

INSPECTION REPORT

THE COMMONWEAL SCHOOL

Swindon

LEA area: Swindon

Unique reference number: 126505

Headteacher: Mr K Defter

Lead inspector: Mr R Palmer

Dates of inspection: 24th – 27th November 2003

Inspection number: 260788

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive
School category: Foundation
Age range of pupils: 11 to 16
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 1111

School address: The Mall
Old Town
Swindon
Postcode: SN1 4JE

Telephone number: 01793 612727
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Appropriate authority: Governing body
Name of chair of governors: Ms C Hardisty

Date of previous inspection: 15th March 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The school is of average size and is fully subscribed. It has submitted a bid to become a specialist performing arts college. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school in Year 7 is above average. Pupils come from broadly average social and economic backgrounds. About one in ten pupils come from a wide range of ethnic minorities. The proportion of pupils whose mother tongue is other than English, about one in 25, is slightly higher than that found in most schools. No pupils are at a very early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs, about one in nine is below average. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs, about one in 20, is above average. The school houses two units for special educational needs, one for physically impaired pupils and one for pupils with specific learning difficulties.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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13786	S Walsh	Lay inspector	
8216	G Binks	Team inspector	Provision for pupils with special educational needs
8104	J Child	Team inspector	Music
32348	R Greenwood	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
32225	C Hough	Team inspector	Physical education
30702	J Johnson	Team inspector	Mathematics
10417	K Lambert	Team inspector	Science
19214	G Price	Team inspector	English Provision for pupils with English as an additional language
32329	A Stafford	Team inspector	Art and design
18188	C Thompson	Team inspector	Design and technology
1845	R Tweed		History Religious education
4829	I Waters	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This **satisfactory** and improving school provides **satisfactory** value for money. Standards are above average when pupils join the school and above average when they leave. Achievement is satisfactory overall. The quality of education is satisfactory for pupils of all ethnicities. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Leadership is good and management is satisfactory.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- GCSE results improved well in 2003 and were above average.
- In English language, boys do not achieve as well as they should by Year 11.
- Achievement is unsatisfactory by Year 11 in religious education and design and technology.
- Pupils achieve well in mathematics, science, art and design, drama, geography, history, music and physical education.
- Pupils with physical impairment and those with specific learning difficulties achieve well.
- Pupils in Years 7 to 9 do not receive their full entitlement to information and communication technology (ICT).
- Some unsatisfactory teaching hinders learning in a few subjects.
- The quality of pastoral care is good. Attendance is above average and pupils behave well.
- Inadequate accommodation restricts the range of learning activities in many subjects.

The school has made **satisfactory** improvement since its previous inspection. Results in public examinations have improved recently, following a previous decline. The amount of good or better teaching has increased. Leadership and management have improved and are satisfactory. The school responded positively to the previous key issues. It has developed effective systems for evaluating its performance. Procedures for staff appraisal are suitable. The curricular shortcomings have been corrected apart from those relating to religious education and ICT. Standards in English in Years 7 to 9 have improved satisfactorily. A suitable plan for the development of ICT is now in place but is not yet fully effective in a few subjects. The school still has the same problems with unsatisfactory accommodation that were identified previously.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2001	2002	2003	2003
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	C	C	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 pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

Achievement is **satisfactory** overall for pupils of all ethnic backgrounds. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well. Standards are above average by Year 9 and represent satisfactory achievement. Results in national tests in 2003 were average in English and above average in mathematics and science. Compared with those of similar schools, results were below average in English, above average in mathematics and well above average in science. GCSE results have indicated underachievement in recent years. However, in 2003, better results indicated satisfactory achievement and a good improvement in the performance of boys. Nevertheless, pupils underachieved in English. GCSE results in 2003 were broadly similar to those of similar schools and have returned to the levels of the previous inspection. Several Year 11 pupils gained good grades at AS level in mathematics, biology and music. Standards are currently above average by Year 11. They are well above average in mathematics, science, art and design and drama. Standards are average in English and ICT and below average in design and technology and religious education. They are above average in other subjects. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is very good in

mathematics and good in science, art and design, geography, history, music and physical education. It is currently satisfactory in English, ICT and modern foreign languages and unsatisfactory in design and technology and religious education. The main hindrances to higher achievement include some unsatisfactory teaching and inadequate accommodation.

Provision for pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is **good**. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. Attendance is above average.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The overall quality of education provided by the school is **satisfactory**.

Teaching and learning are good overall. Teaching is at least satisfactory in all subjects but a small amount of unsatisfactory teaching occurs. Pupils with special educational needs receive good teaching and support and make good progress. Good use of assessment and marking helps pupils to improve their work in most subjects, but marking in English is not always rigorous enough. Limited access to ICT in a few subjects restricts faster progress. The best teachers have appropriately high expectations, use a wide range of teaching methods, explain the work clearly, ask probing questions and encourage pupils to find the answers to their own questions. They insist on good behaviour that results in good learning. Unsatisfactory teaching is mainly a result of non-specialist teaching, inappropriate expectations and ineffective management of behaviour.

The satisfactory curriculum meets pupils' needs. Provision for religious education and ICT does not meet statutory requirements. Pupils enrich their learning through active participation in good extra-curricular activities, particularly in drama, music and sport. Accommodation is unsatisfactory to meet the needs of several subjects. The quality of care, support and guidance is good. The good partnership with parents, other schools and the community supports pupils' learning.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are **satisfactory** overall. Governance is **satisfactory**. The work of the governing body has improved considerably and much of it is good. However, the school does not meet three of its statutory requirements for the curriculum. Good leadership by the head teacher sets a clear direction for further improvement. Monitoring of teaching and learning has improved but lacks consistency in ensuring the spread of good practice within and across subjects. Improvements are occurring in achievement, teaching and the curriculum. Governors and senior staff know the school's strengths and weaknesses, monitor performance critically and set challenging targets.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents and pupils have positive views about the school. Their main concerns are about behaviour and homework. Although incidents of poor behaviour do occur, staff handle these well. The quality and amount of homework are suitable to support pupils' learning.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- raise achievement in English, especially of boys;
- raise achievement in Years 10 and 11 in religious education and design and technology;
- eliminate unsatisfactory teaching;
- improve the accommodation in subjects such as science, music and art and design;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- make provision for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils;

- make suitable provision for religious education in Years 10 and 11 and ICT in Years 7 to 9.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards are rising and are above average. The achievement of boys and girls of all capabilities and different ethnic backgrounds is currently satisfactory overall by the end of Year 11.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results improved in 2003 and were above average.
- Achievement in English language is consistently below that in mathematics and science and boys do not do as well as they should.
- Pupils achieve well in mathematics, science, art and design, drama, geography, history, music and physical education.
- Pupils with physical impairment and those with specific learning difficulties achieve well.
- Lack of provision in Year 11 results in unsatisfactory achievement in religious education.
- Although standards in design and technology are rising, there is underachievement by Year 11.
- High attainers achieved very well in AS-level examinations in mathematics, music and biology.

Commentary

1. Pupils' standards on entry to the school are slightly above average overall. By the end of Years 9 and 11, standards are above average, as indicated in the results of the most recent external examinations and as observed in current classes. Pupils of high and low attainment often make faster rates of progress throughout Years 7 to 11 than pupils of average attainment. Higher attainers receive extension work of good challenge and difficulty in most subjects, and, for example, proceed to sit AS examinations in Year 11 in mathematics, biology and music. Pupils with physical impairment and those with specific learning difficulties achieve well because they receive good support, particularly when working in the special unit in small groups. The achievement of pupils from the many different ethnic minority backgrounds matches that of the majority population of the school.

2. At the time of the previous inspection, standards by the end of Year 9 represented unsatisfactory achievement in English and satisfactory achievement in mathematics and science. Good improvements have taken place. Standards in the National Curriculum tests in 2002 were well above those of similar schools in English, mathematics and science. In 2003, results matched the national average in English and were above average in mathematics and science. The school exceeded its target for performance in all three subjects. Overall, results in these tests are rising at the same rate as the national improvement. The gap between the performances of boys and girls is narrower than the national difference. When compared with those of similar schools, the results in 2003 were below average in English, above average in mathematics and well above average in science. They point to unsatisfactory achievement in English, good achievement in mathematics and very good achievement in science. However, standards in English in current classes in Years 7 to 9, indicate that achievement is satisfactory. This is due to the increasingly effective use of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy to improve literacy and to improvements in teaching and learning that followed a recent and effective review by senior staff of the work of the English department.

3. GCSE results declined following the previous inspection and have been below the national trend of improvement. During the period 2000 to 2002, GCSE results were average but should have been higher. For example, in 2002, performance in GCSE examinations was below that of similar schools and indicated underachievement. In 2003, results rose considerably and were above average, as they should have been, and broadly matched the results of similar schools. They indicate at least satisfactory achievement for pupils of all backgrounds. Results in the performing arts subjects of art and design, drama and music, were well above average and reflect the school's desire to gain status as a specialist college for the performing arts. The proportion of boys gaining five or more grades A*-C rose sharply and was well above the national average for boys. The

proportion of girls attaining five or more grades A*-C was above average. The school met its suitably challenging targets for performance in GCSE examinations in 2003. Results at AS level in mathematics, music and biology were above average and represented very good achievement for the high-attaining pupils involved. More than half of the passes obtained were at grades A and B.

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	60 (53)	53 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	92 (92)	89 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	96 (96)	95 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	37.7 (36.5)	34.7 (34.6)

There were 215 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

4. In recent years, the larger proportion of boys than girls has had an adverse effect on the school's overall GCSE performance. This was partly because the attainment of boys is lower than that of girls nationally and partly because there was underachievement by many boys. The school has worked hard to tackle the problem of boys' underachievement and has succeeded in many subjects. This is evident in the improved GCSE results of boys in 2003 and a narrower gap between the performances of boys and girls than is the case nationally. However, in English language, boys are still not achieving as well as the girls. This is partly because the boys do not complete all their work in English, including homework, and partly because a lack of rigour in marking does not correct pupils' work enough.

5. In Years 7 to 9, standards are currently above average and, overall, represent satisfactory achievement. They are above average in mathematics, science, art and design and history. They are below average in ICT and average in English and all other subjects. They show that, in many subjects, pupils are reaching higher standards by Year 9 than those predicted from their levels of attainment on entry. Achievement is good in mathematics, science, art and design, geography, history and physical education. It is satisfactory in English and in all other subjects

6. In Years 10 and 11, standards are broadly similar to those shown by the most recent GCSE examination results, which were slightly above average. They represent satisfactory achievement overall. Standards are well above average in mathematics, science, art and design and drama. They are above average in citizenship, geography, history, modern foreign languages, music and physical education. They are average in English and ICT, and are below average in religious education and design and technology. Pupils' achievement by Year 11 is very good in mathematics and drama. It is good in science, art and design, citizenship, geography, history, music and physical education. It is satisfactory in English, ICT and modern foreign languages. Achievement is unsatisfactory in design and technology and religious education.

