

INSPECTION REPORT

THE MISBOURNE SCHOOL

Great Missenden

LEA area: Buckinghamshire

Unique reference number: 110490

Headteacher: Mr Jon Howard-Drake

Lead inspector: Bill Stoneham

Dates of inspection: 2nd – 6th February 2004

Inspection number: 263583

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

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Terms used in this report

Key Stage 3 refers to students in Years 7, 8 and 9 who have transferred in most cases from their primary schools at the end of **Key Stage 2** after Year 6. **Key Stage 4** refers to students who are in Years 10 and 11. Those students who remain at school after the compulsory period of education are in the **sixth form**, in Years 12 and 13. Students in Years 7 to 11 follow courses and programmes of study set out in the **National Curriculum**. A course in religious education is a requirement for students of all ages at school.

At the end of Year 9, students aged 14 take national tests in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. At the end of Year 11, students aged 16 may take examinations in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (**GCSE**). Others may follow courses leading to the award of the General National Vocational Qualification (**GNVQ**), or the National Vocational Qualification (**NVQ**). Sixth form students may take further courses leading to awards in the General Certificate of Education (**GCE**) at Advanced level (**A-level**) or Advanced Subsidiary level (**AS-level**), or the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (**AVCE**).

Inspectors judge the **standards** students reach by comparing their attainments with national test and examination results, or by the levels of performance expected for students of the same age nationally. The students' **achievements** reflect whether they have done as well as expected. Such judgements take account of the educational **value added** over time. In this report, **similar schools** are defined as those having similar standards at the start of each stage of learning.

Efforts have been made to minimise the use of shorthand notations, though some have been used. Throughout the report, the notation **ICT** refers to information and communication technology. The term **SENCO** refers to the special needs co-ordinator. An **LSA** is a learning support assistant and an **IEP** is an individual education plan. **PHSE** refers to the school's programme for personal, health and social education. Comparisons to national averages are based on data for the academic year 2002/2003 for tests and examinations at the end of Years 9 and 11. For sixth form students, comparisons to national averages are based on the academic year 2001/2002, the last year for which national comparative data is available. Any reference to examination results in 2003 is to identify trends only.

No reference is made to students for whom English is an additional language. At the time of the inspection judgements about the achievement of students with English as an additional language did not apply to the school. There have been students who received language support in the past, however, and systems are in place should the need arise in the future. At the time of the inspection there were too few students with special educational needs in the sixth form to determine judgements about the quality of education they receive.

The school does not use the term 'homework', preferring instead to refer to 'home-learning'. Wherever possible this report has endeavoured to meet this requirement.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Modern (non-selective)
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11-18
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1242
School address:	Misbourne Drive Great Missenden Buckinghamshire
Postcode:	HP16 0BN
Telephone number:	01494 862869
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	HH Judge Christopher Tyrer
Date of previous inspection:	November 1988

