

INSPECTION REPORT

KATHARINE LADY BERKELEY'S SCHOOL

Wotton-under-Edge

LEA area: Gloucestershire

Unique Reference Number: 115757

Headteacher: Mr A P Harris

Lead inspector: Dr D A W Biltcliffe

Dates of inspection: 2nd - 6th February 2004

Inspection number: 262789

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1,462
School address:	Kingswood Road Wotton-under-Edge Gloucestershire
Postcode:	GL12 8RB
Telephone number:	(01453) 842 227
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs M Clarke
Dates of previous inspection:	30 th November – 4 th December 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

This large comprehensive school holds specialist Language College status. It educates about 1,462 boys and girls aged 11-18 (including a sixth form of around 220). Pupils' social and economic background is well above average. Far more pupils than usual enter the school at the age of 11 with above average attainment. About 99 per cent of pupils are white, whilst the remaining small minority come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs (SEN) or with official SEN statements of such needs is below the national norm. No pupils are at an early stage of learning English. In 2002-2003 about three per cent of pupils joined or left the school other than at the usual time at the beginning or end of the school year. The school gained a *Schools Achievement Award* in 2001 and 2002 from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). It has received two awards from the British Council for its work and holds *Investor in People* and *Investor in Student Careers* status.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1025	Dr D A W Biltcliffe	Lead inspector	Latin
9034	Mrs J W Biltcliffe	Lay inspector	
13452	Mr H Meggitt	Lay inspector	
11479	Mr J A Paine	Team inspector	English; Drama
30576	Mr P Bannon	Team inspector	Mathematics
2048	Mr R D Masterton	Team inspector	Science
4607	Dr D E Ward	Team inspector	Science; Design and technology
11190	Dr W M Burke	Team inspector	Art; Design and technology
12470	Mr B M Greasley	Team inspector	Geography
8873	Ms C Evers	Team inspector	Citizenship; History
17923	Mr M Shaw	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT); Special educational needs; critical thinking
2626	Mrs M Thompson	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
4829	Mr I H C Waters	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
4697	Mr R Black	Team inspector	Music
13217	Mr M D Butterworth	Team inspector	Physical education
10448	Mr M F Elson	Team inspector	Religious education
1819	Mr R H Crowther	Team inspector	Business education; Psychology; Sociology

The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

This large comprehensive school, a Language College, of 1,462 boys and girls in Gloucestershire was inspected on 2nd-6th February 2004 by a team led by Dr D A W Biltcliffe.

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a good, effective school. Academic standards are high. Most pupils achieve well. The sixth form is strong. The school's teaching is good, so that most pupils learn well. Attendance and punctuality are very good. Most pupils behave well. The school cares for its pupils soundly. Governors and staff work hard to make the school the success it is. Most things work well. A few aspects require improvement. The school gives good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Overall attainment is well above average in national tests and GCSE examinations.
- These standards represent a good achievement by pupils, students and teachers.
- Most teaching is at least good. Teaching is a strength of the school.
- The vast majority of pupils are pleasant, industrious, mature and well behaved.
- The seven foreign languages currently taught are a prominent feature of the school's provision.
- Most pastoral work is effective, but support for individual pupils is often not warm enough.
- The school does not provide enough religious education (RE) or collective worship.

Since its last inspection in 1998, the school has made sound progress. It has kept its high academic standards. Its results are better than most of those in a similar type of school. Attendance is even better than it was. Teaching remains strong. Most management is sharper and better organised. The school's warmth as a community needs more effort. It is, nevertheless, a good place for pupils and students to learn and thrive. Its academic reputation is deservedly high.

The school has made satisfactory overall improvement in most of the main weaknesses identified in 1998, but not everything is yet right. Provision of ICT has increased satisfactorily, but more is needed. Management has sharpened its priorities, roles and documentation. More remains to be done on the governors' strategic role, whole-school performance review and sixth-form planning. Suitable curricular changes have been made, but there is not enough RE. Accommodation is better and the school has a steady, rolling programme of improvement. The school has been slow, however, to give any priority to pupils' spiritual development.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*Key: A – well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E – well below average.
For Year 11, "similar schools" are those whose pupils had a similar level of attainment at the end of Year 9.*

Pupils' overall achievement is good. In 2003 (as in earlier years), pupils' overall level of attainment was well above average by the end of Year 9. This represents a good achievement. Their GCSE performance in 2003 was also well above average – again, a good level of achievement. Results are better than those usually gained in a similar kind of school. Current standards of work by the end of Year 11 are at least above average in most subjects and quite often well above average. They are average in physical education (PE) but, owing to shortage of teaching time, below average in information and communication technology (ICT).

Pupils' personal qualities are developed satisfactorily. Their moral, social and cultural development are promoted well. Spiritual growth is lower, but satisfactory. Encouraging, thorough teaching and support from senior pastoral staff give pupils confidence and high aspirations. Most pupils show positive attitudes to the school and their peers and behave sensibly. A few are silly and waste time. Pupils attend very well.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of pupils' education is good. Teaching is good overall and in most subjects. It is a strength of the school. Most teaching is well organised, stimulating and interesting. It is occasionally dull and lacks grip. Teaching is very good in Years 10-11 in art, music, and design and technology, throughout the school in RE and across the sixth form. It is satisfactory in Years 7-9 in geography, ICT and music. In other subjects it is good. Because most teaching is strong (and well over a quarter of it is very good, or better), most pupils show interest, work hard and progress well.

The curriculum is broad. Foreign languages feature prominently. Religious education is very strong, but there is not enough of it in Year 10. The school offers numerous extracurricular activities. Collective worship is virtually non-existent. Welfare and guidance are sound. The school encourages high aspirations in pupils. There are some health and safety loopholes. The school is held in high regard by parents. The very good induction arrangements for new pupils help them to settle in quickly and confidently.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school's **leadership and management are good.** The school is very well organised and runs smoothly under the headteacher's dedicated leadership. Its work is based on clear principles. Senior managers operate soundly and are well complemented by a strong team of middle managers. Whole-school planning and monitoring, however, require more dynamism. Governors are supportive and committed. They have not, however, done enough to provide RE and collective worship, where the school has long been in breach of its statutory duties.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The vast majority of parents, rightly, have great confidence in the school. They commend its academic work, including its teaching, highly. No major concerns emerged that were common to many parents. Pupils like the school, think it is well run and feel that it has good academic standards. They appreciate the good teaching they receive and the trust teachers put in them. Around two-fifths of pupils, however, say they do not feel they would have ready access to a sympathetic adult for personal problems. Inspectors support the positive aspects recorded. They judge that most staff are dedicated. They also believe that all staff – individually and corporately – need to examine how extensively and warmly they engage with pupils out of class around the school.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- remove the weaknesses in a minority of teaching noted in the main body of the report;
- evaluate comprehensively the overall academic and pastoral performance of the school;
- show more dynamism and warmth in staff's out-of-class contact with pupils;
- produce a clear plan for the long-term development of the sixth form's curriculum and facilities;
- raise the achievement of pupils in ICT by providing more time and equipment for the subject;
- enhance the school's provision for pupils' spiritual development;
and, to meet statutory requirements, ensure that:
- enough RE is taught to Year 10 pupils and to students in the sixth form;
- much more effort is put into providing a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

THE SIXTH FORM AT KATHARINE LADY BERKELEY'S SCHOOL

The school's sixth-form provision is larger than usual at around 220 students. An extensive range of some 28 GCE AS-/A-level subjects (but no major vocational courses) is offered at the school.

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of sixth-form provision is very good. In 2003, the pass rate, average point scores and grade quality in GCE A2-level examinations were all well above average. Students achieve well in most of the subjects and courses they take. English, art, business studies, history, Spanish and textiles turned in particularly strong performances in last year's examinations. Science results were satisfactory, but geography results were poor. Results at AS level were good. Teaching is very good. Most students learn diligently. The sixth form is managed well. It is cost effective. Most students believe that the sixth form is a good place for study and the right academic springboard for their future lives.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- GCE A-level results are well above average. Most sixth formers perform well.
- Students have a very wide choice of GCE courses, but no major vocational courses are on offer.
- Of the 18 main subjects inspected, provision is very good in English, art, history, RE, business studies and psychology.
- Provision is good in mathematics, biology, physics, French, German, ICT, music, drama and sociology.
- It is satisfactory in chemistry and critical thinking, but unsatisfactory in geography.
- The overall quality of teaching is very good. One in every 12 lessons seen was outstanding.
- Learning facilities are good, but sometimes cramped.
- The sixth form's character and provision are not underpinned by long-term planning.
- The sixth form is an important ingredient in the school's ethos and success.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	<p>Provision in English literature is very good. The courses are very well organised. Teaching is stimulating and incisive. Students achieve well.</p> <p>Good provision in French. Well-planned, challenging teaching and good management help students to do well. Results are above average.</p> <p>Provision in German is good. The small number of students make good progress because of interesting teaching.</p>
Mathematics	<p>Good. Good teaching, high quality assessment and thoughtful leadership are the key factors in mathematics' success. Course recruitment is unusually high.</p>
Science	<p>Biology provision is good because of enthusiastic teaching, imaginative resources, strong investigational work and many out-of-school activities.</p> <p>Chemistry provision is satisfactory. Teaching and investigations are strengths. Work consolidation and examination results are satisfactory.</p> <p>Physics provision is good. A-level standards are above average. Teaching is very thorough. Some candidates are held back by their weak mathematics.</p>
Information and communication technology	<p>Good overall provision in ICT. Teaching, learning and course management are all good. Students receive much individual attention and achieve well.</p>
Humanities	<p>Geography provision is unsatisfactory. Results are below average and students often underachieve. Teaching lacks rigour. Management is ineffective.</p> <p>Provision in history is very good. Above average results stem from consistently good teaching, thorough assessment and students' hard work.</p> <p>Psychology provision is very good. This success is based on well-prepared lessons and thorough monitoring of progress. Students do well in the subject.</p> <p>Religious education is promoted very well. Specialist teaching, learning and achievement are all of high quality. This is an unusually strong department.</p> <p>Provision in sociology is good. Lively, knowledgeable teaching ensures that students enjoy their work. Feedback on progress is satisfactory.</p>
Visual and performing arts and media	<p>Art provision is very good. Teaching is very good and often outstanding. Students reach well above average standards and achieve very well.</p> <p>Provision in drama is good. The teaching is thorough, imaginative and well organised. Students achieve well and concentrate hard.</p> <p>The good provision in music stems from very knowledgeable teaching and fine facilities. Some students lack background knowledge and musical confidence.</p>
Business	<p>Business studies is very good. Most students respond maturely to the brisk, challenging teaching. Standards are above average and achievement good.</p>
General education	<p>Critical thinking provision is satisfactory. Good overall teaching ensures students make satisfactory progress. Some students find deep analysis taxing.</p>

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

The school strongly encourages its students to aim high. Sixth formers have high levels of aspiration and offer good role models to younger pupils. The school's guidance and support enable students to pursue suitable opportunities in higher education. Tutors know the members of their groups well, but about half the students who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire hesitated to endorse fully the school's personal support for them – a hesitation that the school takes seriously and intends to rectify.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The leadership of the sixth form is very good and its management good. The head of the sixth form knows students very well, supports them enthusiastically and effectively, and fosters a strong sense of corporate identity. She, with her tutors, monitors students' performance very thoroughly. Departmental leadership and management at sixth-form level are good overall and in most subjects. They are very good in art, mathematics, RE and psychology, satisfactory in design and technology, but unsatisfactory in geography. The requirement of the agreed syllabus to teach RE in the sixth form is not met. The school does not have a long-term corporate plan for sixth-form development. The sixth form is cost effective.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Most sixth formers think that the school is a good place to be for their studies. They feel that they receive expert, helpful teaching. They enjoy the friendly atmosphere. About half who expressed a view, however, feel that guidance and some facilities are not quite good enough. As in the main school and as noted above, many do not feel full confidence in finding an adult with whom they could discuss a serious personal problem – a matter for early resolution. Overall, however, they much enjoy, and benefit from, sixth-form life in this school.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Far more pupils than usual reach at least basic national standards by the end of Years 9 and 11. Pupils' level of attainment is well above average in the national tests in Year 9 and in GCSE examinations. These are good achievements, even bearing in mind that the school's intakes are at least above average. In GCSE, girls tend to do better than boys. The high academic standards reported at the last inspection have been maintained. Students' overall standard in GCE Advanced-level examinations is also well above average: the majority of sixth-form students achieve well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The level of results and achievement in external tests and GCSE examinations is good.
- Pupils' progress and achievement are good overall across Years 7-13.
- Pupils' overall level of attainment is well above average.
- Achievement is good in most subjects and sometimes very good.
- Achievement is satisfactory in Years 7-9 in geography, ICT and music, and in the sixth form in music and physical education (PE).
- It is unsatisfactory in ICT in Years 10-11 (lack of time) and in sixth-form geography.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	35.4 (36.3)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	39.7 (39.1)	35.4 (34.7)
science	38.0 (37.1)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 247 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for 2002.

1. In the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2003, the proportions of pupils who achieved the national standards of at least Level 5 or Level 6 were well above average – as they were in earlier years. Mathematics and science consistently reach a slightly higher overall standard than English. When these Year 9 results are compared with those in schools which have either a similar social and economic background or a similar starting-point in Year 7, pupils in this school perform better than the average for their group.

2. Girls are generally ahead of boys in English by the end of Year 9. Girls and boys usually do equally well overall in mathematics. In science, boys tend to have a slight lead over girls, but there is not much between the sexes. In the five other (non-core) subjects formally assessed at the end of Year 9 in 2003, teachers judged the overall attainment of their pupils to be well above average in design and technology, geography, history and modern foreign languages, and broadly average in information and communication technology (ICT). Inspectors judge that current Year 9 standards are above average in most of these subjects, but below average in ICT.

3. In work seen during the inspection, pupils' overall standard of work by the end of Year 9 was above average. It is average in music, physical education (PE) and religious education (RE), below average in ICT, above average in art, design and technology, geography, history and modern foreign languages, and well above average in English, mathematics and science.

4. Pupils' progress and achievement in their studies over Years 7-9 are good overall. This is shown by their performance in both external assessments and the rate of progress they make in

lessons. Their achievement is, however, at a slightly lower, satisfactory level in geography, ICT and music. It is good in all other subjects. Pupils usually achieve well owing to carefully planned, stimulating teaching and to the positive approach to learning shown by the vast majority of pupils. In a few lessons, however, they make unsatisfactory progress, largely because they are not stretched enough intellectually or misbehaviour is inadequately checked.

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	73 (67)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	99 (98)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (98)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	43.7 (42.1)	34.7 (34.7)

There were 232 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for 2002.

5. In the GCSE examinations of 2003, pupils' results were well above the national average. Over the six years since the last inspection, GCSE results have remained high. The proportion of pupils gaining at least five of the higher (A*-C) grades, for example, has been within the range 68-78 per cent over the last six years. It was 73 per cent in 2003. In 2003, virtually every pupil in the school gained at least five A*-G grades, a considerable achievement. The thorough teaching in Years 10-11 and most pupils' willingness to work hard are the major factors in this success.

6. In the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, pupils' attainment of a grade in the range A*-C in GCSE in 2003 was well above average. All three subjects performed equally well. These results were also better than those in most similar schools. The good level of achievement in these subjects provides a very solid base for the rest of the school's work. The good performance in a wide range of foreign languages adds a further distinctive element to the school's academic work.

7. When pupils' performances in all the subjects they take in GCSE are compared with one another, pupils usually do significantly better in mathematics and science than in most of their other subjects; art, geography and history, too, are often stronger subjects. Pupils have tended to do worse in design and technology and (until 2003) in the GCSE part of PE. The highest A* grade was reached by pupils in all subjects in 2003 except in food, Mandarin, Russian, music and child development. The proportion of A* and A grades obtained was double the national average – a good achievement. This school's performance has been better than that of most similar schools in recent years.

8. Girls achieve a greater proportion of the higher (A*-C) grades in GCSE than boys. Usually around four out of five girls reach this standard, compared to just over three out of five boys; two-thirds of boys, however, reached this level in 2003. The overall gap between the sexes was very wide in 2000 at 26 percentage points, but narrowed to 12 points in 2002 and 2003 – about the same as the gap nationally. In 2003, girls did better than boys in English: 90 per cent of the girls, compared with 77 per cent of the boys, for instance, gained a higher (A*-C) grade. Girls performed slightly better, too, in mathematics, but did not do quite as well as boys in science.

9. Taking into account their achievements in the national tests two years earlier, most pupils make good progress in their studies during Years 10 and 11, as did Year 11 pupils in 2003. The school broadly achieved the realistic GCSE targets it set for itself in the 2003 examinations. Although there was some weakness in the rate of progress to achieve at least five A*-C grades in 2001 and 2002, this had disappeared by 2003. The purposeful, skilful teaching seen in most lessons secures good progress for pupils.

10. By the end of Year 11, the proportion of pupils reaching nationally expected standards in subjects is nearly always above average and quite often well above average. The proportions are well above average in English, mathematics, the separate sciences, geography and music, below average

overall in ICT (time shortage), average in PE, and above average in design and technology, history, modern foreign languages and RE.

11. Pupils with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily. They progress well when withdrawn from classes to work on basic literacy and mathematics and often improve their basic skills at a faster rate than might be expected. They also learn well in classes where they are helped by a learning support worker. In Years 7-9, they achieve well in English, mathematics and science. In their other subjects, where support is far less frequent, their learning is satisfactory. In Years 10 and 11, they achieve well because of the firm foundations laid in earlier years. By this stage, most have sufficient levels of reading, writing and numerical skills for the demands of their lessons. The most able generally make good progress in this school.

12. The school uses external data and a finely tuned internal assessment system to judge pupils' progress as they move through the school. It makes good use of this range of data to monitor and guide individual pupils. It does not, however, have a sufficiently strong model or system for judging its overall academic performance. It relies heavily, with some justification, on nationally produced analyses. It now requires a complementary method of rigorously analysing its overall academic performance for strengths, weaknesses, solid trends and action points. This is also necessary to help it to improve the principles and accuracy of its streaming system in Year 7 and its setting arrangements from Year 8.

13. Across the school, pupils' standard of literacy is above average overall. Most pupils read accurately and clearly. They are good at analysing and evaluating textual material. Writing is better than usually found. This is especially true of extended and analytical writing as well as spelling and punctuation. The presentation and layout of work vary widely. They are usually reasonable and sometimes exemplary, but the overall standard could be higher. Most pupils speak clearly and confidently – and a significant minority impressively so. Their range of vocabulary is wider than normal. Nearly all pupils listen well to their teachers and to one another.

14. In mathematics across the curriculum, pupils generally handle numbers and data well. The overall standard of numeracy is well above average. Most pupils handle mental calculations well. Attainment in ICT is below average by the end of Year 11. This is mainly due to insufficient specialist teaching time for the subject (not the quality of teaching) and too little use being made of ICT in many other subjects. Many pupils improve their skill, however, through having access to computers at home.

Sixth form

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	93 (99)	92 (90)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	49 (47)	36 (36)
Average point score per pupil	283 (299)	253 (255)

There were 118 (105) pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for 2002.

15. The overall results at GCE Advanced (A) level for those students entered for two or more subjects have been well above average since the last inspection both in the quality of grades and average point scores obtained. Pass rates are good. Students' point scores per subject studied have consistently been above average over the whole of the 1997-2003 period.

16. All students who took GCE A2 level in 2003 passed in further mathematics, art, history, French, German, Mandarin, Spanish, music, RE, textiles, economics, psychology, sociology and general studies. The quality of grades was generally high. The highest A grade was obtained in nearly all subjects. At least one third of the grades were "A", for example, in further mathematics, physics, art, history, French, Spanish, textiles, business studies and sociology.

17. Taking into account the quality of grades that they gained in GCSE examinations two years earlier, most students made sound progress in their studies to A2 level in 2003. On the subject grades that could be directly compared, students made good (or better) progress in around half the subjects they studied and satisfactory progress in one quarter. They made unsatisfactory progress in nearly one in three cases, but one quarter of these were accounted for by the poor geography results. The overall A2 performance was good.