7. Overall, throughout Years 7 to 11, pupils of all ethnic backgrounds have above average skills in literacy and numeracy and average skills in ICT. Pupils whose mother tongue is other than English have good enough skills and understanding of English to cope with the demands of the different subjects. Staff in all subjects help pupils to develop their literacy skills so that they cope well with the reading and writing requirements of different subjects. Many pupils make good use of the attractive resources of the well-organised library to develop their reading and research skills. Pupils do not receive enough opportunities to practise and apply their computing skills to support learning in subjects such as mathematics, geography and art and design.

8. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is good in Years 7 to 11. Well-qualified teachers and experienced teaching assistants work effectively to ensure that these pupils learn well in all areas of the curriculum. Pupils with physical impairment integrate well and, as a

consequence of good support from teachers and assistants, achieve well. The school is particularly successful in preparing pupils with specific learning difficulties for public examinations.

9. The school has identified pupils who are gifted or talented and provides good opportunities to help these pupils to achieve their potential. Gifted pupils make good progress in most lessons and achieve well over time. They usually receive extension work that is of appropriate difficulty and challenge. Talented pupils receive work and opportunities, particularly in extra-curricular activities, that stimulate them to reach high levels of performance in areas such as drama, music and sport.

10. In many subjects, achievement is good because teaching is good and pupils support their learning by completing classwork and homework conscientiously. The large majority of pupils behave well and have positive attitudes to work that contribute to a purposeful environment for learning, even when the accommodation is inadequate and cramped. Teachers' increasingly good use of assessment to show pupils how to improve is leading to higher standards. The school is trying out various strategies to motivate boys to work harder. These are proving successful in many subjects, but not yet in English.

11. In subjects in which achievement is less than good, pupils often have gaps in their knowledge and underdeveloped skills in the subject. In design and technology, these are a result of a lack of continuity in learning caused by previous staffing difficulties. In religious education, achievement is unsatisfactory by Year 11 because of insufficient teaching of the subject in Years 10 and 11. The school has plans to improve provision for religious education in Years 10 and 11 from the next academic year.

12. Although teaching and learning are generally good, achievement is only satisfactory overall. This is partly because the effects of the current good teaching have not yet had time to overcome gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills caused by previous difficulties, such as long-term staff absences, use of non-specialist teachers or unsuitable courses of study. The previous lack of continuity and progression in learning holds back pupils' current progress in design and technology. Inadequate management of the poor behaviour of a small number of pupils has an adverse effect on learning in a small number of classes, particularly of low attainers. A small amount of unsatisfactory teaching, mainly by supply and non-specialist teachers, across a range of subjects has an adverse effect on achievement in Years 7 to 11. In 2003, it was the first time that the school's GCSE results have risen to the level at which they were at the time of the previous inspection.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are **good**. Attendance is above average. Personal development is **good**. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good attitudes and behaviour assist pupils' achievement.
- Active participation in extra-curricular activities enriches pupils' learning.
- Very good provision for social and moral development encourages good personal development
- Above average attendance ensures good continuity of learning.

Commentary

13. Pupils of all ethnic backgrounds enjoy coming to school and socialising with their friends. Most have good records of attendance, which help pupils to achieve satisfactorily because their learning is continuous. Procedures for monitoring attendance are effective and enhanced by good support from the education welfare service. Staff provide good help and encouragement for pupils to improve attendance and to be punctual.

14. Pupils are generally proud of their school. They enrich their personal development through taking a full part in a wide range of extra-curricular activities of good quality, especially in drama, music and sport. Pupils say that they particularly enjoy practical lessons such as physical education, drama and art and design. They are usually involved fully and actively in the work in lessons and show an interest and desire to achieve as well as possible.

15. Pupils' above average rates of attendance ensure good progression in learning and reflect their positive attitudes towards the school.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data:	6.5	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.

16. Most pupils have mature and sensible attitudes that have a positive effect upon their progress in class. In a small number of lessons, when the teacher's skills in class management are not effective, the inattentive behaviour of a few pupils slows the progress of others. A few parents and pupils were concerned that behaviour is not good enough. However; behaviour is good overall, both in lessons and around the school's site. Even in areas of the school such as the dining hall and corridors, which are overcrowded, pupils behave sensibly and with consideration for others. Pupils in wheelchairs move freely about the site and socialise easily with other pupils. Systems to manage pupils' behaviour have recently been further improved. Good systems of support for pupils who have behavioural and emotional difficulties help to keep incidents of exclusion low. The support of parents makes a substantial contribution to the good quality of behaviour and the above average rates of attendance.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	784	44	0
White – Irish	5	0	0
White – any other White background	21	1	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	19	4	0
Mixed – White and Black African	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	9	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	6	1	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	10	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	8	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	3	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	3	0	0
Black or Black British – African	3	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	2	0	0
Chinese	7	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	226	1	0

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

17. The large majority of parents and pupils feel that the school deals well with bullying and other forms of harassment. A small number of pupils and parents are less confident about the school's approach to bullying. The school takes seriously every individual incident of bullying and deals with incidents in an appropriate manner. However, the anti-bullying policy does not state the procedures clearly enough and tends to be more effective in dealing with bullying than with measures to prevent it happening. Pupils from a wide range of ethnic and social backgrounds mix well together and very few racial incidents are recorded.

18. Although the school still does not meet the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship, improvements have been made to provision for spiritual education since the previous inspection, when it was a shortcoming. Spiritual development is now satisfactory. Good spirituality was observed in a drama lesson in which pupils explored sensitively emotions associated with bereavement. Pupils have a well-developed understanding of the difference between right and wrong and they act according to their own principles. Pupils often have a strong self belief that is encouraged by the way staff value pupils' contributions both to lessons and to whole-school developments. Active citizenship is very much encouraged through the use of peer educators, the school council and involvement in local issues. Pupils who become peer mentors in Year 10 very much appreciate the opportunity to demonstrate real responsibility. They understand how their application of responsibility enhances their personal development through increasing their self-confidence. Although social development is generally very good, the overcrowded accommodation is inadequate to provide areas for pupils to mix socially. Pupils have good opportunities for cultural development through residential visits, visits to galleries and musical activities. When opportunities

present within lessons, pupils enjoy practising and improving their capacity for working independently.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a **satisfactory** quality of education in Years 7 to 11 for boys and girls of all ethnic backgrounds. The curriculum provides a **satisfactory** range of worthwhile activities, in and out of class, to meet the needs of pupils of different capabilities. The resources available are adequate to meet curricular needs. The accommodation is **unsatisfactory** overall. The quality of care is good. Pupils receive good support, advice and guidance, based on monitoring.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is **good** in Years 7 to 11. Assessment, though better in some subjects than others, is **good** overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching is helping to raise standards.
- A small amount of unsatisfactory non-specialist and supply teaching hinders learning.
- Good planning ensures that pupils with special educational needs are taught well.
- Pupils have insufficient opportunities to use ICT to develop their work across subjects.
- Although assessment is used well to promote pupils' learning in many subjects, marking in English is not always rigorous enough to help pupils to improve their work.
- Teachers insist on proper standards of behaviour and pupils respond positively.

Commentary

19. The views of the vast majority of pupils and parents, expressed in the questionnaires completed for the inspection, are that teaching is good. Parents and pupils are justified to hold this opinion. The quality of teaching observed is a little better than it was at the previous inspection, when it was also good. The amount of teaching that is very good or better is now higher. Teaching was good or better in around three out of every five lessons seen. Good teaching was observed in all subjects. The proportion of unsatisfactory teaching is of a similar amount as before. The unsatisfactory teaching was spread across a few subjects, including mathematics, modern foreign languages, ICT and music.

20. Teaching is good overall. The head teacher and senior staff are well aware of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning. The use of performance management and other systems for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning has helped to raise standards. The much-improved results in external examinations in 2003 are a successful outcome of the school's appropriate top priority of improving the quality of teaching and learning in order to raise standards.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 146 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1 (1%)	27 (18%)	59 (40%)	49 (34%)	10 (7%)	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.

21. In the large majority of lessons, teachers have suitably high expectations for pupils' performance. They set work that interests and challenges pupils to work hard and productively. They provide a range of extension activities to ensure that higher attainers do not coast along. They liaise effectively with the special educational needs department to provide suitable support for pupils with learning difficulties. The successful implementation and use of the Key Stage 3 National Strategies across subjects have resulted in well-planned lessons by most teachers.

22. The specialist teachers use their good knowledge of the subject to motivate pupils and to plan their lessons to ensure continuity and progression of learning for pupils of all different capabilities within the class. They have good relationships with pupils and use good skills in managing their classes to ensure that work proceeds at pace and to completion. In lessons observed in English, mathematics and science, for example, learning was often rapid and pupils acquired new skills, knowledge and understanding because teachers placed a clear focus on the steps for learning and made sure that pupils knew what they needed to do to improve. Most teachers manage their classes competently and, through constantly encouraging pupils to think for themselves, seek to keep all pupils actively involved in the work all the time.

23. Boys and girls of all ethnic backgrounds, including pupils with physical impairment and those with specific learning difficulties, integrate easily in classes and cooperate well with one another and the staff. Pupils whose mother tongue is other than English have good enough skills and understanding of the English language to cope with the curricular demands of all subjects. In many subjects, and particularly in drama, pupils have good skills in working independently and collaboratively. They respond eagerly and purposefully to opportunities to speak in class and in groups. Most pupils have mature attitudes to schoolwork and want to do well. They enjoy opportunities to think for themselves and are often prepared to discuss work at length. They answer questions from the teacher or other pupils readily. As seen in drama and in many lessons in other subjects, the best teachers explain the work clearly, ask stimulating and probing questions and encourage pupils to find the answers to their own questions. They use a wide range of teaching methods to capture pupils' interest and to help them to concentrate fully throughout the lesson. In these lessons, insistence on good behaviour results in good learning.

24. Teaching and learning for pupils with special educational needs are good. All the key teachers are well qualified, very experienced and are committed to supporting these pupils. Small-group and individual teaching ensures that pupils benefit fully from the time available, particularly when they are working on basic literacy skills. The skilful support of teaching assistants helps pupils to make good progress in lessons. In many lessons observed in English, mathematics and science, the combination of well-directed support and challenging teaching helped pupils with learning difficulties to achieve well.

