complex questions. Students can find maximum and minimum points of quadratic functions, and most are able to sketch them quickly. Higher attainers are able to apply skills learnt in one aspect to a new one. Lower attainers need support with algebraic manipulation.

166. Progress as shown in lessons during the inspection is good. Teachers explain new ideas in a way that quickly involves students and makes them think. At the end of a lesson on a new topic, students understand the new concepts, though many have to work hard to do so. However, many students are not following this up with sufficient practice outside the classroom to make sure their learning is reinforced and consolidated. Their study skills are not sufficiently developed for AS Level work. This results in satisfactory, not good, achievement as many are not able to sustain their better-than-expected classroom performance. Teachers set appropriate homework but are not doing enough to make sure all students are spending sufficient time outside lessons on mathematical work. Teaching and learning are satisfactory.

167. Teachers adapt their style in lessons well to the needs of post 16 students. Students enjoy learning mathematics, and the lively 'buzz' in lessons supports this. They feel they are well supported in dealing with problems, and say that there is always someone available to help them.

168. Leadership is good. Specialist teachers form a cohesive team and there is a good atmosphere of encouraging students to think mathematically. Management is satisfactory. Examination data are analysed systematically to learn what could be improved, for example from the AS results in 2003. This is used to adapt teaching styles for the coming year. However, not enough is done to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of each new group of students at the beginning of their course, so that necessary skills, especially study skills, can be developed.

169. No specific Post 16 issues were raised in the previous report.

Mathematics across the curriculum

170. Students' mathematical skills are good. They are a positive factor in helping them make progress in different areas of study. Students can work out proportions for titration in science and can transpose formulae when they need to. Their skills in drawing and measuring help them to make accurate prototypes in design and technology. Their skills in symmetry and tessellations support work in art.

SCIENCE

Chemistry was the focus of the inspection, but two lessons in A Level biology were also sampled. In both of them, very good teaching supported very good learning. The teacher continually challenged her students to think about the subject: nothing was allowed to pass without a scholarly explanation at A Level students could understand. In a very good practical lesson, she demonstrated with skill and good humour how to dissect a pig's heart, presenting a model of how deft experimentation followed by sophisticated interpretation leads to a better understanding of science. Although standards in examinations have not always been as good as predicted, achievement in the lessons seen was very good, and students are now well placed to meet their targets in their examinations.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Students' excellent attitudes to the subject, and their motivation to succeed, mean that they learn well and achievement is good.
- Teachers are committed to their students' success, and all teaching is very good.
- Students come into the Sixth Form with a wide range of GCSE grades, and teachers support them in doing well in relation to their ability. Some students, however, do not gain a pass grade, especially in AS Level examinations.
- Students' study skills are not good enough to enable all of them to reach their full potential.

Commentary

171. The school's policy is that any student who satisfies the overall conditions for entry to the Sixth Form may study chemistry, and students with a wide range of GCSE grades in science: double award, join the AS course in Year 12. They make good progress, supported especially by the very good discussions that characterise many lessons, so that their attainment is as expected. Some students make very good progress and go on to gain the highest grades in AS and A Level. Others, however, fail to reach the standard needed for a pass grade at the end of Year 12. Such students usually decide to drop the subject.

172. The number of students choosing to continue to Advanced Level varies from year to year. Small groups mean that statistical comparisons with national figures are unreliable. However, their standards of attainment in lessons are broadly as expected. Students' practical skills are typical. More attention to clean, careful and accurate work would pay dividends in terms of coursework marks, and lead to a better understanding of the underlying ideas. Students' folders are very well maintained, and show that they are well motivated to succeed. They take care with their work, and act upon the very useful comments made by their teachers. Although students use the internet and other sources of information, they have insufficient opportunity to undertake careful research, to write up their findings and discuss them in detail. As a result, they find it difficult to develop the writing skills needed to express complex ideas and relationships precisely; this lowers the quality of their written work. Bearing in mind their levels of attainment at the beginning of Year 12, overall achievement is good.

173. Students are very well taught, and this has a tangible effect in terms of motivation and the will to succeed. Students and their teachers are equal partners in a voyage of discovery which is both challenging and exciting. Lessons take place in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect so that learning is also very good. Small groups mean that teachers understand their students very well and can match their teaching to their needs. However, small groups also limit the opportunities for the scholarly discussion that leads to really good learning. Students who find the subject difficult are very well supported when problems arise. Often, this happens because of poor study skills, or because students are insecure in analysing and evaluating information. More could be done to support the highest attaining students so that they realise their full potential.

174. The subject is very well led and managed. The head of department has a clear vision for progress within the subject and has embodied her ideas in a very good development plan. Routine documentation and policies are all in place and used to promote a learning environment that caters very well for her students. There are clear aims, and monitoring of students' progress through assessment is clearly rooted in national standards. Students know how they are progressing, and what they need to do in order to reach or exceed their targets. Monitoring of the progress of the subject is good. Overall progress since the last inspection is therefore good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Courses in ICT could not be sampled because none took place during the week of inspection as a result of GCE examinations and students' absence.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

175. Teachers do not have high enough expectations of how students can use ICT to improve their learning. Some students have a good grasp of the ways in which they can carry out research and process information from the Internet to aid their study in other subjects. They use this skill well to carry out assignments. However, most students' ICT skills are not exploited to raise standards in their examination courses. The school does not have a co-ordinated programme to develop this key skill for all students, built upon systematic assessment.

HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was in history, but geography was sampled. In a Year 13 geography lesson good teaching led to good learning. Students' files inspected and conversations with them about their work indicate that they are making good progress and achievement through a well-structured course. Most are attaining average standards with some showing above average understanding about physical processes and human issues in geography through greater depth of work. Marking is helpful, but is not sufficiently well linked to A Level grades to give full support.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Very good relationships. Teachers and students share an enthusiasm for the subject.
- There are not enough reference books.
- Occasionally lessons are over-planned so that flexibility is lost.

Commentary

176. Year 12 students who began the course with below average attainment at GCSE are now reaching standards in line with the national average. Year 13 students who began the course with average attainment are now reaching standards well above the national average. In 2003, a significant proportion attained the highest grades at AS and A Level. The levels of attainment reached in the Sixth Form therefore represent very good achievement. Year 12 students are able to consider contradictory interpretations of an event. The Civil War was 'a chivalrous war' or the 'bloodiest war in our history'. They appreciate being asked to make up their own minds and know that well presented and clearly argued opinions will be accepted. Girls' achievement is better than boys. The department is implementing strategies to improve boys' achievement. Year 13 students are well informed and academically confident and their knowledge base is secure. They respond well to the intellectual demands made by their tutors, so that they learn how to marshal and analyse evidence in order to come to a measured conclusion. They are familiar with academic controversy, ask pertinent questions and comment appropriately on the views of professional historians. They recognise that cogent arguments can only be based on solid evidence.

177. This achievement is the result of very good teaching. Teaching is direct, energetic and well informed. Students always know what is expected of them. The technical expertise required for essay writing, the building of arguments and coming to logical conclusions, is very precisely transmitted by teachers, and students respond well. Students value the teaching of examination techniques which gives them academic confidence and security. Teachers are generous with their time. They are always available to give extra help and advice. Careful guidance and encouragement gives students the confidence to think independently. They also co-operate well and share research. They value the opportunities for debate and discussion. They are learning tolerance. They recognise that the historical skills they are acquiring are transferable to other subjects and other situations, in particular, the ability to take a balanced view. They are also developing a healthy scepticism. In every class there is a very pleasant atmosphere conducive to learning. Recruitment into the subject is good. A number of students plan to continue the subject to degree level.

178. Leadership and management of the subject are both very good. Connections have been forged with two large Sixth Forms in other institutions in order to share resources and strategies to improve teaching. The department has established a well-balanced and academically demanding course. It is taught at A Level which encourages students to think, to plan, to analyse, to communicate, to see two sides of every argument and, always, to question.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and Technology

179. Design and technology lessons in Years 12 and 13 were sampled during the inspection. Standards and achievement at both levels are good although group size is small. In lessons observed, students demonstrated a good grasp of design principles and successfully applied design methodology to a range of problems and products. Manufacturing standards were good and good use is made of ICT to enhance and improve work quality.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

180. No subject in this curriculum area was the focus of the inspection. However two lessons in art were sampled, students' work was scrutinised, and a group of students was interviewed.

181. Standards in art are above average and achievement is good because of the excellent attitudes of the students and the very good quality of the teaching. Students enjoy the subject, have a mature attitude to their studies and appreciate the support they get from their teacher.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical Education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Teaching and learning are good.
- Students have very positive attitudes and value the subject.
- There are very good relationships between teachers and students.
- There is insufficient use of ICT in teaching.
- There is no regular monitoring of students' work folders.

Commentary

182. Standards in AS and A Level in 2003 are average, although the low numbers of students involved mean that no comparison can be made against standards of students in similar schools.

183. Standards of work produced by students in Years 12 and 13 are satisfactory. Students understand muscle location and movement at the joints. They are beginning to understand basic mechanics, and the application of Newton's laws of motion to sporting movements. Students are aware of the influence of personality and aggression in sporting activities. In the history of sport they know about festival and wakes, and how mob games were the forerunners of more structured games.

184. Students are achieving what might be expected of them. They build on their knowledge and understanding gained in GCSE, as they learn much more complex anatomy and physiology. They learn new topics about psychology in sport, and show satisfactory achievement as they apply this knowledge to sporting situations.

185. Teaching is good. Lessons are well planned and prepared, particularly in Year 13 where students are challenged to think about issues such as cultural effects on sports and games. In Year 12, teaching is more restricted with heavy reliance on the text books. Students receive plenty of information through printed notes, commercial work sheets, and booklets, all of which are of high quality. However a balance between these and students' own work needs to be found, so that students become more active learners. Students have very positive attitudes to their work, and this contributes to the quality of their learning. Teachers' good subject knowledge enables them to give very detailed explanations, and to focus questions very well, leading to very good student response. Students' work is marked regularly and comments made on how to improve. Routine folder checks would ensure that notes are well organised, and enable better revision for examinations.

186. Leadership and management are good. The A Level courses are well organised. Good analysis of students' performance enables clear targets to be set. Day-to-day organisation is good, and resources have been improved with a range of student texts and reference material. There is planned use for ICT in teaching, and training for this has been arranged for specific software for the A Level course. There has been good progress since the last inspection.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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