18. Most students achieved well in 2003 in English, design and technology, French and business studies. A particularly strong performance was turned in by art, history, textiles and Spanish. The unsatisfactory progress was largely confined to a very small number of subjects. A minority of candidates made unsatisfactory progress in mathematics (on a very large and diverse entry), human biology, chemistry, physics, environmental science and German. Progress in geography was poor: on current evidence, teaching quality and ineffective management are the major causes.

19. In the GCE Advanced Supplementary (AS) level examinations in 2003, 95 per cent of students passed. Both the pass rate and quality of grades were well above average. In most subjects all students passed. Only in PE was the pass rate below 80 per cent. The results represent a good achievement. Male and female students obtained similar average point scores in GCE A2- and AS-level examinations in 2003.

20. Those students expressing a view about their sixth-form courses were generally very satisfied with the school's academic provision. They appreciated particularly the quality of teaching and course guidance. Very few students "drop out" of their courses in this school.

21. Students have above average skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT capability. Most skim and research written material very competently and quickly. Note-taking is generally well done. Essays are usually well structured and cogently argued. More students than usual are capable speakers, with a suitably wide vocabulary – although (despite excellent exceptions) they are provided with too few classroom opportunities to debate issues at length. The overall climate for learning in the sixth form is good. Most students are industrious, thoughtful and businesslike. The result is that they usually make good progress.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attendance and punctuality for both school and lessons are very good. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good overall. Pupils relate well to one another and to adults. The school helps pupils to mature well by developing their capacity to respect other people, distinguish right from wrong and live responsibly in the community. Attitudes in the sixth form are very good. The school helps students very well to grow into mature young adults and good citizens.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Both attendance and punctuality are very good – a credit to everyone involved.
- The school has created a good ethos that successfully promotes pupils' learning and maturity.
- High expectations of pupils' conduct are largely achieved in practice.
- Sixth formers have high levels of aspiration and offer good role models to younger pupils.
- The school could do more to promote pupils' spiritual development.

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	5.1	School data	0.1
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.

Commentary

22. Pupils' attendance is very good overall and well above the pattern nationally. In the 2002-2003 academic year it was 94.8 per cent – higher than the good level of 93.3 per cent at the last inspection. In the current academic year, it gives every indication of being maintained at last year's high level: in the Autumn Term of 2003, for example, it was also at 94.8 per cent. Attendance in Year 11 was particularly good at 95.3 per cent. The lowest level of attendance last academic year was the 93.8 per cent of Year 10 – still a good figure.

23. The vast majority of pupils are punctual for school, despite the school's early start and the distance that many travel. Only a very small number of pupils are slightly late for school each day. Punctuality for lessons, too, is very good. Since the last inspection, the school has improved its good systems of monitoring attendance – as, for example, through its close working links with its effective education welfare service.

24. As at the time of the last inspection, pupils' enthusiasm and positive attitudes enhance their achievement at school. The school makes clear to pupils the attitudes and values it wants them to uphold. Pupils have a very good view of the school's academic life, saying that teachers expect them to work hard and do their best. Their parents agree and rightly feel that, as a result, pupils make good progress.

25. In lessons, pupils show a good attitude to learning. They listen to their teachers and are positive in their responses. In three out of every five lessons, pupils' attitudes are at least good, whilst in two out of five lessons their attitudes are very good (or excellent). Attitudes are rarely unsatisfactory. When they are, it is frequently (as at the time of the last inspection) in lower-attaining groups, with teachers who do not do enough to secure high standards of behaviour. Pupils then show immature conduct and hinder learning for themselves and others.

26. Pupils generally behave well around the school. They understand and accept what the school expects of them in terms of conduct and appearance. There is an absence of vandalism and graffiti around the school. Litter is a problem. In the corridors, when pupils move from one part of the school to another, they generally do so in an orderly and purposeful way and get to their lessons on time.

27. The school uses exclusion as the punishment of last resort. The school's records show that physical assaults by one pupil on another are the most common reason for exclusion. The school has identified the lack of respect for one another shown by a minority of pupils as an important issue that it has begun to address. In partnership with the local authority's behaviour management team, the school has created an internal inclusion unit. The unit is a positive place where pupils can go and exclusion from school be avoided. It is a practical expression of the school's attempt to raise pupils' respect and support for one another.

28. Some pupils see bullying, especially "name calling", as a problem within the school. Most pupils say, when asked, that the school deals adequately with the issue. Some, however, feel that the school does not do enough to protect them from harassment from other pupils. Through the inclusion unit and other opportunities for counselling, the school has begun to address, but not sufficiently allayed, some pupils' concerns.

29. At midday, the arrangements for pupils to have a meal are a poor social experience. The dining area is too small to provide most pupils with the opportunity to sit down in comfort. During the inspection, many pupils had their lunch standing up or walking about outside. This is unsatisfactory. An important opportunity for pupils to develop social skills and attitudes of respect for one another is thereby lost. Given pupils' good behaviour, it is a little surprising that pupils are not allowed to make more use of the school buildings during lunchtime.

30. The prospectus informs parents that the act of collective worship is done on a tutor group or year group basis. Pupils attend assemblies regularly, but the school does not provide pupils with the opportunity for an act of collective worship. Assemblies often lack a sense of occasion and do not do enough to affirm the school's sense of corporate identity. Pupils, even in Year 9, sit close together on the floor: a sense of dignity is missing. Assemblies are also brief. When not in assembly, pupils have tutorial time. Sometimes the input from the tutor is good, but too often pupils spend the time in little purposeful activity.

31. Provision for pupils' personal development is good. The school promotes pupils' moral and social development well. In class, teachers treat pupils with consideration and help them to understand other people's feelings, values and beliefs. In RE, pupils learn very well how religious beliefs affect people's attitudes and actions. The school helps pupils to develop their understanding of, and ability to apply, the principles that distinguish right from wrong. The school council works well, engendering in pupils a sense that they have a role to fulfil within the school and in the wider community.

32. The school promotes most aspects of pupils' cultural awareness very well. Opportunities for pupils to develop a global perspective on the world through engagement with the languages and cultures of both East and West are outstanding. Art with design and technology provide further opportunities for cultural development, as do such whole-school activities as drama productions.

33. Provision for pupils' spiritual development, identified as a weakness in the last two inspection reports, is now satisfactory but not strong. RE, with its considerable emphasis on the development of personal insight through the use of reflective skills, makes a major contribution. In most lessons, however, teachers do not do enough to help pupils acquire reflective skills and to develop a deeper awareness of life.

34. The school does not comply with the statutory requirement for collective worship nor offer a systematic alternative programme to affirm the school's corporate, and pupils' individual, aspirations. Without a school policy, these aspects of pupils' personal development are unplanned and easily overlooked. Similarly, without planning, pupils who have little direct personal experience risk growing up insufficiently prepared for the ethnic and cultural diversity of contemporary Britain.

Sixth form

35. The attendance of students in the sixth form is very good and, at 94.6 per cent, on a par with the very good level in Years 7-11. The school has a thorough but flexible system of registration and exiting for sixth-formers that both ensures accurate record-keeping and allows students to show suitable responsibility. Punctuality for school is very good. It is usually at the same high standard for lessons.

36. Attitudes and behaviour are very good. In lessons, students work hard and enhance their personal development. They exercise responsibility well and show high levels of aspiration. The sixth form not only has its own elected committee, but also gives leadership to the school council. Students attend their own assemblies and engage with them positively and maturely, but they have no opportunity for an act of collective worship. The head of sixth form has ensured that students make good use of the new accommodation for study and fosters a strong sense of corporate identity. The school is rightly proud of its sixth-form students. They are good examples of success for younger pupils.

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	1437	83	2
White – Irish	1	0	0
White – any other White background	3	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	3	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	3	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	7	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	0	0	0
Black or Black British – African	1	0	0
Chinese	0	0	0
Any other ethnic group	0	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	5	0	0

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**Teaching and learning**

The quality of teaching is good overall and similar to what it was at the last inspection. It is very good in the sixth form. The majority of pupils learn well and make good progress because most teaching is well planned, thorough and interesting. Over a quarter of the teaching is very good indeed and occasionally excellent. In a few cases, teaching is dull and ineffective. The quality of teaching and learning is similar throughout Years 7-11. It is at its best in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good and a strength of the school. It is very good in the sixth form.
- Teaching and learning are usually very good in art, design and technology, and RE.
- They are satisfactory overall in geography and music.
- Seven per cent of lessons were unsatisfactorily or poorly taught. These require improvement.
- Out-of-class relationships between teachers and pupils are not as obviously warm as usually seen.
- The assessment of pupils' work and progress is usually well done within subject departments.
- Placement in "sets" relies on primary school performance data, without evidence of natural ability.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 280 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
11 (4%)	66 (24%)	121 (43%)	63 (23%)	16 (6%)	3 (1%)	0 (0%)

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; the figures in brackets show percentages. The percentages do not add up to 100 owing to "rounding".

Commentary

37. The quality of teaching is good overall and a strength of the school. It was at least satisfactory (and usually better) in 93 per cent of all lessons inspected. In seven out of every ten lessons, teaching was good or better. In over a quarter of lessons, it is very good (and occasionally outstanding). Nineteen lessons, however, out of the 280 inspected had teaching that was unsatisfactory (or poor). The quality of teaching is fairly similar throughout the school, but strongest in the sixth form.

38. The quality of teaching is very similar to what it was at the last inspection. The amount of good (or better) teaching, 71 per cent, is fractionally higher than it was then. Very good (or better) teaching was seen in 28 per cent of all lessons – close to the 30 per cent of 1998. Eleven lessons were outstanding. The proportion of unsatisfactory teaching has increased a little – up from the four per cent of 1998 to seven per cent now, a drop that requires quick reversal.

39. Teaching is good in most subjects. It is very good in Years 10-11 in art, design and technology, and music, and throughout the school in RE. It is satisfactory in Years 7-9 in geography, ICT and music. In all other subjects and year groups it is good.

40. The vast majority of teachers have a very good knowledge and clear understanding of what they teach. In most cases, this depth of knowledge leads to interesting, informative lessons. In the best examples, work is very well structured, stimulating and intellectually searching. It is founded on rigorous questioning and incisive debate: pupils' thinking is carefully nurtured and firm foundations of knowledge are secured. The value of teachers' scholarship was seen, for example, in an expertly taught Year 10 lesson in science, where pupils were carefully guided into firm understanding of the abstract concepts of kinetic and potential energy. There were many other examples. A weakness is that teachers' enthusiasm sometimes leads them to talk for too long and do too much for pupils.

41. Lesson planning is well done. It is usually also translated into effective teaching. It is at its best when teachers explain very clearly to pupils precisely what they will study in the hour and why the topic is being studied. In these cases, most teachers map out the stages of lessons well and explain how much time will be spent on different tasks. In a few cases, however – although outline plans are fine – teachers assume too much and do not explain lessons in terms that pupils fully understand. For example, the use of "subtle" and "mythological" – without illustration or explanation – with Year 8 pupils left many in a learning fog. Too rarely are the aims of lessons displayed, explained, discussed and reviewed.

42. Most teachers make lessons interesting. They work hard to engage and retain pupils' attention – and most pupils in this school want to learn and do well. Teachers keep up a brisk pace, vary the style of tasks appropriately and convey their own liking for their subjects. Such enthusiasm rubs off on pupils. In the best lessons, however, they go well beyond simple interest. They draw pupils into the excitement of learning in depth. They both challenge and inspire them to aim high.

43. This is done in several ways. Teachers ensure that pupils understand fully how they will approach new tasks and use well-targeted questions to check out this understanding rather than tacitly assume it is in place. They are precise about the steps to be taken and the amount of time available for each step. Most importantly, they ensure that there is substantial depth to at least part of lessons by the use of supplementary questions, debate and technical language that firmly extend the boundaries of pupils' understanding. They also require pupils to think hard by considering

alternative ideas, explanations and solutions, by taking active initiative and by helping pupils to note the school's motto, *non palma sine pulvere* – “there is no glory without hard graft”.

44. More than one quarter of lessons had these features and a few were quite outstanding. In an excellent Year 8 mathematics lesson about compass bearings and pie charts, for example, low-attaining pupils achieved very well indeed, because the teacher combined high-level encouragement with a fierce pace and individually challenging work that excited the pupils. Similarly, in a Year 10 design and technology lesson, pupils achieved above average standards in metalworking because the teacher was exceptionally well organised, strongly encouraged pupils to work independently (in cramped conditions) and ensured that high standards of finish were achieved.

45. A small minority of lessons, in contrast, are dull and slow, with the result that too little work is done and pupils become passive or restless. Occasionally, teachers talk too fast, keep all on the same task (irrespective of ability) or spend too much time with individuals to the neglect of the majority. A more common weakness in a minority of lessons is a lack of intellectual or creative sparkle. The teaching in such lessons is basically sound and covers the necessary ground, but does not require pupils to think very much.

46. This weakness sometimes occurs because light coverage and superficial answers are all that is expected. More often it is because teachers do too much of the work for pupils – talking for too long, accepting one-word or vague answers and rarely (or never) asking follow-up questions. Too often they themselves expand on pupils' answers rather than ensuring that pupils are more precise, articulate or explanatory. The further professional development of staff – and, in particular, a comprehensive programme of monitoring and evaluating all teaching – now needs to change its central focus from the skills of teaching to what pupils actually learn, attain and achieve.

47. The management of classes is usually good. This is because most teachers have suitable presence and a firm but friendly approach and because most pupils are pleasant and hard-working, responding sensibly to good teaching. Pupils usually settle down to work quickly, paying close attention to their teachers. Most teachers manage classes well by purposeful, brisk, good-natured teaching. In a minority of classes, however, constant chatter is poorly controlled. Occasionally, blatant rudeness is inadequately addressed.

48. A suitably wide range of learning methods is used. The best lessons have very clear introductions and explanations, demanding group or individual work and incisive plenary sessions and reviews. Weaker lessons only skim the surface of issues. Homework was generally well set during the inspection. The marking of books varies, but is generally good, with constructive advice on improvement. Despite a range of weaknesses that require improvement, the overall quality of teaching is good throughout the school.

49. The assessment of pupils' work is thorough in most subjects. It is very good in mathematics, where pupils are grouped according to similar levels of attainment and work is targeted consistently at challenging levels. Assessment is inconsistent in music and weak in citizenship. In geography, marking is inconsistent amongst teachers and work is too often left unchecked.

50. In most lessons, teachers judge accurately when pupils are ready to move forward, usually pitching work at suitably challenging levels. Most pupils have a good feel for how well they are progressing. In art, GCSE pupils use examination criteria to assess their work and Year 7 pupils in modern foreign languages assess other pupils' work. In music, however, pupils in Years 7-9 receive little advice on how to improve.

51. The school makes very good use of Year 6 national test results in English, mathematics and science to set precise targets in these subjects for the end of Year 9. There is, however, no use made of tests of natural ability to offset the in-built advantage that children born earlier in the school year have in these tests. This omission hinders some pupils, because only Year 6 results are used to group pupils into teaching groups for the whole of Year 7. Data from the performance of previous

year groups is used well to guide parents and pupils on likely GCSE results: subject teachers then fine-tune predictions, using their knowledge of individual pupils. The school does not, however, have a suitable system to analyse whether whole cohorts of pupils achieve as well as they should.

Sixth form

52. Seventy-nine sixth-form lessons were inspected. The quality of teaching is very good overall. It was at least satisfactory in all but one lesson inspected and good in half of them. Additionally, three in every ten lessons were very good. A further six were outstanding.

53. The strongest features of sixth-form teaching are the thorough planning and organisation of work, substantial subject knowledge, the pleasant relationships between teachers and pupils, the relaxed but purposeful atmosphere in lessons and – in the very best cases – an exciting and inspirational journey of discovery. Most students respond by displaying high effort and interest. The most limiting features of a few lessons are that teachers talk too much and do not require pupils to engage in rigorous thinking or extended debate. Such an approach encourages students to be passive.

54. Some distinguished teaching was seen. In an excellent Year 12 RE lesson on the Holy Spirit, for instance, the teacher ensured that students prepared and presented their own contributions in a scholarly way, acquiring high cognitive and expressive skills. In two Year 13 art lessons, students' standards and achievement in written work, discussions and practical work were high because of the enthusiasm, focus, pace and professionalism of outstanding teaching. The inspiring, crystal clear teaching in a Year 12 physics lesson ensured that all students understood the maximum power theorem and how to use software modelling.

55. The pre-inspection questionnaire, completed by 70 per cent of students, gives a very favourable view of sixth-form teaching. Nine out of ten students say that they experience challenging, helpful teaching from experts in their subjects. Most feel that their work is assessed carefully and that they are encouraged to stand on their own feet. Most are satisfied with the nature and amount of homework set. They think the school is a good place to study.

56. Assessment is consistently well used to feed back promptly to students. The school has clear review procedures, so that underachievement is usually identified and remedied early. Targets are both challenging and realistic: a thoughtfully adapted version of a national system uses previous results to predict future grades. Teachers' assessments are very thorough in English, mathematics, art, and design and technology. They are particularly helpful in English and mathematics in showing students how to improve.

57. Teaching is good in nearly all subjects. It is very good overall in art, design and technology, history and RE. It is satisfactory overall in geography. As a result of the generally high quality of teaching, most students learn with commitment and interest and are well prepared for external examinations. Sixth-form teaching is a major strength of the school.

The curriculum

The school's curriculum provides a good range of learning opportunities. It strongly reflects the school's specialist Language College status by teaching seven foreign languages. In contrast, the provision of vocational courses is modest. Sixth-form GCE AS- and A2-level choice is wide. The arrangements to support pupils with special educational needs are satisfactory. The range of extracurricular activities and visits is extensive. Its foreign links are exceptional. The provision for RE in Year 10 and in the sixth form does not meet statutory requirements.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Opportunities to learn and experience foreign languages are unusually extensive.
- Sixth-form subject choice is wide and enrichment activities are good.

- The school offers numerous extracurricular activities outside the school day.
- Provision for RE does not fully meet national requirements.
- A daily act of collective worship is very rarely provided for pupils.

Commentary

58. In Years 7-9, the breadth and balance of the curriculum are good overall and exceptional in foreign languages. All subjects of the National Curriculum are taught. There is a wide choice of six foreign languages – French or German, Japanese or Spanish, and Latin or Mandarin Chinese. The majority of pupils learn two languages. Pupils who have a low attainment in English language at the end of Year 6 have additional English lessons in Year 7 and study an international projects course instead of a second language in Years 8 and 9.

59. In Years 10-11, a good range of GCSE subjects is offered. Pupils study the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, plus citizenship, design and technology, ICT, PE, RE and life skills (personal, social and health education, PSHE). The majority of pupils continue to learn two foreign languages. In addition, pupils choose two other subjects from an appropriate range of ten subjects. Approximately 25 per cent of pupils in Year 10 study one foreign language and have the opportunity to study vocationally orientated subjects to GCSE (leisure and tourism, and art and design) or to General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) Intermediate standard (ICT). The requirement for pupils in a specialist language college to study a second foreign language places restrictions on what the school is able to offer beyond the core subjects. Little alternative vocational provision to GCSE courses is offered to pupils for whom it would be appropriate.

60. The school meets statutory requirements in all subjects except RE. There is insufficient time allocated to RE in Year 10 to meet the requirements of the local Agreed Syllabus. The requirement for all pupils in Years 7-11 to experience a daily act of collective worship is not met. The length and structure of the school day have improved since the last inspection. The time allocated to teach drama and ICT (both the GNVQ and GCSE courses) in Years 10-11 is low for the subjects to be taught successfully in sufficient depth. There is no agreed programme for the 15 minutes of tutorial time at the start of each afternoon: the provision varies from very good to unsatisfactory and is satisfactory overall.