25. The teaching of literacy across subjects varies and is satisfactory overall. The teaching of numeracy across the curriculum is satisfactory.

26. The use of ICT to support learning across subjects is unsatisfactory overall. This is mainly because ICT resources are not always readily available when needed and because pupils have very little experience of computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture. In a few subjects, such as science, teachers use their confidence and competence in using ICT to provide a good range of learning activities that require pupils to apply and develop their computing skills. As a result, pupils in science acquire good skills in data logging and Internet research. In English, pupils use their school e-mail address to send homework. In mathematics, pupils make little use of ICT to enhance their work.

27. The main causes of unsatisfactory lessons were one or more of the following factors: an inadequate knowledge of the subject by a non-specialist or supply teacher; ineffective management of unsatisfactory behaviour; sometimes, as seen in lessons in music and mathematics, the work was pitched at an unrealistically high level for the pupils' capabilities and, at other times, as seen in modern foreign languages, the work was too easy. In mathematics, the small amount of unsatisfactory teaching observed was a consequence of non-specialist supply teaching. Scrutiny of pupils' work shows that teaching in mathematics is good overall and often very good.

28. The quality of assessment is good overall. It plays an important part in the improved achievement by Year 11. Teachers now have easy access to information about pupils' work and progress. Senior staff keep a close watch on the performances of boys and girls of all differing levels of attainment. They do not track the progress of pupils according to different ethnic minorities as closely. Information supplied by the school indicates no concerns related to these pupils. Teachers

make good use of frequent and regular assessments of pupils' academic achievements, including test results and well-informed teachers' assessments, to plan work of appropriate difficulty for all pupils. In most subjects, teachers' marking of work is analytical, encouraging and helpful to the pupils concerned. However, in English, the quality of marking lacks consistency and rigour and assessment is only satisfactory. In other subjects, pupils have a clear understanding of their performance, what they should be aiming to achieve and how to tackle problems in their work in order to make further progress. In science, pupils use and adapt the individual target sheets in the front of their books in an element of self-assessment.

The curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is **satisfactory**. It ensures progression in learning and provides good opportunities for enrichment. However, the school does not currently meet all of the statutory requirements for the curriculum. Accommodation is unsatisfactory and resources for learning are adequate.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Unsatisfactory accommodation restricts learning in many subjects.
- Vocational opportunities in Years 10 and 11 provide good opportunities for many pupils.
- The school provides well for pupils with special educational needs.
- Opportunities for extra-curricular enrichment are good, particularly in sport, drama and music.
- Statutory requirements for ICT in Years 7 to 9, for religious education in Years 10 and 11 and for the provision of a daily act of collective worship are not met,
- High attainers benefit from AS-level courses in mathematics, music and biology in Year 11.

Commentary

29. The curriculum provides a satisfactory range of opportunities to meet the needs, interests and capabilities of boys and girls of all backgrounds. It does not currently meet statutory requirements for religious education in Years 10 and 11, ICT in Years 7 to 9 and the provision of a daily act of collective worship. In ICT, pupils in Years 7 to 9 do not currently receive teaching in computer-assisted design and manufacture. The school has plans in place that are intended to meet statutory requirements for the provision of religious education and ICT from the next academic year.

30. In all years, access to the curriculum is good for pupils of all ethnic backgrounds, including those whose mother tongue is other than English. A particularly positive feature is the easy access to all parts of the curriculum for pupils with physical impairments. Frequent and regular reviews of the curriculum take account of new developments, particularly in Years 10 and 11. In Years 7 to 9, pupils follow a similar range of courses to that found in most schools. They receive good enrichment from well-taught courses in drama, as befits a school bidding for status as a specialist performing arts college. The provision of one lesson every two weeks in Years 8 and 9 hinders the continuity and progression of learning in ICT, particularly as the teaching of cross-curricular aspects of the subject, such as computer-assisted design, are not in place.

31. In Years 10 and 11, pupils follow a broad and balanced programme of courses that lead to appropriate qualifications. The school has developed some innovative and successful approaches to make the curriculum relevant to the needs of all pupils in Years 10 and 11. Approximately one third of pupils pursue vocational GCSE courses or work-related courses leading to a public qualification. The school offers vocational GCSE courses in engineering, applied business studies and health and social care as part of the Increased Flexibility Programme. These courses are offered in partnership with Swindon College and involve pupils studying half a day every week at the college. Pupils on these courses receive weekly mentoring support from school staff. A small number of pupils undertake courses at the college in vocational subjects such as plumbing, carpentry, bricklaying, motor vehicle maintenance, hair and beauty and beauty therapy. Pupils find these courses interesting and relevant to their individual needs and, as a result, increase their motivation to do well.

Good provision for lower attainers occurs in the school's own provision of Royal Society of Arts (RSA) courses in office studies and travel and tourism. In Year 10, a small group of pupils take an RSA qualification in care and in sports and recreation. These courses run successfully for pupils who find GCSE examination courses too challenging. Higher attainers receive work that challenges them through taking AS-level courses in Year 11 in mathematics, biology and music.

32. The programme of personal, social and health education is satisfactory. Assemblies and tutorial periods support it well. The teaching of personal, social and health education is through drama in Years 7 to 9. Provision covers alcohol and drug abuse and sex and relationships education. However, the latter is only taught in Year 9, with no opportunity for the topic to be revisited in later years, when it is equally pertinent to pupils' needs.

33. The school makes good provision for pupils with special educational needs. It is particularly successful in integrating pupils with physical impairment into the life of the school. In addition to supporting well pupils with a range of particular needs, the school is also the home for a Specific Learning Difficulties Centre. The pupils of the centre benefit from good specialist teaching and personal support. Pupils with special educational needs have access to the full secondary curriculum. The school building has been adapted well to allow pupils with mobility difficulties access to all subject areas. The only modifications to the full National Curriculum have been made to allow a small number of pupils arriving with low literacy skills to work to improve their reading, writing and spelling when other pupils are doing French. Much of the early work for the younger pupils with specific learning difficulties and moderate learning difficulties focuses suitably on reading, writing and spelling, particularly phonic recognition and word building.

34. Active participation in a wide range of extra-curricular activities of good quality, particularly in drama, music and sport help many pupils to extend their work. Many pupils have represented the town in the area youth games in a variety of sports. Pupils enrich their learning through a wide range of sports and a good choice of activities in music, art and design, clubs and after-school activities, for example in mathematics. Pupils enter national 'mathematics challenges' and gain excellent results. Pupils value and enjoy the residential visits, foreign exchanges and other visits.

35. The number of teaching staff and support staff needed to meet the needs of the curriculum is satisfactory. Virtually all the staff have the appropriate qualifications and experience to teach the courses timetabled for them.

36. Resources for learning in most subjects are satisfactory, although a few shortcomings limit the range of teaching and learning activities in design and technology, geography and music. Many pupils make good use of the very good resources and staffing in the library to improve their skills in reading and research.

37. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. It has some weak features in science, art and design, music and religious education. These limit the scope of the work possible, and in science, for example, are a reason why the high standards are not even higher. The school is aware of the limitations imposed by its inadequate accommodation and makes the best possible use of accommodation to promote pupils' learning. The school is currently seeking status as a performing arts college in order to improve provision and raise standards.

Care, guidance and support

The quality of pupils' care, welfare and health and safety is **good** overall. The provision of support and guidance, based on monitoring, is good. The school has good systems for seeking and acting upon pupils' views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The good pastoral system ensures that pupils are safe, secure and well supported.
- The very good induction process helps pupils to settle into school quickly.
- Pupils with special educational needs receive very good care, support and guidance.
- Careers education does not help pupils sufficiently to make informed post-16 choices.
- Arrangements for pupils' views to be heard and acted upon are good.

Commentary

38. Statutory requirements for health and safety are met. Provision is safe, secure and in generally good repair. There are sensible procedures for risk assessments and to ensure risks to pupils are minimised during school visits. Arrangements for first aid and to look after pupils who are ill are good but the arrangements for the administration of medicines needs to improve. Procedures for child protection and to support children in the care of the local authority are good. Vulnerable pupils receive good support.

39. The well-established house system ensures that pupils receive good support and guidance regarding attendance, behaviour and personal matters. Good continuity of care and communication with parents result in pupils being well known to staff. Relationships between pupils and staff are often warm. Pupils find that most staff are very approachable and provide personal and academic support of high quality. Pupils very much value the help that they receive from staff but say that a very small number of teachers do not provide effective support for pupils who are struggling with their work. Staff identify pupils who are likely to underachieve in GCSE examinations and provide them with good support and encouragement. Procedures for identifying and supporting underachieving pupils in Years 7 to 9 are less developed. The system of personal development plans has the potential to provide a very effective framework for encouraging and monitoring personal development.

40. Pupils and parents appreciate the very well planned induction process. Pupils in Year 6 have access to two visit days that focus separately on academic experiences and familiarisation with the pastoral system. These visits encourage pupils to settle quickly into secondary school routines. The induction process extends beyond the first day at school. A well-planned visit that involves pupils taking part in local outdoor pursuits gives pastoral staff a valuable opportunity to socialise with pupils and to identify quickly the more vulnerable pupils. An early tutor evening enables parents to meet with tutors and resolve any outstanding matters.

41. There is an appropriate programme of careers education for younger pupils, which includes the 'real game' exercise in Year 8 and support for option choices in Year 9. Pupils have access to work experience of good quality that helps them to improve their self-esteem and to gain a greater understanding of the demands of working life. However the lack of formal careers education lessons in Years 10 and 11 limits pupils' awareness of the range of post-16 options available and their relevance to their individual needs. Form tutors provide such support as helping pupils to prepare curricula vitae and personal statements but this support is of inconsistent quality. Pupils with special educational needs or other pressing needs have good access to careers education through Connexions advisors. Higher-attaining pupils are dependent on their own motivation to seek careers advice. However, they can access the 'drop-in' sessions or computer software that supports careers education. Unfortunately, many of these pupils do not have well formed ideas about their future careers or the qualifications that they need to attain their aspirations. Pupils make visits to and from local colleges but do not have easy access to unbiased information. Visits to universities have

excited higher-attaining pupils but a few older pupils have a very limited understanding of the nature of post-16 qualifications and the university system.

42. The school provides very good support for pupils with special educational needs. Teachers assess and monitor the progress of these pupils very well. This is an area that has improved since the previous inspection. Teachers and support staff carry out the annual reviews of pupils with special educational needs with thoroughness and care. Pupils' files show that teachers, parents, pupils and other agencies provide very helpful information to guide the process of review.

