

### **Addendum to the report**

An error was made in the report that was originally published. On page 8, the first page of the sixth form summary, the emboldened judgement for Leisure and Recreation now reads 'good' rather than 'satisfactory'.

## **INSPECTION REPORT**

### **THE AMERSHAM SCHOOL**

Amersham, Bucks

LEA area: Buckinghamshire

Unique reference number: 110509

Headteacher: John Walton

Lead inspector: Graham Preston

Dates of inspection: 29<sup>th</sup> March - 1<sup>st</sup> April 2004

Inspection number: 262793

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



© Crown copyright 2004

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

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

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Modern (non-selective)
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	844

School address:	Stanley Hill Amersham Buckinghamshire
Postcode:	HP7 9HH

Telephone number:	01494 726562
Fax number:	01494 434181

Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Erica Elson

Date of previous inspection:	23 <sup>rd</sup> May 2002
------------------------------	---------------------------

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The Amersham School is an 11-18 modern school and is one of twenty-one such upper schools in the wholly selective secondary education system of Buckinghamshire. It provides for pupils from the Amersham area and its intake mostly consists of white British pupils from average and above average socio-economic backgrounds. In that area, around 30 per cent of pupils go to grammar schools and The Amersham School largely provides for the remainder. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is about average and there are very few who are at an early stage of learning English. Overall standards on entry are below national average, though with strengths in mathematics and science. The school has developing links with local industry reflected in its participation in Young Enterprise and its application to be a business and enterprise specialist school. It is an 'Investors in People' accredited centre, has an Artsmark silver award and recently received a Schools Achievement Award for its improved standards.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1990	Graham Preston	Lead inspector	Leisure and recreation 16-19, business studies 11-16
32670	Graham Saltmarsh	Lay inspector	
28199	Peter Lawley	Team inspector	English 11-19, English as an additional language
33139	Mark Wilson	Team inspector	Mathematics 11-19
3242	Mike Newman	Team inspector	Science 11-16
32590	Roger Fenwick	Team inspector	Design and technology 11-16
2501	Raye Allison-Smith	Team inspector	Art and design 11-19
31238	Gordon Clubb	Team inspector	
27226	Richard Cribb	Team inspector	History 11-16
18663	Phil Burchell	Team inspector	Geography 11-16, sixth form co-ordinator
31682	Graeme Rudland	Team inspector	Music 11-16
31192	John Stewart	Team inspector	Physical education 11-16
22928	Denise Chaplin	Team inspector	Religious education 11-16,
30800	Betty Colley	Team inspector	Sociology 16-19, Special educational needs
32231	Adrian Lyons	Team inspector	Information and communication technology 11-16
30433	Chris Corp	Team inspector	Biology 16-19
33324	Jo Fullwood	Team inspector	French 11-19, German 11-16
30973	Geoff Hancock	Team inspector	
24453	Gordon Jackson	Team inspector	Citizenship 11-16

The inspection contractor was:

**e-Qualitas Limited**

Langshaw  
Pastens Road  
Limpsfield Chart  
Oxted  
Surrey  
RH8 0RE

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

## REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS</b>	
<b>STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS</b>	<b>10</b>
Standards achieved in subjects and courses	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
<b>QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL</b>	<b>16</b>
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
<b>LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4</b>	
<b>SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM</b>	
<b>PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS</b>	<b>49</b>

## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**Amersham is a good school that has continued to improve under the very good new leadership.** The school focus on improved practice is further raising academic standards and enabling students to achieve well. The school compares favourably with similar non-selective schools and provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are

- The very positive leadership of the headteacher who, with the staff, has sustained the school's momentum for improvement
- Good teaching and support that enables pupils to make good progress and achieve well in most of their subjects
- Very good behaviour and co-operative attitudes of most pupils reflected in their above-average attendance and punctuality
- A broadening and relevant curriculum for pupils and students at GCSE and the sixth form
- Unsatisfactory implementation of the requirements for citizenship education, religious education and collective worship
- A lack of information and communication technology (ICT) use in most subject areas because of insufficient access to resources

Barriers to further school improvement are

- Lack of good specialist teachers adversely affects provision in music and ICT
- Financial constraints that slow the implementation of school improvement

**The school has made good improvement since the 2002 inspection report.** English standards are significantly better, while the strength in mathematics has been sustained. Standards have continued to improve, particularly in Years 7-9. This is principally because of the better teaching and learning.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

**Pupils attend regularly, demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviour and achieve well.**

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

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

Pupils enter the school with below-average standards and make good progress in most subjects, including mathematics, science and English, to reach national average standards at the end of Year 9. Those with special educational needs and the few at an early stage of learning English, also do well. Pupils sustain their good progress at GCSE level and their average points scores are broadly similar to those of all schools nationally. Pupils perform much better than those in similar modern schools, reflected in the table above. Sixth form results are below national average but standards are improving and most students achieve well. Attitudes and behaviour are good and pupils **progress well** in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The overall quality of education, including teaching, is good.**

Pupils are well supported, particularly by the heads of year. The range of sixth form courses is wide, enabling students to combine academic and vocational courses. The breadth and choice has been extended well to Years 10-11 though the school has some weaknesses in religious education and has not fully implemented citizenship education. Extra-curricular activities are sufficient and include sport and various visits and trips though these opportunities have been curtailed by staffing problems in music and drama. The strong and developing school ethos supports the good social and moral development of pupils and staff use assemblies effectively to develop spiritual awareness. Teaching in two of every three lessons is good or better. Teaching strengths are in specialist knowledge, planning and learning support. Sixth form teaching is strongest though the school's work in developing good practice in Years 7-9 and has improved the teaching of those younger pupils. There is a small but significant amount of unsatisfactory teaching, often because of the need to use temporary and non-specialist teachers in a few subjects such as music and ICT.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Overall leadership and management are good but governance is currently unsatisfactory.**

The recently appointed headteacher is very good and is well supported by senior and middle managers. The developing management systems are satisfactory overall with key strengths in financial management and teaching-improvement strategies. The positive and supportive governors now work closely with the headteacher and senior staff and have an improved understanding of the school. However, the governance of the school is unsatisfactory while the school has statutory breaches in citizenship, religious education and provision for collective worship.

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

Parents value the new school leadership and committed teachers and believe their children are well cared for and supported. They appreciate the good and improved links with the school through, for example, the newsletter. However, some believe, with some justification, that the quality and frequency of homework are patchy. Pupils and sixth form students are positive about the school and a number actively participate in the school council.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

The most important things the school should do to improve are

- Identify and recruit good specialist teachers or potentially good trainees and, as a matter of urgency, improve teaching provision for music
- Substantially increase the level of computer facilities and ensure subjects make sufficient use of ICT by relevant staff training
- Develop a more unified school improvement plan and establish effective monitoring and evaluation procedures for its different aspects
- Build on the good work being done to establish assessment and target setting by improving pupils understanding of how they can improve their work and reach higher standards
- Continue efforts to offset the significant shortfall in funding by, for example, expanding the sixth form to establish an even more cost effective provision, and continue efforts to become a specialist business and enterprise school

and, to meet statutory requirements

- More effectively implement the citizenship curriculum and procedures for its assessment in Years 7-9
- More explicitly identify and deliver a distinct religious education component within the GCSE world studies course and provide fully for religious education in the sixth form
- Build on the good work in assemblies by ensuring the collective worship requirement is met in tutorial sessions



## THE SIXTH FORM AT THE AMERSHAM SCHOOL

### OVERALL EVALUATION

The sixth form is smaller than average with around 140 students but is steadily increasing.

**The sixth form provision is both good and cost effective.** Students attain results that are below the national average but they achieve well in relation to their standards on entry. The sixth form caters well for its students through a good range of courses that include GCE Advanced and Advanced Vocational courses as well as GNVQ and the Community Sports' Leader Award. It also provides a satisfactory environment for students' personal and social development. Teaching in the sixth form is good and students learn effectively as a result.

The main strengths and weaknesses are

- Standards are generally below the national average, but there is good achievement in most subjects, and very good achievement in some
- The sixth form is open to all students and provides a good range of academic and practically based subjects
- Teaching is well planned, appropriately challenging and ensures students learn well
- There is a very high level of student satisfaction and attitudes to study are very good
- The induction programme and on-going guidance and support are good. Even so, there is some course mismatch with a significant number of students not completing their chosen courses
- The school does not fully meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus in respect of the provision of religious education

### 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	<b>English: Satisfactory.</b> Teachers' good subject knowledge and sound teaching combined with excellent student attitudes, lead to satisfactory standards and achievement. <b>French: Good.</b> Teacher expertise and specialist knowledge is very good, leading to plenty of experience of the target language. Students make satisfactory progress at this early stage of the first year of the course.
Mathematics	<b>Mathematics: Good.</b> Teaching and learning are good and students achieve well as a result.
Science	<b>Biology: Very Good.</b> Students and teachers share very good relationships and make very good progress.
Business	<b>Business: Good.</b> Students reach national average representing good achievement. Teaching relates business concepts well to students' own experiences, leading to good learning.
Sociology	<b>Sociology: Good.</b> Good planning by teachers enables students to discuss and research well to develop a good understanding of the topics covered.
Art and Design	<b>Art and Design: Good.</b> Students achieve well because teachers provide very good support and monitor their work rigorously. Teaching, learning, leadership and management are all good.
Leisure and Recreation	<b>Leisure and Recreation: Good.</b> Well-informed teaching led to students gaining a satisfactory understanding of a range of issues surrounding human resource management in the sampled lesson.

*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'.*

A number of subjects were sampled during the inspection:

- **Photography:** Students make considerable progress and reach national average standards because of good teaching and varied opportunities
- **ICT:** Teaching was satisfactory, students' work was thorough and detailed and achievement good in Year 13
- **Chemistry:** Students were making very good progress and responded well to the teacher who had high expectations of them
- **Design and technology:** Students achieved appropriately in reaching national average standards graphic product design. They benefited from satisfactory teaching but learning was inhibited by limited resources
- **History and geography:** Lessons were very good in terms of challenge and careful planning that resulted in very positive student attitudes and progress
- **GNVQ Intermediate business:** Students were achieving well and appreciated the flexibility of the course
- **Psychology:** Students were making sound progress though were reluctant to discuss in what was a well planned and taught lesson
- **Media studies:** The lesson was well taught and students were making good progress
- **Sixth form enrichment:** As part of the programme, students can pursue the Duke of Edinburgh award and in the lesson seen they did so enthusiastically

### **Advice, Guidance and Support**

Sixth form managers provide good quality support and guidance, including that for university entrance. Consequently, students are well prepared for their course requirements though some are overambitious in the courses chosen. Few students leave prematurely but a significant number do not complete courses where the challenge is too great. There are a good number of extra-curricular opportunities; community links to support learning and encourage participation are very good.

### **Leadership and Management**

The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Effective leadership has created a positive ethos for learning. The management of the student monitoring and review process is very good, though focus on raising the achievement of the sixth form as a whole is less effective. Day-to-day administration is well managed.

### **Students' Views of the Sixth Form**

Students are very positive about the sixth form, the range of subjects offered, the quality of teaching and the level of support they receive. These strengths are in line with inspectors' judgements during the period of the inspection.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

#### Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Pupils make **good** progress in most of their subjects and **achieve well** because of the good school provision. Standards are broadly in line with national average and in some curriculum areas the pupils exceed national averages at GCSE level.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE are in line with all schools nationally, and as a secondary modern school, it is in the top quarter of all such schools in terms of the good and often very good achievement of its pupils
- Standards in English have significantly improved since the last inspection, while the other core subjects of mathematics and science have sustained their high standards against similar schools
- High proportions of pupils successfully complete their chosen GCSE courses
- Pupils' achievement is unsatisfactory in music, ICT in Years 7-9 and religious education in Years 10-11. Reasons include a lack of competent specialist teaching, limited ICT resources and ineffective curriculum planning
- Standards in the sixth form are improving and students achieve well in relation to their prior GCSE attainment

#### Commentary

1. The school provides for the 70 per cent of pupils not selected for local grammar schools and so standards on entry are below the national average for all-ability schools. However, the school intake is drawn from an area that is relatively favoured socially and economically, and this has two consequences. First, the proportion of pupils with special educational needs is noticeably smaller and so many have sound basic skills. Secondly, while the school has far fewer exceptionally able students, there is still a considerable number with strengths in many subject areas, including science and mathematics.

2. Pupils are inducted into a school that actively promotes positive self-esteem and has good and improving provision. The effect of this is that, by the end of Year 9, pupils make good progress and achieve standards in the three core subjects that are at least in line with all schools nationally. Standards in English, in particular, have improved considerably since the last inspection as shown in the table below.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	34.3 (32.7)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	35.5 (35.3)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	33.7 (33.5)	33.6 (33.3)

*There were 144 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

3. Compared with similar schools, that is other secondary modern schools nationally, standards in the core subjects at the end of Year 9 are high. The school also compares very favourably with other secondary modern schools in Buckinghamshire, particularly in mathematics. This again reflects both the stronger-than-average intake for a modern school and the good teaching the pupils receive.

4. Standards seen in the inspection broadly reflect recent end of Year 9 results. English standards are in line with those nationally and very much better than those for similar schools.

Pupils can discuss and contribute ideas clearly, most can write competently in a variety of forms even though spelling is less secure. All of this reflects good achievement in different aspects of literacy.