61. The life skills (PSHE) programme, which includes appropriate education about sex and relationships, careers and the harmful effects of drug misuse, is taught to all pupils in Years 8-11. The organisation of the course is satisfactory. The programme is taught by a team of specialist teachers. The quality of teaching varies from good to unsatisfactory, but is satisfactory overall. In the best lessons, pupils complete a well-planned variety of well-structured activities at a lively pace, show interest, are fully involved and learn well. The subject is not taught in Year 7. The allocation of one period each fortnight to this course is not enough to explore most issues in sufficient depth. Work is rarely marked and no systematic monitoring of the course is undertaken.

62. The school works hard to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all pupils. In Years 10-11, higher-attaining pupils are able to study three separate sciences; there is no special provision for lower-attaining pupils. Appropriate provision is made for the minority of pupils who do not learn a foreign language in Years 10-11. The school works closely with a local further education college to provide work-orientated courses for a small group of pupils for whom the full range of courses in Year 10 is (reasonably) not judged to be appropriate.

63. In most subjects, pupils are grouped in classes that are organised on the basis of their prior attainment. This arrangement is broadly successful, as teachers usually match work well to the differing needs of pupils. As reported at the time of the last inspection, however, the number of boys and girls in sets varies significantly. It is also noticeable that often there are often approximately twice as many pupils in the higher-attaining sets who were born in the Autumn as in the Summer.

64. Satisfactory provision is made for pupils with special educational needs (SEN). A strong team of learning support assistants knows pupils well as individuals. They also have good knowledge of the educational needs of pupils and the ways such pupils learn best. Not only do they know when to offer support but, importantly, when to stand back a little so that their pupils do not become too reliant upon them for help. The special educational needs co-ordinator has developed this team well, identifying appropriate training and ensuring that the team is deployed to good effect. Support is not, however, always available and so the learning of these pupils does not advance as well as it otherwise might. On occasions, learning support assistants provide only limited help in class, because there has not been discussion about the content of the lesson between the teacher and assistant beforehand.

65. A good bank of computer programs is being established. Some pupils with special educational needs regularly use computer-aided learning to help them to improve their reading and spelling. Pupils enjoy using these programs. Although not set up specifically for them, pupils with special educational needs benefit from courses at a local college of further education. Pupils study a good range of vocational subjects that includes construction and motor mechanics. Some pupils have gained apprenticeships as a result of attending the college.

66. The school meets the requirements of pupils' statements of special educational need and meets the needs of other pupils on the SEN register. There is compliance with the Code of Practice for these pupils. Individual educational plans (IEPs) give some information, but often require greater detail of needs and specific advice on how these can be met. The coordinator attends the review meetings for all pupils with special educational needs before they leave primary school. This means that the school is well placed to meet pupils' needs as soon as they enter the school at the age of 11. Regular secretarial help ensures that teachers and learning support workers do not have to spend excessive time on administration.

67. The curriculum prepares pupils satisfactorily for the next stage of education or employment. Careers education forms a major strand in the life skills course. An appropriate programme of work is taught by a team of specialist teachers. The course is enhanced with a biennial careers convention, drama presentations and mock interviews with local employers. No formal, systematic monitoring of the progress made by pupils or the effectiveness of the programme takes place. Pupils are carefully guided, when making their choice of subjects in Year 9. In Years 10-11, well-considered, impartial guidance on choices in future education or employment is provided for those pupils deemed to be in greatest need. Other pupils who request guidance receive appropriate support.

68. A well-maintained careers library is situated in an annex to the main school library. Access is restricted to one day each week and 15 minutes during form tutor time on other days. Appropriate careers information programs are available, however, on the school's computer network. All pupils participate in work experience for one week in Year 10. Placement is well organised, although some opportunities are missed to strengthen pupils' knowledge of job application, selection and workplace procedures. Over 40 per cent of pupils are not, however, visited by a member of staff whilst on placement, nor are pupils required to complete a log book to record their experience.

69. The curriculum is evaluated and reviewed regularly by senior managers, but this is not based on close departmental links or the systematic monitoring of curricular quality and suitability. Such links do exist between governors and subject departments. As a consequence of the recent relaxation of the rules for specialist Language College status, the school plans to take full advantage of the flexibility this offers. Most subject schemes of work are of good quality.

70. A very wide range of extracurricular opportunities enhances the curriculum. Most subjects provide support for pupils outside the school day - through, for example, general interest groups, clubs and help with study. Pupils participate in a good spread of activities - as, for instance, in music, fieldwork, a major drama production, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and visits to

museums. Over 40 per cent of pupils participate regularly in a very wide range of sports and inter-school activities, with the enthusiastic commitment of 12 members of staff.

71. A strong feature of the school is the exceptional range of international activities it provides. Exchange visits take place with schools in countries as diverse as France, Germany, Japan and Spain. There are regular visits to European countries and China, and sixth form students gain work experience in France and Germany.

72. The school has a full complement of suitably qualified staff. There is insufficient technical support, however, for food technology and textiles. There are enough learning support assistants to provide effective support for pupils with statements of special educational need.

73. The amount and quality of accommodation have improved since the last inspection. There are well-equipped new rooms for teaching science, ICT, music and general subjects. Two temporary classrooms remain in a poor state of repair. Accommodation is often cramped. Some smaller rooms restrict the range of teaching styles, when they are used by large classes. The spaces used for drama are unsuitable. Up to one fifth of lessons in English, mathematics and foreign languages are taught in classrooms some distance from their main subject bases. This places additional strain on staff who are required to move equipment and materials and teach in non-specialist rooms. Some design and technology rooms are cramped and present a potential danger, when used for general teaching purposes.

74. The school's learning resources are sufficient and generally of good quality. There are enough textbooks and specialist equipment to teach subjects successfully. The school has an appropriate ratio of computers to pupils, but none is available in subject bases in English, mathematics, science, geography, history and PE. The newly built school library is attractive, spacious and well organised. It incorporates good computer facilities.

Sixth Form

75. A wide range of 28 courses is taught to GCE AS and A2 level. This includes a choice of six languages that reflect well the school's specialist status. Almost all pupils asked felt that the choice of courses suited their abilities and career plans. There are, however, no major vocational courses offered. The school is discussing plans to provide such courses, including a partnership with another secondary school.

76. The statutory requirement to teach RE to all students is not met, as no time is allocated to teaching the programme specified in the local Agreed Syllabus. This deficiency was reported at the time of the last inspection and no progress has been made in addressing the issue. The timetable is appropriate for all subjects except music and PE. Students studying music are timetabled at different times, so wasting teacher time. PE activities are restricted, as many students are timetabled at the same time to study other subjects.

77. Enrichment provision is good. Two-fifths of students who completed a questionnaire felt that the range of enrichment courses provided was unsatisfactory. The inspection judged that the school's provision is good. All students in Year 12 study a foreign language, leading to a National Vocational Qualification. They also follow a general studies programme and have the option of joining a group to study a course in critical thinking. The curriculum is further enhanced by a wide range of extracurricular activities. These include the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, debates, discussion groups, drama and music productions, organising fund-raising, supporting such school activities as "paired reading", acting as prefects and running a lunchtime homework club.

78. An appropriate programme is provided to prepare students for entrance to higher education and the world of work. Students receive well-considered, informed advice from the sixth-form senior staff and tutors. A regularly updated careers library and computer programs are readily accessible. Good advice, coordinated with the Connexions service, is also available for those wishing to enter employment.

79. The quality of accommodation provided for the sixth form is good, but often crowded. Study facilities and a common room are enhanced by a large, adequately stocked library that has good access to computers. No designated space is available for sixth-form art students to study and store their work. Learning resources are sufficient and generally of good quality.

Care, guidance and support

The steps taken to ensure pupils' care, welfare, health and safety and to give them support, advice and guidance are satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form. There are, however, health and safety loopholes. The school involves pupils and students well in school life through seeking, valuing and acting on their views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Arrangements for the induction of pupils to the school are very good.
- Many pupils say there is no adult within the school they would turn to, if they had a personal problem.
- The school engenders high aspirations in students and ensures that they follow appropriate studies.
- There is a variety of health and safety risks around the school.

Commentary

80. Procedures for the protection of pupils are satisfactory and in line with locally agreed arrangements for child protection. The designated person has had the necessary training and refers cases appropriately to external agencies.

81. Health and safety matters are, in the main, appropriately addressed. The school complies with the guidance of the local education authority when teachers take pupils off site: teachers follow the stringent requirements necessary for the approval of school journeys. Procedures for risk assessment on the school site are also in place. Members of staff draw attention to defects needing attention by reporting them to the bursar or site manager. Concerns arose during the inspection about several aspects of health and safety – as, for example, in the design and technology rooms and about the irregularity of inspection of portable electrical equipment. Responsive, visual inspection of the buildings and grounds during the school day is not a regular feature or precaution.

82. The tutorial system exists to offer pupils a supportive relationship with at least one adult in the school. On most days, tutors spend 20 minutes with their groups. Pupils show some uncertainty about the effectiveness of the tutorial system as a source of support. It is unsatisfactory, however, that many pupils say that they do not feel they have an adult within the school to turn to if they have a personal problem. The school is anxious to investigate this perception thoroughly. Part of the solution is to ensure that all staff (teaching and non-teaching), individually and corporately, reflect on – and, where relevant, improve – the extent, warmth and reassurance of their out-of-class contacts with pupils and the role models that they present.

83. Pupils have access to well-informed advice and guidance as they progress through the school. Arrangements for the induction of pupils to the school are very good. The Head of Year 7 remains the same person from year to year and has built up good relationships with the main primary schools and prospective pupils. These induction arrangements are an aspect of the school that parents applaud highly.

84. The school has good arrangements for involving pupils in the life of the school. The councils of elected representatives discuss thoughtfully issues of concern to pupils. The school successfully seeks and values pupils' views.

Sixth form

85. The school engenders appropriately high aspirations in students and enables them to pursue the most suitable opportunities in higher education. Tutors know the members of their form well and have the skills appropriate to students' needs – although, as with younger pupils, many were hesitant in fully endorsing the school's personal support. A good programme of recruitment and induction, together with good careers guidance, ensures that students follow the right course of study. The sixth-form committee is an effective forum for students to represent their views and organise their activities.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school is held in very high regard by parents. Both pupils and sixth-form students feel that it is a good school to attend. Parents are pleased with the progress their children make and support the high expectations held by staff. The school works closely with its contributory primary schools in introducing modern foreign languages. The transition and induction arrangements for primary pupils are a major strength of the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The transfer and induction of pupils from primary to secondary education are very well handled.
- There are substantial, effective links for modern foreign language teaching in primary schools.
- The school has impressive worldwide links as a result of its Language College status.
- The pupils' *Daily Diary* is used inconsistently.

Commentary

86. The school's links with parents are good. Parents and pupils value the school and consider that its teaching is good. The school has many productive links with its local community, particularly through its status as a Language College. It now embraces the worldwide community in arranging placements, student exchanges and work experience – a substantial (and unusual) strength. The transfer and induction of new pupils to the school are now good. There has also been a marked improvement in the issuing and content of written reports since the last inspection.

87. Parents are informed of their children's progress by a wide variety of channels – as, for example, through consultation evenings, written reports, termly interim reports and the pupils' *Daily Diary*. The school's imaginative and comprehensive website provides a valuable range of services and information. The *Daily Diary* system, however, is used inconsistently and too piecemeal: better scrutiny of its use is required. The monthly newsletters, introduced since the last inspection, are much appreciated by parents. They provide a good coverage of the school's activities and achievements.

88. The school seeks the views of parents and, importantly, acts appropriately upon the findings. The timing and arrangements for parents' evenings, for example, have been improved as a result of such consultations. The school makes good efforts to accommodate any parental or other visits. Links with parents are further enhanced through the activities of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). The PTA organises a wide range of activities, provides refreshments at parents' evenings and arranges, for instance, a social evening for new parents during the Autumn term. It issues its own newsletter (also available electronically) and contributes valuable funds to the school.

89. The school has good contacts with the parents of those pupils with special educational needs. The vast majority of these parents attend the meetings at which their children's needs are reviewed. Because of these good links, parents have a better understanding of how to help their children at home.

90. The school recognises the importance of its role in the local community and the benefits that this brings. Many of its pupils and students come from a wide rural community. The school has, nevertheless, developed productive and vocational links for them.

91. A nearby large employer helps the school in many ways – as, for example, with project work and assistance with the organisation of mock interviews, on their premises, for job-seekers and university entrants. As a language college, adult evening classes in modern foreign languages are held at the school. Their sports facilities, too, are widely used by groups and clubs from the locality. The school's Performing Arts faculty produces a number of performances each year that are greatly enjoyed by the local community, including parents.

92. A particular strength of the school is its close links with contributory primary schools. Staff from the school visit all the relevant primary schools to talk to pupils and teachers in Year 6. Careful consideration is given to personal factors in the construction of tutor and teaching groups. Parents and pupils are invited to come and visit the school during the summer term prior to transition. The range of documentation provided to new pupils and parents is extensive and informative.

93. Primary school foreign language links are exceptional: about 350 pupils in 12 different schools benefit from taster courses. If any pupils coming to the school require additional tuition in modern foreign languages, short courses are made available in the summer holidays. The effectiveness and popularity of this successful aspect of Language College status was summed up in a portfolio produced by a pupil in one primary school: "I love German. It is really fun." The school has links with one secondary school for video-conferencing in Spanish. Within the local community, a range of adult foreign language classes is run in conjunction with a local college of further education.

94. Worldwide links with the school are outstanding. There are regular exchanges with schools in France, Germany and Spain. Students in the sixth form complete work experience in Brunswick, Brest and (from this year) in Gran Canaria. Fifteen pupils visited China in 2002, a visit that is to be repeated this year. There is an annual exchange of pupils with Japan. All three teachers who teach Japanese and Mandarin have had first-hand experience of the countries. They impart their knowledge to pupils very enthusiastically.

Sixth Form

95. The return rate of the pre-inspection questionnaire from students was good at 70 per cent. Students view favourably the school's teaching and overall academic provision. Whilst a large majority enjoy being a student at the school, around half expressed a degree of unhappiness with the level of careers advice and guidance they receive. The school's provision is, however, consistent with that typically offered nationally. The school offers a varied spread of enrichment and extracurricular activities, including overseas visits.

96. The school's sixth form remains a popular choice for students from within the school. It is very well led and managed. It achieves good results, with a high proportion of students gaining university entrance. Further outside links for post-16 education are not actively pursued, owing to the large range of courses currently offered within the school's own sixth form.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall leadership and management of the school are good. The school has made satisfactory progress since the previous inspection. The headteacher is a good leader and extremely well organised. The senior management team is sound. Middle management is good and effective. The governing body supports the school well, but has not ensured that all statutory requirements are met.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher's leadership is good; his management and organisation are very thorough.
- The management of the school is good at all levels: the school runs very efficiently.
- The leadership team as a whole is sound, but requires greater dynamism.

- Governors have not investigated sufficiently ways of providing a daily act of collective worship.

Commentary

97. The school has appropriate, very full and clearly stated aims and objectives that are well translated into effective action. This is an improvement since the time of the previous inspection. Pupils not only achieve well in their academic work, but also develop and mature well as individuals.

98. The headteacher is a good leader. He has a clear, relevant vision for the development of the school. His high dedication, commitment and skill have ensured that the school has improved satisfactorily since its previous inspection. He is supported by a hard-working team of senior managers, whose roles are now clearly defined – an improvement since the previous inspection.

99. The leadership team is strongly committed to the school's welfare and progress. Not all its members, however, sufficiently display the dynamism and analytical thought necessary to move the school forward. Development planning for the whole school is inadequately reflected in departmental development plans and some departmental plans do not clearly identify the priority of targets they plan to meet. A comprehensive management information system is not available to underpin its decision-making – so that, for instance, it can judge precisely how successful its academic work is and make any necessary adjustments.

100. The school has a strong team of middle managers for both its classroom and pastoral work. They play a vital, central part in maintaining the high academic standards and good achievement of pupils. Their overall quality is good. There is very good leadership in English, art and RE. It is good in nearly all other subjects. It is satisfactory in design and technology and in geography. The school runs very efficiently on a day-to-day basis. There are, however, inconsistencies in the implementation of whole-school policies for literacy, numeracy, ICT and citizenship.

101. The part played by the governing body in supporting the school has improved since the previous inspection. Many aspects are sound. They show commitment and pride in the school's work. There are now clear links through which governors may support or challenge the performance of subject departments. Although satisfactory progress has been made in dealing with most of the key issues from the previous inspection, several have not been dealt with satisfactorily. The governing body is far from fulfilling its statutory duty to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils and has not sufficiently investigated methods other than assemblies through which this might be provided. It has not ensured that sufficient time is provided for RE in Year 10 or that RE is provided for the sixth form. As a result, despite its many positive features, governance is unsatisfactory overall.

102. The governing body meets its legal requirements in respect of pupils with special educational needs. A governor has been designated to oversee provision for these pupils. This enthusiastic governor attends the school regularly, visiting classes, talking with teachers and reporting each term to the governing body. The governing body does not, however, evaluate the provision for pupils with special educational needs in a systematic manner. Governors are aware of their responsibilities in respect of access for disabled people. They are currently ensuring that minimum standards of access are met – by, for example, installing a lift to give wheelchair access to the art rooms (the only subject without at least one room at ground floor level).

103. The school has an appropriate range of data by which to gauge individual pupils' progress. It does not, however, evaluate effectively enough how well the whole school performs in its academic or other work. More precise use of data is needed to ensure that pupils are always grouped appropriately – as, for example, in the "streaming" system that is adopted on pupils' entry to the school.

104. The performance management scheme operates soundly and consistently, although the standard of teaching remains largely as it was (generally good) at the previous inspection. There are good opportunities for teachers to participate in training. The staff training scheme is well

organised and evaluated, an improvement since the previous inspection. The induction scheme for newly qualified teachers is very good and much appreciated.

105. The school has a below-average income and expenditure. Financial planning is good. Spending is clearly linked to the school's priorities. The management and administration of financial matters are efficiently organised. The school considers carefully and thoroughly how to achieve best value in its spending. Bearing in mind its below-average income and its effectiveness in enhancing pupils' attainment, achievement and personal development, the school gives good value for money.

Sixth form

106. The leadership of the sixth form is very good and its management good. The head of the sixth form knows students very well and supports, enthusiastically and effectively, the high aspirations that most of them have. She monitors their performance very thoroughly. Departmental leadership and management are good overall and in most subjects. They are very good in English, mathematics, art and RE, satisfactory in design and technology (DT), but unsatisfactory in geography.

107. The school has not planned the long-term development of the sixth form sufficiently to meet the needs of all students who might wish to remain at the school in Years 12 and 13. The requirements of the local Agreed Syllabus to teach RE in the sixth form are not met – a long-standing omission. The costs of the sixth form are broadly equal to the income it brings into the school.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	4,424,828
Total expenditure	4,385,580
Expenditure per pupil	3,016

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	5,073
Balance carried forward to the next	44,321

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most teaching is at least good.
- Assessment is used well to evaluate and guide pupils' progress.
- Most pupils achieve well in the subject.
- Examination results in GCSE are well above average.
- The overall attainment of boys could be higher.
- Pupils have insufficient access to ICT in lessons.

Commentary

108. National test results at the end of Year 9 in 2003 represented a good achievement. The proportions of pupils who achieved at least Level 5 or Level 6 were well above the national average. In GCSE in 2003, the proportion of pupils gaining a grade in the A*-C range was well above average.

109. The standard of work seen in lessons confirms that pupils in Year 9 perform well above the usual national picture. This represents a good achievement from the time that the pupils entered the school in Year 7. The majority read aloud accurately, confidently and with expression. Most use the skills of skimming and scanning very well, when retrieving information from texts. They quickly justify their points of view by finding evidence from the literature they read. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are above average. Pupils readily and accurately use their knowledge of technical terms in lessons. When suitable opportunities are created for them, pupils sustain extended discussions of a very good standard.

110. The standard of pupils' written work is above average overall. Most pupils plan and organise their writing carefully, regularly using writing frameworks to create coherent writing. The use of modelled writing, showing how sentences and paragraphs are drafted and improved, is, however, not a regular feature of lessons.