43. The school identifies high-attaining pupils and seeks to develop their thinking beyond the basic secondary curriculum. In mathematics, science and music, for example, a few pupils are encouraged to take the AS-level examination in Year 11. The school's 'More Able Policy' makes provision for these pupils to undertake visits to universities, participate in residential experiences and to receive individual guidance. It succeeds in raising the aspirations of gifted and talented pupils.

44. Pupils are aware that their views matter. The head teacher attends the school council and listens carefully to opinions expressed openly by pupils. The school encourages pupils to consider how they can improve the school's routines and provision. For example, pupils have made their own choices regarding the decoration of the newly renovated girls' toilets.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's partnership with parents, other schools and the community is **good** overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are very supportive of their children's education and encourage them to achieve well.
- Written reports do not provide enough information to show pupils how to improve.
- Very good links with local primary schools promote continuity and progression in learning.
- Good links with the local community enhance educational opportunities.

Commentary

45. The school has a good partnership with parents. There is good communication with parents about the work of the school. The governors' annual report to parents has been improved and now meets statutory requirements. Parents are very satisfied with what the school provides. The majority of parents are very supportive of their children's education and there is a very active parent and teacher association. Good information about arrangements for GCSE examinations enables parents to provide support for their children, for example, in meeting deadlines for coursework. A few parents were concerned, justifiably, about the quality of information provided about pupils' progress. Written reports do not always give parents a clear enough picture of their children's level of attainment or rates of current progress. Reports often focus on pupils' attitudes to the subject and contain few targets or strategies for improvement.

46. The school maintains good relationships with parents and carers of pupils with special educational needs, as evident during a review meeting observed. The meeting was particularly helpful in discussing transitional arrangements in anticipation of the end of compulsory schooling. The special educational needs coordinator provided a good overview of the numerous alternatives for consideration. Appropriately, before an annual review, parents are invited to express their views about their child's progress and any concerns that they may have.

47. The school is outward looking and has productive links with the local community that support pupils' learning. Drawing governors from the local community has helped to inform the school's decision-making. The music department makes a considerable contribution to the local community through frequent musical performances. Good links with the local business community enhance pupils' learning and all-round personal development, for example, through work experience and the

use of business mentors. Pupils have shown considerable interest in the sensitive local issue of the development of an area known as 'The Front Garden'. Through listening to both sides of the argument, they have extended their understanding of active citizenship.

48. Transfer of information between partner schools is efficient and timely. The school works very well with partner primary schools. As a result, good curricular links ensure effective and supportive transition. Links with colleges have improved and extend pupils' opportunities to study, for example, vocational GCSE courses in business education, engineering and health and social care. Local colleges come into school to offer information about post -16 provision and play a very important part in an otherwise limited careers education programme.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management is **satisfactory**. The leadership of the head teacher is good. Management is satisfactory. Governance is satisfactory but the school does not currently fulfil all of its statutory requirements for the curriculum.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good leadership has resulted in recent improvements in standards.
- The school succeeds in promoting racial harmony.
- The work of governors is much more effective than at the time of the previous inspection but the school does not fulfil all of its statutory requirements for the curriculum.
- Monitoring has improved but does not always ensure the spread of good practice.
- Good financial management and planning support pupils' learning.

Commentary

49. The quality of leadership and management has improved considerably since the previous inspection. Shortcomings in the work of the governing body have been corrected. Governors now play an influential and positive part in the school's development. They are creating a good balance of supporting the school's work actively and calling it to account. A few years ago, governors realized that, though the school's performances in external examinations were at least average, pupils were not achieving as well as they should by the end of Year 11. Working closely with the headteacher and senior staff, they have taken appropriate steps, such as the improved monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, to tackle the underachievement. External examination results in 2003, in which pupils' overall achievement was at least satisfactory, are an indication that the determination of governors and senior staff to raise standards is succeeding.

50. The headteacher and governing body set a clear educational direction. They set suitably challenging targets for improvement for the school and different departments. Governors have a very good knowledge of what the school does well and what it should do better. They keep a close eye on the differences in the attainment of girls and boys and are pleased with the recent good improvements in boys' GCSE achievement. They carry out their role as 'critical friends' of the school responsibly. Governors keep well informed of curricular developments. They know which departments are doing well and which should do better and play an active role in determining the school's development plan. They have suitably high expectations of staff and pupils that result in rising standards and an improving quality of education for pupils of all backgrounds.

51. Governors carry out their responsibilities well, apart from ensuring the provision of a daily act of collective worship, the provision of religious education in Years 10 and 11 and ICT in Years 7 to 9. The school has plans to adjust the curriculum from the next academic year with the intention of meeting statutory requirements for the provision of religious education and ICT. Governors and senior staff review the school's performance frequently and take a close interest in the all-round development, as well as the academic success, of all pupils. They support the preparation of the

school's bid to become a specialist performing arts college and appreciate the benefits a successful bid would bring.

52. The school's financial management is good. Governors keep a close watch on all aspects of the school's spending. Good procedures check that spending decisions provide best value for money. Budgetary planning is good. Although the school carries a large proportion of its budget through to the next year, this is largely earmarked to support its bid for specialist college status. The inclusion of the bursar in the senior management team means that principles of best value are considered frequently and spending decisions relate closely to the priorities of the school development plan. The school makes good use of the financial expertise it acquired when running its own affairs as a grant-maintained school. It has used balances brought forward from its grant-maintained days to alleviate current financial difficulties. However, it is reliant on the success of its bid for specialist college status and support from the local authority to tackle the problem of much unsatisfactory accommodation.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3 583 294	Balance from previous year	295 864
Total expenditure	3 311 448	Balance carried forward to the next	271 846
Expenditure per pupil	3010		

53. The good leadership of the head teacher, supported well by the fairly new senior management team, has played an important part in the school's recent improvements. The appropriate focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning is proving successful in tackling the problem of underachievement by Year 11. The school promotes the all-round and academic development of pupils of all ethnic groups and is particularly successful in its provision for pupils with physical impairments and those with specific learning difficulties. Racial harmony is clear in the school's daily life. Pupils in wheelchairs are an integral part of daily school life and socialise easily with other pupils. The leadership provided by heads of department is good overall and indicates a shared commitment to raise standards. Heads of house provide effective leadership and good support and guidance to staff and pupils.

54. Management is much better than at the time of the previous inspection and is satisfactory overall. Procedures for reviewing performance and planning for improvements have improved. The current development plan has clearly stated and appropriate targets and priorities for raising standards. Members of the senior management team carry out their responsibilities well. They oversee the school's policies conscientiously. Management is very good in science and at least satisfactory in all other subjects. Line management is now clear and staff know what is expected of them. The system of performance management has helped to improve the quality of teaching and learning. However, it is not always rigorous enough to ensure the spread of good practice within and across subjects. Over the past few years, all heads of faculty have received good opportunities to develop their managerial skills by spending one year as a temporary member of the senior management team. This has resulted in them gaining a greater awareness of the school's strengths and weaknesses and a shared commitment to improve standards and the quality of education. A positive outcome is the improvement in external examination results in 2003. Departments now make better use of assessment to set challenging and achievable targets and to show pupils how to improve their work.

55. The good leadership, organisation and management of the very experienced and well-qualified team of staff enable pupils with special educational needs to make the progress expected of them. The governing body has not been actively overseeing provision in recent months but it has recently appointed a new link governor for special educational needs.

56. The headteacher's consultative approach encourages staff to participate in decisions and to be more accountable for the performances of their departments. This approach has enabled many

departments to make good progress. In English, for example, standards are improving as a result of good follow up to a very recent evaluation by senior staff and the head of faculty. Occasionally, however, too much time elapses before direct intervention by senior staff. In design and technology, for instance, much earlier action was needed to ensure that appropriate schemes of work were in place in resistant materials. However, the allocation of the new deputy head as the department's line manager, has resulted in improvements in curricular provision in design and technology.

57. The views of parents and pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaires are that the school is led and managed well. Most pupils say that the school is good and that they are expected to do their best.

58. Until recently, the school had not made as much improvement since the previous inspection as it should have. GCSE results had declined and many pupils, particularly boys, underachieved. Recent developments, under the guidance of the current headteacher, show that improvement since the previous inspection is now satisfactory. The most recent GCSE results indicate at least satisfactory achievement by boys and girls, and big improvements by boys. The systems for monitoring and evaluating the school's performance have improved and are effective. There is now an appropriate system for staff appraisal. Shortcomings in the curriculum have been met except that those relating to provision in religious education and ICT will not be fully in place until next year. Standards in English in Years 7 to 9 have improved satisfactorily. The school still has the same problems with unsatisfactory accommodation that were identified in the previous report.

59. The main aids to pupils' achievement include: much good teaching; a very good library; the good attendance, behaviour and positive attitudes to work of the large majority of pupils; effective use of assessment to show pupils how to improve; good provision for pupils with special educational needs; and pupils' generally above average skills in literacy and numeracy.

60. The main hindrances to pupils' achievement are: some unsatisfactory teaching; the occasionally inadequate management of the poor behaviour of a small number of pupils; insufficient provision for religious education in Years 10 and 11 and for ICT in Years 7 to 9; and unsatisfactory accommodation in several subjects.

61. Taking into account the funding received by the school, the social and economic backgrounds of pupils and the current quality of education and achievement, the school provides satisfactory value for money.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The performance of Year 9 pupils in national tests has improved since the previous inspection.
- Boys do not achieve as well they should in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils do not achieve as well in English as they do in mathematics and science.
- Good teaching now helps pupils to learn well in most lessons.
- Marking does not consistently help pupils, particularly boys, to improve their writing.

Commentary

62. Standards in English are currently average by Year 9 and by Year 11. In 2002, results in national tests for pupils in Year 9 were above the national average. In 2003, results were average but below levels anticipated by teachers' assessments. Results in English were below those in mathematics and science. English GCSE results were close to average in 2002 and 2003. GCSE English literature results for both years were average. Results at grades A*-C were below expectations based on pupils' prior attainment in the national tests taken two years earlier.

63. In Years 7 to 11, achievement is satisfactory. Pupils join the school with broadly average levels of attainment in English. By Year 9, they make the progress expected of them to achieve average standards. By Year 11, the work of girls is generally above average. In Years 10 and 11 boys often work at above average levels but a large proportion of middle and lower-attaining boys underachieve. This is partly because they do not always complete their homework and partly because the marking of their work by a few teachers is often skimpy and pupils are not made to correct their work or present it better. Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds succeed equally as well as other pupils. Those with special educational needs achieve expected standards. Pupils in wheelchairs participate fully in lessons and contribute well to discussions. Most pupils work hard and are keen to do well.