5. Mathematics has been strong in the school for some time. Pupils make very good progress in handling data in Years 7-9 and standards in Year 9 are line with those for all schools nationally and very much better for similar schools. Numeracy skills are above average even though skills development is not a particular focus in many subjects. Science lessons provide evidence of stronger number work.

6. In science lessons the pupils make good progress and show secure knowledge and skills in line with that nationally for all schools. In those lessons, there is good evidence of independent learning and effective use of ICT, albeit mostly at home.

7. Despite some effective independent computer use by pupils and satisfactory GCSE teaching, ICT is an area of weakness throughout the school. It is not well taught by the non-specialists who provide it in Years 7-9 and pupils have limited access to facilities in other subjects and so pupils' progress and subsequent achievement are unsatisfactory.

8. Progress in other subjects in Years 7-9 is generally good, with a number of exceptions such as music and citizenship. Pupils come to the school with clearly below-average standards in almost all other subjects. In part this reflects less focus on some subject areas in primary schools but more obviously because of the selection system. The school emphasis on using the Key Stage 3 National Strategy to improve teaching and learning is clearly working and pupils are reaching standards in line with national expectations. Achievement in music is unsatisfactory and standards are below expectations because of ineffective non-specialist teaching.

9. At GCSE level, pupils reach standards in line with those nationally for pupils in all-ability schools. The table below shows that half of all pupils gain the national benchmark of five grades A\*-C and have a GCSE average points score that is a little better than that nationally. Compared with other secondary modern schools nationally, it is in the top fifth of all such schools. A positive feature is the high completion rate for all pupils. The school has its share of more challenging and less committed pupils but staff effort ensures 98 percent of all pupils leave with qualifications. The rate of pupil progress in Years 10-11 indicated in the 2003 results is not as impressive as in Years 7-9 but is still good, even though the school believes it can do rather better.

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

	School results	National results
age of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	50 (50)	52 (50)
age of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	96 (96)	91 (91)
age of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	98 (97)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	35.4 (34.7)	35.8 (34.7)

*There were 133 pupils in the year group. The ages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

10. The inspection of lessons and work generally indicates that the school is improving on recent results in most subjects. In some, such as mathematics, business studies, French and design and technology, pupils are working at standards above national average. In most GCSE courses pupils are achieving well, that is, better than might be expected based on their standards on entry to the school. In some subjects such as English and art and design this reflects considerable improvement in the quality of provision. Standards are noticeably stronger at GCSE level in ICT and French, where pupils specifically chose the course and benefited from specialist teaching. However, the staffing problems in music and lack of identified provision for RE result in unsatisfactory progress in those areas.

11. Girls enter the school with better prior attainment and tend to do better than the boys in most subjects including English and mathematics. Even so, both genders achieve well and boys match girls' performance in some subjects such as science and geography and do better in design and technology, particularly at GCSE.

12. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and achieve well when their starting scores in Year 7 are compared with their GCSE results. Pupils receive good support in lessons and well-focused help in support lessons and lunchtime sessions.

13. A small number of pupils using English as an additional language are mainly at advanced stages and achieve in line with others. Those individuals at the early stages of learning English learn well because additional staff in classrooms give well-targeted assistance by prompting and giving explanations as they work in class.

14. Given the local selective system, the overall standards in the school are constrained by the relatively fewer higher-attaining and designated gifted and talented pupils. Some subjects such as mathematics and science do well to get pupils to the higher National Curriculum levels in earlier years. At GCSE it is more challenging and even in the stronger subjects including English and business studies, those gaining the highest grades are fewer than average. Even so, the pupils the school has identified as gifted and talented achieve well in most subjects. The targeting of more-able students is particularly good in English, science, religious education, drama and physical education. In these and other subjects, high expectations and good opportunities are helping to raise standards and the achievement of high-attaining pupils, even if progress is not always monitored as rigorously as it might be.

### **Sixth form**

15. The 2003 results were a considerable improvement on the previous year, but remain below the national average A-E pass rate. Passes at higher grades were well below average. Girls significantly outperform boys in gaining higher grades. Average point scores of girls were below average, while boys' were well below average.

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

	School results	National results
age of entries gaining A-E grades	78.0 (83.4)	89.4 (92.6)
age of entries gaining A-B grades	19.5 (7.1)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per student	173.5 (155.5)	258.2 (263.3)

*There were 48 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

16. In 2003, the A Level results were below the national average. The average point score per candidate rose by 18 points, but was well below the national average. The average point score per subject for female students rose in 2003, but boys remained broadly the same.

17. In 2003, the proportion of students who attained A or B grades at A level was nearly three times more than in the previous year, but the proportion of students gaining grades A-E fell slightly, which was similar to the fall in the national average. Nevertheless, nine subjects had a 100 percent pass rate. The 2003 A Level results in English literature, art and design and sociology were significantly better than other subjects, taking the ability of students into consideration. In 2002, English literature and sociology had again been the strongest subjects at A Level, while at VCE the most successful were business and leisure and recreation. Buckinghamshire LEA analysis shows that Amersham was the third most successful of nineteen schools in adding value to its students. Given that students enter the sixth form well below average, and there are relatively few high attainers, the school's results represent good achievement overall.

18. In lessons observed and in the samples of work scrutinized during the inspection, standards were in line with the national average. Both male and female students were achieving better than expected in most subjects, and much better in biology, chemistry, history, geography and physical education.

19. Standards in mathematics are above average. Some subjects make satisfactory use of mathematics, as in art and geography, but opportunities for skill development are limited in this area. Literacy skills are well supported and so students continue to make progress.

20. Students are competent independent users of ICT, particularly for research and presentation of homework and coursework. However, use by subjects across the curriculum is unsatisfactory.

21. There are six students with special educational needs (SEN) in the sixth form and four of these have statements of need. Careful consideration is given to the course of study adopted by students with special educational needs. These students receive very good support from teacher assistants to help them achieve well.

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

Attitudes are **good**, and behaviour across the school, including the sixth form, is **very good**. Attendance is better than the national average. Pupils progress **well** in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Positive attitudes translate to good attendance and punctuality across the school
- Behaviour and attitudes in lessons and around the school are very good and courtesy, care and consideration to others is very much in evidence
- Personal development is good and is woven into the positive ethos of the school
- Relationships between pupils and staff are good
- Provision of personal, health and social education (PHSE)/Citizenship is not consistent across the entire school

### **Commentary**

22. Attendance and punctuality across the whole school is good. The school is above the national median and is improving year on year.

#### ***Attendance in the latest complete reporting year 2003***

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data:	7.3%	School data:	0.5%
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.*

23. Attitudes in the main school are good and behaviour is very good. Pupils are very positive, enjoy coming to school and are absorbed in their tasks. This remains consistent throughout the school day.

24. SEN pupils have positive attitudes and a willingness to work hard. Those pupils who receive additional specialist help, cope very well with the one-to-one teaching support. They are able to contribute to lessons and clearly benefit from the support they receive.

25. Many of the pupils participate in the good range of extra-curricular activities on offer to them. These include after school clubs run by the art, ICT and drama departments and there are some opportunities for musical activities. Pupils are appreciative of the extra support available to them in revision for academic subjects. There are regular weekly practices and matches for a wide range of

sports including football, rugby, netball, basketball and hockey. In the summer term there is a weekly tennis club for all pupils. The school involves itself in numerous academic and sporting visits and competitions. As examples there are language group visits to France and Germany and various geography field trips in the United Kingdom. There are, or have been, English, drama, and music visits to both London and regional theatres for all students. This has culminated with the involvement of the drama department in a national competition hosted by The National Theatre and Shell Connexions performing both at the school and at The Theatre Royal, Bath in front of a large audience. The school intends to enter the competition again during this academic year.

26. There is a noticeable absence of any signs of bullying in the school. Pupils, parents and staff all agree that any form of bullying will not be tolerated and any suggestion of any such behaviour is immediately addressed. Pupils are mutually supportive and show care and concern towards each other. They feel very confident in being able to draw any instance of inappropriate behaviour to the attention of staff if needs be. The school has an effective and straightforward policy in this regard and this is respected across the whole school community.

27. The positive attitudes and behaviour of pupils is a significant strength of community life in the school. Consequently lapses are comparatively few and such breakdowns in behaviour are promptly and effectively addressed by the school. The school goes to great lengths to investigate the causes and effects of inappropriate behaviour and approaches these issues with the pupil concerned. Many incidents are dealt with by dialogue and counselling, with an input from parents if deemed necessary.

28. Detentions are used to reinforce the schools high expectations of pupils. There have been no permanent exclusions from the school in the last two years and the 37 fixed term exclusions in the last academic year reflects the school's attitude towards inappropriate behaviour as and when it occurs.

#### ***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	725	35	
White-Irish	6		
White-any other White background	24		
Mixed-White and Black Caribbean	5		
Mixed-White and Black African	3		
Mixed-White and Asian	7		
Mixed-any other mixed background	9		
Asian or Asian British-Indian	4		
Asian or Asian British-Pakistani	17		
Asian or Asian British-any other Asian background	4	2	
Black or Black British-Caribbean	5		
Black or Black British-African	2		
Black or Black British-any other Black background	1		
Chinese	5		
Any other ethnic group	3		

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

29. Personal development is good and there are some strong features of overall social development and understanding of others. Personal, social and health education is both co-ordinated and woven into the overall caring ethos of the school. It is generally in evidence across the

curriculum, not just in the World Studies programme but in other subjects, especially art and drama. Additional opportunities for PHSE teaching and course work are taken effectively during form time and assemblies. Pupils respond well to these experiences and this is reflected in their good personal and social development. Despite this there are occasional lost opportunities to expand and co-ordinate some PHSE and citizenship topics across the whole school, but this is already being addressed by the key staff concerned.

30. Spiritual and cultural development are good. This is a result of the strong school focus on these aspects. Weekly themes and thoughts are discussed at assembly and during form time. The curriculum ensures a sound understanding of Christianity and other world religions. Various trips and activities support students' appreciation of other people's beliefs and traditions. The wider curriculum is also very effectively utilised to support learning in a multi-cultural society. Examples seen during the inspection included pupils in a music lesson comparing traditional African drum music with contemporary groups. An understanding of non-Western music often based on the resources available to make instruments was discussed by students. In design and technology some very good examples of cultural and moral issues were seen in lessons; North American, Asian and European influences are appreciated in the design of textiles and aspects of diet. Art is used as an effective vehicle to explore issues in society, for example the work of John Constable has been examined; the stylised English country scenes are explored with their relevance today and what these past images say to us about life then and now. Global issues of recycling and pollution are frequently discussed in lessons.

### **Sixth Form**

31. Attendance and punctuality are good. Attitudes are good in the sixth form and behaviour is very good and sometimes excellent. Students are enthusiastic and positive about their life in school and respond to and enjoy being treated as young adults by the staff.

32. Students appreciate the further education and careers advice they receive and the opportunities to make visits to assist in decisions for their future life. There is a good range of enrichment activities on offer. Students show good attitudes towards learning and are also anxious to contribute to academic life in the school often by supporting younger pupils with specific learning difficulties.

33. Personal development in the sixth form is good. There is a comprehensive programme of events and activities coupled with outside speakers and various visits to broaden careers options. Students benefit from good leadership and care from the head of sixth form and other key staff. The result is that a good number involve themselves as mentors and give support to outside learning initiatives for the community. Sixth form members also involve themselves in sports coaching at local primary schools by attaining a specific qualification enabling them to train young children.



## QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The overall quality of education in the school is **good**. The school is firmly committed to raising standards and improving pupil self esteem. Much emphasis has been placed on improving teaching and learning with some success. The curriculum is satisfactory overall with some valuable and developing breadth to meet the needs of all pupils and sixth form students, but staffing problems and financial constraints have resulted in some weaknesses in this area. The level of care and support is greatly valued by pupils and students and a considerable number are actively involved in the life of the school.

### Teaching and learning

Teaching is good overall, which is a considerable improvement since the last inspection, although staffing problems have resulted in some unsatisfactory teaching in a few subjects. The good teaching enables pupils and sixth form students to learn well. Assessment practice is sound and improving.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Effective lesson planning and classroom organisation is evident in most subjects in part as a response to the National Key Stage 3 Strategy
- Specialist teachers are well informed , particularly those who contribute to the sixth form courses
- The lack of specialist staff has resulted in considerable weaknesses in the teaching of music and ICT
- Additional learning support enables pupils with special educational needs to make good progress
- Better assessment systems are being developed but setting of homework and use of assessment to improve pupil learning are both used inconsistently by different subjects

### Commentary

34. The school has made a concerted effort to improve the quality of teaching and learning and in particular has used the National Key Stage 3 Strategy to improve lesson planning and develop more varied teaching strategies. This has been generally successful particularly in Years 7-9. As indicated in the table below, well over nine out of ten lessons seen were satisfactory or better with nearly two thirds good or better. There was considerable consistency in the amount of good teaching across most subjects.

#### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 146 lessons*

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2 (1%)	30 (21%)	60 (42%)	46 (31%)	8 (5%)	0	0

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

35. Effective planning is evident in most lessons where there is an emphasis on three or more parts that provide variety and sustain good pace to learning. Even where teaching was unsatisfactory as in the case of music, the lessons were well prepared. In modern foreign languages lessons are planned and delivered in logical steps so that pupils listen, speak, read and write in the target language. English lesson planning also uses a variety of approaches to sustain pupils' interest and library lessons are well organised to develop pupils' reading skills for pleasure. Mathematics teachers also endeavour to use variety through the 'three part lesson', mostly with success, though teachers occasionally run out of time to use the final plenary session to reinforce learning.