111. Most work in Years 7-9 is at least above average. Year 7 pupils, for example, studying the genre of film, enthusiastically recalled different symbols (such as lightning and a rainy day) and quickly explained their impact on an audience. Their discussion of the different audiences for films was deepened when one pupil suggested "an audience of critics". This comment immediately provoked further questions to explain what this meant. Pupils in another class of Year 7 pupils, studying the poem, *Wreck of the Hesperus*, by Henry Longfellow, revised their knowledge of similes by identifying such examples as "Blue were her eyes as the fairy flax." They then widened their understanding of similes by being asked to choose one example and explain its effectiveness. Brisk discussion of descriptive language, including a revision of adverbs and adjectives, greatly helped pupils to understand how emotions are expressed through descriptive language.

112. Pupils' understanding of public speaking (involving a chairperson, speaker and someone to propose a vote of thanks) was well demonstrated by pupils in a Year 8 class. Cue cards made sure that each part of the public speaking was successful, whilst pupils' knowledge of the differences between formal and informal language helped them to make appropriate word choices. In another

Year 8 class, pupils compared thoughtfully the differences between emotive and objective language and decided that scientific words were “more believable” because “they are facts”. Their understanding of how information might be presented was developed still further, when they discussed the function of diagrams and illustrations.

113. A lower set of Year 9 pupils, closely reading an extract from a handbook on ballooning, were praised because they explained successfully why the powerful descriptions of the empty balloon “as thin as a shirt” and a “rather scruffy canvas bag” are effective. Lively and sustained discussion in another Year 9 class was of an excellent quality, as they explored the extent to which Macbeth was the victim of his own imagination. The pupils’ ability to draw upon evidence from the play, construct their own hypotheses and then pose alternative viewpoints was a delight to hear.

114. By the end of Year 11, far more pupils than usual reach an above average standard. In their written work, most pupils shape their answers carefully. They use a range of sentence structures and ensure that their responses to literature include short quotations that reinforce their points of view. Higher-attaining pupils’ writing is reflective and cogently argued. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress.

115. A lower set of Year 11 pupils worked hard to improve their techniques of descriptive writing. They gained confidence as they explained the need to use the five senses and then went on to write successfully their own first draft. Pupils in a Year 10 class, in slight contrast, comparing Robert Browning’s poems, *My Last Duchess* and *The Laboratory*, watched a video recording of a reading of the poem *My Last Duchess*, followed by an appreciation of it. The failure to use and build upon this interpretation weakened its impact on pupils’ learning as they went on to consider the significance of key lines.

116. Teaching is good throughout the school. Lessons are very well planned. In the majority of lessons, pupils are challenged to deepen and apply their understanding. Starter activities are judiciously used to reinforce key linguistic skills. Opportunities to use ICT, however, are restricted by a lack of access to computers in classrooms. Although teaching is strong, the potential for it to be even better is sometimes undermined by teachers intervening too quickly after a question has been asked: they supply the answer themselves rather than allow pupils sufficient thinking time before answering.

117. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The head of department has a clear vision for the subject which is shared by all his staff. Effective use is made of data to monitor pupils’ attainment and progress, but pupils’ achievement is not tracked across all years. Schemes of work are regularly reviewed to ensure that they are up to date. Very effective curricular links exist with drama. An extensive range of extracurricular opportunities ensures that pupils have good opportunities to deepen their cultural understanding. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

118. The standard of literacy in subjects other than English is above average overall. Planning the organisation and structure of writing are strengths in most subjects, with the exception of music and design and technology. Presentation of written work is a weakness in geography. The standard of spelling and punctuation is at least average in mathematics, design and technology, history and music and usually above average in other subjects.

119. The standard of pupils’ reading is above average overall. Their skimming and scanning of texts to retrieve information are a strength of most subject teaching. Those pupils who come in Year 7 with a low standard of linguistic confidence are given effective support to enable them to make good progress.

120. The quality of speaking and listening is above average. Clarity, audibility and expression are much in evidence when pupils are speaking. More opportunities for students to discuss significant

aspects of work thoroughly are required in some subjects. Pupils' readiness and competence in using subject-specific language is of a high standard in all subjects except geography and music. The monitoring of pupils' literacy across all subjects, as a means of raising standards further, is inadequately done.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils are offered the opportunity to study a very wide range of foreign languages.
- The school's worldwide links are outstanding.
- All languages contribute very well to pupils' cultural development.
- The leadership and management of this large department are good.
- Links with local primary schools are excellent.
- Well-planned teaching helps most pupils to achieve well.
- The requirement to study two foreign languages in Years 10-11 sometimes leads to disaffection.
- At times, unsatisfactory management of boys in French and Spanish leads to underachievement.

121. In modern foreign languages, a much larger proportion of the year group is entered for GCSE examinations than is usual. In 2003, 230 pupils were entered for French, 71 for German, 53 for Italian, nine for Japanese, two for Mandarin, five for Russian and 81 for Spanish.

122. In GCSE in 2003, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*- C in French was above average. There was a sharp rise over 2002 in the number of pupils attaining the highest grades. Girls' attainment was much higher than boys', particularly in gaining the highest grades. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C in German was above average for both boys and girls. Girls performed better than boys, but the difference between the sexes was much lower than that seen nationally. These results also showed a marked improvement over those of 2002, particularly for boys. In Spanish, studied for a shorter time and with less able pupils, results were below average and had declined since the previous year.

123. In 2003 in Italian, 53 per cent of candidates gained a grade in the range A*-C and about one quarter gained the highest A* or A grades. The Russian results were much lower: the highest grade gained was at C level and this was awarded to only one out of the five candidates. Eight out of the ten candidates in Japanese attained grades at A*-C level. One of the pupils entered for Mandarin attained grade B and the other grade G. Italian and Russian are not currently taught in Year 11 for GCSE in 2004.

124. By the end of Year 9, pupils' overall level of attainment is above average in French and German. It is average in Spanish, because it is taught for a shorter time. In all three languages, most pupils speak and write about past and future events confidently. They successfully retrieve information from listening exercises. Speaking skills are generally good. In a Year 9 German lesson, for example, average pupils gave opinions about school subjects from memory, using subordinate clauses with the correct word order. Pupils of all abilities discuss familiar topics confidently. In Year 9 lower-attaining classes, for example, pupils discuss competently what they do in their spare time. Pupils use foreign languages soundly as their basic classroom language, when given the opportunity to do so.

125. Pupils have a good understanding of the foreign languages, used extensively by teachers in class. Their written work is above average. The most able pupils write extended passages accurately, describing (for example) past and future holidays. By Year 9, higher-attaining pupils have acquired a good knowledge of past tenses and begin to write about future events. Average pupils have a good knowledge of vocabulary and constructions. The standard of writing by higher-

attaining pupils in Years 7 and 8 is often impressive. One particular piece of work about a holiday by a girl in Year 8 was worthy of Year 11.

126. Pupils have a good level of awareness of linguistic usage. They understand, for example, what adjectives, verbs and nouns are and apply simple grammatical rules to both written and spoken language. They understand texts well and improve their insight by, for instance, highlighting key nouns and verbs. Pupils of all abilities develop a good range of reading techniques.

127. By the end of Year 11, pupils' overall attainment in French, German and Spanish is above average. The highest attainers speak and write their foreign languages accurately and in a fairly sophisticated way – as, for example, giving opinions about films, writing diaries and describing their families. They use a range of tenses confidently when speaking. In one lesson, they quickly learned to adapt infinitive phrases, involving a change of word order. Lower attainers, however, are often not confident speakers and rely on prompts to make up sentences. All pupils succeed in conveying meaning, even when their language use is inaccurate. Pronunciation is generally good and pupils have a wide vocabulary.

128. Knowledge of grammar develops well. Pupils have a generally good understanding of the foreign languages heard in class and of written texts. In a Year 10 German class, for example, average pupils understood the main points of a reading passage that they heard. Several lower-attaining boys in the lower set, however, had some difficulty in identifying the verbs in short sentences. The difference between the attainment of boys and girls is greater than that found nationally and there are many more girls in top sets than boys. The presentation of work is often below average. The development of ICT skills is satisfactory.

129. The quality of written coursework varies widely, but is above average overall. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 11 show a good knowledge of vocabulary and different tenses and write reasonably accurately. Other pupils are less consistently accurate.

130. Most pupils achieve well in French, German and Spanish throughout Years 7-11 and make rapid progress. However, a minority of pupils, particularly boys, have negative attitudes to language learning: they waste time in lessons or fail to learn vocabulary thoroughly for tests. This approach results in underachievement. It affects pupils of all abilities, but particularly boys in the middle- and lower-attaining classes. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. Gifted pupils achieve well. Over time, pupils make good progress.

131. Teaching and learning in French, German and Spanish range from poor to very good and are good overall. They are best with upper sets. Teachers have a solid knowledge of their subjects and use foreign languages well in the class to extend pupils' capabilities. This usage also provides a good model for pupils to imitate. Lessons are planned well. They include a suitable variety of activities and skills to engage the interest of pupils. This approach helps pupils to consolidate vocabulary and constructions. Pupils develop a good understanding of grammar, because teachers provide clear expositions for pupils to follow. Teachers pay good attention to the development of linguistic skills, particularly in reading in French and writing in German.

132. The aims of lessons are explained in detail to pupils and progress is reviewed at the end. Pupils are prepared well for examinations. Clear explanations ensure that pupils understand grammar and apply it well to reading and speaking the foreign languages. A strong emphasis on developing reading skills has led to improvements: pupils read aloud with good pronunciation. Well-made teacher resources such as computer games and exercises, flashcards and overhead transparencies help in motivating pupils to learn.

133. Pupils have the opportunity to work independently or in pairs, and respond well. In several lessons, boys showed a lack of motivation. Their attitudes are not always conducive to good learning. In all three languages, homework is used constructively to extend and consolidate classwork. The marking of pupils' written work is regular, but guidance is not always provided on how pupils can improve. In some lessons where they are involved in judging the quality of their own

and their peers' work, pupils acquire a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve. In German, few pupils respond positively by completing corrections. Teachers prepare pupils well for their examinations and coursework.

134. The best lessons provide a high level of challenge and a fast pace. They also allow pupils to be creative and have fun – as, for example, in miming complex messages in the foreign language for other pupils to guess. In poor and unsatisfactory lessons, the behaviour of some boys is allowed to interrupt learning and leads to underachievement. Even in otherwise good lessons, boys are sometimes allowed to adopt a casual attitude to work or to dominate oral work. Occasionally, too little use is made of the foreign languages for classroom business.

135. The leadership and management of the department are good. Subject co-ordinators manage their areas of responsibility competently and work well with the head of faculty. The work of the Language College is co-ordinated effectively. The department has made sound progress since the last inspection.

136. The curriculum offers a very wide range of languages throughout the school. These are able to be examined at GCSE, AS, A and NVQ levels. Primary liaison is excellent and the school's worldwide links are outstanding. There is insufficient specialist accommodation for some classes, and teachers are therefore obliged to move equipment a considerable distance. At present, eight out of every ten pupils in Year 11 and seven out of ten pupils in Year 10 take two modern foreign languages. The resulting curriculum for some of these pupils, particularly boys in the middle and lower groups, is inappropriate. Many lack motivation and adopt casual attitudes. The school is actively investigating a reduction in the proportion of pupils in Years 10 and 11 who study a second modern foreign language.

137. Two lessons in Japanese were sampled. In both lessons, the teaching was very good. In Year 7, the pupils reciprocated the enthusiasm shown by the teacher. They consolidated hiragana combinations and took part in a competition at the end. In the Year 10 lesson (with a different teacher), pupils worked productively on whiteboards. The teacher provided very good challenge to gifted pupils, who scored well in a test at the end of the lesson. One Year 9 lesson in Mandarin was sampled. Pupils learned reasonably how to extend sentences by the use of adverbs. Teaching was satisfactory. Pupils were, however, talkative between tasks and had to be told on several occasions not to shout out.

138. One very good lesson of Latin was sampled in Year 9. The teacher ensured that pupils learned in a brisk, relaxed and pleasant way. She rapidly reviewed the previous lesson, held a quick test and explained carefully, with relevant examples, how to form the passive voice in verbs. Pupils were very interested, readily contributed their ideas and quickly understood and practised relevant exercises. Pupils achieved well because of their own enthusiasm, the buoyant classroom atmosphere and the imaginative way that the teacher introduced new material to them.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- National test and GCSE results are consistently well above the norm.
- Pupils achieve well by the end of Year 11.
- Good leadership and management have built up a strong department.
- Accommodation is cramped, with too many pupils taught in unsuitable rooms.

Commentary

139. National test results for pupils at the end of Year 9 were well above the national average in 2003. This continued the trend of consistently satisfactory, and often good, achievement over many years for all pupils. GCSE results were also well above the national norm in 2003, representing good progress throughout their school lives for pupils by the end of Year 11.

140. By the end of Year 9, current attainment is also well above average. This represents a good achievement from entry standards in Year 7. The most able pupils, for example, explain with confidence and accuracy the rules for continuing difficult sequences in algebraic format. In a very good lesson, pupils in a class just above the school's middle-ability range also used algebra very impressively to calculate terms in sequences and showed a good understanding by confidently reversing these procedures, when required to do so.

141. Current standards in Year 11 show that pupils have maintained the good progress they made over Years 7-9. The overall standard of work is well above average. This is a good achievement across the ranges of ability. The school's middle attainers, for instance, worked well and collaboratively to show a good grasp of percentage changes. Gifted pupils combine graph work and algebra confidently and accurately to solve difficult inequalities. Lower-attaining pupils show satisfactory levels of success, when solving algebraic equations, at a standard that would normally be expected of average pupils nationally.

142. Teaching is always at least satisfactory. It is usually good and often very good. It is occasionally excellent – such as when the least able pupils in a Year 8 class were engrossed in their work and learned extremely well throughout. The teacher's excellent use of resources, her timing of varied and challenging activities and the strong support of two teaching assistants ensured that all pupils made excellent progress in drawing pie charts. Resources (other than ICT, to which there is very limited access) are regularly used well. Teachers work hard and prepare an enjoyable mixture of activities.

143. A strength of teaching is the very thorough use of assessment. Pupils are carefully organised into suitable groups and work is targeted at challenging levels: assessment is regular, using half-termly tests, and marking offers clear advice on how to improve. Occasionally, pupils are not managed well enough and the pace of learning drops.

144. Leadership and management are consistently good. Detailed schemes of work, including clear assessment procedures, help to promote challenge for all pupils. Roles within the department are clearly defined and morale is high, despite classes regularly being taught in unsuitable accommodation where sometimes noisy machinery and difficult seating arrangements hinder learning. The setting in Years 9-11 is very helpful in differentiating work at the most suitably challenging levels. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.

Mathematics across the curriculum

145. Standards of numeracy are well above average in all year groups. Pupils work comfortably at the levels of numeracy required in other subjects. In design and technology, for example, they show good skills in number work, data-handling and work on shapes and space. In science and ICT, pupils use formulae accurately and in science and geography interpret data carefully from graphs. Overall, however, less use is made of mathematics than normally seen in other subjects.

146. There is no formal policy for coordinating the use of mathematics across the curriculum, although all teachers have received training in the expected layout of graphs and the use of formulae and units. They are also aware of the competencies expected for each year group. There is, however, inadequate tracking of the extent to which numeracy is used across all subjects.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The overall standard of attainment is well above average by the end of Year 9.
- Pupils' achievement is good throughout the school.
- In GCSE, a large proportion of pupils gain high grades in two or three science subjects.
- Science teaching makes little contribution to pupils' moral, social and citizenship education.
- Teaching methods for lower attainers are often not as good as those for high-attaining pupils.

Commentary

147. Results in the Year 9 national tests have been consistently high for many years. Currently, they are much higher than generally achieved by schools with a similar social background. Achievement in Years 7-9 is good. Pupils make rapid progress in their science lessons from the time they start in Year 7, enjoy their work and gain suitable scientific knowledge and understanding.

148. By the end of Year 11, the overall standard is above average. For GCSE examinations, one class of pupils is prepared for examinations in the three separate sciences within the time normally allowed for only two subjects – a fine achievement. These pupils normally gain three GCSEs with grades in the range A*-C. All other pupils are prepared for the double science accreditation: in 2003, 61 per cent of them achieved grades in the range A*-C. The combined results are much higher than the national average. Pupils' progress and achievement in Years 10 and 11 are good, but not quite as rapid as in Years 7-9. Almost all pupils gain accreditation in science at GCSE – again much better than the national picture.

149. By the end of Year 9, the standard of classwork is well above average. Pupils in a Year 8 class, for example, following a topic on geology, used microscopes very confidently as they watched the growth of crystals in warm or cool conditions. Their work was guided by a very effective demonstration from their teacher. Pupils were fascinated by what they learned and disappointed when the lesson ended. Year 7 classes learned about aspects of sex education with care and sensitivity. They appreciated the dimension of commitment in human relationships and showed considerable intellectual maturity.

150. The overall standard by the end of Year 11 is above average. High-attaining pupils respond very well to the teaching they receive. They make good progress, because they concentrate hard. Pupils in a Year 10 class, for example, applied the basic principles of energy well to car braking. As a result of the teacher's expertly structured questions, pupils clearly and quickly understood the pattern of braking distances. Pupils who found the work difficult made satisfactory progress because of the careful support offered by their teacher, whilst those who understood the work quickly maintained momentum through further work and new ideas. Pupils quickly moved on to an understanding of abstract, interconnected ideas.

151. Teaching and learning are good overall throughout Years 7-11. They are consistently so in Years 7-9, but more variable in quality in Years 10-11. Teachers plan lessons carefully and vary learning activities appropriately. They generally include plenty of practical work. The aims of lessons are shared with pupils at the outset. Teaching is often characterised by energy and flair. Teaching is a little less effective, but at least satisfactory overall, with some lower-attaining classes (especially in Years 10-11), because activities lack suitable variety. As a result, some pupils are inattentive and misbehave, so slowing their own progress and that of others.

152. Staff know their specialist subjects very well. They are enthusiastic in class and confidently respond to the many questions that pupils raise. Pupils' progress is carefully assessed and their scientific mistakes thoughtfully corrected. Resources from the Internet and illustrated presentations

increasingly enrich science lessons. Science teaching makes a limited contribution, however, to pupils' discussion of social and moral issues and to their awareness of citizenship.

153. Departmental leadership and management are good overall, but have room for improvement. The three major disciplines within the department are effectively coordinated. The department undertakes a careful statistical analysis of pupils' performance and class achievement. This approach underpins a new strategy to improve GCSE grades by using a modular examination that will be completed by the first cohort of pupils in 2005. The quality of teaching and learning are, however, insufficiently monitored and linked to staff training to improve standards further. Such whole-school priorities as literacy and numeracy are not fully incorporated into departmental planning or regularly monitored.

154. There are other aspects for attention. Some classes are very large, so restricting space for practical work and opportunities for pupils to answer questions and contribute discussion points – or for teachers to give individual support. There is no curricular programme in Years 10-11, as an alternative to GCSE, for those pupils who are not able to benefit fully from the academic science options. Links with local employers are not greatly used to enrich the teaching programme.

155. Since the last inspection, standards in Years 7-9 have gradually improved broadly in line with the national, upward trend. Teaching incorporates more practical work and problem-solving. Pupils' performance is now very thoroughly analysed. Accommodation is better. The greater use of ICT for science teaching is limited by insufficiency of both computers and networked communications throughout the laboratories.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have good knowledge of their subject.
- Not enough time is given to courses in Years 10 and 11.
- Work is sometimes too easy for some pupils or not hard enough for others.
- Good use is made of work from other subjects to illustrate ICT applications.

Commentary

156. Pupils enter the school with below average standards overall. Although the standard of work seen from pupils in Year 9 was below average, this represents satisfactory achievement. In 2003, teachers assessed the work of 14-year-old pupils to be at the standard expected for their age, with girls achieving more than boys. No significant difference between the standard of boys' and girls' work was noted during the inspection.