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The Misbourne School is a larger than average sized, mixed, non-selective school located in the large village of Great Missenden. It has 1,242 students aged between 11 and 18, of whom 177 are in the sixth form, which is of average size. The school is planning a bid to become a business and enterprise college and in 2002 was awarded a Schools Achievement Award, as well as Sportsmark and a Careers Excellence Award. The area served by the school is large, extending to the nearby towns of High Wycombe and Chesham. Students from these areas tend to come from more mixed socio-economic households, whereas students living closer to the school largely come from homes with highly favourable socio-economic circumstances. There are a number of selective grammar schools in close proximity to The Misbourne School. Nevertheless, standards on entry to Year 7 are average overall. Standards on entry to the sixth form, however, are average. This is because a number of highly successful GCSE students annually opt to pursue their sixth form education in the grammar schools. Approximately 60 per cent of students in Year 11 continue into the sixth form. The proportion of students identified as having special educational needs, including statements is below average; however, the proportion with a Statement of Special Educational Need is broadly average. The ethnic mix of the school reflects that of the surrounding area, being mainly of white race. Though the percentage of students whose first language is not English is a bit higher than in most schools, none is at an early stage of English acquisition. There are no students from refugee or asylum seeking families, though there are - very small numbers from the travelling community. Approximately two per cent of students join or leave the school other than at the usual times of the year.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
27407	Bill Stoneham	Lead inspector	
19653	Libby Dickson	Lay inspector	
19913	Roger Garrett	Team inspector	English English Post 16
22691	Ray Woodhouse	Team inspector	Mathematics Mathematics Post 16
15266	Maurice Hicks	Team inspector	Science Biology Post 16
2971	Kathy Hopper	Team inspector	Design and Technology
8682	Martin Trevor	Team inspector	Information and Communication Technology Design and Technology Post 16
31690	Bridget Smith	Team inspector	Modern Foreign Languages
15462	Cliff Blakemore	Team inspector	History Business Studies Post 16
22590	Bob Castle	Team inspector	Geography Geography Post 16
32329	Andrew Stafford	Team inspector	Art and Design Art and Design Post 16
20767	Jerry Royle	Team inspector	Music
18755	Roger Whittaker	Team inspector	Physical Education
10759	Lynn Bappa	Team inspector	Citizenship Religious Education
17530	Mary Cureton	Team inspector	Special Educational Needs Media Studies Post 16

The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the school is good, including that of the sixth form. Standards in the main school are above average, representing good achievement as the students build on their prior learning and achieve well in comparison to similar schools. Standards in the sixth form are also above average and students achieve well. The quality of teaching and learning seen during the inspection was good in all years, including the sixth form. The school collects much assessment data and this is being used well to raise standards further. The work of the school is, however, handicapped by unsatisfactory accommodation and learning resources, especially in relation to ICT. Despite these problems, good value for money is offered by the school overall and by the sixth form.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The leadership of the headteacher is very good, with good support from other senior staff, and this is having a marked impact on raising standards.
- Learning benefits from the good relationships between students and between students and their teachers.
- This is an inclusive school. Its provision for special educational needs and in the student support unit is very good.
- Students, including those in the sixth form, learn well because of the consistently good teaching they receive.
- The school's accommodation and learning resources are unsatisfactory and are impinging on the quality of teaching and learning.
- The use of ICT across the school as a tool to enliven teaching and improve learning is poor.
- There are very good enrichment opportunities in music.
- Students' attendance at school is very good, but too much teaching time is lost because of their unsatisfactory punctuality.
- The present provision for the teaching of textiles in the sixth form is excellent.
- There are insufficient opportunities for physical education in the sixth form.

Good progress has been made since the last inspection. Most of the key issues identified then have been addressed and standards have continued to rise faster than those nationally. Some significant improvements to accommodation have been made, but work still has to be done in association with the local education authority to ensure that all accommodation is fit for purpose and that all health and safety issues have been addressed. The quality of learning resources requires further work and the school still finds it difficult to provide a daily act of collective worship for all because of a shortage of space.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Overall, achievement in the school is good. By the end of Year 11, standards are above average and achievement is good. The achievements of students with special educational needs are also good. In the sixth form standards are above average and achievement is good. By the end of Year 9, standards in English are well above average and are above average in mathematics and science. In

these three years, achievement is good in most subjects, with the exception of design and technology and ICT where it is satisfactory. In Years 10 and 11 standards are well above average in English and above average in mathematics and science. Achievement is satisfactory in geography, but is good in all other subjects. In the sixth form achievement is very good in English, mathematics, biology and design and technology. It is good in art and design, geography and media and communications studies and it is satisfactory in business studies.