36. Most teachers are specialists and use their knowledge well to stimulate pupil interest and develop understanding and skills. This is particularly so in GCSE classes where the stronger teachers provide greater intellectual challenge and guide pupils well in producing coursework and

preparing for examination. The specialist RE teaching in Years 7-9 is very well informed, leading to some exciting teaching that stimulates considerable pupil response.

37. In most lessons, teachers maintain good relationships with pupils, who in the greater majority of cases have a positive attitude to learning. In the best lessons, pupils take an active part by answering questions and joining in discussion. In some subjects such as science, pupils are encouraged to work with greater independence, with some success.

38. Where teaching was seen to be unsatisfactory it was often because of wider problems the school faces in terms of staffing and curriculum. For example, religious education is well taught in Years 7-9 where it benefits from talented specialist teachers. In contrast, the lack of a specific religious education perspective in the world studies course as taught by largely non-specialists makes provision unsatisfactory. In ICT it is the use of non-specialists, who have had limited training, to teach the core lessons in Years 7-9 that results in insufficient challenge and unsatisfactory pupil progress. It is the GCSE ICT that benefits from specialist teaching though ICT use is lacking in the teaching of most other subjects because of currently limited resources. While the one-to-one instrument teaching by outside specialist musicians is fine, the music teaching is generally poor. Again this is because of the lack of a specialist and in spite of the school's effort to provide outside advisory support.

39. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream classes is good because of the support they receive and because teachers know them well and plan to meet their needs. Learning in lessons is well supported by the teaching assistants (TAs) who are effective because the joint planning ensures that their time is used appropriately. Teaching in the learning support unit (faculty of foundation studies) links well with individual education plans (IEPs) and teachers and teacher assistants work effectively with individual pupils. All pupils who have special educational needs have individual education plans. The targets in these plans are satisfactory. Teacher assistants note activities and behaviour they observe during lessons. These records, though useful, lack more detailed information about pupils' standards and targets. Documents and work seen in lessons show that most teachers judge pupils' achievements against their targets in class even though these are not always passed on effectively through review information.

40. Teachers generally mark books thoroughly though vary considerably in the guidance they give to pupils as to how they can improve their work. Some teachers, particularly in art, history and geography, set targets for pupils that are specifically designed to help raise the level of attainment. However, this approach is not used in all areas. Even when targets are set the teachers do not always follow them up in order to ensure pupils make progress. In many subjects pupils have little understanding of exactly what they need to do to improve. This is an issue for the school that has been identified and is seen as the next logical step in the ongoing development of an effective monitoring and assessment system.

41. The school has a clear homework policy and timetable though parents felt that teachers did not use the timetable consistently. The inspection found that while most teachers endeavour to set appropriate homework there is considerable variation in its timing and frequency.

42. A potentially effective whole school system of monitoring the progress of all pupils is being established. In this system the previous attainment of each pupil is used to produce realistic predicted grades that are known and used by all teachers and pupils. The standards attained by pupils in each subject are summarised in detail on two curriculum review days and with the annual written report. On occasion, the time in between these reviews is too long to enable staff and parents to respond promptly to any identified concerns. The school evaluates the data from national tests in a thorough manner and any issues identified and incorporated into the school improvement plan.

## Sixth form

43. The overall standard of teaching and learning in the sixth form is good with about 40 percent of lessons being very good and all teaching being at least satisfactory. Teachers plan and organise well and set clear objectives for their students. They use their good subject and teaching expertise to interest and engage students. Tasks are appropriate and often varied, and supported by good use of resources.

44. A key factor in the best lessons is the very good student attitudes, which enable teachers to use imaginative methods and to engage students in challenging and often enjoyable dialogues. Students make good, or very good, gains in lessons when the pace is brisk and they are provided with the structure to acquire new skills, knowledge and understanding. Where teaching is very good, as in biology, chemistry, history, geography and physical education, work is very well planned and teachers ensure that students think with a high level of analysis. In satisfactory lessons, teaching can lack 'sparkle', is sometimes not fully matched to all students' needs and relies too heavily on students' willingness to learn and work independently.

45. Teachers work well together and use a good range of activities and styles that generally suit students' different needs. Teachers know their students well and a very productive atmosphere of mutual trust and respect leads students to feel confident and well served by their teachers.

46. In most subject areas, homework is set regularly and well planned to build on and extend classroom learning. Assessment is used effectively to ensure that students know their strengths and can tackle weaknesses. Targets are clear and helpful.

47. Based on the student questionnaire and inspectors' discussions with students, it is clear that students consider that teaching is challenging and well suited to their individual needs. They particularly value the expertise of their teachers and their readiness to offer individual help and advice, both in and out of lesson time. They also appreciate the Enrichment Programme, which widens their experience in interesting and often practical ways.

## The curriculum

The overall quality of the curriculum is **satisfactory**, including opportunities for enrichment such as out of school activities. The quality and quantity of accommodation is **satisfactory** but resources, including ICT, are **unsatisfactory**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum is tailored to satisfy the needs of individual pupils and groups of pupils
- Statutory requirements are not met for citizenship, RE and collective worship
- Adopting the national strategy to improve teaching has raised achievement in many subjects including mathematics, science and English
- The provision for delivering ICT is unsatisfactory. There is also a lack of computers which is limiting achievement and reducing the curriculum content of some subjects
- Difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers has adversely affected some subject areas
- The sixth form curriculum is sufficiently broad and continues to develop with the growth of student numbers and is well supported by the teachers' subject knowledge

## Commentary

48. The provision for the National Curriculum requirements in citizenship in Years 7-9 and religious education in Years 10-11 is unsatisfactory. Pupils in year 7 only receive an hour for citizenship every two weeks and this is insufficient time to cover the required work. Students in Years 10-11 follow a world studies course that addresses a range of topics, but does not yet fulfil the requirements for religious education. In addition, the curriculum does not comply with the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship.

49. In other ways the curriculum has considerable strengths. The school uses innovative methods in an effort to tailor the curriculum to meet the needs of individual and groups of pupils. Examples of this include the work related project which is offered to pupils in Years 10-11. This involves pupils attending the local college for two hours a week and undertaking a number of challenges. These challenges vary from physical trials such as rock climbing to the use of computers to word process documents. Pupils speak with enthusiasm about their involvement with the project. This provision is good as it has motivated the pupils and raised achievement. This newly introduced alternative curriculum is effectively meeting the needs of previously disaffected and sometimes low attaining students. Pupils with special educational needs are helped to improve their literacy and numeracy skills in intensive courses in Years 7 in particular, but better use of ICT would assist this process. Courses generally build up self-esteem and develop leadership qualities. The local Connexions services are involved, from Year 9, in the placement of these pupils and representatives attend reviews to assist them in finding appropriate employment.

50. Opportunities for gifted and talented pupils are offered through curricular enhancement. For example, assessment leads to a cohort of students taking the statistics mathematics examination in Year 11 as well as the usual mathematics papers. Some subjects raise the interests and aspirations of more able students so that they extend their learning. For example, talented games players are put forward for County representation. The gifted and talented policy is in place, and in subjects pupils have been formally identified. Opportunities for these pupils are being developed satisfactorily.

51. The school has adopted the national strategy to improve teaching and learning and this has clearly improved the schemes of work of the core and other subjects. This work is raising levels of achievement in English, mathematics and science in Years 7-9.

52. Provision for learning outside the school day is satisfactory. Very good quality provision exists in English where a programme of work centred around the library promotes reading through a 'readathon', book club and visiting authors. There is good provision at lunchtime to help pupils with low levels of achievement develop their literacy skills. Geography fieldwork has been developed in Years 10-11 and there is good quality planning for the development of this work into Years 7-9.

53. The provision for sport is good and provides a wide range of opportunity. Extra curricular provision in the arts is satisfactory. There is good provision in drama and dance and pupils benefit from theatre trips and workshops. There are very few extra-curricular music groups although the very good partnership with the local music service enables those pupils who take instrumental lessons to attend their activities.

54. The school does not have sufficient computers to accommodate the full use of ICT across the curriculum. This particularly limits curriculum opportunities in design technology and music.

55. The match of teachers to the curriculum is satisfactory overall. However, difficulty in recruiting teachers has affected the delivery of the curriculum in certain subject areas. Design technology, ICT and music have experienced particular difficulties. Staffing difficulties limit the quality of provision caused by the need to use non-specialist teachers.

56. The quality of the school's accommodation is mixed. In some subject areas such as science, information technology and modern languages it is good. In geography the situation is very mixed. Subjects taught in suited accommodation are better able to enhance learning. Where there is no set base and teaching is scattered across a number of rooms around the school, as in some geography provision, the pupils' learning suffers.

## **Curriculum post 16**

57. Curricular opportunities are very broad and students can choose from a wide range of academic and vocational courses to meet their needs and aspirations. The good subject knowledge of the teachers is raising standards. Enrichment through extra-curricular provision is satisfactory. In physical education students are given responsibility as sports leaders and help to organise pupils

in the lower school. The students appreciate the efforts made by their teachers to provide them with worthwhile activities.

58. The school does not comply with the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for sixth form students.

### **Care, guidance and support**

Overall care and support is **good**. The school monitors and supports pupils **well** and has **good** links to external agencies that support its work. Pupils and students contribute well to school life. Sixth form induction is **good** and students' progress is well monitored and supported.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The pastoral system is strong and pupils and sixth form students generally value the good support and guidance they receive
- The induction for new pupils is good and prepares pupils for entry to Year 7 well. Sixth form induction is similarly strong
- Support and guidance through the tutorial system is inconsistent
- There are good procedures to ensure that pupils work in a healthy and safe environment
- Pupils undertake charity work that they organize themselves and sixth form students valuably support main school activities through their organisation of lower school year councils and inter-form sports competitions

### **Commentary**

59. The systems to ensure a safe and healthy working environment for pupils are well organised. Staff work hard to ensure that the school site is well managed. The policies and procedures are clear and these are regularly reviewed and updated. Very good work has developed risk assessment procedures, particularly in respect of school trips. Regular site checks and statutory checks of equipment are undertaken; however there are areas of the site that are in need of attention. Child protection procedures are well known by staff. Issues that arise are dealt with correctly and sensitively, because the appropriate training of staff has taken place. Arrangements for first aid are very thorough and a trained first-aider is available during the day in each area of the site. Clear systems exist to deal with accident or fire.

60. Pupils are generally well supported through the twice-termly review days. They know that they can turn to an adult whom they know well should the need arise. Good developments are now linking together the monitoring of academic and personal progress. In Year 10, the targeting of pupils who have difficulties settling into GCSE courses is very good. The induction procedures for new pupils entering Year 7 are good. Good use is made of the services of a wide range of external agencies that provide good support, care and guidance to pupils where this is required. Pupils are clear that the process for selecting their GCSE courses was good. The inconsistencies in delivering personal, social and health education and the 'thought for the day' arise because form tutors do not always carry out the procedures.

61. Pupils in Years 7-9 say that the year and school councils are important forums for them to put forward their ideas and opinions about school life. They feel that teachers generally listen to their ideas and they chose the drinking taps and benches paid for out of funds. The issue raised of unsatisfactory toilets is still a concern. However, although pupils can hold office with the council, opportunities for responsibilities are limited. Even so, individuals have shown considerable initiative in setting up charitable fund-raising activities, such as Blind Date.

62. Students say that their progress is well monitored on a regular basis, not only by their year leaders but also by the senior teaching staff. Individual support and guidance is good and advice on university application is thorough. Where tutors are very good, there is good focused use of tutorial time. This has been helpful in dealing with any issues that arise and students indicate that issues are dealt with well. The advice offered by Connexions advisers is very helpful and the majority have clear ideas about what they will do next in higher education, further studies or work. Where the tutors are less effective there are inconsistencies in applying the procedures. A small number of students miss out on aspects of their entitlement to support and monitoring.

63. Induction arrangements into the sixth form are good and students are well advised on careers and on opportunities in further and higher education. The school's desire to give each student every opportunity to succeed, in some instances, works against helping students make realistic course choices. Consequently, a number of students do not complete their chosen courses due to a discrepancy between their aspirations and their capacity for the work required. Few students actually drop out of the sixth form though a considerable number change courses, particularly in Year 12.

64. The wider range of opportunities for student participation considerably helps students' personal and social development. The school council plays a very important role in the life of the students. It seeks students' opinions, as was seen in the survey on school meals, and acts effectively to deal with issues such as the provision of drinking taps. The opportunity for students to take a more active role in working with younger students on the school site is an area that is developing well. This is particularly strong, as was seen in the junior sports leader group's organization of inter-form volleyball and netball competitions during the inspection. There are very good links with other institutions and the induction of students is good and thorough, including off-site training and team building sessions.

### **Partnership with parents, other schools and the community**

Overall school links, including that with parents, are **good**. Improved information contributes to good and developing home-school links. The **effective** links with local schools, college and the community enhance pupil learning.