157. The highest-attaining pupils in Year 9 use computers well to control such actions as opening a barrier to a car park. They begin to use computer code to make changes to a web-page. They do not yet evaluate their work in detail – as, for example, by explaining why they have chosen one way of solving a problem rather than an alternative method. Pupils of average attainment extract information from databases. Whilst they test their work, they do not plan systematic checks. Lower-attaining pupils print out computer records, but do not describe their work in detail. Pupils with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily when helped by a learning support assistant. When such additional staff are not present, their achievement is reduced, because they often do not fully understand the work.

158. No pupil in Year 11 was taking a course in ICT at the time of the inspection, because all these pupils had taken GCSE whilst in Year 10. This arrangement has been discontinued. Results in GCSE in 2003 showed the overall standard attained to be below average. Work from pupils in

Year 10 is also below average. Achievement is unsatisfactory. This is because insufficient time is given to the courses that many pupils follow and pupils do not therefore reach the standards of which they are capable.

159. The highest-attaining pupils in Year 10 produce computer presentations that include sound and animation, but these presentations do not always use a consistent style. Pupils of average attainment detect and correct errors in their work. They know about different computer devices, but do not explain why one is more suitable than another when they design a system. Lower-attaining pupils set out their work attractively, but do not check for errors.

160. Boys and girls achieve equally. Standards of literacy and mathematics are more than sufficient for the demands of the ICT work at all ages. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is unsatisfactory. No support for Year 10 pupils was seen during the inspection and this omission lowers their achievement.

161. Teaching is good overall and leads to good learning. The teaching of skills is not as good as the teaching of the application of those skills. There is more of the latter as pupils become older. For this reason, teaching and learning are satisfactory in the first three years, but good thereafter. When teaching a new skill, teachers do not always meet the needs of all pupils in their class. Sometimes, a pupil who has quickly learned the new skill and completed the task set is given another task at the same level rather than something more demanding. Occasionally, a few pupils find their work too difficult.

162. With the best teaching, pupils readily explore the features of a computer program. In Year 10, for example, they enjoyed finding out for themselves how to make text fit onto the picture of a building, when designing a publicity leaflet. Very good use is made of work from other subjects, so showing pupils how their ICT learning is useful to them. Pupils in Year 8, for instance, enjoyed finding out about medieval castles, using this information to design posters. They were interested in the work, because they were studying this topic in history. Teachers have good knowledge of their subject and so answer questions with confidence and illustrate teaching with helpful examples. Although the vast majority of pupils have good attitudes to their work, teachers occasionally do not deal effectively with disruptive behaviour.

163. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The team of teachers works efficiently and effectively. In choosing the examination courses currently followed after the age of 14, however, insufficient thought has been given to the amount of time required for pupils to achieve the standards they should reach. Unlike at the time of the previous inspection, the requirements of the National Curriculum are met and parents now receive reports on progress made by pupils in ICT. The decline in standards noted at the previous inspection has been checked. Standards are above their low level at that time. This represents satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

164. Computers are used well to help pupils to learn in several subjects – as, for example, in physics to learn about friction, in art to manipulate images and in design and technology for research, analysis and the presentation of work. Other subjects make insufficient use of ICT. Teachers have sufficient skills, however, to be able to make good use of ICT in their lessons. Pupils use the skills learned in ICT confidently in their other work. Whilst this provides good practice for these skills, pupils rarely extend their ICT skills in other subjects.

165. The school has fewer computers than normally found in a school of this size. This means that teachers cannot always arrange to use computers with their classes. The school network is well managed and contains a good range of material to help pupils to learn. Many pupils use the school's website from home. The ICT department offers good support to other teachers, but the development of ICT across all subjects is insufficiently coordinated. Some subjects, for instance, do not contribute to the assessment of ICT standards.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment in the GCSE examination is well above average.
- The quality of teaching in Years 10-11 is good, with high expectations.
- Teaching in Years 7-9 is not rigorous enough for pupils to reach the highest standards.
- Assessment is not used effectively to support and guide individual pupils.
- There is insufficient, systematic monitoring to improve the quality of teaching and marking.
- Accommodation and resources are of good quality.

Commentary

166. When teachers assessed pupils' work in 2003 at the end of Year 9, their results suggested the overall standard was well above average. The current level of attainment is above average and represents satisfactory achievement. In the GCSE examination of 2003, results were well above the national average. Pupils tended to gain better results in this subject than in most of their other subjects. Results in 2003 were better than in 2002 and in line with those of 2001. This level of attainment represents good achievement.

167. Pupils' overall attainment by the end of Year 9 is above the national average. Pupils have a good knowledge of how landscapes are formed – as, for example, by the action of earthquakes and volcanoes. They understand how towns grow. Pupils in Year 7, for instance, successfully studied the origins of Bristol. Higher-attaining pupils understand clearly the links between geographical features – such as those between climate, vegetation, soils and people in an equatorial forest. Pupils draw graphs (such as climate graphs) correctly. They read maps accurately when, for instance, drawing and analysing a map to show the distribution of population in Brazil. Higher-attaining pupils write fluently and structure their work effectively. The written work of middle- and lower-attaining pupils, in contrast, is often brief, lacks detail, rarely includes geographical terms and contains unnecessary spelling errors.

168. By the end of Year 11, pupils' overall level of attainment is well above average. Pupils have a very good understanding of the delicate relationship between people and their environment, such as in the causes and effects of acid rain. They clearly appreciate what places are like and how they are changing in, for example, cities such as Sao Paulo in Brazil. They have a good knowledge of examples to illustrate topics as diverse as agriculture in Japan and coastal erosion in Dorset. Pupils effectively relate geographical models to real examples, as when they describe the use of land in cities. Written work is well structured and coherent, but answers are often brief and notetaking lacks detail. Pupils understand the use of hypotheses and the different methods of data-collection and analysis for their coursework enquiries. They know the limitations of the methods they use and reach sensible conclusions.

169. Pupils achieve less well in Years 7-9 than in Years 10-11. In Years 7-9, pupils make satisfactory progress in extending their understanding. In too many lessons, however, teaching is not robust enough to encourage pupils to work to their full capacity and pay attention to detail. A minority of pupils do not achieve as well as they could. This is because they have a short attention span and do not complete work carefully and in sufficient depth. The achievement of higher-attaining pupils is satisfactory. Teachers do not, however, develop sufficient depth of understanding in those pupils or challenge them sufficiently – as, for example, through rigorous questions and specifically designed materials. Pupils with special educational needs are fully involved, complete work accurately and make steady progress. Teachers match work closely to their requirements and provide good support.

170. In Years 10-11, teachers' expectations are high and pupils have a good attitude to work, pay full attention, work hard at a good pace and assimilate knowledge quickly. They retain their knowledge and use it well, using ideas learned in a previous lesson – as, for example, to explain the changes in agriculture in Japan. As a result, they make good progress and achieve well.

171. The quality of teaching is satisfactory in Years 7-9 and good overall in Years 10-11. Teachers are generally well prepared and lessons start promptly. In the best lessons, particularly in Years 10-11, teachers use their good command of the subject to structure lessons effectively with a good variety of worthwhile activities. They stimulate pupils' interest with imaginative starter activities, lively explanations, incisive questioning and a range of teaching methods (including paired and group work), so that all pupils are fully involved in lessons. A feature of such lessons are high expectations of work and behaviour, encouraging pupils to think carefully and deeply about the subject.

172. In too many lessons, especially in Years 7-9, however, teachers do not present pupils with a challenge: lessons lack life, pace and interest, so that pupils fail to reach their full potential. The aims of lessons are rarely made clear and not used to assess progress at the end. Starter activities are a dull review of previous work. Discussion and explanation are dominated by teachers, who all too readily accept one-word answers during discussion. The pace of such lessons is slow. Visual material is often lacking and activities are uninspiring – as, for example, copying or completing a simple worksheet. In such lessons, pupils do not take pride in their work. The variable quality of the marking, from good to superficial, results in many untidy books, with brief answers and incomplete work.

173. Leadership and management are just satisfactory, largely because there is an appropriate focus on standards and good achievement in GCSE. There are, however, weaknesses that require improvement. There is, for example, a lack of systematic, well-focused monitoring and rigorous evaluation of the work of the department as a basis for clear priorities for action. The curriculum is being revised, but does not identify clearly enough the progression of learning ideas, skills and topics from Years 7-11. The system of assessment is satisfactory, but the results are not recorded or used effectively to support the work of individual pupils. Accommodation is good, with fine displays of pupils' work. There are sufficient, good quality resources.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is consistently good and sometimes very good: it leads to good achievement.
- The standards pupils reach in GCSE examinations are well above average.
- Most pupils show interest and enthusiasm in lessons and make good progress.
- Pupils do not use ICT sufficiently for research and the presentation of work.

Commentary

174. By the end of Year 9, pupils' overall attainment is above average. This standard is reflected in teachers' assessment of pupils' work over the past four years. The standard of work seen during the inspection was above average, and a significant proportion of pupils reach the highest standards. Most pupils achieve well and make good progress. The highest-attaining pupils sometimes make very good progress, because teachers set appropriately demanding work. Pupils with special educational needs achieve soundly, because teachers provide suitable work and use support assistants effectively in lessons.

175. Most pupils in Years 7-9 have good knowledge and understanding of the past. They usually recall well work done in previous lessons, so that teachers can quickly move on to new work. Most see and understand well the reasons for past events. They use a wide range of sources very

competently to build up a picture of the past. High attainers evaluate well the reliability of sources. In Year 8, for instance, these pupils used statistics very successfully in their study of the Great Plague of 1665 and understood clearly some of the reasons why diaries may (or may not) be reliable historical sources. The highest attainers write very well at length. Although lower attainers use sources satisfactorily for information, they often fail to use the information to make valid deductions. Their written work often lacks depth and detail. In their oral work, the majority of pupils answer articulately and high attainers frequently provide lengthy responses.

176. The overall attainment of pupils at the end of Year 11 is above average. Results in the GCSE examinations from 2000 to 2003 were well above average. In 2003, one third of the boys and half of the girls who took the examination gained an A or A* grade, a considerable achievement. The work seen during the inspection was above average overall. The majority of pupils achieve well. Most know the standard of their current work and what they need to do to improve it.

177. The majority of pupils in Years 10 and 11 have good knowledge and understanding of the topics they study. They make effective use of historical sources, successfully evaluating their reliability and usefulness. This was especially evident in work on a range of sources about World War 1 by pupils in Years 10 and 11. The highest attainers write very well at length, producing essays in which points of view are backed up with valid evidence. In contrast, essays from lower attainers are largely narrative or descriptive in character.

178. The consistently good (and occasionally very good) teaching is a strength of the department. This good teaching is characterised by considerable subject knowledge, effective classroom management, high expectations of behaviour and hard work, and a brisk pace. Teachers normally use a range of short, motivating activities that interest pupils and keep them appropriately busy and actively involved in their learning. They make effective use of a wide range of resources, including occasional use of the Internet. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported by their class teachers and learning assistants. The vast majority of pupils respond very positively to this good teaching, work hard and achieve well. Pupils' behaviour and attitude to work are usually very good. This is a major reason for their good achievement.

179. The department is led and managed well. Because of good planning and effective teamwork, it has continued to function well during the temporary absence of the head of department. Pupils do not use ICT enough in class time for research or for the presentation of their work, because there are no computers in the department for pupils' use. The organisation of classes, which has resulted in one Year 7 class being shared between two teachers, has not been satisfactorily resolved. One teacher sees this class only once a fortnight: the result is that pupils often do not recall the work they did the previous lesson, so that the teacher has to repeat work before moving on to a new topic. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection.

Religious Education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils in Year 10 do not receive their minimum RE entitlement.
- The head of department is a very good role model who has created a highly effective team.
- Teaching, learning, leadership and management within the subject are all very good.
- Through the GCSE short course, all Year 11 pupils reach above average standards in their work.
- The standard of work and the results on the GCSE full course are well above average.

Commentary

180. By the end of Year 9, pupils' work is in line with the expectations of the agreed syllabus. Pupils know and understand the beliefs and practices of Christianity and of the other religions studied. They explain their responses to such unfamiliar experiences as meditation in Buddhism. They reflect on and evaluate different expressions of human meaning and purpose, relating them well to their own lives. They write fluently and with confidence, using the specialist vocabulary of religion correctly.

181. All pupils follow the GCSE short course. By the end of Year 11, the standard of their work is above average. Their knowledge and understanding of religion are good. They recognise and respond to the meanings and motives of religious belief and practice. They evaluate different points of view and use reason, evidence and argument thoughtfully.

182. Pupils who follow the GCSE full course are, by the end of Year 11, well above average in the standard of their work. Their knowledge and understanding are accurate, and often detailed and comprehensive. They recognise and explain with insight a wide range of aspects of religious belief and observance. They respond appropriately to the moral dimensions raised by religious awareness. They support reasoned judgements with a range of evidence and well-developed arguments.

183. At the time of the last inspection, most pupils did not follow an accredited course. Although pupils now follow the GCSE short course, there are no results to report from this, because the first GCSE examination entry will not be taken until summer 2004. The number of pupils following the GCSE full course has recently been less than 20 per year, but results have been well above average. In 2003, the school entered no pupils, but in 2002 all except one of the 16 candidates achieved grades in the range A*-C.

184. Achievement by pupils in Years 7-9 and of pupils following the short course in Years 10 and 11 is good. From the beginning, pupils acquire well the knowledge and understanding about religions that they need. They deepen their insight into the meaning of religious belief and practice. They develop the critical skills of evaluation and learn to speak and write with fluency and assurance. Pupils are confident about their capacity to achieve.

185. Achievement by pupils following the GCSE full course is very good. The extra time they have enables them to study Judaism in greater depth and detail. They explore practices such as the mikveh and the festival of shavuot in Judaism not only with insight into their meaning, but also with understanding of how they relate to universal human experience. They also meet the requirements of the examination well.

186. The subject's contribution to both intellectual and personal development is very good. Pupils reflect seriously on life's fundamental questions and show respect for other people's feelings and beliefs, whether religious or non-religious. They are critical but compassionate in their treatment of moral issues. They recognise the responsibilities of good citizenship. They appreciate the richness of religious and cultural diversity. Pupils' attitudes are good. They enjoy their lessons and are keen to learn.

187. Since the last inspection, teaching and learning have improved greatly and are now very good. The three specialist teachers have a very good command of the subject. The planning of lessons is excellent, so that learning objectives are clear and pupils follow a well-defined, sequential structure. Pupils respond well to the challenge to think for themselves. Teachers make very effective use of a range of learning resources. In lessons, not a moment is wasted and teachers achieve excellent standards of behaviour.

188. The marking of pupils' work is thorough and pupils understand what they need to do to improve. In one outstanding lesson seen during the inspection, pupils considered whether Jesus was a rebel. The teacher's skill in the use of "levels" of work enabled pupils to make very rapid progress. In most lessons, however, teachers do not use levels of attainment to help pupils to

understand how well they are doing. The regular use of assessment tasks to measure performance is good.

189. Leadership is very good. The head of department is a very effective role model who has created an excellent teaching team. Clarity of vision, sense of purpose and high aspirations define the character of the department. Management is very good. The department does thorough self-evaluation through the analysis of performance data. Procedures for measuring and monitoring performance and for taking action that will lead to further improvement are highly effective.

190. Both previous inspections identified failures to comply with statutory requirements. All pupils in Years 7-11 now receive their full entitlement of RE teaching, except those in Year 10. The governors plan to put this omission right from September 2004. The introduction of the GCSE short course for all, with the opportunity for some pupils to follow the full course, has been a great success. The improvement in provision has been very good.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The overall standard attained at GCSE level is well above average.
- Most pupils achieve well owing to good teaching and suitable resources.
- Communication amongst members of the faculty is unsatisfactory.
- The workshops are cramped. This has an adverse effect on health and safety procedures.

Commentary

191. The overall standard on entry to the school is average. By the end of Year 9, the overall standard is above average. This represents a good achievement. Most pupils reach a level that is above average in, for example, hand- and machine-sewing or modifying a recipe to suit a particular purpose. Their literacy levels are generally above average. Skill and confidence in using ICT is good. Numeracy levels are above average.

192. By the end of Year 11, the overall standard is above average. A Year 10 metalwork group, for instance, comprised mainly of boys, worked competently under quite restricted conditions to forge, turn and file metal in readiness for making a plant holder. Many Year 11 pupils make use of the workshop facilities after school, working carefully to finish wooden cabinets and other units that they have previously designed. In a Year 11 food lesson, pupils worked scientifically by testing and modifying dishes – some with a focus on vegetarian needs and others trying to improve the range of dishes to be found on a pub menu. Both the finished dishes and the records kept of menu modifications were above average in quality.

193. Achievement in lessons in Years 7-9 is good. This is because the units of work are well planned for the six-week modules that are allocated to each aspect of technology. The hour-long lessons put pressure on pupils to work to tight time limits. They do this very well, particularly in food lessons. The projects set are fun and, as a result, pupils look forward to the variety of experiences. The worksheets provided are helpful. The standard of work produced in workbooks is often above average. The outside covers of books, however, are often tattered and sometimes torn. They do not give a good impression of the good standard of work inside.

194. By the end of Year 11, overall achievement is good. Displays celebrate pupils' achievement in designing and evaluating products made in metal, plastic and wood as well as in graphics, food

and textiles. Computer-aided design and manufacture is satisfactory and an increasing feature of pupils' experience. Good links exist with a local, precision-instrument firm.

195. Although some unsatisfactory teaching and learning were observed, they are generally good (or better). They are very good overall in Years 10-11. The strengths of teaching lie in teachers' subject knowledge, enthusiasm and high expectations. The strengths in learning are in pupils' application and productivity. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, pupils' needs are not carefully considered. As a result, minds wander, behaviour deteriorates and the pace of work slows.

196. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There are high aspirations and a clear vision by all with responsibility both for, and within, the faculty. There is, however, no corporate sense of identity and unsatisfactory levels of communication. Cramped conditions in workshops put undue strain on health and safety procedures. The lack of annual testing of electrical equipment is a breach of statutory regulations – and a problem wider than this department. The technician is overstretched in the range of work he is expected to undertake. There is a need for a separate technician in food and textiles to provide adequate assistance and to ensure that health and safety standards are secure in these areas. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. There is now a skilled technician in place and computer-aided design and manufacture as well as control technologies are taught.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good in Years 10-11.
- They are good in Years 7-9, but require better planning.
- The overall standard of work is above average. It is well above average in Years 10-11.
- Most pupils achieve very well when drawing, printmaking or using sketchbooks.

Commentary

197. The standard of work on entry to the school is broadly average. By the end of Year 9, the overall standard is above average. Most pupils observe accurately and draw with increasing confidence. They recall printmaking processes well and use the correct technical terms when talking about them. Their linguistic levels are above average overall: most pupils talk confidently about their work and make good use of computers for researching artists. A small number in some classes think of art solely as a practical activity and do not understand why their teacher requires them to apply their minds as well as to use their eyes and hands, when drawing and painting.

198. By the end of Year 11, the overall standard of work is well above average. Higher attainers achieve very well in drawing from observation and painting in the style of an artist. They use tone and colour very effectively. Printmaking is a very strong feature. Computers are used well for research and for scanning images or for taking photographs. Many pupils are on target to gain A* at GCSE level. Lower attainers achieve well. This is because their needs are understood by their teachers, the curriculum is modified to help them to achieve and their self-esteem is raised by the activities offered. Over the past three years, GCSE results have been consistently well above the national average. The best results were in 2003.

199. Achievement in Years 7-9 is good overall. This is largely as a result of the good demonstrations by teachers, the high quality of visual resources available and the quality materials provided. As a result, pupils learn to use line, tone and colour well. They also achieve well when using collage or when modelling. By the end of Year 11, overall achievement is very good. By this

stage, pupils display individual interests in different art materials, techniques and styles of working. They confidently search websites for information – as, for example, about myths and legends. They initiate ideas of their own, based on personal research.

200. Teaching and learning are good overall in Years 7-9 and very good in Years 10-11. The strongest features are teachers' subject knowledge, their enthusiasm and their high expectations. The aims and objectives of tasks set are shared with pupils. They are not in all lessons, however, emphasised or used for reflection on whether they have been met. A weakness is that pupils have few opportunities to work collaboratively. A start has been made in involving pupils in the assessment of their own progress, but too many pupils are allowed to chat socially when drawing, painting or printmaking.

201. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The areas for improvement identified in this report have been recognised by the department and procedures are being put in place to address them. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Teaching rooms are close together and a very good technician has been appointed.

Drama

Provision in drama is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Departmental leadership and management are good.
- Examination results in GCSE are above average.
- The quality of teaching is good.
- Accommodation for the subject is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

202. Drama is taught throughout Years 7-11, although pupils in Years 7-9 have only one lesson of drama every two weeks. The overall standard of work is above average throughout the school. High expectations are established at the beginning of lessons. A Year 7 class, for example, worked hard during the warm-up session and a review of earlier work. The pupils' high level of engagement was sustained as they responded well to questions and developed a good understanding of "thought tracking" during the lesson. They used their imaginations well to depict a variety of situations.

203. A Year 8 class, working on melodrama, found it difficult to recall from the previous lesson the meaning and significance of "asides" and "monologues". The teacher developed pupils' learning by quickly adapting her planning to focus on how characters are exaggerated in melodrama. Pupils then worked on their exaggerated interpretations of characters in either *The Wages of Sin* or *Murder in the Red Barn*. Their learning was well supported by the teacher and, as a result, some pleasing performances were given. In these, pupils used their voices particularly well to emphasise the qualities of different characters.

204. In a Year 9 class, pupils worked eagerly on a pantomime performance for primary schools. Although there was a lot of silliness during the warm-up activities at the beginning of the lesson, pupils' attitudes changed once they began to work in groups. Expectations were high and pupils were challenged, especially when in character. As a result, they gained confidence in using their voices and in making sure that they were projected well. A Year 10 class began their lesson by creating a word circle that recalled aspects of *Macbeth* – such as "death/Cawdor" and "murder/Duncan". They then worked on their use of voice, exploiting the development of tone, tempo and pitch in their interpretations of sequences from the play. During small-group work to create word collages, the teacher deepened their learning by her prompts and praise.

205. The quality of teaching is good overall. Its strongest features are the enthusiasm and detailed preparation by teachers to ensure that lessons are interesting and challenging. The subject is led and managed well. Schemes of work are up-to-date. Pupils' work is assessed well. Good curricular links have been made with English. Although accommodation is unsatisfactory, teachers create lessons in which good dramatic skills and techniques are developed.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at the end of Year 11 have been well above average for several years.
- This high standard is the outcome of very good teaching in Years 10 and 11.
- The very good, new accommodation is a strong support for teaching and learning.
- A high number of pupils receive instrumental lessons.
- Provision for the use of ICT in music is good.
- Although many pupils in Years 7-9 make good progress, a significant minority underachieve.

Commentary

206. The overall standard of musical work at the end of Year 9 is about average. Pupils compose good melodies for their songs and many perform well. The highest standards are, not unexpectedly, shown by the many pupils who learn instruments. The standard of performance and composition of the non-instrumentalists is, in contrast, slightly below average. Achievement is satisfactory overall.

207. Standards at the end of Year 11 are well above average. The number of pupils taking music to GCSE has been high for the last few years. The results have been extremely good. Over 80 per cent of pupils gained passes at grade B or higher in both 2001 and 2002; two-thirds did so in 2003. Work seen during the inspection in Years 10 and 11 reflects these high standards. Pupils' compositions and performances in Year 11 show unusually good competence and maturity, whilst pupils in Year 10 have a knowledge of chords that is well above average.

208. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good and satisfactory in Years 7-9. Through their instrumental studies, many pupils in Years 7-11 receive much extra teaching, with the result that their overall progress is very good. This factor tends to mask the underachievement of a number of non-instrumentalists in Years 7-9. The main reason for underachievement at this earlier stage is the lack of emphasis in teaching on the development of musical skills.

209. Overall teaching and learning are very good in Years 10 and 11, but satisfactory in Years 7-9. There was, however, an example of the very good teaching of singing seen in Year 7. In Years 10 and 11, there is much evidence of teachers' very good subject knowledge, one of the strengths of the department. In these later years, the great majority of pupils are very competent players who have an obvious enthusiasm for their music, well-developed techniques and enquiring minds. They respond well to the very good teaching they receive. Assessment (including marking) is inconsistent in Years 7-9, but well planned, constructive and effective in Years 10-11.

210. In the lessons seen in Years 7-9, teaching ranged from the very good to the unsatisfactory, but was satisfactory overall. The main weakness in unsatisfactory lessons is that the scheme of work does not focus teaching enough upon the key skills of performance, through both keyboard work and singing. The best teaching and learning in these earlier years are in singing, where standards are above average. In a Year 7 class, for example, pupils responded very well to the teaching they received and were most enthusiastic. Similarly, in the very good junior choir rehearsal, both teachers taught from their strengths in performance. In the unsatisfactory lessons,

many pupils make only limited progress, because lesson material is insufficiently matched to their ability.

211. Departmental leadership is good overall, but has aspects for improvement. The leadership of the department is enthusiastic and has a clear vision for the future. As noted above, however, the course content and teaching in Years 7-9 require improvement in order to raise achievement further. Departmental management is very good. The instrumental teaching is very efficiently organised and provides many opportunities for pupils to perform. The new buildings offer an exciting future for the department. Many of the extensive, new resources offer very strong support to pupils' learning, particularly through ICT.

212. The previous inspection report highlighted the poor accommodation and some non-specialist teaching. All lessons are now taught by specialist teachers in the new, very good facilities. Pupils are very appreciative of the new music suite and the facilities for ICT. Progress since the previous inspection has been good.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good.
- There is good departmental leadership and management.
- The 2003 GCSE results were well above the national average.
- Good relationships exist between teachers and pupils.
- Some aspects of accommodation are unsatisfactory.

213. By the end of Year 9, standards of performance in games are average. In soccer and basketball, most boys have elementary passing and shooting skills. They achieve well in most lessons and show good progress. In a Year 7 class, for example, girls achieved well in a "short tennis" lesson, making good improvement in the overhead serve. Year 8 girls produce very good work in dance, showing imagination and awareness of essential style. The overall standard of performance in boys' gymnastics, however, is weak: only a few of the boys observed had a satisfactory range of basic skills.

214. By the end of Year 11, boys' and girls' practical skills are average. Year 10 girls achieved well, learning how to perform dropped shots in badminton. This was largely because the teacher explained key points very clearly and demonstrated the skill consistently well. In basketball, pupils on the GCSE course achieved well in a lesson, learning to operate defensive tactics more effectively. Examination results in GCSE were, for the first time in 2003, significantly above the national average. Many pupils on this course present good written work, but make little use of ICT. Coursework files are often not organised well enough, thereby making it difficult for pupils to revise efficiently.

215. Teaching is good, and occasionally very good. Lessons (particularly theory lessons) are well prepared and delivered. Learning objectives in some practical lessons, however, are unclear and the sharing of these with pupils is not standard practice. Relationships with classes are good. Pupils are well motivated and behave well in lessons. Very few fail to take part in PE without valid reasons.

216. In the best lessons, teachers have high expectations and pupils are given responsibility and independence. In one Year 8 lesson, for example, girls effectively organised their own warm-up and understood the key principles of doing so. This was a good example of how readily pupils cooperate and collaborate, when given the opportunity to do so. Most lessons proceed with good pace and purpose.

217. Good leadership and management are reflected in the improvement of standards. Carefully considered changes are being made to the curriculum and, as a result, the range of opportunities for pupils is increasing. The introduction of AS- & A2-level courses to follow on from main school work is a good example of this improvement. Policies are appropriately modified and updated. Most teachers have good ICT skills. The day-to-day running of the department is efficient.

218. There are, however, unsatisfactory aspects to accommodation – particularly the necessity for theory lessons to be taught in a number of different classrooms. Changing rooms are dingy and showering facilities inadequate. Staff facilities are poor. There is only one computer in the department. A number of improvements have put right weaknesses raised at the previous inspection.

219. Extracurricular provision is very good. Many boys and girls regularly take part in competitive sports. A range of after-school clubs is very well attended: a considerable number of teachers assist with the running of them. Several pupils achieve well at sport, representing the school at regional and county levels. Two boys have recently represented England – one in gymnastics and the other in cross-country running.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL SUBJECTS

220. The main focus was on business education, but GCSE leisure and tourism was also sampled in three lessons. Because the GCSE course has just replaced the Foundation and Intermediate level GNVQ courses, current Year 11 pupils will be the first to complete the new course. Teachers work hard to maintain the attention and interest of the small group of pupils, some of whom also undertake extended work experience and vocational options in a further education college. The overall standard of work on the leisure and tourism course is well below average.

221. In one Year 10 lesson, the class was led firmly but sympathetically through role-play exercises and helped to be more aware of the meaning of body language. They showed improvement in performance and understanding, despite their short attention span, and gave constructive feedback to their peers when their work was being assessed. The teaching was calm and positive throughout. The teaching in another Year 10 class was much less effective in getting the pupils to complete a worksheet on visitor attractions by extracting information from leaflets. Pupils did eventually tackle the task, albeit without any sense of urgency.

222. A similar poor level of attention and self-control was evident in a Year 11 lesson which had the aim of researching the website of a national firm. In two of the lessons, therefore, teaching and learning were unsatisfactory, with the result that standards were low and achievement well below average. Pupils in this subject gain valuable experience through practical activities involved in the organisation of school events – such as acting as front-of-house staff for school dramatic productions.

Business Education

Provision in business education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE examination results are well above average.
- Higher attainers produce above average work and are good at working independently.
- Teachers provide lively, varied lessons.
- A small minority of students behave immaturely in class.

223. At the last inspection, GCSE grades were well above average, with girls doing a little better than boys. Attainment is still at this level, but boys, who predominate amongst those choosing the subject, now achieve the better results. In 2003, 57 per cent of candidates achieved grades in the range A*-C. Two business subjects are now available at GCSE. Pupils generally achieve well.

224. Standards by the end of Year 11 are generally above average. Written work is neat, accurate and well written. Books and folders always include the marking scheme for the subject and a running list of key words and their definitions. The best work in both Years 10 and 11 is well above average and shows good skill in analysis and evaluation. Work done for the business and communication skills course consists mainly of short answers and practical work of a standard that is in line with course requirements. Pupils have appropriate ICT skills.

225. Teaching is good. Although the efforts of teachers are occasionally spoiled by the immature behaviour of a minority of pupils, the pace, variety and range of activities introduced ensure that pupils largely keep on task. Well-structured lessons, at a level appropriate to the group, were provided on, for example, internal and external recruitment, external influences on business performance and the use of ICT for a variety of business tasks.

226. Most learning is good. By Year 11, higher-attaining pupils work systematically and independently, when required to do so, with minimal teacher intervention. They respond intelligently in class to questions and join effectively in discussion. Year 10 pupils are beginning to show the same level of maturity. Year 10 pupils, for example, gave well-managed presentations to their class and adult "judges" on the budgetary decisions in a local authority. Lower attainers, under clear direction, systematically develop their subject knowledge.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

227. Citizenship was the major focus in this domain, but child development was sampled. The school's provision for pupils' personal development is made largely through a life skills programme in Years 8-11 and tutorial time for all pupils at the beginning of afternoon school. Elements of citizenship are incorporated within both the life skills programme and the RE courses.

228. A GCSE course in child development is offered in Years 10-11. The course is chosen by girls (although it is open to boys) and includes topics studied with a rigour appropriate to a GCSE award. Teaching is good. Staff outside the department occasionally help by bringing their own young children to schools for lessons. In their long-term study of a child, as part of their coursework looking at all aspects of child development, girls make frequent, extended visits to their "case study" and document satisfactorily the child's physical, emotional and intellectual development. The importance of nutrition featured in one lesson, where pupils compared the taste, texture and quality of freshly prepared baby meals with those sold in a can. Pupils rightly regard this course as important for their future lives. They are well motivated by the opportunity that the school has provided.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are now good.
- The school has good plans for the structure and development of the subject.
- The assessment of pupils' attainment and progress is inadequate.
- There is insufficient monitoring of how well – and where – the subject is taught.

Commentary

229. Citizenship has developed slowly within the school as an identified feature. The school has, however, recently appointed a coordinator for the subject who is also head of the RE department. He has planned effectively for the provision of citizenship within RE and has identified the provision that other subjects offer. The school is poised to develop citizenship in the school as an important, integrated element in pupils' education.

230. There are no precise norms available for this subject against which pupils' attainment and experience can be measured. The evidence from lessons and pupils' written work indicates that pupils' attainment is in line with the broad national picture and that their achievement is satisfactory by the end of both Year 9 and Year 11.

231. Pupils have satisfactory knowledge of rights and responsibilities. In Year 11, for example, within an RE topic on crime and punishment, they demonstrated good understanding of the aims of punishment. Many willingly enter into debate and discussion – as, for instance, in a PSHE lesson that required them to explain their decisions on subject choice for their GCSE course. Pupils in Year 8 completed a topic in mathematics in which they made thoughtful decisions about the allocation of funds to charities.

232. Satisfactory opportunities are provided for pupils to participate in activities relating to citizenship. Pupils have, for example, practical experience of elections to the school council. They participate in fund-raising. In some subjects, they have opportunities to debate and discuss issues democratically. The school's wide range of foreign languages and its links with the world community offer pupils very good opportunities to develop as world citizens.

233. The quality of teaching ranges from very good to unsatisfactory and is satisfactory overall. In the best examples, teachers have good command of the subject, plan lessons well, and interest and involve pupils in discussion. These qualities were especially in evidence in a Year 8 lesson in which pupils discussed the difference between migrants and refugees. Pupils generally have a good attitude towards the subject and respond positively to good teaching. Many become deeply involved and ask very pertinent questions.

234. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The co-ordinator has clear, well-considered plans for the future. An audit has ensured that other subjects contribute to citizenship. There is, however, insufficient monitoring of this contribution. Most subjects provide opportunities to deepen education in citizenship, but the school does not know whether these opportunities are taken up effectively. There is no assessment of the progress pupils make in the subject, but firm plans exist for assessment to take place in time for reporting to parents in Summer 2004.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 18 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table overleaf shows the school's entry and performance information for the major courses sampled that were completed in 2003. *Data in the "England" columns relate to 2002, the latest data available at the time of the report's publication.*

Level 3 GCE AS level courses – Year 12

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
English	45	98	92	58	30	48	36
Mathematics	64	89	74	42	34	39	31
Biology	13	100	82	54	33	42	33
Chemistry	17	100	85	41	37	41	35
Physics	19	100	82	68	36	49	34
Art	12	100	90	92	43	57	39
Geography	18	94	88	11	36	31	36
History	11	100	92	91	37	53	38
ICT	16	88	78	19	21	32	29
French	8	88	85	63	35	41	35
German	4	100	88	25	35	40	36
Music	3	100	94	0	39	33	39
Religious education	6	100	91	33	39	35	38
Business studies	30	97	89	63	32	47	35
Drama	7	100	95	0	38	31	39
Psychology	34	100	83	50	33	43	34
Sociology	11	82	84	36	34	37	34

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
English	37	97	98	38	37	81	80
Mathematics	34	85	93	41	52	75	85
Biology	25	92	92	52	36	85	74
Chemistry	17	94	94	53	46	85	81
Physics	18	89	93	44	43	77	79
Art	19	100	96	94	49	114	85
Geography	23	83	97	13	41	53	81
History	11	100	97	91	41	109	81
French	9	100	96	89	46	107	83
German	3	100	96	33	44	60	82
Music	2	100	98	50	42	90	82
Religious education	1	100	96	100	44	100	82
Business studies (AL)	21	95	96	67	33	95	77
Business studies (AVCE)	9	100	87	0	17	62	60
Psychology	29	100	94	41	39	88	78
Sociology	6	100	95	33	40	90	79

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification	
		School	England
National Vocational Qualification			
French	5	100	n/a
German	17	94	n/a
Italian	9	67	n/a
Spanish	16	100	n/a

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English literature

Provision in English literature is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teaching of the course is well done.
- Both the AS and A2 courses are very well organised and managed.
- Students progress very well in the subject.

Commentary

235. English literature is a very popular subject and one in which most students do well. Sixty-eight students currently study the subject at either AS or A2 level. In 2003, 37 students took the A2-level examination. Although one student did not pass, 14 students obtained either A or B grades.

236. The standard of work of most students is well in line with course requirements and most students achieve very well. In a Year 12 class, students studying Chaucer's Prologue in *The Canterbury Tales* collated the virtues and vices of the Prioress. Reflecting on Chaucer's use of irony, the students understood the ways in which he did not decry her essential qualities. Excellent textual references were made by students, as they developed their interpretation of the Squire and deepened their understanding of Chaucer's use of language. The probing questions of the teacher extended significantly students' understanding of Chaucer's portrayal of character, as they built up their interpretations of the Monk.

237. In a Year 13 class, students reviewed well Canto Two of Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* and quickly summarised the character of the Baron. Sustained, detailed discussion was a particularly strong feature of this lesson, as students reflected on what they knew about the Baron and Belinda. An analysis of the card game led to a practical activity, in which students worked out the details of the game. The interactive nature of the discussions and the challenging questions regularly posed by the teacher ensured that students' rate of learning was high.

238. In another very good lesson, a Year 13 class, studying Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, analysed thoughtfully the character of Blanche, drawing attention to the quality of relationships and the significance of the colour of Stanley's shirt. The impact on students' learning of the persistent clarification of their perceptions by the teacher was a very strong feature in this lesson.

239. Teaching is always at least good and often very good. It enables students to develop a strong, critical understanding of literature and is appropriately informed by textual references. Teachers' high levels of subject knowledge ensure that students' individual needs are met in suitably different ways. The quality of students' engagement with literature is impressive.

Language and learning across the curriculum

240. The standard of students' literacy in other subjects is well above average overall. The standard of writing is particularly strong in history. The presentation of writing in geography and music is not as good as in other subjects. The quality of students' speaking and listening is generally above average. Most students are articulate and express their points of view clearly. Students' use of technical language is good overall and exceptionally good in art.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

241. The main emphasis was on French and German, but Italian, Japanese, Mandarin and Spanish were also sampled. In Italian, the teaching in two lessons was good. Students responded well to the teacher's lively, conversational style. They increased their knowledge and understanding well in carefully structured listening exercises.

242. In Japanese, all four students who were entered for GCE A2 level in 2003 passed the examination, but three did not perform as well as expected on the basis of their GCSE results. One lesson was observed in Year 12. The teaching was very enthusiastic and challenging. It led to a lively conversation between the teacher and students about nutrition. Students are well motivated and apply themselves very well to their tasks. Assessments of work show that students make steady progress.

243. In Mandarin, students in an NVQ lesson reciprocated the enthusiasm of the teacher in a very good lesson. They consolidated their knowledge in a revision of basic characters, developed this in role play and went on to learn how to fill in a hotel booking form. The teacher explained clearly how to form negative statements. In the AS-level examination in 2003, one of the two students attained a high grade.

244. In Spanish, one lesson was observed in each of Years 12 and 13 and a range of students' work was scrutinised. Classes are small and exclusively female. The standard of most work is above average. Fluency in spoken Spanish is variable in Year 12, but sound overall. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and present a suitable level of challenge. Assessment of work is very thorough. Students achieve well owing to good teaching and their positive attitudes to learning.

245. Good provision is made for sixth-form students to continue the study of a language through supported, independent work or to begin a newly taught language. National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) are offered as part of the school's sixth-form provision in Year 12. In 2003, all candidates gained the NVQ Level 2 qualification in French and Spanish. The pass rates were 94 per cent in German and 67 per cent in Italian. Students appreciate the opportunities offered and responded in a mature way in the lessons seen. Teaching, student support and learning are all good. Students make rapid progress.

French

Provision in French is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in public examinations are above average.
- Well-organised, challenging teaching helps students to achieve well.
- Leadership and management are good and have contributed much to improved examination results.
- Students learn well partly because of their mature attitudes to work.