The students' personal qualities are good. Attitudes and behaviour are good, attendance is very good, but punctuality is unsatisfactory. **Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good.**

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The overall quality of education provided by the school is good. The quality of teaching and learning is good in all years, including the sixth form. In Years 7 to 11, the quality of teaching and learning is good in all subjects, with the exception of ICT where it is satisfactory. In the sixth form, teaching and learning are very good in English, mathematics, biology and design and technology. They are good in art and design, geography and media and communications studies and are satisfactory in business education. Throughout the school, learning is enhanced by the subject specialist staff and by the good relationships that exist between staff and students. Recent improvements in accommodation particularly help learning in the performing arts, but many other subjects are suffering because of the unsuitable nature of the teaching accommodation available.

The curriculum is good, with continuous improvement made to raise standards and develop independent learning. Students have good opportunities to enrich their learning from a wide range of visits and other educational experiences. Community partnerships are already good and there is a desire to improve and extend this aspect of the school's work. The students are well supported in their education and their views are taken seriously. There are, however, weaknesses in the provision of ICT that need to be addressed.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school is **effectively led and managed.** The leadership of the headteacher is very good. Though in post for only a relatively short time, he has made improvements, especially in terms of budgetary control, and has maintained a strong focus on high aspirations and continuous improvement. The leadership and management of other key staff are good and they are skilled in encouraging colleagues to work effectively with them to raise students' attainment. Governors are very supportive of the school and they are effective in carrying out most of their responsibilities; however, some statutory requirements are not met, so that governance is satisfactory.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Most parents and students are very pleased with the school. Parents believe that children achieve well and like the many additional opportunities offered. They are very appreciative of the work of the staff and supportive of the new headteacher. Some would like to be consulted more and there is some dissatisfaction with the arrangements for consultation evenings. Some parents are also aware that there are issues with the school's accommodation and the level of funds made available. Some parents raised issues about homework. Some believe there is too much, but others consider it appropriate. A few find parents' evenings too rushed and a very few believe there is too much emphasis on examinations. Students like the chance to achieve but also find the school friendly and relaxed. They feel trusted and appreciate the extra-curricular activities. They find most lessons interesting. They believe their school is progressive and focuses on people as well as achievement.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Ensure that there are adequate learning resources in all departments and that accommodation throughout the school is fit for its purpose and meets all health and safety requirements.
- Ensure that all departments have improved access to ICT so that the quality of teaching and learning can be improved further.
- Reduce the amount of lost teaching time by insisting that students are more punctual arriving at lessons.
- Offer sixth form students more opportunities to participate in sporting and recreational activities.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Provide a daily act of collective worship for all.
- Ensure full National Curriculum coverage in ICT in Years 10 and 11.

THE SIXTH FORM AT THE MISBOURNE SCHOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good. Standards are above average and achievement is good. Completion rates on advanced courses are very good. Teaching and learning, leadership and management are all good. The limited ICT facilities present a barrier to promoting independent learning. Though some teaching groups are small, the cost effectiveness of the sixth form is good.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Students achieve well because of good teaching, monitoring and guidance.
- Standards are above average in most subjects and provision in textiles is excellent.
- Students are confident, independent and develop very good relationships with their teachers.
- Students are offered insufficient opportunities to participate in recreational and sporting activities.
- There is no provision for a daily act of collective worship.

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	Very good in English. Students are motivated by high quality specialist teaching.
Mathematics	Very good in mathematics. Standards are above average, helped by very good teaching and learning.
Science	Very good in biology. The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
Humanities	Good in geography. Teaching is good and the students achieve well.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Very good in design and technology. Standards overall are well above average, with excellent provision in textiles.
Visual and performing arts and media	Good in art and design. Standards are above average, helped by good teaching. Satisfactory in media and communications studies. Good teaching is leading to good achievement.
Business	Satisfactory in business studies. Students need to be challenged more and given more opportunities to work independently.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