### **Main strengths**

- Good information including reports is provided to parents
- Twice yearly academic review days and a parent-teacher consultation day give parents the opportunity to discuss issues of concern
- Good links exist with the local community and there are developing links with industry and business
- Good links with other schools and colleges in the area are used to support induction and subsequent transition to further education and the world of work
- A strong supportive parents association promotes the school effectively

### **Commentary**

65. Parents are generally positive about almost all aspects of the school. They like the induction procedures, the ethos of the school and the expectations of student standards. They approve of the range of options and extra activities on offer. A few parents felt that the school did not actively seek their views. There are a number of scheduled opportunities including two academic review days and a parent-teacher evening in each year where progress can be discussed. The school does not currently use questionnaires to seek the generic views of parents and carers, though is responsive to parental suggestions and enquiries.

66. The support for pupils with special educational needs illustrate the strength of different links. Pupils are identified early in Year 7 following initial testing in spelling and reading of the whole of the new intake and this is supported by the primary schools who pass on information to assist transition.

Statements of special needs and individual education plans are reviewed regularly and the school makes every effort to involve parents in the evaluation and target setting process. Targets are measurable, with dates by which they are to be achieved. Individual education plans provide enough guidance for teachers and information to parents.

67. The school itself communicates well to parents through a variety of means. These include a detailed and informative prospectus and comprehensive reports written in plain language. An informative and entertaining weekly newsletter keeps parents completely up to date with any issues and activities affecting life in the school.

68. The school enjoys good links with the local community and these are continuing to develop in a variety of ways. The school is actively made available for use by the local community such as Amersham Music Centre which uses the school during the evening and at the weekend. This is a good resource for local children and the school itself benefits by being able to use the extra musical instruments provided for the centre. The Young Bucks University also uses the site at weekends as a learning resource for local children.

69. Links with feeder primary and middle schools in the area are strong and there is an excellent relationship with secondary liaison teachers to ensure smooth transition of pupils.

70. There are plans to redevelop the school library later this year with new purpose built accommodation. Upon completion it is anticipated that this expanded resource will be made available to the wider community, particularly with The Young Bucks University and the development of a "reading buddies" scheme.

71. The school has good links with both local and the wider national business community. This is giving students the opportunity to make personal contacts with business people following visits and discussions. As well as large international locally based companies, the local Rotary Club support the school's participation in the *Young Enterprise* initiative by visiting the school and taking lessons with the students. As part of this project students have the opportunity to take a nationally accredited examination testing the knowledge and skills required to set up and run a business.

72. Amersham is home to one of the world's most prestigious life science corporations. This organisation is partnering the school's bid to become a specialist Business and Enterprise School. This is intended to enhance community education in the area and further strengthen links with national and local business.

73. The energetic Amersham School Association gives the school considerable financial support and has established positive links with the wider community. This has helped publicise the school's growing success. A wide variety of fund raising activities take place across the year. These include quiz nights, a craft fair, fashion evenings and other social events to which local residents are warmly welcomed. A large firework display was a major financial success for the school and attracts younger children and parents from all around the district.

### **Sixth Form**

74. The sixth form enthusiastically support local and national charities and students are active in devising various events and functions to raise funds. Examples in the last year include working with a local toy box charity for children in Latin America and a sixth form talent show, the proceeds of which went to various funds. The sixth form support various national charities through events and functions such as the Christmas charity party.

75. Community action includes the Community Sports Leaders Award by teaching and coaching younger children in a variety of sporting and recreational activities. Sixth form students also teach and support young children at the Young Bucks University which uses the school site on Saturday mornings.

76. Links with other schools and colleges are strong and sixth form students attend other local colleges for both academic and vocational studies.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall leadership and management are **good**. The headteacher provides **very good** leadership and is well supported by senior staff and the committed and better informed governing body. However, governance is currently **unsatisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The leadership of the headteacher, well supported by the senior management team, is providing inspiration for staff and pupils to work hard at improving achievement
- Delegated leadership is creating a positive climate of accountability for all staff
- The sixth form leadership creates a positive and inclusive ethos
- Very good financial management is now helping to provide a platform for improvement but the deficit situation is affecting strategic management
- Important statutory curriculum requirements are not met
- Management systems are sound but a number of systems such as assessment and overall monitoring and evaluation procedures are not fully embedded

### Commentary

77. The headteacher provides very good leadership and has developed a shared vision for success. He is supported by senior managers and governors. Staff and pupils are inspired by the headteacher. The ethos of the school is one where the emphasis is on a “can do” philosophy and hard work is the expected standard.

78. Middle managers, heads of faculty, heads of department and heads of year are becoming empowered with leadership responsibilities and staff are encouraged to participate in whole school decision making through the learning enhancement group.

79. The leadership and coordination of special educational needs is well developed but some management systems are not fully linked to improvement. For example, review feedback from subject departments does not concentrate sufficiently on standards and achievement or contribute as well as it could to target setting.

80. The governing body has recently been reconstituted into three main committees. The headteacher provides information regarding all school functions and governors are involving themselves more than previously, in the life and work of the school. Governors attend heads of department meetings, annual review days and school functions and provide evaluative information to the headteacher.

81. However, governors do not effectively monitor the curriculum. Statutory requirements for ICT, citizenship and religious education are not met. Although the school assemblies have an act of collective worship, form tutor time fails in this regard. While these breaches remain, the governance of the school is unsatisfactory despite the governors’ good work in other areas.

82. The school improvement plan in part derives from the previous OFSTED action plan and has appropriate priorities for school improvement. However, the monitoring and evaluation of achievement criteria and costs are not sufficiently explicit.

83. The recruitment of staff is difficult because of the cost of living in the Buckinghamshire area and because of the school’s recent history it has been unable to enter arrangements with student teachers or with the graduate and registered teacher programme. The school has had to rely on overseas trained teachers to fill vacancies. Although there is an induction programme for new staff, arrangements for staff joining mid-way through the year are delegated to departments and practices are inconsistent, as are systems for pupil assessment and data retrieval.



84. It is a credit to the head and his team that the standards are improving in the school. However, because of the constraints imposed through the budget deficit the headteacher and his senior team are required to teach far more than in comparable schools. This has the effect of reducing the time for carrying out monitoring and evaluation functions and for strategic planning.

85. The school is in a deficit budget because of previously unavoidable financial costs. Financial management is now very good. The business manager has introduced systems and procedures for all spending and the greater focus on developing leadership at middle management level is helping improve financial management across the school. Even so, the school has to repay substantial amounts to reduce its deficit which limits scope for greater investment and development. The governors' finance committee fulfils its monitoring role effectively. Funding in the main school and sixth form is used in a cost-effective way to give students an appropriate curriculum and good quality of teaching.

86. The school provides good value for money given that it has continued to improve in spite of financial constraints.

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

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	2663187	Balance from previous year	-139317
Total expenditure	2812335	Balance carried forward to the next	-288465
Expenditure per pupil	3295		

**Sixth form**

87. The sixth form leadership is effective and encourages in students a strong sense of identity, self-esteem and direction resulting from the school's commitment to equal opportunities and improved curriculum opportunities. Even so, the higher than average level of non completion rates in certain courses indicate that curriculum managers have not fully ensured students are well matched to those courses.

88. Administrative arrangements and systems work well. Students are well known as individuals by senior managers and tutors, and the monitoring and recording of their progress and academic and personal achievements are very thorough and effective.

89. In questionnaires and discussion with inspectors students were very positive about sixth form provision and life, and all said they would recommend the sixth form.

90. Funding is used effectively to give students a good curriculum and good quality of teaching. The sixth form size continues to grow and though still below that of the average sixth form it is sufficiently large to be cost effective. Staffing is sufficient to meet the demands of the curriculum though the lack of ICT access also affects the sixth form.

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

### **SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4**

#### **ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

##### **English**

Provision in English is **good**.

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

- Very good achievement and rising results by the end of Year 9 are a result of improved teaching methods since the last inspection
- Staff effectively promote younger pupils' wider reading for pleasure and information
- Good teaching of pupils with special educational needs is based on a mixture of sensitivity and high demands
- Marking practice is uneven in the guidance it provides to help pupils improve their work
- Staff do not share a consistent approach to improving pupils' spelling and punctuation

##### **Commentary**

91. English results are above average and rose in 2003. Girls did better than boys in national tests at end of Year 9, matching the national picture for the subject. Girls also were further above the national profile for their sex than boys. Pupils achieved very well in their first three years when compared with those in similar schools. Over several years, performance in English was similar to science, but below mathematics.

92. In GCSE English, the proportions gaining both higher grades (A\*-C) and overall results matched those found nationally. Results in English Literature were average, although the proportion gaining higher grades was below average.

93. By Year 9, standards are above average. Pupils answer questions and explain themselves clearly in class in response to well-focussed teacher questioning. They benefit from frequent opportunities to develop and share their own ideas in small discussion groups. Pupils read a range of fiction and write about it with obvious enjoyment, enthusiasm and a thorough grasp of key events and principal characters. Nevertheless, lower-attaining pupils tend to retell events without understanding and drawing out deeper themes. Higher and middle attaining pupils' writing is lively and uses paragraphs well to order its content to communicate clearly to the reader. Pupils write well in a variety of forms including book reviews, diaries, and letters. They describe personal experiences well as in the case of a colourful and amusing account of a visit to Madame Tussauds. At all levels, pupils suffer from insecure spelling because teachers have not focused on this skill consistently.

94. In year 10 and 11, standards are average, matching those previously obtained. Pupils read poetry with insight, attention to detail and well-developed analytical skills cultivated by challenging teaching. They explain themselves clearly, but tend to answer questions in class in brief sentences and phrases because teachers do not draw out extended answers. Higher-attaining pupils produce vivid descriptions and original stories. Their literature work is thorough and well documented because teaching is detailed and systematic. Boys' writing often displays a sharp sense of humour and succinctness of expression, although these are not always recognised as strengths by teachers. Middle and lower-attaining pupils understand the challenges of their literature work well because tasks are suitably adjusted to make them comprehensible yet stimulating. Nevertheless, weaknesses in spelling and punctuation continue to mar their work because teachers do not share consistent practice designed to focus on and improve that aspect of pupils' work. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well because teachers adapt their methods and materials well to hold their interest.

95. In Year 7-9, pupils achieve very well because they rise to high demands made on them in lessons and in written assignments done for homework. In Years 10-11, they achieve well. Pupils

with special educational needs achieve well because teachers keep their concentration high with a fruitful mixture of sensitivity and high demands.

96. The quality of teaching and learning is very good in the first three years. It is good in Years 10-11, where the best of the new methods used with younger pupils are only starting to be applied. Teachers make good use of a variety of activities to hold pupils' interest. They question individuals sensitively, but keep up the demands they make on whole classes, which sustains a high work rate. Written work is marked thoroughly, although the advice pupils receive on what they need to do in order to improve further is not specific enough. In the first two years, wider reading skills for pleasure and information are very well developed because library lessons are well organised and pupils' progress carefully checked to ensure their further development.

97. The subject is led and managed well. Priorities are analysed and agreed on in a well-led team leading to improvements in teaching methods. There are good systems to check how well pupils are doing and to give additional advice to those who fall behind. Leadership has ensured improvement in teaching since the last inspection, especially in the first three years.

### **Literacy across the curriculum**

98. Standards of literacy across the subjects are satisfactory overall. Standards of speaking and listening are better than writing, particularly in mathematics, geography and physical education where discussion helps pupils to clarify and consolidate their understanding of technical concepts. Reading for pleasure and information is promoted very well by a dynamically-managed library which is popular with pupils. Its imminent expansion will further enhance this good work. Writing standards match the national average, and are good by Year 9. Pupils achieve well in their first three years because most teachers take responsibility to help pupils improve their written work, and make good use of national initiatives to promote literacy. They also help pupils to order, consolidate and express to others what they have learned. In history and geography for example, pupils benefit from help in laying out and structuring extended assignments. In music, by contrast, pupils lack assistance in laying out their work. Here, their spelling is poor because it is not corrected and they are exposed to non-standard and even wrong teacher spelling written on the board. Opportunities are missed frequently to help pupils to learn to draft, redraft and check their writing using computers. Across the school, standards of literacy are improving as a result of better focus on the issue in lessons.

### **Modern foreign languages**

Provision in Modern Foreign Languages is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is good resulting in pupils achieving well in Key Stage 3 and those who choose it, achieve well in Key Stage 4
- Shared classes and the fortnightly timetable hinder progress in Years 7-9
- Sharing of good practice does not yet ensure uniformly good, interactive teaching in the target language
- Good leadership results in good organization, policies, systems and communication
- Continuous target setting referring to National Curriculum levels is not standard practice
- Lack of resources inhibits the use of ICT

### **Commentary**

99. Recent GCSE standards were well above national average for the relatively small numbers that opt for languages.

100. Students join the school at 11 with below average standards and make good progress to reach national average by the end of Year 9. This represents good achievement. In Years 7-9 pupils progress from forming sentences about everyday situations like time, weather and shopping, to writing short paragraphs about themselves, school or hobbies, using different tenses. They question each other about sports and pastimes, for example. They read and listen to conversations with basic understanding.

101. By Year 11 achievement is good. In the lower set, a high proportion is working towards C grades and exceeding their predicted targets. They choose alternative forms of questions and talk about holidays, foods and daily routines, using authentic idioms. They listen with understanding and write essays about work experience, for example, using past, present and future tenses.