Commentary

246. Results in GCE AS- and A2-level examinations in 2003 were above average. They were an improvement on those of the previous year, particularly in relation to the highest grades. In A2 examinations in 2003, all nine students (all female) passed and eight of them attained the highest (A or B) grades. Students achieve well in relation to their performance at GCSE. Seven out of eight students passed at AS level; almost two-thirds attained the highest grades.

247. In Years 12 and 13, current work is consistently above average and students' achievement is good. Students understand well the detail of authentic spoken and written French. They readily absorb, for example, articles on people's views on technological and environmental issues as well as audiotapes about social problems. They engage fluently in written and spoken discussion about such diverse topics as drink/driving, what it is like to be a Muslim in the 21st century or the use of electronic chat-rooms.

248. The quality of students' spoken French is good in Year 13. Students give lengthy, detailed responses, although the quality of pronunciation and the levels of fluency and accuracy vary widely. This variation is even greater in Year 12, where students worked hard and successfully at the taxing activity of interviewing, and being interviewed, for a job.

249. Written work demonstrates that students have a wide vocabulary and, especially in Year 13, a thorough understanding of grammar. Students have good attitudes to learning. They display a mature, responsible attitude to work, preparing their homework well and learning vocabulary thoroughly.

250. Teaching and learning are consistently good. Effectively planned and well-taught lessons ensure that students learn rapidly. A good range of teaching methods is used. Well-chosen ideas (such as the job interview) are used to create excitement. Lessons proceed at a suitably fast pace and students rise to the challenge. Homework is carefully planned to extend classwork and provides appropriate opportunities for independent study.

251. Work is regularly and thoroughly marked. Teachers give students good quality guidance on how to improve. Good knowledge of examination requirements results in students being well prepared. The heavy emphasis on the teaching of grammar helps students considerably to bridge the large gap between the demands of GCSE and A-level examinations.

252. Leadership and management are good. Close team work has resulted in improved examination results. There are very good opportunities for students to undertake work experience abroad and to take part in educational exchanges. There were no suggested improvements at the time of the last inspection and high standards have been maintained. The subject has maintained good progress since the last inspection.

German

Provision in German is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good and students achieve well.
- Not all students have contact with a native speaker.

Commentary

253. Results in the A2-level examination in 2002 for a small group of students were above average. The 2003 results, in contrast, were below average and two of the three candidates did not make the expected progress from their prior attainment in GCSE. Results at AS level in 2003 included fewer high grades than in the previous year. Three of the four AS students from 2003 have since continued

their study of German towards A2 level and are making good progress. Their standard of attainment is above average.

254. In work seen during the inspection, standards in Year 12 were average overall. Students have a sound knowledge and understanding of the topics they study. They acquire the relevant vocabulary to enable them to read, speak and write about a variety of topics, such as tourism or marriage. Teachers provide a careful, regular coverage of grammatical points which the students practise in different exercises. Adjectival endings are a weakness in written work. The teacher targeted this weakness in lessons through a starter activity. The results show that students are not fully conversant with adjectives, but are improving.

255. Students' understanding of German is good, but their speaking skills are not strong enough for them to speak confidently and at length. During the lesson, they learned new words and phrases about advertising, with the help of authentic advertisements, to help them in their writing and speaking.

256. Two of the three boys present in Year 13 responded well to the teacher's effective questioning in a very good lesson about post-war Germany. They both have a very good understanding of the major German events of 1953, 1961 and 1989, and their connection with East Germany. Their coursework on this topic is of a high standard. Their files are well organised. They have covered many aspects of grammar and acquired a good range of topic vocabulary. They respond very well to their teachers' effective questioning. They consolidate and expand their knowledge effectively.

257. Teaching is good. Lessons are planned well. Teachers use a suitable variety of activities and methods to engage students' interest. They are aware of the need to extend students' oral responses. German is the language of the classroom for teachers and students alike. Year 13 students spoke of the good support that they had received from their teachers in acquiring a wide range of relevant topic vocabulary.

258. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The department does not have the services of a foreign language assistant and only Year 13 students have contact with a native speaker. Year 13 students have availed themselves of the opportunity to undertake work experience in Germany.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCE A-level results in 2002 were above the national average. Results dipped in 2003.
- Teaching is consistently good (or better). Assessment is undertaken very thoroughly.
- Students achieve well, are confident and enjoy the subject.
- The recruitment and retention of students on the course are consistently impressive.

Commentary

259. GCE A-level results in 2002 were above the national average. There was a slight dip in 2003, but the most able students regularly attain the highest grade in further mathematics. In 2002, GCE AS-level results were average, but there was considerable improvement in 2003, with an impressive number of higher grades. The proportion of students recruited onto advanced courses and retained to gain GCE A2-level grades is consistently much higher than that seen in most schools.

260. During the inspection, students in Year 13 showed above average levels of attainment. They were confident and knowledgeable, and clearly enjoyed their studies. Students of further

mathematics show rigour in difficult algebraic proofs and even the weakest students know how to locate the centre of a circle from its algebraic formula. Students achieve well.

261. Students in Year 12 have just completed their first modular examinations. In an excellent lesson on decision-making in mathematics, even students who had previously struggled followed sets of procedures accurately to minimise the use of time and cost in various questions relating to real life.

262. Teaching is consistently good. It is usually very good and sometimes excellent. Teachers have a mastery of the subject and work hard to make learning interesting and easy to understand. Students learn effectively because of this and are given plenty of time to practise solving problems and discuss their work in class. Teachers know their students very well. Assessment of work in progress is a strength: work is not only targeted relentlessly at challenging levels, but clear written advice is regularly fed back to students so that they know how to improve.

263. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department, who leads by example, is a very good teacher. Schemes of work ensure that the syllabus is covered effectively and fellow teachers have been supported well in building up their expertise to teach at A level. As a result, students receive a good mix of teaching and learning styles and have never lost momentum because of teacher absence. One teacher regularly produces booklets of material with high quality diagrams and structured tasks that promote very good learning.

Mathematics across the curriculum

264. The standard of mathematics across other subjects is above average. In science, geography, ICT, business education, psychology and sociology, students make good use of data. In science, they clearly understand the implications of negative powers to identify extremely small quantities and in business education they are adept at all aspects of number work.

SCIENCE

265. The department offers biology, human biology, chemistry and physics at both AS and A2 levels. Sciences are a popular choice. The majority of students have A* and A grades in separate GCSE sciences before joining the sixth form. In 2003, there was a total subject entry of 64 at AS level and 75 at A2 level.

266. The majority of students do well, often studying three sciences and mathematics (and sometimes further mathematics) at AS level. The sciences are taught in a suite of attractive, modern, well-equipped laboratories. This pleasant learning environment has, however, a low number of computers available for students' individual use. Students speak highly of the support they receive from their science teachers. Many progress to premier universities to study for engineering, medicine, science, technology and veterinary degrees.

Biology

Provision in biology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good, based on teachers' enthusiasm for their subject.
- Results are good overall and usually consistent with students' GCSE attainment.
- Studies are enhanced by the extensive use of scientific magazines.
- Investigative work is strong, but ICT underused.
- A wide range of out-of-school activities extends students' horizons.

Commentary

267. There are three teaching groups in each of Years 12 and 13. Currently, 34 students take biology and 19 take human biology courses. Students understand the difference in approach of the two courses. Those taking human biology are quick to commend the wisdom of their personal choice, with its greater emphasis on coursework.

268. In the 2003 AS examination, half the students gained an A or B grade and all students passed. At A2 level, about half the students gained A or B grades. Biology results are consistently well above national averages. The overall achievement of students is good. Human biology tends to be taken by students with low prior attainment; the results are broadly in line with national figures for the subject. Current standards of attainment are very well in line with course requirements. Pupils achieve well.

269. In the five lessons observed, the overall level of attainment was above average. Students undertake investigative and experimental work carefully and enthusiastically. They readily express relief and satisfaction when their investigations work – as, for example, occurred when one student, who had persevered with a datalogging experiment, screamed aloud when she found that she had a set of reliable data. Students learn from one another, checking their hypotheses and predictions, and celebrating their accomplishments. Students take their work seriously in a pleasant learning atmosphere. They appreciate the conscientious, caring and usually humorous approach of their teachers.

270. A notable feature is the regular use of magazine articles. Students are expected to read and analyse them and then feed back relevant information to their peers. Presentations and reports led by students on, for example, the benefits of genetically modified crops provided the stimulus for active debate and discussion. Teachers place great store on students' understanding of the environmental and social context of their studies.

271. Teaching is generally good. Lessons are carefully planned and a suitable variety of teaching and learning methods employed. A number of computerised slide sequences, prepared by staff, reinforce syllabus knowledge well. Leadership and management are good: the subject is well coordinated by two enthusiastic teachers. Five teachers work well as a team, sharing both theoretical and practical lessons. This approach is apt: students appreciate the different strengths that their teachers offer.

272. Detailed records are kept of students' progress. Assessment is good. The provision for individual students to access computers and the Internet within the science block is inadequate. A good range of extracurricular activities extends students' horizons. There has been solid improvement since the last inspection.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are inconsistent, year on year.
- Teachers are enthusiastic. Their good teaching actively engages students.
- Investigational work plays a major role in the department's work.
- Revision and consolidation of work are weaker aspects, but satisfactory overall.

Commentary

273. The overall attainment of Year 13 students in the 2001 and 2003 A2 examinations was below the national average, but well above average in 2002. Analysis of students' grades shows that the

achievement of the ablest candidates is comparable to that in other subjects. Those students who have irregular patterns of attendance, take chemistry as their sole science or are weaker in mathematics tend to make unsatisfactory progress in chemistry. In 2003 at AS level, seven of the 17 students gained an A or B grade.

274. Current work is above average overall. In a good Year 12 lesson, the teacher competently demonstrated a range of the properties of chlorine gas. This was accomplished with the flair of a magician as he gave students a step-by-step commentary that engaged their interest and imagination. Students asked questions spontaneously and all enjoyed the excitement of chemistry.

275. In a different, very good Year 12 lesson held in an ICT suite, students successfully plotted the physical properties of Group VII elements. They subsequently participated in extended debate on the effect of electron clouds shielding the attraction of the positive nucleus. The availability of the ICT equipment and the competence of the teacher were major factors in the lesson's success.

276. In two Year 13 lessons, students handled glassware competently, made accurate observations and carefully interpreted trends in their data. They explained in detail their hypotheses and predictions. Their preparation for these investigations was good, because they were required to order their equipment and solutions in advance – a notable feature of the subject's emphasis on individual students' scientific skills and organisation. Students make good progress as a consequence of their regular engagement in investigative work.

277. Teaching is good and occasionally very good. Students' files were, however, noticeably thinner than those usually offered for inspection, containing fewer worked examples of past examination questions than normal. Subject leadership and management are satisfactory. The two chemistry teachers work cooperatively. There are few links with the scientific and industrial communities. Improvement since the last inspection has been broadly satisfactory.

Physics

Provision in physics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A-level standards are consistently above average.
- Not all students have their learning needs sufficiently identified and supported.

Commentary

278. The overall standard in the subject is above average. In 2003, all students studying for AS level at the end of Year 12 passed the examination. The proportion of high grades obtained was about double the national average. At A2 level, the pass rate and grade quality were average. At both levels, however, the proportion of students gaining grade A is above average.

279. The standard of current work is consistent with these levels of examination success. The standard of students' written work is generally high – particularly in coursework assignments, which offer very good opportunities for self-motivated study on chosen topics of interest. Students' achievement is generally sound. Those students who did not pass their examinations in 2003 often required additional mathematical support geared towards their physics studies.

280. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have an excellent command of their subject and use a suitably wide range of teaching methods. Both boys and girls have very good role models for choosing this subject. Teachers take a very caring approach with students. Work is marked and assessed carefully. The modular A-level course sustains students' motivation and engagement well.

281. In one outstanding Year 12 lesson, students were very thoroughly and imaginatively taught the principles of the transfer of energy from a battery and the conditions for maximum power output. The development and behaviour of the theoretical model were perceptively compared with real measurements. The lesson also included expert use of computer-aided modelling software where students could study the behaviour of inter-related variables. These approaches substantially reinforced students' understanding of abstract ideas and the core principle of scientific methodology. In another very good lesson, Year 13 students received clear, individual advice on the progress being made with coursework – as, for example, on the physics of digital radio broadcasting or high-definition, flat television displays.

282. The leadership of A-level physics is good. Responsibility for management is effectively shared by two members of staff. They have a clear appreciation of the rigour, importance and character of the subject. Accommodation and resources are good. Fine opportunities have arisen, through the school's extensive European links, for students to visit CERN in Geneva and other sites of scientific interest. High standards have been maintained since the previous inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

- Teaching is consistently good.
- The subject is led and managed well.
- Students gain a good understanding of how ICT affects society.
- Students do not know as much as they should when they start the course.

Commentary

283. This is a new course and no student has yet taken the A2 examination. Students in both years started on the course with standards well below those normally found, because they had not studied the subject in Years 10 and 11. This gap will not exist in the future. Nevertheless, the standard of work seen from students in Year 13 was at the national average and so represents good achievement.

284. Students display good technical knowledge – as, for example, when explaining how to back up data stored on computer. Practical skills are satisfactory but weaker than they should be, because students did not bring the expected levels of skills to the start of the course. For example, students had not been taught how to design a web page before the start of Year 12. When designing a computer system, students analyse the needs of a customer, but do not fully evaluate a number of alternatives.

285. A larger than usual proportion of students chose not to continue with the course after taking the AS examination in 2003. This is accounted for by the fact that the A2 course would be unfamiliar to students not having studied an ICT course for two years. Students' standards of literacy and mathematics more than meet the requirements of the course.

286. All teaching seen during the inspection was good, leading to good learning in class and explaining the good achievement that students make. Teachers have very good knowledge of the applications of ICT. They use their knowledge to give good illustrations. These illustrations help students to understand what they are supposed to be learning. Examples may often have controversial aspects that engage students' interest. Year 13 students, for instance, enjoyed discussing the amount of information that may be held on individuals, the potential for misuse of such data and ways to ensure proper use.

287. In a good Year 12 lesson, students learned effectively about computer networks because of the good range of activities they undertook. The teacher first checked that students understood the basic technical terms that had been researched for homework. Students then watched an amusing

animation which helped them to understand the more complex aspects of what they had read. This was followed by the school's network manager describing how the school's computer system works. Within one hour, students had increased their knowledge considerably.

288. Teachers know each student as an individual. Not only do they monitor closely the progress each student makes, but also know the ways in which they learn best. Careful assignment of students to groups ensured that those in Year 13 helped one another to learn about data security. Students demonstrate positive attitudes to their work, thereby enhancing their learning.

289. The subject is led and managed well. The school responded to a request by students for an ICT examination course in the sixth form. Great care was taken in selecting a course that was accessible to students with little prior knowledge, but also a course on which they could achieve grades that would not disadvantage them when, for instance, applying to a university. Consistency in the quality of teaching reflects the careful monitoring of teachers' work. As this is a new course, it is not possible to comment on improvement since the previous inspection.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

290. Students have average levels of ICT skills and so make appropriate use of computers in their work. In an excellent physics lesson, students in Year 12 learned about the power limits of a circuit by modelling that used a computer program from a foreign university. Video-conferencing is used to good effect to allow modern foreign language students to practise their speaking and listening skills. In music, ICT assists students considerably with their compositions.

291. There is, however, no systematic development of ICT skills for all sixth formers, so that some students may not use computers at all. Students are not always able to find an available computer for use during periods of private study, so reducing their efficient use of time.

HUMANITIES

The main focus was on geography, history, religious education (RE), psychology and sociology. Additionally, one lesson of Latin was sampled. In the very good Year 12 Latin lesson seen, students had been studying the language for just over one term for one lesson per week. They remembered previous work satisfactorily and made good progress in learning the irregular forms of some common verbs. Students achieved well because of the teacher's encouraging, buoyant approach and their own high endeavour and interest. Other notable features of the lesson were tight time-scales for tasks, a careful structuring of new work and a relaxed but purposeful approach to learning.

Geography

Provision in geography is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment is below average and students are underachieving.
- Teaching has insufficient challenge and rigour. Expectations are too low.
- Departmental leadership and management are ineffective.
- Students are well motivated and their attitudes are good.

Commentary

292. The overall standard of work is below average. In 2003, examination results at both AS and A2 level were well below average. An analysis of these results and those for 2002 indicates that a significant number of students underachieve in this subject. This represents a serious decline in standards since the time of the last inspection in 1998.

293. Students in Year 12 have an average knowledge of how cities grow and change. One class, for instance, understood well the different geographical models and the theories that explain the pattern of land use in cities. They have an average knowledge of how landscapes change owing to the action of water and the theory of plate tectonics. Their understanding, however, lacks the detail and precision required at this level.

294. Students in Year 13 have an average understanding of the changes taking place in the environment. In one lesson, for instance, they understood the changes taking place in plant growth at the edges of ponds and lakes, but the clarity of their knowledge of geographical terms and the processes involved is insecure. Students have a superficial understanding of economic geography. They have a sound knowledge of exemplars to illustrate the topics they have studied.

295. Throughout the sixth form, the majority of students have good note-taking skills. They extract information accurately from a wide range of resource materials and use the collected information effectively to answer geographical questions. By the end of Year 13, students write fluently, essays are carefully structured and the majority use geographical terms effectively.

296. Students do not make enough progress, as they are not challenged sufficiently to reach their full potential. They do not achieve as well as they should, because teachers often dominate discussions and the work is not rigorous enough. Students are well motivated and work hard, but they are not encouraged sufficiently to work out answers for themselves or to discuss ideas with their peers.

297. Teaching is satisfactory overall. Teachers have a good command of the subject, with the result that explanations are clear and well structured. The majority of lessons start promptly, but the aims of lessons are rarely made clear to students. Discussion is well structured and explanations well illustrated, but the tone is often over-relaxed and students are not challenged sufficiently through incisive questioning. Expectations are not high enough – as, for example, when the teacher dominates the discussion or dictates notes to pupils. The good resources provided are not fully exploited. Students are rarely given the opportunity to explore ideas, develop their understanding and discuss questions in pairs or in groups. Where good pace and challenging activities are provided, students respond with great interest, work hard and are quick to be fully involved in the lesson.

298. Good relationships exist between staff and students. Attitudes are good. Students are keen and well motivated, attend lessons regularly and maintain focus throughout. Essays are marked thoroughly and, as a result, students understand clearly how they can improve. Homework is set regularly and used effectively.

299. Leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory. There is little sense of purpose and focus on how standards can be improved. No systematic, effective monitoring of the work or rigorous self-evaluation has taken place to develop a clear plan of action to drive up standards. The curriculum is being revised, but does not provide a clear progression of ideas, learning and skills or of compatibility across all aspects of the subject. Fieldwork opportunities are good. Assessment information is not fully exploited to support individual students.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is consistently good and leads to very good achievement.
- Marking is very good, helping students to see clearly how to improve their work.
- Most students have very positive attitudes to work and so learn well.

- Standards are above average overall.
- Sometimes teachers do not demand enough depth in students' oral answers.

Commentary

300. The standard of work in both Years 12 and 13 is above average. The AS- and A-level results in both 2002 and 2003 were well above average. In 2003, 90 per cent of students gained an A or B grade, a considerable achievement. The standard of work seen during the inspection was above average. A larger than usual proportion reach high standards. This indicates that students have made very good progress during the sixth form from their above average GCSE grades.

301. Students in Year 12 generally have very good knowledge and understanding of the topics they study. They use complex texts well to extend their view of past events. Their essays are well planned and usually well structured. Those by the highest attainers contain very cogent arguments. Most students successfully evaluate a range of historical sources.

302. The majority of students in Year 13 have very good knowledge and understanding. Those studying the changing nature of warfare, for instance, thoroughly understood the problems facing generals during World War 1. They skim-read texts well to identify key points quickly. Their oral responses are invariably articulate and often perceptive, although teachers do not always give them the opportunity to develop their answers deeply enough.

303. Most students have a very positive attitude to their work and achieve very well overall. They are keen to know more and ready to question and challenge their teachers, in order to develop their own understanding further.