64. Pupils in all years are confident and competent speakers. They participate well in discussions involving the whole class, although a few boys are inclined to shout out and are less good at listening to others. Reading skills in Years 7 to 9 are above average. Pupils grasp quickly the meaning of what they read and read aloud well. Many are regular and enthusiastic users of the busy school library. Written work shows a good range of vocabulary and expression. Accuracy is generally above average. Presentation is often good but where teachers mark books less regularly standards are less consistent. By Year 11, pupils analyse in detail the meaning and language of demanding literature. Their own writing is often assured and perceptive, as seen when lower-attaining pupils wrote as characters from John Steinbeck's 'Of Mice and Men'. However, a sizeable minority of pupils, especially boys, do not develop their essays in sufficient detail. They lack accuracy in writing and often have below average skills in expression. Higher-attaining pupils show good control of tone and effective use of imaginative language in their descriptive writing.

65. Teaching and learning are good overall in Years 7 to 11. A sizeable proportion of teaching observed was very good. However, scrutiny of work indicated that the quality of marking is inconsistent. The reason that achievement is only satisfactory is that recent improvements in teaching and assessment have not yet resulted in pupils, particularly boys, reaching higher than

expected levels of performance in GCSE examinations. Although boys achieve as well as girls in Years 7 to 9 in English, they do not achieve as well as girls in Years 10 and 11. Lessons are well planned and the best offer pupils continual challenge. As a result, in these lessons, pupils work close to the limits of their capabilities and make rapid progress. In one such lesson for Year 10 pupils, on Willie Russell's 'Educating Rita', the teacher's excellent planning provided a stimulating range of activities that involved all pupils. Tasks were challenging but clear modelling of what pupils needed to do ensured that they all made very good progress. Very occasionally, pupils make slow progress when the teacher's expectations are too low. In a small number of lessons, the poor attitudes of a few pupils adversely affected the learning of others.

66. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Leadership is effective in ensuring that teachers work well together and contribute to the strategy for improving standards, but it is not yet successful in raising boys' achievement sufficiently in Years 10 and 11. Management is satisfactory. Lesson plans for pupils in each year have not previously guaranteed progressive coverage of all areas of the National Curriculum. They are now being revised thoroughly. Teaching has improved and is now more consistent across the department. Since the previous inspection, improvement is satisfactory. Although standards for pupils in Years 7 to 9 have improved those for pupils in Years 10 and 11 have not.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

67. Standards of literacy are above average. Pupils in all years are generally confident speakers. Reading is very well developed. Pupils read their own books regularly in English lessons. Their wide use of the library reflects the very good programme of induction for pupils in Year 7. Very good support for reading is always available from library staff. Pupils receive good support in developing their reading skills in subjects such as science, history, religious education and design and technology. In these subjects, pupils read aloud and are encouraged to read purposefully from a variety of sources. Pupils write with above average accuracy in spelling, grammar and punctuation, although, in many subjects, teachers do not support pupils' writing by marking errors. Apart from in English, opportunities for writing are limited. However, in history, pupils produce descriptive, persuasive and journalistic writing. In science and modern foreign languages, teachers help pupils to structure their written work effectively. Teachers in most subjects focus well on important vocabulary both in lessons and through classroom displays. The school has made suitable progress in its strategy for raising literacy levels but the contribution of teachers varies from subject to subject.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results in 2003 in French and German improved considerably.
- The quality of teaching across the department is inconsistent.
- Too few pupils complete corrections or redraft their work.
- Provision for pupils' cultural development is good.
- Many pupils lack confidence in speaking the foreign language.

Commentary

68. Just over one third of the year group entered the GCSE examinations in French in 2003 and a very small group entered in German. Results in French were well above average, showing a considerable improvement over 2002, particularly at grades A* and A for boys and girls. They represent satisfactory achievement for higher and average-attaining pupils. Pupils performed better in French than in most other subjects.

69. Standards in French are average by Year 9 and indicate satisfactory achievement for pupils of all ethnic backgrounds and capabilities. They are above average in French and German in Years 10 and 11, as reflected in the GCSE results over the past two years, and show satisfactory achievement. Standards for the one German group in Year 9 are just below average, but indicate satisfactory achievement taking into account the limited amount of teaching time available in Year 8. Over time, pupils acquire a good knowledge of relevant vocabulary, which enables them to complete successfully listening tasks and exercises designed to test their understanding of the foreign language. Pupils write at an appropriate level. By Year 9, they write interesting pieces about themselves and their teachers with reasonable accuracy. By Year 11, pupils use a range of different tenses, but accuracy is not always consistent. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 11 produce coursework of good quality. Speaking skills vary and are average overall. Pupils in a Year 10 French lesson improved their replies, because the teacher showed them how to extend their sentences. In a Year 9 German lesson, pupils developed confidence and competence working in pairs. A few pupils do not speak with confidence or audibly and the pronunciation of many pupils is often anglicised. In all years, pupils with special educational needs, including those who have physical impairment, make the same rates of progress as other pupils in modern foreign languages.

70. The quality of teaching and learning across the department is inconsistent and is satisfactory overall. All teachers use resources well, particularly worksheets. Most teachers share what they have to learn with pupils and introduce lessons with an interesting and thought-provoking starter activity. Marking is regular and many comments are helpful, but teachers' expectations of pupils' presentation of written work are not high enough. Too few pupils respond positively by completing corrections or redrafting their work or take sufficient pride in it.

71. In good lessons, teachers engage pupils' interest, challenge pupils well so that they work productively. They use the foreign language widely and consistently. Sometimes pupils have to be encouraged to answer questions or told to put their hand up. Pupils benefit from good opportunities to speak or to read aloud. When the teaching is only satisfactory, pupils do not take such an active part in the lesson. Teachers miss opportunities for pupils to read aloud or to repeat words or phrases to enhance pronunciation. Evaluation at the end does not focus sufficiently on what has been learned and retained. In two unsatisfactory lessons in French in Years 8 and 9, a few pupils were reluctant to work and did not achieve enough, because the teachers did not exercise their authority sufficiently. Inappropriate behaviour in the Year 9 class, mainly of boys, impeded the progress of other pupils.

72. Satisfactory leadership and management provide a suitable agenda for improvement. Results have improved, and the use of ICT has increased. Provision for pupils' cultural development is good. Many pupils increase their awareness of life and culture in France and Germany through a good programme of visits and exchanges. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average in Year 9 and well above average in Year 11.
- High attainers gain good AS-level results.
- Good teaching and pupils' very positive attitudes to mathematics lead to very good achievement by Year 11.
- Pupils know how to improve because of good assessment and constructive marking of work.
- ICT does not support learning as effectively as it could.
- Very good leadership ensures that pupils achieve well in mathematics.

Commentary

73. In 2003, results in National Curriculum tests in Year 9 were above the national average and above those of similar schools. Boys performed better than girls at the higher levels. GCSE results have been improving steadily and were above average in 2003. Results at grades A*-C in 2003 were above expectations based on pupils' prior attainment in national tests two years earlier. A few pupils gain high GCSE grades in Year 10 and proceed to gain high AS level grades in Year 11. In 2003, five of the 13 candidates gained an AS grade of A and a further five gained a grade B.

74. Standards reached by current pupils reflect these results. Pupils in Year 9 entered the school with a little above average standards and their above average standards reflect good achievement. This is due to a well-planned programme of work and effective teaching. Achievement of Year 11 pupils is very good when compared with their prior attainment. Pupils' examination coursework is managed well and is of good quality. The use of smaller classes in Years 10 and 11 and pupils' high motivation promote high standards. In a small number of lessons in Years 7 to 11, however, work is not always matched well to the full range of capability within the class so that lower-attaining pupils in these classes do not make as much progress as other pupils. Overall the achievement of pupils with special educational needs, including those with physical impairment, matches that of their peers because they receive good support in class and work that is suited well to their individual needs.

75. The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 7 to 11 and has improved since the previous inspection. Some of the teaching is very good and, coupled with pupils' very positive attitudes to the subject, helps pupils' to achieve very well in GCSE and AS-level examinations. Teachers make good use of their subject knowledge to teach basic skills well. They explain new concepts clearly and make sure that pupils understand the work before setting them individual tasks. In a few lessons, for example, pupils do the work on individual white boards, which enable the teacher to assess quickly how well pupils understand. A good example of this was a Year 11 lesson in which pupils sketched a range of graphs of quadratic functions before going on to use a graphics programme and to identify the translation vectors that mapped one curve onto its images. In most lessons, the work is well-structured and assessed, motivation is good and pupils settle down to work quickly, work hard and achieve well. In less effective lessons, the assessment of learning is not as thorough and a few pupils need extra help from the teacher before they tackle the tasks set. Non-specialist, supply teaching was one of the causes of the few unsatisfactory lessons observed. In these lessons, learning was unsatisfactory because the teacher had not assessed pupils' understanding of the work well enough and provided work of inappropriate challenge and difficulty. As a result, pupils showed frustration, loss of concentration and, occasionally, deterioration in behaviour. Teachers use homework well to reinforce work in class. Marking is generally thorough and helpful in showing pupils how to improve.

76. Very good leadership and good management enable teachers to work as a committed team. They take turns in marking examination and test papers to ensure consistency of marking pupils' work. In the process of developing an effective marking policy, teachers examined the exercise books of each other's pupils in order to identify good practice. The consistent application of the marking policy and the effective use of assessment now ensure that pupils know not only what they do well, but also how they can improve. The formal curriculum is enriched with opportunities for higher-attaining pupils and links with the world of work for pupils in Year 9. The use of ICT has improved since the previous inspection but is still not used consistently in the support of learning, particularly in Years 7 to 9. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Standards have been maintained in Year 9 and have improved in Year 11.

Mathematics across the curriculum

77. Pupils' numeracy skills are above average and are more than adequate to help them to cope with work in other subjects. Pupils make satisfactory use of their above average numeracy and data handling skills to support their work in many subjects. In physical education, pupils collect, represent and analyse information related to measuring heart rates, agility and reactions. In science, they deal competently with the effects of cooling, calculate speeds of toy cars and perform appropriate

calculations in chemistry. In citizenship, pupils perform calculations related to money matters. Overall, the awareness of numeracy across the curriculum has improved since the previous inspection and mathematics teachers attend other departmental meetings each term to discuss this aspect of work. This has raised awareness of bar charts and histograms recently. In geography, pupils develop their skills in plotting and interpreting graphs in class and during field trips.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results in 2003 were well above average and well above those of similar schools.
- Results in Year 9 national tests indicated very good achievement in the past two years.
- Good teaching and very good use of assessment help pupils to achieve well by Year 11.
- Good use of ICT promotes pupils' learning.
- The AS biology course extends higher-attaining pupils in science.
- Very good technical support sustains teaching and learning in spite of inadequate accommodation.