102. Teaching in Years 7-9 is mostly good. Lessons are planned and delivered in logical steps so that pupils listen, speak, read and write in the target language. Pupils regularly speak with a native speaker and various resources are used to accommodate pupils' different learning styles. However, pupils spend too little time speaking the target language to consolidate their knowledge. Where there is satisfactory though uninspired teaching, pupils are given insufficient opportunities to be more involved and gain linguistic confidence from varied activities such as games, songs, mime, competitions and role-play. Marking is regular though teachers are still developing consistent assessment approaches that relate to National Curriculum criteria and enable pupils to know how to improve their work.

103. In Years 10-11 French is chosen by a relatively small number of students, most of whom are usually girls. Marking is more regular and helpful. Classes, each with one teacher, are smaller and mostly well motivated, so pupils learn well. There is little use of ICT because of lack of resources, so pupils cannot present their work as well as they might. Provision for German has been curtailed by the difficulty of recruiting specialists to teach it.

104. Leadership and management are good. The department, including supply teachers, follows programmes of work with consistency, demonstrating good organization. Pupils benefit from visits to France and Germany and good classroom displays enhance learning. Systems of monitoring and assessing pupils are satisfactory and developing. Changing the GCSE syllabus is raising achievement and helping establish French in the sixth form. The specialist staffing has become more stable and two foreign assistants enrich the experience of the students.

105. Overall, the subject has made good progress.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards in both the Year 9 national tests and the GCSE examinations are well above average in comparison with similar schools. This reflects very good achievement
- Teachers plan their lessons well and the subject specialists have a good knowledge of mathematics. Consequently pupils, overall, learn very well
- The highest attaining pupils are well provided for with a double GCSE course, including statistics. The lower attainers' lessons are enriched with 'maths for life'
- The head of department is a very good leader and role model with a clear vision that is successfully moving the department forward
- The minimal use of ICT by pupils in lessons does not enhance their understanding of mathematics

## Commentary

106. Results in the 2003 National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 were in line with the national average and were well above in relation to similar schools. These results were an improvement of those in 2002. The GCSE results in 2003 were above national average standards and were well above average in comparison with similar secondary modern schools. These results were slightly higher than those achieved in 2002.

107. Current standards are well above that for similar schools. Higher-attaining pupils can construct straight-line graphs from a table of their calculated values and can derive with ease both the intercepts and the gradients of a straight line. The lower attainers have started to understand the connection between  $x$  and  $y$  co-ordinates and this allows them to plot straight- line graphs.

108. At the end of Year 11, standards are above the national average. Higher-attaining pupils in their GCSE coursework can construct stem and leaf diagrams, cumulative frequency graphs and box and whisker plots to display their data. The lower attainers can use scatter graphs well and can calculate the inter-quartile range in their course work.

109. Pupils on entry are about in line with national average although with a lower than average proportion at the highest National Curriculum levels. Pupils make very good progress during Years 7-9, evident in their increasing ability to handle data effectively. This very good progress continues at GCSE and pupils reach standards above national average and very high for similar schools reflecting very good achievement. Girls make faster progress in Years 7-9 though both sexes achieve equally well at GCSE level.

110. Overall, teaching and learning are good and some of the specialists demonstrate very good practice. The teachers plan their lessons well and work hard to raise standards. The school strategy to provide greater variety in teaching methods is reflected in mathematics, though the good practice of recapping and reinforcing learning at the end of lessons is not used so consistently. Teachers share lesson objectives with the pupils and in the better lessons, the tasks and time allocated are made clear. Where this happens, pupils understand the relevance of their learning and make very good progress.

111. Taking both GCSE statistics and GCSE mathematics in Years 10-11 challenges the higher-attaining students well. Lower attainers' learning is also enhanced with 'maths for life' giving them the opportunity to use maths in everyday situations. However, higher attainers in other lessons are not specifically targeted and challenged to reach their learning potential. The best teaching challenges pupils to achieve very well. In one Year 9 lesson a challenging starter activity was set and pupils were asked to identify on the board the deliberate mistakes in a graphed parabola. The pupils collaboratively identified the issues and corrected each other's misconceptions, resulting in very good learning taking place.

112. Years 7-9 records of achievement and module test forms are used by pupils to reflect on what work they need to focus on, in order to reach their target level. In the majority of lessons, teachers work to improve pupils' literacy skills, by insisting on the correct use of mathematical vocabulary. Pupils are given homework though not always according to the homework timetable and teachers vary in the standards of work they are prepared to accept which reduces its overall learning effectiveness. The good and constructive marking informs pupils where they need to revisit and correct work. However, this is not sufficiently consistent across all staff to support all pupils' learning.

113. The head of department is a very good leader and role model. She is moving the well regarded department forward, in line with her very clear vision, to ensure the highest possible standards. There is effective co-ordination and monitoring of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11, with a good faculty improvement plan for raising achievement. The teachers work well as a team with roles effectively delegated. Non-specialist teachers are presently well supported by the management team. ICT use in lessons is embryonic and is not fully embedded in the schemes of work and current practice. Assessment and performance data are well used to identify, track and monitor the pupils' progress, as well as substantiate their targets. Good use is made of this data by

the head of department in the very good reflective self-review, which is carried out to inform planning. Extra-curricular activities are offered to raise achievement, including revision classes, Fantasy Football and support after school to those pupils requiring help. However, links with the community are not developed sufficiently to enrich the curriculum.

114. Overall improvement since the last inspection is good.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

115. Overall, pupils show above average numerical competency. The teaching of mathematics as a basic skill in all subjects across the curriculum is satisfactory in that most teachers are able to incorporate relevant knowledge and skills into their lessons. The mathematics department has delivered a half-day training session to other subjects on the teaching and learning of mathematics. A booklet has been produced outlining when a topic will be taught and by which method. Some subjects such as geography liaise more closely with mathematics and demonstrate good practice.

## **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good teaching has promoted positive pupil self-esteem and enabled good pupil achievement
- Pupils' positive behaviour and attitudes to work contribute to good learning.
- Effective leadership and management has led to good teamwork and good subject improvement
- Assessment and target setting has yet to be fully developed
- More pupils are capable of taking the GCSE double award than are currently being entered

### **Commentary**

116. Results in the 2003 Year 9 tests were in line with national expectations and above average compared with similar schools. Although a secondary modern school there has been a consistent increase in pupils attaining the higher levels 6 and 7. At GCSE in 2003, results were in line with national average for all schools and above average for similar schools and even better for overall grades A\*-G. This indicated that pupils with special educational needs performed well. At both levels, boys do as well as girls on average compared with similar schools.

117. Current standards reflect recent results. Pupils have a secure grasp of scientific knowledge and skills with strengths in numeracy and personal research skills. This was evident in the challenging work in a higher set Year 9 where they were studying xylem in celery, and in a GCSE group where pupils demonstrated independent working in the study of the nitrogen cycle.

118. Overall teaching and learning is good. The main teaching strengths include teachers' enthusiasm for their subject that they share successfully with pupils. Lessons are generally well planned and reflect the current school strategy to provide greater variety in approach, including individual and group work, that supports effective learning through sustained pupil interest and clearer learning outcomes. The best teaching encourages pupils to work with greater independence reflected in personal research. Pupils with special educational needs are able to learn well because of the teachers' effective use of different levels of appropriate learning.

119. The department is well led and has a clear vision for improvement. This vision is being realised, with many examples of improvement. There is good teamwork by the teachers, including the overseas trained, with the able support of the technicians. Improvements have been made in assessment though this has yet to be fully developed to set pupils' targets and help them better understand how they can improve their work. Extra-curricular opportunities are good and include field trips, competitions and some help curriculum links with primary schools. The department has made improvements in resources, including ICT, and plans for new laboratories will improve accommodation further. Curriculum development is helping further to improve standards though

schemes of work have insufficient extension work for more able pupils and too many pupils are entered for single award science when they are capable of the combined double award.

120. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good with particular emphasis on teaching and learning and on promoting pupil self-esteem through a welcoming environment.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

Provision in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is **unsatisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Non-specialist teachers have insufficient knowledge and understanding
- The main issues from the last report have not been improved enough
- All pupils in Year 11 have the opportunity to gain an ICT qualification
- The lack of use of ICT across the curriculum restricts achievement
- A lack of challenge for pupils with a lot of prior knowledge in Years 7-9

### **Commentary**

121. In 2003, GCSE ICT was an optional subject and results were around the national average. The results were above those normally found in similar schools. All pupils in Years 10-11 now take either a short or a full course GCSE.

122. Pupils enter Year 7 with ICT skills that are below average. Current standards of work seen in lessons in Years 7-9 are unsatisfactory and this is largely because of the effect of non-specialist teaching. It is better in Years 10-11 where the teaching of GCSE is largely done by the specialist subject leader and standards are about in line with national averages for all schools. There are though, gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills in Years 10-11. For example pupils in Years 10-11 are studying elements of control such as writing instructions for the operation of traffic lights, that are now being introduced to Year 7.

123. Teaching and learning are good in Years 10-11 but unsatisfactory in Years 7-9. In Year 11, the well planned lessons of the ICT specialist build learning sequentially through a series of tasks, asking pupils to provide examples from every day life of input, process, output, such as playing a video. This prepared pupils well to write instructions to control traffic lights. Teaching was less effective in years 7-9 where non specialist teachers lacked the knowledge to deal with pupils' questions confidently. As those teachers' ICT skills were limited, their expectations of what pupils could do were sometimes too low leading to unsatisfactory learning and underachievement. Even so, the school focus on more varied teaching reflected in the National Key Stage 3 Strategy and the improving resources and accommodation, is helping improve provision in the earlier years.

124. The leadership of the actual subject (as opposed to the planning for ICT across the school) is good. The current leadership of the department has successfully introduced GCSE and Advanced level courses and has ensured that all pupils have access to their National Curriculum entitlements. Improved teaching methodology is also raising standards in years 7-9. However the management of the department is unsatisfactory because the only specialist teacher is confined to teaching Years 10, 11 and sixth form. Years 7-9 are taught by non-specialists who are based in other departments and despite the good efforts to support them by both the departmental leadership and the local education authority, it is not possible to operate as an effective team. There are insufficient opportunities to monitor and support non-specialists.

125. The leadership and management of ICT across the school are unsatisfactory. While the introduction of examination courses for all pupils and improved Key Stage 3 provision have both raised standards, difficulties in recruiting and retaining specialist staff, as well as a lack of ICT training for other teachers, continue to provide a barrier to raising achievement. The lack of computer resources further limits the whole school development of ICT.

## **ICT across the curriculum**

126. "The use of ICT to support learning across the curriculum is significantly underdeveloped as in many subjects pupils have insufficient planned experience of the effective application of ICT". This was the case two years ago and remains true. The number of up to date computers capable of running modern software is well below the national average. Where departments such as SEN or business studies do have their own group of computers these are not connected to the network, limiting their effectiveness. Whilst the discrete ICT lessons provide coverage of the statutory requirements for ICT, many subjects struggle to meet their own specific requirements. For example, in design and technology there is no computer-aided design nor access to the school network system.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **Geography**

Provision in geography is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards in Year 11 are above those of similar schools
- Pupils' achievement is good
- The subject is growing in popularity as an option, because it is enthusiastically led, well taught and relationships are productive
- School systems of assessment, monitoring and evaluation have been fully implemented, but are not yet improving standards as much as possible

### **Commentary**

127. In 2003 the percentage of pupils gaining A\* to C grades at GCSE was below the national average, but above that for Secondary Modern Schools. Forty per cent of pupils took geography and all passed, but mostly with grades that were average or just below.

128. Current standards in Years 9 and 11 are in line with the national average overall. By Year 9 most pupils can use maps, interpret various sources and data, and understand distinctions between human and physical geography. By Year 11 most understand key ideas such as ecosystems and, when challenged and supported well, can defend opinions effectively. Current standards are slightly better than those reported as a result of the Key Stage 3 Strategy to improve teaching and better subject management.

129. Most pupils of all ages achieve well in the long term because teaching is well organised and monitoring of pupil progress is effective. Pupils begin Year 7 below average, but make good progress so that they are broadly average by Year 9. Pupils of all abilities opt for geography, and good progress is maintained in Years 10-11 because pupils apply themselves well to work under teachers' good encouragement. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well because teachers know them and support from learning support assistants is good, when available. More able pupils make satisfactory progress, but are not always sufficiently challenged in lessons when whole class approaches are used.

130. Teaching is good overall and very good in a quarter of lessons. The best teaching combines enthusiasm, good subject knowledge and planning, clear objectives and very good resources, so that all pupils remain interested, motivated and focused. Thinking is supported by well-structured activities. For example Year 8 pupils worked very well with the teacher, and in groups, to deduce physical and human characteristics of the Greenwich Peninsula from aerial and other computer based photographs. This led them to a very good understanding of sustainable development. When satisfactory, teaching leads to pupils learning adequately, but with less pace and clarity of direction, particularly for more able pupils. Marking and assessment are regular and with some supportive comment this does not sufficiently spell out how pupils can further improve their work.



131. Although not a focus in the last inspection, the department has made very good progress recently, and much has been put in place where previously little existed. Leadership and management are now both good: appropriate priorities have been set and all systems are working well according to the whole-school framework. However, there has been too little time for all changes to develop and have full impact. Resources are currently inadequate to enable pupils' use of Information and communication technology in lessons, and for further improvements to the teaching of more able pupils and those with special educational needs. Assessment and evaluation systems are not yet fully efficient or productive. A lack of adequate suited accommodation is restricting the progress of some pupils.