304. Teaching is consistently good and sometimes very good. A strength of the teaching is very good subject knowledge and the effective planning of lessons. Teachers use a suitable range of activities that both challenge and motivate students. Students' work is carefully marked. Detailed comments provide guidance to students on how to improve their work still further. Teachers ensure that all students contribute to class discussions and use questioning effectively to check what students have learned. Although teachers make good use of a range of resources, insufficient use is made of ICT within lessons, mainly because the department does not have good ICT facilities available at all times.

305. The leadership and management of the department are good. Teachers work very well as a team to maintain high standards. They have ensured that the department has continued to run smoothly during the temporary absence of the head of department.

Religious education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Specialist teaching is often outstanding and students' achievement very good.
- Inspiring, dedicated leadership is resulting in more students and higher standards.
- Students gain an enormous amount from RE in both their personal and intellectual development.
- Non-specialist students in the sixth form do not receive their minimum RE entitlement.

Commentary

306. Two lessons were seen. One was very good and the other was excellent. In the very good lesson, five students were following the A2 course in Year 13. The standard of their work was above average overall. Students' knowledge is generally accurate and sometimes comprehensive. They use specialist vocabulary with varying degrees of skill to explain, for example, the meaning and application

of the Five Precepts in Buddhism. They show good, personal insight into how moral meaning emerges from religious belief. They also relate their studies to their own lives and to the deeper and wider aspects of human experience.

307. In the excellent lesson, five students were following the AS course in Year 12. The standard of their work is exceptionally high. All are on the way to the highest grades. They were studying Christian ethics. Two students gave presentations during the lesson, one on the Holy Spirit and the other on the Sermon on the Mount, as sources of Christian ethics. They and their listeners all showed a good command of theory and used language with precision and clarity. These students refer with ease to the relevant authorities, from Socrates to Fletcher, and readily identify an intuitionist or deontological point of view.

308. Results in the GCE examination in recent years have been good, but numbers have been too low for valid statistical comparison. In 2003, all seven candidates passed and three achieved grades A or B. The level of grades awarded in 2003 suggests an upward trend.

309. Students' achievement is very good. Students know their predicted grades and the targets they have to work towards. Another reason for their rapid progress is that, by preparing and giving presentations, students learn to speak and write with confidence. They develop personal insight, independent thought and the critical skills of analysis and evaluation. Students clearly enjoy their lessons and gain an enormous amount in both personal and intellectual development.

310. Teaching and learning are in the range of very good to excellent. Teachers show exemplary command of the subject. The planning of lessons and the methods used are highly effective, enabling students to be actively involved in their own learning. Teachers show exceptional skill in relating the 'formal' aspects of ethics and the 'distant' concepts of Buddhism to the more immediate dimension of students' own experience. By developing their capacity to work both independently and collaboratively, students learn to speak and write with great precision and clarity.

311. Leadership and management are very good. The school has very much improved its provision since the last inspection. Better provision in Year 11 has been the foundation for greater success in the sixth form. Inspiring, dedicated leadership within the department, coupled with very effective teaching, is leading to greater numbers of students and higher standards. Students respond well to the department's clarity of vision, strong sense of purpose and high aspirations. The school knows well, however, that the vast majority of students in the sixth form still receive none of the 15 hours per year RE teaching that the agreed syllabus requires. This long-standing omission requires urgent improvement.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Resource materials and lessons are prepared exceptionally well.
- Students' oral and written work is of good quality.
- Target-setting, assessment and the monitoring of performance are all very sound.
- Students achieve well.

312. The achievement of the increasing number of students taking the subject is good when measured against other schools, the students' performance in other subjects within the school and their predicted results based on prior performance. In 2003, half the students gained grades A or B at AS level and two-fifths did so at A2 level. This shows a steady increase on previous years.

313. The standard of work of present students is above average. In class, they respond fluently to questions, develop their understanding well by asking questions, and debate topics with

intelligence and enthusiasm. Written work is systematically structured, contains clear annotated notes and leads (in most cases) to very well presented essays that show systematic research and thoughtful interpretation of facts.

314. Teaching and learning are good, and sometimes very good. Lessons are well structured around very carefully prepared materials. A good variety of methods is used to ensure full understanding of the subject. Year 12 students, for example, debated Freud's psychoanalytic approach and asked pertinent questions about it, following a careful session of directed note-taking. In looking at a very different topic – the construction of hypotheses for practical coursework – students understood the process and its associated calculations well, as a result of the very clear, appropriately paced lesson. Year 13 students used a tabular format to record their paired work on the attributes of a student-centred school, based on the work of Carl Rogers. They then reported this back cogently to the rest of the class before undertaking a more detailed study of a school, based on this model of learning.

315. Leadership and management of the subject by the one teacher involved are very good overall. A useful handbook has been prepared for students. Appropriate feedback on their work is given in an individual assessment portfolio. Unit handbooks provide a thorough basis for in-depth work. There are a well-planned structure for the teaching of each topic and clear statements of how individual students will be supported. The overall course aims show clearly, for example, how ethnocentric and discriminatory issues will be tackled at specific points in the syllabus.

Sociology

Provision in sociology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is lively and teachers are knowledgeable.
- Students enjoy their work and are improving their performance.
- Feedback on written work does not record targets for improvement.

Commentary

316. Results are around the national average at AS and A2 levels, although they (and the number of students taking the courses) are improving. The performance of individual students often exceeds that predicted on the basis of their earlier GCSE results. Students' overall achievement is satisfactory.

317. The overall standard in lessons is average. Some Year 12 written work is clear, well presented and accurate. Other work in Year 12 does not show the appropriate style and detail required at this level. Written feedback does not always show students how their work can be improved. The standard of students' oral contributions varies. Only a minority of students in Year 12 contribute thoughtful ideas and questions, although most understand the work and respond accurately to questions.

318. By Year 13, students draw well on key texts and apply them appropriately to new topics – as, for example, how environmental factors may affect the type and amount of crime in a particular neighbourhood. By this stage, some written and oral work is above average.

319. Teaching is good. The teachers are lively and enthusiastic and prepare lessons well. Learning through group work or whole-class discussion is regularly reinforced by summarising conclusions in students' notes. Teachers occasionally dominate discussion rather than prompt students to research information or to consider a question individually or in small groups before it is discussed by the whole class. Nevertheless, lively discussion on the introduction of a "democracy" channel on television was stimulated by the teacher's input and the questions listed on the board before discussion started.

320. Students learn well in Year 12. They begin to develop a knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, the subject and how to study it. This is shown by their increasing confidence in tackling such topics as social surveys. Their appreciation of sampling techniques was enhanced through a series of lively exercises, to which they responded with understanding. By Year 13, students draw on their previous reading to analyse and discuss recent research and apply this to both essays and classwork.

321. Leadership is good. Although neither teacher has sociology as their main teaching subject, they have successfully planned the teaching of the subject and provide students with guidance on how to study. A development plan has been written and implemented. Management is satisfactory. There is no formal link with the social sciences faculty. Students' performance is systematically monitored and any corrective action soundly taken.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

322. There was no major focus in this domain, but provision in design and technology was sampled. In the two lessons seen, the overall standard of work was above average and a good achievement. Students respond very well to the challenges offered to them by their teachers. In conversation, students were very clear about how well they were doing and also what they needed to do to improve further.

323. Year 13 students articulately discussed new materials and showed good understanding of their possible application to practical solutions. Students in both Years 12 and 13 are knowledgeable and developing well as product designers of both minor and major projects. They build well on earlier experiences. They use electrical equipment efficiently, for instance, to cut and finish wood. The flat-pack units which Year 12 were making fitted accurately together to create models of animals or sea creatures.

324. Computer software is well used, both at home and in school, for the presentation and development of designs. Graphics students build detailed models to explain and illustrate their thinking. Teaching is very good and occasionally outstanding. Better communication between the teachers taking the course is necessary to ensure the accuracy of assessment and the higher standards that are possible.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

325. The major focus was on art, music and drama, but art textiles and film studies were also sampled. In art textiles, the overall standard of work seen and recent A-level results were well above average. Students develop their ideas creatively from (for example) natural forms and present them well on paper. They use computers efficiently for research. They draw on a range of materials and such techniques as tie dye, batik, felt-making and hand- and machine-stitching to create rich surface textures. Students enjoy the course and respond very well to the opportunities provided, particularly their contact with textile artists. Teaching is very good. This course adds considerably to students' personal development.

326. The popular but demanding course in film studies is now in its second year. Students display considerable interest and dedication. The teaching is very well informed and reflects the teacher's considerable enthusiasm and interest. Relationships between teacher and students are excellent and contribute much to the good progress that students make.

327. Students present their ideas very well through carefully constructed essays and well-prepared presentations. A talk by one student, for example, exploring "realism and the realistic" in the work of Steven Spielberg, was very well received by the other students who made well-informed comments and generally spoke well. Feedback and appraisal from the teacher are prominent features of lessons. The teacher very effectively identifies what students have done well and how their ideas could be presented more clearly.

Art

Provision in art is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good and often outstanding.
- The overall standard of work is well above average.
- All students achieve very well when painting, printmaking and producing three-dimensional work.
- The lack of a sixth-form study room limits the scale of work possible and slows students' progress.

Commentary

328. By the end of Year 13, the overall standard of work is well above average. Over the past three years, A-level standards have been high. The best results were in 2003 and represented a very good level of achievement. Numbers taking the subject are increasing, with good retention rates from AS to A2 level.

329. Students initially study portraiture and structure in Year 12 and extend their skills in printmaking. Their journals and visual diaries record important staging-posts in their creative journey. A visit to Barcelona opened many students' eyes to the range and richness of cultural influences in another western culture. In their assessment conversations with teachers, students explore such difficult concepts as irrationality. Literacy levels are well above average. Most students are articulate and discussion often reaches an impressive level. Skill and confidence in using ICT are very good.

330. Students make very good gains in understanding art styles from both western and non-western cultures. Many show considerable initiative. One student recently made contact with a Turner Prize winner and spent a day in London, at his invitation, studying his work and learning about his methods of working. She is now producing pots that have a story line rather than pure decoration. Through their teachers, many students have contact with local artists. They also benefit from attending life classes: one student, inspired by the nude form, created a box structure celebrating femininity.

331. Teaching and learning are very good and often outstanding. Each teacher contributes his or her personal strengths in graphics, printmaking and three-dimensional studies. They share their very good subject knowledge and high expectations. Assessment is very well used to set targets for improvement.

332. Leadership and management are very good. There is a very clear vision for high standards. The teachers and a technician form a highly effective team. Increased numbers, attracted to the subject, are putting considerable pressure on cramped accommodation. The lack of a sixth-form study room is a major limitation. It often limits students' ability to continue with work beyond the hour allotted to them. It also limits the scale of work that can be undertaken. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Rooms are now grouped together and a skilled technician supports the department's work invaluablely.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have usually been above average in recent years.

- The new accommodation and resources provide very good support for sixth-form studies.
- Teachers' very good subject knowledge is a strength of the department.
- Students have a limited knowledge of the musical repertoire.

Commentary

333. Advanced-level results have been above average in recent years. The current level of attainment is broadly average. The new accommodation presents very good facilities for advanced musical studies. Access to ICT, an excellent new piano and extensive practice spaces provide a strong incentive to work. Students are very appreciative of the facilities. Software specifically concerned with composition is still required.

334. Students make steady progress in their work. Teaching is good overall and takes students forward in their studies effectively. Students are, for example, helped to analyse music aurally – to understand what they are listening to and to recognise styles and structural features. It is, however, a slow process, because students do not have a strong musical repertoire. In answering questions that require careful listening, their responses are often not spontaneous and require much teacher help and encouragement. Students do not give enough time to the essential task of listening.

335. The present music students include some very accomplished instrumentalists. They show a good interest in their work and are eager to absorb whatever is presented to them. Apart from their instrumental work, however, they depend too much upon their teacher. They require more confidence and independence to express their knowledge, to write well-constructed essays and to answer analytical questions in depth. Students' work is well marked by staff and contains many constructive comments. The department plans to introduce a music technology course in Autumn 2004.

Drama

Provision in drama is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching of the courses is good.
- Both the AS and A2 courses are well organised and managed.
- Students make good progress in the subject.
- Facilities for the subject are poor.

Commentary

336. Twenty-two students currently study drama at either AS or A2 level. The standard of work of most students is in line with course requirements. Most students achieve well. In 2003, all seven students who took the AS-level examination passed: all grades were in the range C to E.

337. In the Year 12 class, the teacher's excellent subject knowledge helped students to decide their priorities in preparing their performance of one play (*Bouncers*, *A Taste of Honey* or *Look Back in Anger*). One group of students experimented creatively with lighting and discussed the ways in which it emphasised the movement of characters. Later, the same group teased out the interrelationships between movement and gesture, as they considered their perceptions of the two characters, Jo and Helen. High expectations are reflected in the analytical discussions that occur during lessons. In another class, the students preparing *Bouncers* discussed thoughtfully how characterisation can be created, focusing on how Eric introduces Maureen and the importance of the use of voice.

338. As a result of the excellent, gentle probing of their teacher, students in the Year 13 class prepared carefully for a performance of Tennessee Williams's play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

They held a sustained, detailed discussion of their perceptions of Blanche as she changes into her dress before dinner. So intense was the discussion that other students, preparing a different play, were drawn into it. Together, they considered how the words "Excuse me, while I slip on my pretty new dress" might be said. Running through the words repeatedly and focusing intensely on perceptions of the character, students made great gains in interpretation, as they reflected on timing, pace, facial expression and silence.

339. Teaching is always good, drawing on both theoretical understanding and practical experience to guide lessons. Well-planned lessons enable students to develop their critical awareness and refine their dramatic techniques and skills. Students concentrate well. Many are intensely enthusiastic about the subject.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

340. There was no major focus in this domain, but PE was sampled. Courses in PE now run at both AS and A2 levels: the first group of students to complete the A2 course will take the examination in 2004. The number of students on the courses is still small, but the potential recruitment for next year is much higher.

341. Two lessons were seen. In one, theoretical principles were studied and related well to a top-level basketball match, whilst in the other the effects of training on the cardio-vascular system were well appreciated. Students' files indicate that work is in line with course requirements. Most marking of work is good and contains appropriate information to help pupils reflect on how to improve their standards further. Some coursework files are, however, poorly organised. Difficulties are caused for teachers, because theory lessons have to be taught in several different rooms. Some sixth formers express disappointment that, because of timetable constraints, they are unable to take part in PE.

BUSINESS

342. The main focus was on business studies, but economics was also sampled. Standards in economics at AS and A2 levels have been at least average over the last three years, although the number of students proceeding to A2 level has been small. Nevertheless, all eight students passed A2 level in 2003 and four gained A or B grades.

343. Students demonstrate a good knowledge of the subject. They discuss its major concepts well and apply them thoughtfully to new topics. Students in Year 13, for example, enthusiastically and purposefully debated proposals for combating poverty and presented them cogently in a plenary session at the end of the lesson. Year 12 students, working in pairs, showed above average knowledge of recent economic events – as, for instance, about inflation and its causes. Teachers in both lessons showed excellent subject knowledge and were careful to put the themes of the lessons in the context of current political decisions.

344. Teachers extend students' understanding through clear questioning, whilst students are confident at asking their own questions. Lessons are well structured, but flexible enough to allow individual students to develop their knowledge, record new information and link it back to previous work. Both their oral work and the best written work are above average. Teachers provide clear marking schemes and suitable feedback for the frequent tests and essays. Despite occasional misunderstanding of terminology in Year 12 written assignments, work is generally well structured and accurate. Data and graphical questions are handled competently.

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' overall attainment is above average. Their achievement is invariably good.
- The 2003 GCE results were well above average.
- Lessons are suitably brisk and challenging. Most students respond confidently and maturely.
- Links with other social sciences are light.
- Some school resources require enhancement and relocation.

345. The overall attainment of AS and A2 students is well above average. Virtually all 60 students passed their A-level studies in 2003. The proportion gaining the highest A or B grades was double the national average. Two-thirds of the 21 students taking A2 level in 2003 gained grades A or B – a fine achievement.

346. Current attainment is above average. Both oral and written work shows a good understanding of the work being studied and a high standard of presentation, with few errors. In Year 12, students take about half a term to adjust to the required standard. In lessons, they draw well on their own experience as well as the information provided systematically by their teachers. By Year 13, the standard of much of the work is above average. In both years, students work conscientiously and independently and use ICT resources intelligently.

347. Teaching is good overall. The pace is usually brisk. Students are challenged to develop their ideas through incisive questions and suitable opportunities for discussion. The atmosphere is relaxed, but well focused on the task in hand. The overall structure of lessons ensures that students have clear objectives and review their progress regularly. Year 12 students have the confidence to ask questions and challenge assumptions – as when they halted a video recording about Herzberg to debate his beliefs on worker motivation. A parallel group used websites efficiently to find out about theories of motivation and fed back clearly to others on their initial findings. Teachers have the confidence and flexibility to respond to students' comments, whilst ensuring that lesson objectives are met.

348. Learning is good. The style of lessons and teaching varies, but students respond equally well to all teachers. They are confident in responding to their teachers, using resources to gather information, and presenting information and analysis in a variety of formats. They cooperate well with one another and their teachers. Year 13 students shared information they had researched and went on to explain and discuss clearly the factors that might lead to the growth or retrenchment of firms. Year 12 are well on the way to this level of work – as when they worked in pairs to discuss the effects of under-utilisation of resources in a firm and checked this against the teacher's summary.

349. Leadership and management are good. Formal meeting time amongst the three teachers involved is readily supplemented by informal discussion. Schemes of work have been revised to meet the needs and abilities of students better. Course objectives and development tasks are clearly set out in the departmental handbook. There is regular monitoring of students' performance against their original targets.

350. Some imaginative activities enhance the department's work. A working lunch for students is led by a Year 13 student. Good use is made of employers, visits and external competitions to supplement classroom work. Peer-marking is being developed. Learning resources are generally adequate, but the department does not have a computer of its own. Links with related subjects vary, but are not conducted within an overall school strategy. The standards in the department have been sustained at a similar high level to what they were at the last inspection.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

Critical Thinking

Provision in critical thinking is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have good knowledge of the subject and the course.
- Students do not analyse material in sufficient depth.
- Some students do not see clearly why they are taking this course.
- Students help one another to learn.

Commentary

351. This is a new course and no public examination has yet been taken. It is taken by all students in Year 12 who study fewer than four AS-level courses. They are joined by other students from both Year 12 and 13 on a voluntary basis. Two lessons were able to be seen. The standards attained by students vary from above to below average, but are below average overall. This nevertheless represents satisfactory achievement for the students involved.

352. Most students discriminate satisfactorily between, for example, statements, proposals and arguments. Higher-attaining students assess the reliability of evidence and synthesise evidence to reach a logical conclusion. Some lower-attaining students do not always have a sufficient range of vocabulary to be able to express their ideas succinctly and precisely.

353. Teaching was satisfactory in one lesson and had very good features in the other. Students learn satisfactorily. Teachers have a good knowledge of the processes the course seeks to develop and a good understanding of how students will be assessed. They draw upon a wide and appropriate range of examples.

354. Students realised the power of the skills they were developing, when watching a short scene in the jury room from the film *Twelve Angry Men*. Many of the examples seen remain topical and therefore more relevant and appealing to students. Teaching does not, however, always seek to explore the depths of argument, although good breadth is achieved. On occasions, the learning from discussion is reduced, because the teacher takes too strong a lead. This has the result that students lose the opportunity to explore fully the consequences of their own thinking.

355. Teachers help substantially to develop students' powers of analysis – as, for example, by providing a grid for students to assess the credibility of evidence in a case of alleged cheating during a rock-climbing competition. Expectations are not always sufficiently clear – as, for example, when students do not know how long they have available for a particular exercise.

356. Students support one another well in groups or pairs. They listen attentively to one another. They often help to develop a line of argument being proposed by someone else, but rarely do they offer constructive, negative criticism. The leadership and management of the course are sound. The course runs smoothly. Insufficient thought, however, has been given to the implications of requiring certain students to take this course, especially when they would not voluntarily choose to do so.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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