Commentary

78. Standards in science are broadly average on entry to the school. Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 were above average in 2002 and 2003. They were well above average in comparison with similar schools in 2003. GCSE results in science were slightly above average in 2002 and well above average in 2003. Results at grades A*-C in 2003 were well above expectations based on attainment in national tests two years earlier. Results in external examinations in science are similar to those in mathematics and better than those in English. There were no significant differences between standards for boys or girls or for different ethnic groups in 2003.

79. Standards are currently above average and represent good achievement by Year 9. Pupils of all capabilities, including those with physical impairment and other special educational needs, acquire a good knowledge and understanding across all aspects of the syllabus. They have good practical skills such as a clear understanding of the reactivity series and show careful observation of small-scale reactions.

80. By Year 11, standards of work are well above average and represent good achievement for boys and girls of all backgrounds and capabilities. Achievement is good by Year 11, because teaching is good and teachers make very effective use of assessment to show pupils how to improve. Pupils on the Year 11 AS biology course have high standards in understanding and explaining ideas involved in the transmission of infectious diseases. Lower-attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve well in science because they find the work interesting, relevant and of suitable challenge and difficulty.

81. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers use their subject expertise well to motivate and inspire pupils, as evident in the AS biology course. Most lessons proceed at a brisk pace because pupils receive a good range and sequence of activities that help them to make progress according to their individual capabilities. In a Year 10 lesson on neutralising acidity, the starter activity of a team game helped pupils quickly to revise and recall previous ideas. The teacher followed this by skilfully providing opportunities for pupils to perform group practical investigations, some using a conventional approach with universal indicator whilst others used pH probes. Pupils consolidated their learning at the end of the lesson by discussing their findings and the advantages of the different methods used. Gifted pupils make good progress in lessons because they receive challenging work through the AS biology course and, in many lessons, through extension materials. For example, Year 7 higher attainers thought deeply about the task of measuring the speed of a marble down a complex

shaped run. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress especially where there is good classroom support. Good relationships between teachers and pupils create a good learning atmosphere in lessons. Teachers set appropriate homework frequently and regularly that helps pupils to reinforce and extend their work.

82. The department's positive response to the national strategy for pupils' learning in Years 7 to 9 has helped to raise standards. The new scheme of work in Year 7 is helping to improve pupils' thinking skills, as observed in a lesson in which pupils measured the speed of a variety of children's toys with enthusiasm and accuracy.

83. Good teaching of literacy helps pupils to improve their work in science. Teachers make good references to key scientific words in topic summaries and laboratory displays of connectives. Science teachers are competent in helping pupils to apply their skills in numeracy. They provide many opportunities for pupils to produce line and bar graphs and to carry out calculations such as averaging of results and mole calculations in Year 11. Teaching and learning make much use of ICT in science but this usually involves the movement of computer trolleys around the department causing some disruption to lessons. In spite of these restrictions, a Year 10 group plotted cooling curves using temperature sensors, drew a diagram of the apparatus using the computer and word processed a description and an evaluation of the experiment all within one lesson. Where access to a dedicated ICT suite was available, as with a Year 10 group revising a past examination paper, much lesson time was saved. The department contributes to pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural education. For example, a Year 11 class of lower attainers considered the social and ethical problems of the greenhouse effect. At the end of Year 9, the department organises a major cross-curricular project on health and sex education that plays an important part in pupils' all-round development.

84. Good leadership and very good management result in effective monitoring, evaluation and review of the work of the department on a collaborative basis. The department makes detailed analyses of pupils' progress and uses this information well to provide appropriate targets for pupils and to monitor the achievement of different groups of pupils. The very effective work of the technical support staff keeps to a minimum the disruptive effect of the unsatisfactory accommodation. Resources are adequate and include a good stock of books. The inadequate accommodation restricts the range of teaching and learning activities, particularly for practical work. In spite of the accommodation, progress since the previous inspection is good. Teaching has improved and standards are higher.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are well above the national average.
- There is insufficient time to teach all aspects of the National Curriculum course in Years 7 to 9.
- New leadership has realistic plans for improvement.
- Assessment and marking of work in Years 7 to 9 do not show pupils sufficiently how to improve.
- Problems with logging on to the school network and intranet waste learning time.

Commentary

85. Standards are currently below average by Year 9. Taking into account the limited amount of curricular time available for the subject, achievement is satisfactory for pupils of all, ethnic backgrounds and capabilities. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 show that pupils' attainment is above average. However, these assessments are unreliable because one of the key aspects of the work, control technology was neither taught nor assessed. In classes observed, pupils of all capabilities used sequences of instructions to control simple, virtual devices. However,

many pupils lack a good enough understanding to create their own sequences of instructions to control events and are not very aware of how ICT influences everyday life.

86. Standards are average by Year 11 and represent satisfactory achievement. A few boys in Year 9 and Year 11 underachieve because they show little interest in the subject. GCSE results in 2002 and in 2003 were well above the national average. Girls attained higher GCSE results than boys. In 2002, boys and girls attained generally higher grades in ICT than they did in the other GCSE subjects they entered. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well in relation to their prior attainment. The department offers different forms of certification, GCSE and GNVQ, which serves well the range of interests and ambitions of many pupils.

87. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Where they are good, lessons have good pace and interest. In a Year 7 lesson, the teacher ensured work proceeded briskly through a series of quick-fire questions followed by pupils presenting their work using an inter-active whiteboard. By evaluating each other's work pupils gained clear ideas about how to improve. This set the scene for individual work, carefully monitored by the teacher, who used brief sum-up sessions to clarify important points. This made pupils think and spurred them on. In a good Year 11 lesson, the teacher gave a sense of urgency and pace to individual work by setting targets of what should be completed in a time span. The teacher linked explanations and guidance carefully to the requirements of the examination syllabus. In these lessons, good relationships between the teacher and the class, created a good climate for learning. Because pupils in Years 8 and 9 receive only one lesson every fortnight, the continuity and progression of learning are affected adversely. This is particularly so in classes taught by non-specialist teachers, who tend to use a more limited range of resources than the specialist teachers. The marking and assessment of pupils' work in Years 7 to 9 lack consistency, are unsatisfactory and are not used well to show pupils how to improve. However, in Years 10 and 11, pupils gain a good awareness of the knowledge, skills and understanding necessary to gain a particular GCSE grade.

88. Good leadership has a clear view for the subject's development and a realistic assessment of the current strengths and weaknesses. Management is satisfactory. Teachers are enthusiastic to improve. The ICT knowledge of experienced teachers is competent. However, those new to teaching ICT lack sufficient access to good practice. Pupils have targets set but weaknesses in assessment and marking mean that they do not have a good enough knowledge of the levels at which they are working or how to improve. In a few rooms, pupils have insufficient workspace. Slow access to the school network and intranet reduces learning time. The technical staff provide good support to teachers and pupils. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Control technology is now taught. ICT networked facilities have grown. There are plans for growth. Pupils use e-mail communication and have access to an Intranet.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

89. The provision for ICT across subjects is unsatisfactory because computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture are not taught. Pupils use their ICT skills adequately to support and extend their work in several subjects. Pressure on computer rooms makes access to ICT limited in a few subjects, even though the overall proportion of five pupils to one computer is good. Subjects such as geography, history, modern foreign languages, religious education and mathematics have coherent plans for the use of ICT. However, difficulty in booking the computer rooms means these are not implemented fully. All pupils have an e-mail address, which pupils use to send in their English homework. Pupils do not make enough use of ICT in art and design and music lessons because the departments lack specialist software and equipment. Pupils have good opportunities to practise and apply their ICT skills in science. The computing skills of science staff are very good and they make effective use of ICT in planning many aspects of the work in science. As a result, pupils acquire good skills in data logging and Internet research.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average by Year 11.
- Pupils, especially boys, achieve well as a result of good teaching and positive attitudes to work.
- Good leadership and management result in good learning and above average standards.
- Excellent fieldwork stimulates pupils' interest, particularly that of boys.
- Limited use of ICT reduces learning opportunities.

Commentary

90. GCSE results in 2003 improved significantly on those in 2002 to be well above average. The subject is a popular GCSE option. In 2002, boys and girls gained similar GCSE results.

91. By Year 9, standards are average and achievement is good. This is the result of good teaching and pupils' positive attitudes to learning. Pupils gain a good grounding in geographical skills. Most use and interpret maps well but graphical plotting of statistical data sometimes lacks sufficient accuracy. Knowledge of place is good and pupils are beginning to understand that similar environments worldwide usually have similar characteristics. Higher attainers, particularly the gifted pupils, are not always challenged enough. Average and lower attainers achieve well, often producing work above expectations based on prior attainment. Pupils with special educational needs progress well when provided with specialist support but, occasionally, cannot finish the tasks set in the time available. There is no significant difference in the progress of boys and girls or between pupils of different ethnic groups.

92. By Year 11, standards are above average, matching recent GCSE results. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good. This is due to good teaching that focuses precisely on GCSE examination needs and well-motivated pupils who work hard. The best GCSE projects involving independent study are of high quality. The use of good revision material and regular testing of pupils' learning help pupils to achieve well. Throughout Years 7 to 11, pupils in wheelchairs participate actively in lessons, receive good support and achieve well.

93. Teaching and learning are good overall. The teaching by subject specialists is often very good. Teachers are committed, caring and supportive of pupils. Management and control in lessons are very good and relationships are warm. There is a relaxed yet purposeful air in lessons that is conducive to good learning. Learning is most effective when underpinned by the teachers' detailed knowledge of topics taught and work is presented in a structured and focused way. In the best lessons, teachers and pupils have high but realistic expectations. Learning benefits considerably from the consistently very good attitudes and behaviour of pupils in lessons. In Years 7 to 9, learning is sometimes limited because of insufficient use of local maps and examples and atlases to help pupils to develop understanding of spatial patterns.