## **History**

Provision for history is **good**.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils achieve well in Years 7-9 because they are well taught and enjoy the challenge of the work
- Pupils develop a very good command of complex issues such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, because their teachers have very good subject knowledge and plan lessons well
- Pupils' work is generally well marked and they have good understanding of what levels they achieve and how they can do better
- Pupils are not always given enough tasks to maintain their interest and work is sometimes too difficult or too easy for the individual child

## **Commentary**

132. Results in 2003 at GCSE were significantly below national average. The 2003 results were significantly lower than those attained in 2002.

133. Standards of work in the present Year 9 are in line with expectation for their age. Their written work shows that they can describe events well, such as the changes in the lives of people between 1750 and 1900. They can make good links between cause and effect, as in work on how the developments in weaving and spinning led to political unrest and incidents such as the Peterloo Massacre. In the present Years 10-11, pupils taking history GCSE produce work and have understanding of history in line national average. This represents an improvement over recent GCSE results and reflects good pupil achievement. They are able to substantiate their views well with supporting evidence, as was the case in work on why Hitler became Chancellor in 1933 and how the massacre of buffalo herds affected native Americans in the 1870s.

134. The quality of teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge, which gives confidence to all pupils, particularly those who find the subject challenging. This was particularly seen in a very good lesson on the Arab-Israeli conflict, where the teacher's enthusiasm and careful structuring of the learning enabled pupils to explain complex ideas very well. As a result, they achieved well. Teachers give clear explanations and offer good support to pupils. This was seen in Year 9 work on the abolition of slavery, when very good use was made of a video to help pupils have a very clear understanding of what it meant to be treated as someone's property. This led to some very searching questions by the pupils and they achieved very well because of the expert work of the teacher in answering them. Teachers' good use of sources helps pupils to recognise that history is open to a number of interpretations. They plan lessons well and good use is made of discussion in GCSE. Where learning is less effective the lessons lack variety with less pupil participation. SEN pupils are well integrated though are not always given work that is designed to meet their needs. ICT lacks development but the activities are effective on the few occasions computers are used.

135. Assessment is satisfactory with potentially good procedures being developed in order to provide pupils with a clearer idea of their progress related to National Curriculum levels.

136. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The monitoring of the effect that teaching has upon pupils' learning is developing well. There is a clear commitment to raising standards and ensuring pupils achieve according to their capabilities. Schemes of work are satisfactorily detailed and there is a satisfactory range of resources to support learning. Some of the programmes of work have helped the team to contribute effectively to the moral and cultural awareness of pupils.

137. There has been good improvement in teaching and learning that is beginning to raise standards and improve pupil achievement.

### **Religious education**

Provision in religious education is **unsatisfactory** despite considerable strengths in Years 7- 9.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school is failing to provide religious education according to the agreed syllabus for pupils in Years 10-11
- Teaching in Years 7-9 is consistently good and sometimes very good
- Well managed oral activities extend and develop the learning of pupils of all abilities
- RE contributes well to the development of pupils' literacy skills
- The use of ICT within religious education is weak
- Pupils behave well in lessons and have a positive attitude to the subject

### **Commentary**

138. Pupils enter the school with limited knowledge and skills in the subject. By the end of Year 9, standards in relation to the agreed syllabus are below average. Judgements about standards in RE in Years 10-11 cannot be made as there is currently not enough evidence of RE work in the World Studies course on which to form a judgement.

139. Most pupils achieve well in lessons, particularly in oral work. Baseline assessments of prior learning at the start of year 7 and regular marking and assessments during years 7-9 show steady progress over time. Boys, girls and pupils from different groups achieve well; the least able pupils achieve very well orally. Good examples of oral responses were in year 9 when pupils discussed whether it is ever right to kill, considering issues of abortion, euthanasia and war and a year 7 lesson when a pupil suggested a pilgrim might respond to pilgrimage by saying 'at last I have seen this most amazing place'.

140. Teaching in Years 7-9 is good overall with some very good practice from the two specialist teachers. They have very good subject knowledge and teach lessons that are well planned. Skills of research, interpretation, reflection, expression and communication are promoted well in years 7-9. Creative thinking skills are well developed in exploration of questions about human nature, personal fulfilment and belief. Pupils develop a good subject specific vocabulary and RE contributes well to the development of literacy through good oral work and a wide range of written genres, such as play scripts, letters, descriptive writing, recounts, rules and interviews. ICT use is limited though some pupils make use of computers for homework.

141. Assessment is satisfactory. It is carried out regularly and contains useful comment for improvement though the use of attainment level criteria is still being developed. Consequently, pupils are unclear about the level at which they are working.

142. Pupils' good behaviour and positive attitude to lessons enable a good pace to be maintained. They contribute enthusiastically to oral activities and explore sensitive issues and personal beliefs and values thoughtfully and with respect for each other's opinions. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

143. The RE department consists of two specialist teachers who provide good subject leadership and management in the areas where they have direct control. There is a positive learning ethos in Years 7-9 with good development of resources. There is also a clear idea of what needs to be improved, though development planning, including monitoring and evaluation, lacks detail. The good subject leadership in Years 7-9 is balanced by the lack of clarity that persists in Years 10-11 where the subject is part of the world studies GCSE. The RE component is delivered by non-specialists who do not sufficiently cover the statutory requirements nor provide a sufficiently distinctive RE perspective. The lack of subject leadership for Years 10-11 makes overall leadership and management unsatisfactory.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **Design and technology**

The department offers GCSE courses in product design using graphics, textiles and resistant materials and food technology.

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The improving results are well above average; boys do particularly well in this subject
- The effective teaching and range of work done in Years 7-9 enable pupils to make good progress towards GCSEs
- Older pupils finish their work to a high standard though it would be even better if they used product specifications more to shape designs and evaluate their work as it progresses
- The department does not have networked computer equipment to enable pupils to use computer-aided design and manufacturing in their practical work as required

### **Commentary**

144. GCSE results are well above average. The results have improved in the last three years. In 2003 boys did much better than the girls in this subject, which is a reversal of the usual pattern and linked to staffing difficulties.

145. Standards in Years 7-9 are above national average representing good achievement for most pupils. In year 7 pupils achieve well in food technology because the teachers challenge the pupils to plan well for practical lessons. Year 8 pupils are making good progress in designing their own products. By the end of Year 9 all pupils are able to make their own electronic products using an alarm circuit and a vacuum formed case. Pupils take pride in their work and have very good standards of behaviour in lessons. Some pupils' drawing and illustration is weak and this is compounded by a lack of computer-aided design facilities. Pupils do not have enough sewing machines to use in textiles and this slows progress in lessons.

146. GCSE coursework standards are above national average. Practical work is carefully finished and more pupils than usual complete the examination requirements. The very creative work in textiles includes good use of cultural and artistic influences. Again, as in earlier years, limited access to computers and computer-aided manufacturing equipment limits some progress.

147. Teaching and learning is good overall. Teachers have good subject knowledge and give very clear instructions to pupils. This enables Years 7-9 pupils rapidly to develop new skills. Right from the start teachers use approaches that prepare pupils well for GCSE. When teaching is less successful in Years 7-9 it is due to teachers not using more varied teaching techniques and not considering the different ability ranges sufficiently. Pupils are well prepared for GCSE, and given good advice. The good relationships between pupils and teachers enable effective teaching. Pupils use cultural influences well in textiles in their work based upon North American designs. Pupils are well trained in the designing processes, although some folder-work shows that designing and evaluative thinking is not linked sufficiently to the product specification. The good teaching is being

inhibited by the lack of computers and computer-aided manufacturing equipment and pupils are not fulfilling all of the requirements because of the lack of these resources.

148. The new leadership is ensuring good improvement. The department has suffered from staffing difficulties in the last year and this has limited effectiveness and several identified issues still need more time to be resolved. The day-to-day management of the department is good and rooms are safely organised. Computer resources continue to be a problem.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

### **Art and design**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Actions taken to tackle underperformance are having a positive impact
- Good teaching and learning is underpinned by teachers' good subject knowledge and high expectations of pupils' behaviour
- Standards and expectations are not entirely consistent and so in some classes pupils do better than in others
- The planning for, and development of literacy skills are good
- Basic skills of drawing and painting are not progressively developed year on year

### **Commentary**

149. In the 2003 GCSE results attainment was well below the average when compared with both comprehensive schools and also schools with a similar intake. These results were an improvement on the previous year.

150. Standards are broadly at expected levels in Year 9, which is an improvement on previous years. On entry to the school, pupils' skills in art are weak, but by Year 9 the majority of pupils have made good progress and achieve similar levels to those in their other subjects. In the past they had been lower. A more systematic approach to assessment and a settled staffing situation coupled with pupils' positive attitudes are making positive contributions to this good achievement. In a significant number of lessons teachers planned for and supported pupils' literacy skills well. Question and answer were used effectively to extend understanding of, for example, the work of Arcimboldo, and show pupils how to apply what they had learnt to their own self-portraits. The only exception to this otherwise very positive picture is that in a minority of classes, where teaching is less rigorously focused on pupils' improvement, progress is too erratic. Some pupils do not achieve their potential, sketchbooks contain unfinished work and presentation is weaker than in other classes.

151. Standards in current examination groups in Years 11 are below the average but there are signs of improvement that demonstrate the actions that have been taken, to raise expectations and standards, are beginning to have an impact. The improvement is most marked in Year 10. Overall pupils are achieving well. However some basic skills within the subject, for example, drawing from first hand experience, are still low and act as barriers to raising standards and pupils' self confidence. Some therefore start the course unprepared for the rigours of the examination.

152. Teaching and learning are good, underpinned by teachers' good subject knowledge and expertise and their very high expectations of behaviour. Where teaching was very effective the pace of the lesson was brisk and pupils listened and responded well to requests for extended answers. Learning was significantly more effective where pupils looking at demonstrations and exemplar materials and worked from firsthand, rather than secondary sources. Assessment is constructive and thorough and used by most teachers to plan lessons that are designed to progressively achieve higher goals and standards. However, not enough use is made of NC levels to set targets and to communicate to pupils how well they are progressing and how they can improve their performance.

153. The subject is well led and managed. There is a strong focus on improvement and the analysis of results has led to changes that are gradually raising achievement. Currently teaching and learning are not consistently effective and closer monitoring is required to ensure that all pupils achieve their potential. The subject was not reported in the last inspection so there is insufficient evidence to comment on improvement over the longer term.

## **Music**

Provision in music is **unsatisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school has been unable to recruit an appropriately qualified and experienced subject leader, contributing to unsatisfactory teaching, learning, achievement, and management
- Improvement since the time of the previous inspection is poor
- The department has no computers and this impedes the development of pupils' composition work
- Good support has been provided to the supply teacher to maintain music teaching in the school and the provision for individual instrumental tuition has been effectively maintained

### **Commentary**

154. Results in the 2003 GCSE examination were below average. Pupils did less well in music than in their other subjects.

155. Pupils enter the school with limited knowledge and skills in music. Standards at the end of Year 9 are well below the national average, and this represents unsatisfactory achievement. Pupils in Year 7 perform simple rhythms to a pulse and are developing an understanding of notation. In Year 9, pupils improvise freely, but only the most able do so with musical understanding. They do not use musical notation and their keyboard skills are weak. Most pupils who take the subject in Years 10-11 do so because they also have individual instrumental tuition and so greater competence. Even so, standards in Year 11 are below average, representing unsatisfactory achievement. Pupils have limited knowledge of musical styles and whilst they are fulfilling examination coursework requirements, their compositions are unrefined and lack musical development.

156. Teaching is unsatisfactory because of insecure subject knowledge and a limited command of language. There is a strong focus on key words in lessons, but the misspelling and mispronunciation of terms hinders progress. Lessons are thoroughly planned, with a good emphasis on a range of musical cultures, but inadequacies in delivery mean that learning is unsatisfactory. Attitudes are good because pupils enjoy the practical nature of the work. National Curriculum requirements are not being fully met; singing is not taught, and pupils do not use ICT. The lack of computers also impedes composition work in Years 10-11. Marking is poor because pupils are not told how to improve, and errors are not corrected.

157. In the absence of subject leadership, the school has worked hard to maintain music teaching. The overseas trained teacher has been well-supported by the external music adviser. Management is unsatisfactory because many aspects of the provision are in a state of neglect. Extra curricular opportunities are very limited. There is no clear strategy for supporting the less able, or extending the talented.

158. Tuition on a range of instruments is available, although uptake is below average. A county-wide vocal project has raised the standards that singers achieve in GCSE coursework. A partnership with the Amersham Music Centre is managed very well by administrative staff. The school benefits from access to their resources housed on the premises, and these include nine pianos. Staff recruitment problems mean that the quality of provision has declined significantly since the time of the previous inspection.

## **Drama**

159. Drama was sampled during the inspection. GCSE standards were below those found nationally, both for those reaching higher grades (A\*-C) and overall. In work seen standards have improved and now match those found nationally by Year 11. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Good knowledge of productions techniques is used to develop pupils' appreciation of technical aspects of performances.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

Overall provision for physical education is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The quality of teaching is enabling pupils to achieve well
- Pupils come to lessons prepared to learn and their good attitudes help improve standards
- Schemes of work are not sufficiently modified for the teaching of key skills and department planning does not identify GCSE targets
- Assessment procedures do not fully support pupils' awareness of how they can improve

### **Commentary**

160. Girls' GCSE results were slightly below average and boys well below. Overall, results in 2003 were well below average compared to similar schools.