94. Competent leadership and management enable staff to work together very cooperatively. Long-term staff illness and changes of teacher have slowed the continuity of learning in a few classes. The subject improvement plans and curricular planning are thoughtful and of high quality. Day-to-day marking is satisfactory overall but is inconsistent across the subject and grading against national standards is unclear. Pupils have few opportunities to evaluate work for themselves. The coherent planned programme of ICT is not implemented fully because of difficulties of access to computer facilities. Fieldwork undertaken locally around the school and in Cheddar, Bristol and Dorset provides excellent and most effective learning. It stimulates pupils' interest, particularly that of

boys, in geography. There is good improvement in the raising of standards since the previous inspection and very good capacity to take action on the points raised in this report.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average and represent good achievement.
- Good teaching helps pupils to achieve well.
- Pupils acquire good skills in using and interpreting sources of historical evidence.
- Pupils write well about historical events in a wide range of styles.
- The current unreliability of intranet access restricts pupils' independent research.

Commentary

95. Standards are above average and represent good achievement by Year 9 and by Year 11. In 2003, almost two thirds of those pupils who chose to study history at GCSE level attained grades A*-C. Although this is a slightly lower proportion than that achieved in 2002, taking the last three years in total there has been a rising trend in GCSE performance.

96. In Years 7 to 9, pupils of all ethnic backgrounds and capabilities, including those with special educational needs, acquire a good understanding of how to use sources of historical evidence. Teachers ensure that pupils read and understand text material in many different forms such as handbills, old newspapers or first hand accounts from diaries. Pupils learn how to interpret pictorial evidence, such as that representing the lives of children in Victorian mills, with empathy and insight. In Years 10 and 11, pupils make good use of archive film, for example, of the signatories to the Treaty of Versailles, to understand how major events can be open to several interpretations. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 develop their understanding of how the provenance of a historical source bears on its reliability, for instance, by distinguishing between the contemporary diaries of soldiers in the trenches and the subsequent memoirs of retired soldiers. This work also contributes strongly to pupils' spiritual and moral understanding.

97. Standards of writing in history are good throughout the school. Pupils produce extended narrative in good English, using different formats such as mock newspaper articles. These good standards owe much to the care that teachers take to encourage effort, mark work accurately, and suggest how writing can be improved. Pupils in wheelchairs receive good encouragement and play a full part in class and group discussions.

98. Teaching and learning in history are good. Teachers plan lessons well and explain the activities clearly to ensure that pupils have a very clear understanding of the purpose of the work. Lessons proceed at pace because teachers provide a good range of interesting and challenging tasks to help pupils to sustain effort and concentration. Teachers use video, narrative and discussion appropriately to capture and maintain pupils' interest. By contrast, in a lesson in which the teacher spoke from the front for over half an hour, pupils lost interest and became restless. A lesson using the computer suite, which was very well prepared so that pupils could find historical evidence about the reign of Henry VIII independently, was marred by the unreliability of the network. This meant that the work could not be completed in time. In GCSE classes, particularly, teachers are careful to remind pupils of the strategies they need to adopt to achieve good results. Good opportunities for field study to historical sites such as Flanders contribute well to pupils' learning.

99. Effective leadership and management are helping to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Systematic though infrequent monitoring of lessons is helping to share good practice. Teachers make increasingly good use of data to analyse the department's results and to set meaningful targets for improvement. Since the previous inspection, progress in history is good. Standards remain above average and the monitoring and evaluation of teaching have improved.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are above average.
- Inadequate provision for pupils in Year 11 leads to unsatisfactory achievement.
- Pupils in Years 7 to 9 write well.
- Good schemes of work to prepare pupils for the GCSE short course are being introduced in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

100. Standards are average and represent satisfactory achievement by Year 9. Although teachers did not carry out assessments in Year 9 last year, the evidence from pupils' written work and from talking to them indicates that most pupils reached average standards. Pupils in Year 7 understand the significance of Christian signs and symbols, which they reproduce with artistic flair. In Year 8, they write well in a variety of styles such as extended narrative, posters and mock newspapers, to convey the importance of the miracles performed by Jesus. In Year 9, pupils start work on the GCSE short course and develop their understanding of different arguments for the existence of God.

101. The small numbers that took GCSE religious studies in 2003 performed very well indeed, and well above their own performance in other subjects. Boys, in particular, achieved good grades, with six out of the 10 who entered getting an A* grade. The statutory entitlement of all pupils to receive religious education is not met. Accordingly, achievement in religious education is unsatisfactory overall by Year 11. However, the school has begun to implement curricular arrangements which, when implemented fully, are intended to rectify this curricular deficiency.

102. Teaching is good throughout Years 7 to 11. Teachers encourage pupils to compare Christianity with other faiths, as in a Year 7 lesson on the significance of dance as a Hindu expression of worship. The pace of lessons and range of interesting teaching activities help to maintain pupils' motivation. Direct experience of faith community members, such as that provided by speakers from Swindon Youth for Christ, has a positive effect on pupils' learning. Teaching encourages pupils to evaluate their own and each other's work objectively, as observed in a Year 11 lesson in which small groups of pupils made collaborative presentations on different topics.

103. Pupils' learning is satisfactory throughout the school and is the reason that achievement is only satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, despite good teaching. Pupils of different capabilities, including those with special educational needs take pride in their written work. Pupils in wheelchairs play an active part in lessons and make good progress. Pupils of all ethnic backgrounds show mutual respect in the way they discuss difficult topics, such as the impact of bereavement on people's faiths. Whilst most pupils enjoy their lessons, many do not see religious education as an important subject within the school curriculum. Several pupils show little interest in the subject. Many pupils do not work independently and rely too much on the teacher for guidance.

104. Leadership and management are satisfactory, but the department has had a difficult period recently with frequent staff changes. Weaknesses such as the absence of teachers' assessment in Years 7 to 9 and the lack of provision for all pupils in Years 10 and 11 are now being addressed with vigour and determination. Although progress since the previous inspection is unsatisfactory, the school's capacity for improvement in the subject is now good.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results have been below average and indicated unsatisfactory achievement.
- Good teaching in food and textiles technology enables pupils to achieve well.
- Standards in resistant materials are improving under the new management of the department.
- Recent improvements in staffing and the curriculum are helping to raise achievement.
- There has been insufficient improvement since the previous inspection.

Commentary

105. Standards have been well below average and represented unsatisfactory achievement in recent years, mainly because of weaknesses in resistant materials. Changes in the curriculum and staffing for resistant materials are having a positive effect on standards, so that, taking into account all the courses taught in design and technology, standards of work observed are now close to average by Years 9 and 11.

106. The proportion of pupils entering the GCSE examination in design and technology, about one in three pupils, is well below the national proportion. GCSE results in 2002 were well below average. There was an improvement in 2003 but results were still below the national average and indicated the lowest scoring subject in the school. However, results in food technology in 2003 were well above average. In recent years, GCSE results in design and technology have indicated underachievement.

107. Overall, standards by Year 9 indicate satisfactory current achievement for pupils of all ethnic backgrounds. In food and textiles, pupils achieve well and standards are above the national average. Standards in resistant materials are low in Year 9, mainly as a result of gaps in knowledge from previous years. However, there is a satisfactory improvement in achievement in Years 7 and 8 with the introduction of a broader curriculum and an emphasis on developing precision skills and finishes of good quality when working with wood and acrylic. Standards in the current Year 11 are well above average in food technology and pupils make good progress. In resistant materials, standards, though improving, remain low. A narrow curriculum in this area in previous years has had an adverse effect on the quality of learning for current Year 11 pupils. As a result, even though teaching is now satisfactory in Years 10 and 11 and the curriculum has improved, achievement is unsatisfactory in Year 11. Pupils with special educational needs benefit from good support, individual attention and work of appropriate difficulty that enable them to achieve satisfactorily throughout Years 7 to 11.

108. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teaching in food and textiles is consistently good, resulting in good achievement in this area. The teachers are well organised, set high expectations and teach at a brisk pace. This motivates and challenges pupils to complete their work to a good standard. Although there is currently no provision for computer-aided design or computer-aided manufacture, plans for its introduction are in place. Some non-specialist teaching over the past few years has had an adverse effect on standards in resistant materials. Teaching of resistant materials is now satisfactory and good teaching was observed in a Year 10 lesson on isometric drawings to support work in design. Assessment is used well to track progress and to show pupils how to improve in food and textiles.

109. The quality of leadership is now satisfactory and has the capacity to make the necessary improvements. Until September 2003, the two departments of resistant materials and of food and textiles worked independently. Since the appointment of a new head of department for resistant materials, the two departments are beginning to share consistency of approach. The food and

textiles team work closely together. This has enabled them to keep up to date and have high aspirations for their pupils. They evaluate their own practice and act upon their findings. The new leadership of resistant materials has a clear vision for improvement and, starting from a low base line, has introduced appropriate schemes of work. This has already helped to raise standards. Improvement since the previous inspection is unsatisfactory. GCSE results have fallen below the national average. In resistant materials, there is little integration of ICT and little evaluation of assessment to help pupils to improve. There has been little formal monitoring of teaching across the department apart from that involved in performance management.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Lessons in **drama** were sampled. Boys and girls of all capabilities and ethnic backgrounds achieve well. By Year 9, pupils work at above average levels. This is good achievement considering their standards when they join the school. By Year 11, the many pupils taking the GCSE course work at levels that are consistently above average. They build well on their standards at the beginning of Year 10. GCSE results for 2002 were above average. Results for 2003 were exceptional with nine out of every ten pupils entered achieving A*-C grades. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 are confident in drama and work very well together. They follow an imaginative and demanding programme in each year. Teachers have very high expectations. They use drama very effectively to develop pupils' personal and social education. In a very good Year 8 lesson, pupils explored status through role-plays in small groups. Their understanding was well above average and they worked with verve and confidence. Boys and girls worked very imaginatively together and learning for all was fun. In a Year 10 lesson, pupils worked intently on freeze frames depicting stories on the theme of child abuse. The teacher planned the lesson carefully to ensure that all pupils were challenged throughout. As a result, all work showed good awareness both of the complexities of the theme and the dramatic requirements for effective staging. Outside the classroom, pupils have very good opportunities for developing and practising their drama skills in very many productions and workshops. The annual school production involves over a hundred pupils and virtually every member of staff. Very good leadership and management of the subject are helping to maintain very high standards in drama throughout the school.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are high.
- Good teaching helps pupils of all capabilities to achieve well.
- Teachers use assessment well to show pupils how to improve their work.
- Pupils make insufficient use of ICT to develop their work in art and design.

Commentary

110. GCSE results in 2003 were well above the national average and indicated very good achievement. Results were particularly high in 2002, when 94 of the 98 candidates gained grades A*-C and 25 gained grades A* or A. Pupils usually attain higher grades in art and design than in most of the other subjects they take.

111. Standards by Year 9 are above average and represent good achievement for pupils of all ethnic backgrounds and capabilities, in relation to when they started at the school in Year 7. Pupils improve their standards through using a critical approach to their work. This was seen, for example, in their use of colour, logo and typefaces in design work in Year 9.

112. Standards in the current Year 11 are well above average and indicate good achievement compared with the National Curriculum levels attained at the end of Year 9. Pupils on the GCSE

course develop individual ideas on a set theme. For example, pupils improved their coursework by the completion of an extensive printmaking project using enlargements of a self-portrait. Pupils with special educational needs make similarly good progress as other pupils. Pupils who are talented receive suitably challenging and difficult work to fulfil their potential. Ethnic minority pupils make similar rates of progress as other pupils. Boys' achievement is as good as that of girls.

113. The quality of teaching and learning is good throughout the school. All pupils learn effectively because teaching builds progressively on their previous experience. This was seen in a Year 8 lesson about cubism in which the concept was skilfully taught. As a result, pupils made good progress when drawing still-life objects from observation from several viewpoints. GCSE candidates study movement in Marcel Duchamp's 'Nude Descending Staircase'. They respond purposefully to the challenge of this difficult artistic concept and raise the standard of their coursework. Assessment is good and the system of setting targets and tracking pupils' progress is helping pupils to improve their work. Pupils' positive attitudes and behaviour contribute to their good learning. Teachers provide few opportunities for pupils in Years 7 to 11 to enrich and extend their work through the use of ICT.

114. Good leadership has resulted in a cohesive team that is energetically tackling the issues concerned with raising standards. Management is good. The newly developed system of assessment contributes to raising standards and gives pupils clear advice about how to improve. Progress since the previous inspection is good because teaching and learning are now good and GCSE results have risen to well above average.

Music

Provision in music is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE and AS results are well above national averages and indicate good achievement.
- Good extra-curricular provision helps many pupils to extend their music making.
- The quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9 varies, though it is satisfactory overall.
- Schemes of work need review for Years 8 and 9.
- The inadequate accommodation and resources restrict the range of learning activities.

Commentary

115. GCSE results are well above average for boys and girls and indicate good achievement. In 2003, results were particularly good with 12 of the 23 candidates gaining grades A* or A. The seven pupils who completed the AS course attained grades in the range A to C, with four attaining A grades.

116. Standards are average by Year 9 and indicate satisfactory achievement for pupils of all capabilities, including those with special educational needs. Pupils have average skills and knowledge in singing, performing and composing. They have above average understanding of musical terminology and musical vocabulary. In Years 10 and 11, standards are above average and indicate good achievement. Pupils develop above average skills of performing and composing and they show good understanding of musical processes when listening and appraising.

117. The quality of teaching and learning varies considerably in Years 7 to 9 and is satisfactory overall. The planning of lessons lacks consistency. In some lessons, pupils are engaged actively in listening, performing and composing and make good progress. In other lessons, however, expectations are often unrealistically high and the teacher's explanations take too much time, so that pupils have little time for involvement in practical musical activities. In these lessons, pupils' progress is occasionally unsatisfactory. In most lessons, boys and girls respond well and enjoy their music making. They listen attentively to their teachers and work with concentration. In Years 10 and 11, teaching and learning are good. Boys and girls, including the gifted musicians, respond

eagerly to the good pace and challenge of the work and achieve well. Assessment procedures are in place and occur at the end of each unit of work. They are not as helpful to pupils' progress as they should be because they do not relate clearly to the levels of the National Curriculum. In Years 10 and 11, pupils are assessed on each completed piece of work and improve their learning because they are involved in evaluating their own work.

118. Pupils extend their skills and learning in music through active participation in a good range of musical activities out of lessons. These range from the school band and choir, to a training-band, which is taken by a talented pupil with the support of a teacher. Around 80 pupils take instrumental lessons and approximately 60 pupils take part in formal extra-curricular activities. This good participation enables pupils to increase their competence and confidence in playing and performing as individuals and groups and promotes their social development. The department is open every lunchtime for pupils to engage in music making.

119. Satisfactory leadership and management recognise the need for the review of current schemes of work and for greater consistency in teaching approaches, particularly in Years 8 and 9. The accommodation is severely limited in terms of space and resources are presently unsatisfactory. There are no classroom percussion instruments and there is no ICT facility beyond the use of keyboard instruments. Progress since the previous inspection is satisfactory. The department has maintained high GCSE standards and provision for lower-attaining pupils has improved.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good leadership and management have resulted in a consistently good quality of teaching.
- Evaluation helps pupils to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their own and others' work.
- Pupils develop their skills through a good extra-curricular programme.
- Lessons do not always show pupils how to move on quickly to higher levels of performance.

Commentary

120. By Year 9, standards are average and indicate good achievement, taking into account pupils' standards on entry in Year 7. Standards by Year 11, both on the common course taken by all pupils and on the GCSE optional course, are above average and represent good achievement. GCSE results were slightly above average in 2002 and well above average in 2003. Pupils with special educational needs achieve equally as well as other pupils in all years.

121. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11 is good. Teachers plan lessons well and use a good range of methods effectively to capture pupils' interest. Pupils' enthusiastic responses enhance their acquisition of new skills. A consistent focus on evaluation encourages pupils to understand and explain to each other the strengths and areas for development in their work. In a very good Year 7 boys' dance lesson, pupils developed their own movement ideas through a well-structured task. They responded enthusiastically to the music and, as a result of clear guidance, knew exactly what was expected of them. Their movements were vivid in shape and quality of expression and they demonstrated good rhythmical awareness. Their evaluation of each others' work was constructive and showed clear understanding of the set criteria. The teacher dealt sensitively with the needs of two pupils with physical impairments, to the extent that they were also keen to participate in the evaluation process. Occasionally, lessons do not analyse skills closely enough to enable pupils to move quickly on to higher levels of performance.

122. In Years 10 and 11, planning of lessons is thorough and teachers encourage pupils to work independently and collaboratively. Pupils respond well and make good progress because they enjoy the opportunities to take on different roles according to their capabilities. Pupils categorise their GCSE files in physical education clearly and present them very neatly. Teachers' marking is constructive and shows pupils where they can make improvements. This helps them to make good progress. Pupils in all years develop and practise their skills in physical education through active participation in a wide-ranging extra-curricular programme that is well supported by staff.

123. Good leadership sets a clear vision for future development, shown through the department's plans for the school's bid for specialist performing arts status. Management is good. Staff work closely together as a team and have individual responsibilities delegated within their areas of particular interest. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation of teaching ensure the sharing of good practice and lead to suitable professional development. The development of the assessment system is ongoing and shows a commitment to improving pupils' understanding of how they can progress to higher levels of performance. Improvement since the previous inspection is good.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Work was sampled on the vocational courses taught to pupils in Years 10 and 11 in school and at the local college. Pupils have good access to a range of vocational GCSE and GNVQ courses. Standards of work seen are average overall and reflect the very different capabilities of different pupils on the courses. Organisational and learning methods have been adjusted since the first year of the course and pupils now feel well satisfied with arrangements. Teaching was good on the applied business studies course at the college. Pupils benefit from the mentoring sessions held at school in respect of the college courses in engineering, applied business studies and health and social care.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average and show good achievement in Years 10 and 11.
- Good planning provides an interesting and valuable programme of study.
- Pupils develop good skills of enquiry throughout the course.
- Strategies are not yet in place to assess standards and progress.
- There is no coherent monitoring of pupils' experiences in citizenship.

Commentary

124. Citizenship is taught by form tutors and through drama in Years 7 to 9. Aspects are taught through tutorial time and the personal, social and health education programme that runs in Years 10 and 11. Topics in assemblies support the work in citizenship. The school has investigated carefully the contributions to citizenship made by subjects and by other aspects of school life. These contributions have been supplemented by a programme of work that ensures full coverage of necessary content and so fulfil the National Curriculum requirements for citizenship.

125. During the inspection, no citizenship topics were covered in tutorial time in Years 7 to 9. Discussion with pupils and evidence of work covered indicate that standards are average and achievement and teaching are satisfactory. In Years 10 and 11, standards of work observed are above average and pupils achieve well. In a very good Year 10 lesson, pupils' learning was purposeful. They worked confidently in drama on freeze frames as part of a continuing assignment on the Barnado's Child Abuse theme. In their analyses of scenes, pupils showed good awareness of

the emotional complexities and conflicts surrounding child abuse and its consequences. High expectations were evident in challenging and productive work.

126. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. Most teachers have very good skills in managing behaviour and provide very good opportunities for discussion to which pupils respond very well. Lessons are well planned, structured, and interesting, as they involve pupils fully and actively in their learning. For example, in a very good Year 10 lesson, pupils preparing for a radio recording were using interviewing skills in establishing four or five places to visit in Swindon and how to improve the town. Pupils learnt from the teacher and at first hand from a local broadcaster of how a radio programme seeks to capture and retain the audience's interest. Pupils responded enthusiastically and contributed many very good ideas.

127. Pupils develop good skills of enquiry and communication through practical careers exercises. These help them to research lifestyles, money matters, aspects of community and issues of the local environment. Pupils work well in groups and undertake independent study and whole-class events. In Year 8, a number of speakers from the local community stimulate pupils to research and study community matters such as safety and traffic, amnesty and the work of the Samaritans. In drama lessons in Year 9, pupils perform monologues, as a follow up to research of different personnel such as social workers, police officers and the media. These increase pupils' understanding of different opinions. Pupils increase their awareness of the responsibilities of citizenship through work in personal, social and health education in Years 10 and 11 that involves workshop-style sessions with magistrates and visits to court to observe a real case. Pupils have numerous opportunities to develop research and communication skills in many subjects in Years 7 to 11.

128. Pupils of all capabilities, and particularly those with special educational needs, develop their skills of participation and responsible action through many aspects of school life. For instance, a group of pupils helps after school with the annual shop-mobility event to help the elderly and disabled with their Christmas shopping. A group of current and past dyslexic pupils are working with staff from studios in Swindon to produce a film about the problems of dyslexia. Pupils in wheelchairs play an active part in lessons and make good contributions to discussions. The school council meets monthly and is developing as a meaningful democratic group, representing pupils' views. However, the school realises the need to extend the democratic system by involving tutor groups more directly in discussions, opinion and feed back. A rich and varied programme of school visits and extra-curricular activities makes a valuable contribution to pupils' education in citizenship.

129. Planning for the development of citizenship is good with a clear commitment to the subject's further development. A coordinator for the subject is in place and leadership is competent. However, the monitoring of pupils' learning experiences lacks coherence and does not show them clearly how well they are doing. This is mainly because there are no clear guidelines for teachers to assess standards and measure progress. Nevertheless, provision is good and results in pupils learning to become good citizens within the school community.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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