161. On entry pupils are generally below average but during Years 7-9 they reach average standards. This represents good achievement. In a Year 9 boys' rugby lesson achievement was very good because teaching was suitably adapted to cater for all abilities. Pupils with SEN benefit from the support they receive and make good progress.

162. Although results in Years 10-11 were well below average, standards are now average because the quality of teaching has improved. In Year 11 pupils have more practical lessons than theory and standards in these lessons are better than in GCSE classes where written work is required. In Year 11 GCSE, girls' standards are average and are better than boys', yet in Year 10 boys' standards are similar to girls' because they benefit from learning alongside girls.

163. Teaching overall is good and strongest in Years 7-9. Where teaching is good and very good, teachers have good subject knowledge and plan modified lessons to cater for all abilities. In these lessons teachers have high expectations and are imaginative in their planning with lesson content that challenges pupils. For example this style resulted in pupils in a Year 7 rugby lesson learning the technical aspects of drift defence and in Year 8 badminton the use of the overhead clear as an attacking option. In Years 10-11 there are more practical than theory lessons. Teaching is better in practical lessons particularly with boys. Girls' learning is good in both theory and practical lessons.

164. The department is well led. There is a clear vision for future development and a drive from the whole team to improve achievement. Financial management is effective and performance management is in place. Teachers' professional development is linked to the department improvement plan which outlines development in line with whole school priorities but is not sufficiently focused on GCSE outcomes. Schemes of work omit detailed planning of modified work for all pupils and lack emphasis on developing key skills within each activity. The use of assessment for learning is developing and the department uses the school's tracking procedure but it is not sufficiently developed to enable pupils to understand fully how they can improve. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

## **BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES**

Business studies together with leisure and tourism are the vocational subjects offered to pupils in Years 10-11 and provision is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The 2003 GCSE results for business studies were well above average for passes in the A\* to C range
- The business studies department is well led and managed which contributes to the good achievement
- Business studies is taught mostly by experienced teachers who have a good understanding of course requirements
- Recent staffing difficulties have created problems for the department
- The recently introduced applied GCSE in leisure and tourism is developing well and the teaching and learning are good

### **Commentary**

165. The percentage of GCSE A\* to C grades for business studies in 2003 was significantly higher than the national average. Most of these were for grades C and B and the average points score was at the national average representing good pupil achievement.

166. Current standards of work in business studies are in line with national average. In lessons pupils undertake coursework relating to international trade, tariffs and methods of communication in business. They are interested in the work and demonstrate skills and confidence in the use of ICT. They can produce flow charts, tabulate data, use graphical images and a variety of fonts to produce informative documents. The work produced represents good pupil achievement.

167. Teaching in GCSE business studies is good with some very good practice. Lessons are well planned and structured with appropriate emphasis given to pupils working independently. Pupils are well supported by guidance handouts and by the teacher, who ensures that pupils are appropriately challenged. The pupils appreciate the good teaching which contributes to their good achievement. Where teaching is covered by temporary staff, it is only satisfactory. Consequently pupils are less confident and progress is slower than that seen in the best lessons, despite the best efforts of the head of department to provide additional support.

168. The head of business studies has produced clear department policies and objectives together with appropriate department development plans. Schemes of work are detailed with arrangements for assignments and assessment guidance provided. This contributes to the good leadership and management of the department. However, departmental records have yet to be fully used to evaluate the effectiveness of provision and monitor pupil progress.

169. The separately managed leisure and tourism course is well taught by the course leader and reflects similarly well organised learning and assessment materials evident in the related sixth form course.

170. A small number of pupils with special educational needs have the opportunity of following the ASDAN Youth Award programme. This provides for vocational study at a local college for part of the week. These pupils were very well supported by the school staff and one excellent lesson was observed, which involved planning a leavers' party. These pupils were very well motivated by the various learning opportunities provided and as a result their levels of achievement were very good.

## PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

### Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **unsatisfactory**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- National Curriculum requirements are not fully covered because insufficient time is given to citizenship in Years 7-9
- Statutory requirements relating to the assessment and reporting of citizenship have yet to be implemented
- The subject lacks clear leadership
- For Years 7-9 there is unsatisfactory leadership and management of the subject
- The well planned World Studies course provides good provision for the subject for pupils in Years 10-11
- A high proportion of good and very good teaching and learning was observed in Years 10-11

#### Commentary

171. The study of Citizenship is carried out through the teaching of the published GCSE course of "World Studies" for pupils in Years 10-11 and is combined with PSHE to become personal, social, citizenship and health education (PSCHE) for pupils in Years 7-9. Following the departure of the previous subject leader, the work has been coordinated since February by two teachers, on a temporary basis, who also have curriculum responsibilities in other areas. This has resulted in an unsatisfactory situation for the overall monitoring and development of the subject especially for Years 7-9.

172. In the World Studies lessons observed, topics taught included: conflict and cooperation; institutional racism; the Lawrence enquiry and environmental issues. Pupils were largely unaware of the fact that these related to citizenship. Even so, these lessons were well planned and resourced and delivered at a brisk pace, which contributed to the good and very good lessons seen. This course is taught by a core of experienced teachers who ensure that pupils are fully interested in the topics and have opportunities to be involved in their own learning. This approach helps to develop good skills of teamwork, cooperation and communication. Pupils have an average overall knowledge and understanding of the issues and so are achieving well. This is also reflected in many of the pupils' books and in most cases, the work was well marked. Results from topic tests are also used well to monitor pupils' progress. The citizenship coordinator for this stage is managing well and considering the short time he has held the post, is providing satisfactory leadership.

173. Pupils in Years 7-9 were also unaware that some of the teaching related to citizenship. Two PSCHE Year 9 lessons were observed, both about disability issues. In one lesson there was good teaching and learning. In the other, problems with the video severely affected the quality and pace of the teaching and so limited the pupils' learning. The most effective parts of the lessons were when pupils had the opportunity to be actively involved in discussions on issues to which they could relate. Only a very limited quantity of written work was available for scrutiny and this was below average in quality. Overall though, pupils' achievement was satisfactory.

174. In Years 7-9 the time available for the teaching of citizenship is limited. In Year 7, PSCHE only has one period every two weeks and has to be supplemented by some issues being taught by non specialist form tutors in form time. Although an audit of other subjects' contributions to citizenship was undertaken two years ago, teachers of other subjects do not make citizenship a clear focus. As a result, pupils' experiences of citizenship are incidental to their learning and the links are usually not recognised. The contributions made by all such opportunities are insufficiently monitored and evaluated in order to produce a well structured and cohesive course. The current coordinators are aware that further work is required and are planning a further audit for next term. Decisions have yet to be made on how best to monitor the progress of pupils in these years in order to meet the statutory reporting requirements.



## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2003.

### *Level 3 GCE AS level courses*

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and Design	10	90.0	80.1	10	23.7	18.3	29.9
Biology	9	77.7	65.2	33.3	11.1	27.5	20.6
Chemistry	4	100.0	72.7	0.0	13.9	22.5	24.1
English literature	16	100.0	85.9	18.8	19.1	35.0	30.2
Geography	10	100.0	74.3	10	19.8	21.1	26.5
History	6	100.0	80.7	0.0	19.5	25.0	28.6
Sports/PE studies	7	71.4	73.2	0.0	11.4	17.5	23.1
Psychology	18	66.6	69.7	16.6	16.7	20.0	24.1
Sociology	17	70.5	69.7	17.6	16.7	18.2	24.1
Textiles	1	100.0	74.9	0.0	15.1	20.0	25.3

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

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	6	100.0	98.6	50.0	50.2	93.3	87.5
Biology	8	87.5	96.4	37.5	39.2	67.5	78.6
Business studies	20	70.0	98.7	10.0	36.8	70.0	80.1
Chemistry	1	100.0	97.6	100.0	49.0	100.0	84.9
Design and technology	3	100.0	97.8	33.3	35.0	66.7	77.9
Drama	3	100.0	86.5	33.3	19.6	66.6	30.6
English literature	10	100.0	99.5	50.0	46.5	84.0	86.5
Geography	3	100.0	98.7	0.0	44.5	40.0	84.0
History	6	83.3	99.0	0.0	44.6	50.0	84.6
Leisure and recreation	18	100.0	88.1	16.6	15.0	65.6	57.9
Mathematics	1	100.0	96.	100.0	55.6	100.0	88.8
Media studies	10	100.0	87.9	30.0	30.5	54.0	70.1
Sports/PE studies	8	87.5	98.0	0.0	30.9	40.0	75.2
Photography	6	100.0	98.6	50.0	50.2	80.0	87.5
Psychology	9	100.0	97.4	11.1	42.7	68.9	81.8

Sociology	7	100.0	98.2	42.9	44.3	88.6	83.6
-----------	---	-------	------	------	------	------	------

### **Level 2 vocational qualifications**

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
GNVQ business	7	14.0	N/A	0.0	N/A	0.0	N/A

## **ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

### **English**

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good teacher subject knowledge used well to question and prompt students to extend their understanding
- Good student achievement arising from response to challenging teaching in Year 13
- Excellent student concentration and commitment to the subject
- Advice given on how to improve written work is not detailed enough to be of practical assistance
- Inadequate library resources to promote independent study and research skills

### **Commentary**

175. In Year 13, standards reflect those in the previous year's examination results. Students read and annotate set texts independently with understanding and discrimination. They explain themselves confidently, illustrating their views and insights with detailed reference to what they have read. One group, for example analysed an extract from Sebastian Faulks' 'Birdsong' adeptly, picking out details of atmosphere and character development, with close reference to words and phrases.

176. Written work of higher-attaining students demonstrates a mature and comprehensive knowledge of a wide range of literature from modern novels to Jacobean drama. Here, they develop ideas independently and know how to give ample evidence to support their judgements. Lower-attaining students tend to cover surface detail well without developing the habits and skills of reflection on themes, content and individuality of authors.

177. Students achieve appropriately in Year 12 and well in Year 13 because they add to skills acquired earlier, engaging fully with tasks of increasing challenge. Here, they build well in Year 12 from their existing facility to annotate and analyse difficulties of meaning in a text. By year 13, they know how to compose extended assignments which deploy a range of analytical techniques and extend their thinking to the fullest, reflecting independently on common settings and themes in the works they study. They maintain consistently excellent standards of concentration and commitment in all lessons.

178. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teachers deploy good subject knowledge to interrogate and extend student understanding with well-focused questions and prompting in class. Written work is marked regularly and gives helpful indications of students' strengths and weaknesses. At the same time, advice given on how to improve is either lacking or not specific enough to give solid practical assistance. A specialist stock of reference books in the library is inadequate to support the range of independent study and research skills expected at this level.

179. Subject leadership and management are satisfactory. Lessons are informed by clear aims and planned to ensure an appropriate and broad coverage of syllabus requirements. This underpins sound achievement and ensures consistent standards.

### **Literacy in the sixth form**

180. Standards of literacy are good across the subjects. Students are skilful in note taking and lay out written assignments logically. They demonstrate good comprehension in class and in written assignments for homework. This is underpinned by well structured discussion in lessons. Teachers focus discussions and question and answer sessions well so that students clarify and extend their understanding confidently.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The knowledge and understanding of the teachers is good and this supports students' learning well
- Students are well supported with after school lessons in order to assist them to reach their potential
- Students are encouraged to participate in discussions, responding well to questions and volunteering suggestions in articulate ways
- ICT is not used sufficiently by students in lessons to develop and enhance their mathematical understanding

### **Commentary**

181. By the end of Year 13, standards are in line with the national average. In Year 12 at AS level, students carry out well algebraic manipulation of polynomials including expanding brackets and collecting like terms. By Year 13, students have studied kinematics and use integration and differentiation to find the velocity and acceleration of a moving object.

182. Overall most students are achieving well. They steadily acquire new knowledge and skills as seen in their progress in using and understanding calculus. Some students, especially those with lower GCSE attainment, find the transition between Years 11 and 12 difficult to make. They find difficulty in understanding the theory and adapting to the different style of learning. Consequently a number do not continue beyond AS level. The progress and achievement of male and female students is similarly good.

183. Overall teaching and learning are good. Teachers have a good knowledge of mathematics and support students' learning well with clear explanations. Students freely participate in discussions, respond well to questions and volunteer suggestions articulately. The lessons proceed at a brisk pace and are planned and structured well to allow students to build on each stage of new learning before progressing to the next. Students have a sound understanding of mathematics and make effective use of past work when introduced to a new topic. Homework is set regularly; it is used effectively to consolidate and extend new learning introduced in the lesson. However, students have too few opportunities to develop their independent study skills through research and preparing for topics in advance of their lessons. The notes taken in class by a minority of students in Year 12 sometimes lack structure and do not always form a useful resource for future revision and learning. The marking of students' work contains good helpful comments that show the students where they have made mistakes and what they need to do to improve.

184. The head of department provides good leadership and manages the department well. Teachers work together effectively to raise standards. They provide extra curricular activities for the students, such as after school mathematics sessions to assist them to achieve their potential. The department also offers GCSE re-take mathematics to those students who wish to improve upon their previous grade. There are good procedures in place for assessing students' performance. However the use of such performance data to track students and measure their value added achievement as they progress through Years 12 and 13 is insufficient. Schemes of work do not support teachers sufficiently in order that standards of teaching and learning may be raised. In particular ICT is not mentioned and neither is it used by students sufficiently to enhance their mathematical development.

185. Improvement since the previous inspection is good.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

186. Standards of numerical competency are above average. The mathematics department has generally supported subjects by agreeing a commonality to numerical approaches. Some satisfactory use is made of mathematics across the curriculum, such as in art in the calculation of scale. However, the co-ordination and support given to subjects overall is insufficient to establish and develop numeracy across the curriculum.

### **SCIENCE**

The focus was on biology but **chemistry** was also sampled. In the Year 12 chemistry lesson observed the relationships seen between the teacher and the students were very good. This gave rise to a very positive learning environment where the students achieved very well and were able to discuss aspects of alcohol chemistry with confidence. The students have made very good progress from their GCSE course.

### **Biology**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers are experienced and have very good subject knowledge that enable students to achieve very well
- Staff and students share very good relationships and students are very well supported
- Lessons and sequences of lessons are well planned
- Use of computers is insufficient
- Monitoring of students attainment is too infrequent

### **Commentary**

187. The attainment of students in 2003 was close to the national average at both AS and A level in biology. The standards seen both in lessons and in students' folders demonstrate that the standards at A level have improved and are now above the national level. The standards seen with the Year 12 students are, however, wide ranging, going from grade A to E but overall close to the national average.

188. Overall the achievement of students in biology is very good and this has been the situation in previous years. Students enter the sixth form below the national level. The achievement of AS students is wide ranging but is good overall. The achievement of the A level students is very good and students attain grades at or above those predicted from their previous GCSE results. The achievement of students is due to the teachers knowing them well, linked to the very good attitudes shown by these students to the subject. The achievement of students with special educational needs is also very good. They receive very good support from the teaching assistant who is very aware of the students' needs and is involved in the planning of the lessons.

189. The teaching and learning is very good. The two specialist teachers have a very good subject knowledge and are experienced in the requirements for examinations. The enthusiastic teachers share very good relationships with their students especially in Year 13. The students greatly appreciate the quality of teaching they experience and the support they receive both in and out of lessons. The students experience a wide range of learning styles and are given many opportunities for independent learning. There is however insufficient use of computers for simulation and data collecting. The department have recognised this and the necessary resources are now available.

190. The teachers are skilled at handling effective question and answer sessions that enabled them to gauge the students' understanding of the topics covered. The most effective learning occurred in the Year 13 class due to the involvement and motivation of the students and their very

good attitude to the subject. The attainment of the students is closely monitored by the teachers but needs to be performed on a more regular basis. The students are aware of how to improve though staff recognise the need to further improve mentoring and target-setting, especially in Year 12.

191. The leadership and management of the department are good. The experienced head of department is well supported by another specialist teacher and effective technician. The department has organised the delivery of biology in both Years 12 and 13 that allows good progression through the course. There is good provision made for the course.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

### **Information and communication technology across the curriculum**

192. ICT was not one of the focus subjects but some lessons were sampled. In those lessons the teaching was satisfactory but inconsistent in its impact. Students' work was thorough and detailed and they were making sufficiently good progress to be achieving well by Year 13. The problem of access to computer facilities also affects sixth form courses limiting ICT use. Where ICT is an important part of the course, as in leisure and recreation and business studies, there is better access though some of those computers are not linked to the network so restricting Internet use.

## **HUMANITIES**

**History and geography** were sampled and both considered very good in terms of the well planned and challenging teaching and the consequently very good student achievement and response.

**Psychology** teaching was well prepared and well informed though students were reticent in discussion of the topic in the sampled lesson.

### **Sociology**

Provision in sociology is **good**.

### **Main strengths**

- Students achieve well in A-level examinations
- Teaching is good and students learn well
- Students' attitudes are very good so they quickly accumulate knowledge and understanding
- The subject is well led and the course is well directed

### **Commentary**

193. A-Level results were above average in 2003 and students performed better than in the previous year.

194. Standards in Years 12 are average and students achieve well on a course of which they have had no previous knowledge. In Year 13 students are above average and they achieve well. In Year 12 students can identify definitions and technical terms and link these to specific theorists. Specialist vocabulary is strongly emphasised in all lessons. For example, students understand the influences of class on education and can link this with language and ease of expression within the family and then the effect on educational prospects. Students' achievement results from the challenging teaching and the careful planning in the course, particularly in Year 13. Students here apply their good understanding of theorists and different perspectives to a variety of topics. This leads to well-informed discussions. They are competent at organising essays and understand the value of planning and research. Students answer questions very well and choose appropriate examples to support their answers. Students understand how to interpret statistics, analyse graphs, collect data and argue hypotheses. Good feedback from marking keeps all students aware of possible grades and this is effective in raising their achievement.

195. In lessons, a rapid pace ensures that much is achieved in the time. In very good lessons the personal understanding of the teacher and the use of a variety of teaching methods challenged

students. For example, in a Year 13 lesson, students understood the pressures of conformity within a group and how deviant behaviour can label the individual. The teacher brought alive the social, moral and cultural implications of the pressures brought to bear on attitudes towards crime and compared this well with nudity in different situations within societies so that students could identify the effects of labelling. Teaching extends students' thinking well through good challenging questioning and discussion which results in good exchange of ideas. Students appreciate the joint learning environment created and are prepared to take risks with their ideas. Students' good learning is supported well through supplementary texts, Internet research and document-based research. Students feel that they have a good understanding of the impact of their learning and feel that a knowledge of how society functions is a useful contribution to future careers.

196. Regular attendance on courses helps to keep the department and students up-to-date and fully acquainted with examination requirements. Good systems of monitoring students' progress enable the teacher to identify areas for improvement to guide. The popularity and success of the sociology course, and consequently increasing numbers, puts strain on the satisfactory accommodation and resources available.

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

197. **Photography** was sampled and provision is good. Recent results were up to national average students are now making considerable progress and producing higher quality work because of good teaching and varied opportunities.

198. **Media Studies** is good with well-organised teaching and very positive student attitudes leading to good achievement in this sampled lesson.

### **Art and design**

The overall provision in art and design is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards and achievement in Year 12 are very good
- The constructive assessment strategies help students manage their time and become independent learners
- Teachers have a very secure understanding of the subject and course requirements
- The curriculum is enriched by out of school activities including visits to galleries in this country and abroad
- Standards of drawing are lower than might be expected

### **Commentary**

199. Results in 2003 show students' average point scores to be well above the average. A significant number of students joined the course with below average qualifications. From their various starting points students achieved very well. This was a significant improvement on standards in the previous year.

200. The work of current Year 13 students is below average but students are achieving well, often joining the course with well below average results. In Year 12 however standards are significantly higher and achievement is very good. The preparatory work by the highest attaining students shows imagination and creativity. Lower-attaining students have weaker standards of literacy that hamper their understanding of artistic styles and conventions and makes them more reliant on teachers. The standard of drawing seen was lower than might be expected at this level. However in addition to lessons in the school, attendance at a life drawing class has both helped to raise standards and strengthened the range and quality of work in individual portfolios. Students confidently use computers to research and gather information and a few include computer-manipulated images as part of their research. However the use of computers to manipulate images creatively is underdeveloped because of the lack of earlier opportunities in the school and the limited appropriate software.

201. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers have a very good command of the subject and course requirements and share very high expectations. Much of the teaching seen was very effective. Teachers planned their inputs carefully and students received very detailed and constructive feedback. As a result they knew how to improve and were able to maximise the time spent working outside of lessons. Students work hard and independent study skills are well developed. A somewhat narrow range of teaching and learning styles were planned and observed in lessons - mainly whole class or one-on-one advice and guidance - with few opportunities for students to work in pairs, groups or make presentations about their own and others' work. Students are well motivated and each year a high proportion continue their studies by taking up places in higher education. Visits to local and national galleries give the curriculum added breadth and trips to Europe provide an international perspective. These, and other enrichment opportunities prepare students well for the next stage of their education or employment.

202. Leadership and management are good. There is a strong focus on improvement and to this end results, and the impact of teaching, are closely analysed. There is very effective teamwork. The subject is gaining in popularity, which places an increasing strain on storage space and resources. Currently students do not have access to a designated work-space that can be used outside of lessons and this limits the scope and scale of their work in some instances.

203. The subject was not reported in the last inspection and there is insufficient information on which to base a judgement on the improvement in recent years.

### **Engineering, technology and manufacturing**

204. **Graphic Product Design** was sampled and provision was considered satisfactory. Students were achieving appropriately in reaching national average standards and benefited from satisfactory teaching, but learning was inhibited by limited resources.

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

### **Leisure and recreation**

The overall quality of provision in leisure and recreation is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students achieve well because of the good teaching and effective support they receive
- Marking and assessment practice gives students a clear idea of how they can improve
- Course leadership is well organised and effective
- Learning is supported through visits though there are currently no opportunities for more extended work related experiences

### **Commentary**

205. Results in the Advanced Vocational (AVCE) course in leisure and recreation have been above national average in both the most recent years with almost all students gaining two A level passes. The 2003 results were particularly strong with most students attaining grades A-C. Given students' modest GCSE standards on entry, this reflected good achievement.

206. Standards seen in work are above average although the highest levels of attainment are less evident. Much of the work shows a clear understanding of the topic area and students demonstrate effective planning and research skills. Much of students' assignment work is based on investigating and reviewing provision for leisure and recreation. Much of the work is very thorough though conceptual understanding and evaluation skills are less strong limiting the attainment of the highest grades. ICT is well used in assignments and reflects sound knowledge of Internet research and a range of applications for presentation. Given the students' prior attainment at GCSE, most are making at least good progress and achieving well.

207. At the time of the inspection a specialist teacher was involved in a student visit to Germany so some of the teaching was provided by cover staff. The quality of teaching and learning were generally good in the lessons seen. The best teaching used videoed role play that helped students develop their communication skills in handling customer relations. Positive relationships between teachers and students were evident in all lessons though on occasion there was a tendency for the teacher to talk at length and this had the effect of discouraging student involvement in question and answer and discussion activities.

208. Marking and assessment was good in the way it closely related to the grade criteria and provided clear explanations of how students could further improve their work. This is a significant aspect of the course in that it enables students to refine and improve their performance.

209. The course organisation is clearly good with detailed planning and clear objectives for development. The students have a useful handbook that provides valuable guidance about assessment. Student progress looks to be closely monitored with clear and challenging targets. There are no work placements set up in the course and this can be seen as a weakness but the students do benefit from three or four outside visits and a residential trip each year.

210. The course was not inspected in the last report but clearly makes a valuable contribution to the school's sixth form provision.

## **BUSINESS**

In addition to the Advanced vocational course the **Intermediate Level GNVQ** was sampled. Students were sufficiently challenged in lessons and looked to be achieving well.

Overall provision in business is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students achieve well through good teaching
- Assessment is used well to monitor and support students' progress
- The department is well led but it has proved difficult to create an effective team
- Courses are provided to cater for a wide range of students

### **Commentary**

211. The number of students entered in 2003 for the A2 examination was too low to make meaningful comparisons with national statistics. However, all four students entered passed, and one gained a grade B. Nineteen students entered for the advanced vocational certificate in education and only 42% passed which was below the national average. One student gained a B grade. The AVCE was more successful in 2002 when everyone passed and results were above the national average. Standards seen during the inspection in both courses were in line with course expectations. In relation to their abilities students achieve well.

212. Teaching and learning are good. In AS and A2 lessons teaching varied between good and very good while in AVCE lessons the range was from satisfactory to good. Where teaching was most successful a wide range of activities maintained the interest of students and their motivation by building on their own experience, such as their part time employment. For example a lesson on communication began with a lively test on knowledge of the meaning of road signs. This effectively made the point that for communication to be effective everyone needs to understand what is meant and led into a good discussion where students contributed examples of communication and differentiated between internal and external forms of communication. Students engage well with relevant case studies and theory is clearly linked to its business context. Where teaching was less effective learning time was not well managed and the planning of lessons failed to keep students working productively. In all lessons seen relationships were very productive and the attitudes of students created a positive learning environment. Students are prepared well for examination success. There is an evident focus on examination preparation and students receive explicit



feedback on their work and they are clear about what they need to do to improve. In one lesson observed students received oral feedback through a series of individual tutorials which was effective. Students feel well supported and value their teachers who are approachable and are available to support individuals out of lessons.

213. Leadership is good and management is satisfactory. The leadership of the department has been in place for less than a year and the course leader has responded quickly to implement ways of improving standards and results. There exists a clear rationale for the provision of a range of post 16 business courses to meet the needs of different groups of learners. The department is well resourced but while it has access to some computers these are not linked to the network and an absence of internet access restricts access to the excellent resources for business studies that exist on the web. The department has suffered from turbulent staffing and the department's leadership has worked hard to ensure that students are adequately supported. There is good use of visiting speakers from business and some trips are undertaken to study the real world of business. Such activities are useful but do not yet involve all students and are in need of expansion. One such visit was to the visitor's centre of a well known chocolate manufacturer in Bournville organised by an AVCE student as an assignment for her course. Good links exist with the local education business partnership and the school is part of a government supported pathfinder project for developing enterprise education in school. The school is working with other local schools to train teachers for enterprise education. Young Enterprise teams operate successfully and expand the reach of business education within the sixth form.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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