There is very good advice given to students planning to enter the sixth form, backed by good academic and pastoral support once they are there.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. A good learning environment has been established standards are above average. The procedures for monitoring work are improving, relationships are supportive and there is a broad range of curricular opportunities. Students value their experiences in the sixth form, which is becoming increasingly popular in the local community.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students enjoy being in the sixth form and regard the teaching as demanding. Most are happy with their choice of courses and they are appreciative of the opportunities offered. Many students, however, expressed a wish that there were more opportunities to participate in physical and recreational activities. The inspection team endorses this view.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

The overall achievement of students, including those with special educational needs is good; it is also good in the sixth form. Students enter the school with above average standards of prior attainment. By the end of Year 9 standards are also above average, as they are by the end of Year 11. Evidence on improvement offered by the school indicated that most students gained better GCSE results than indicated by their prior attainment and in comparison with students in similar schools. Standards in the sixth form are above average. Students start their sixth form courses with average prior attainment and, overall, gain better results by the end of Year 13 than predicted. Their achievements are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement in Years 7 to 11 is good because of the quality of teaching offered.
- Overall achievement in the sixth form is good; it is very good in English, mathematics, biology and design and technology.
- Standards in all years are rising because of the recent improved use of monitoring procedures.
- All departments must use assessment data with consistency to monitor students' progress and to set challenges.

Commentary

1. The Year 9 national test results in 2003 were well above average in English, above average in science and mathematics and well above average overall when compared to all schools nationally. In comparison to similar schools based on prior attainment, standards were well above average in English and mathematics, were above average in science and well above average overall.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	36.8 (36.4)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	37.1 (36.5)	35.4 (34.7)
science	35.2 (35.2)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 181 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

2. Standards in GCSE examinations in 2003 were above average when compared to all schools nationally, based on both average total GCSE points per student and average points scored on their best eight subjects. When compared to similar schools based on prior attainment, results were again above average on both measures. The school's own value-added data shows that overall students achieved well in the 2003 GCSE examinations.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	61 (55)	52 (50)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	94 (92)	91 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	98 (97)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	38.2 (36.7)	34.7 (34.7)

There were 183 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. In the 2003 GCSE results the proportion of students gaining A* to C grades, or the equivalent, was broadly average in most subjects. In terms of average points scored, standards were average in art and design, business studies and German. They were above average in the dual science award, English language and English literature, French, geography, mathematics and physical education. In design and technology, history and drama, they were well above average. These results suggested that the school was doing good work in securing high pass rates in subjects but that the monitoring of students' work was not sharp enough and the students were not challenged sufficiently as the number of higher grades awarded was disappointing. This weakness has been addressed and the school's monitoring mechanisms are now more detailed and cover all students. Thus, more challenges are being presented to all, whether low, middle or high attaining. An analysis of these results shows that achievement was good overall and was good in the majority of subjects.
4. Inspection evidence based on lesson observations and analysis of students' work indicates that standards are above average in all subjects except English, where they are well above average and ICT and physical education where they are satisfactory. All students, including those with special educational needs, are achieving well. In Years 10 and 11 standards are above average in most subjects but well above in both English language and literature and design and technology. Standards are average in history and music. Overall, students are achieving well in all subjects apart from geography where achievement is satisfactory. Standards seen in GCSE work are higher than in recent examinations because greater use is being made of assessment data at a whole school level to set all students individual targets and to monitor their performance against such targets. One remaining challenge is to ensure that all departments use assessment data with consistency to monitor students' progress and to set challenges.
5. Overall, all students with special educational needs achieve well, including those with statements. They generally reach their minimum predicted grades at GCSE and some surpass them. The achievement of gifted and talented students is in line with that of their peers.

Sixth form

6. Standards reached in A-level and equivalent level examinations in 2002 were similar to the national average, with no discernible difference based on gender. The outcomes in 2003, were very similar to those recorded in both 2001 and 2002, the last year for which comparative national data are available. In 2002, many subjects returned 100 per cent pass rates and standards were above average in English, design and technology and history. In art and design and in media and communications studies standards were average, but in business studies, geography and other social sciences, they were below average and they were well below average in biology, French, physics and physical education. The standard on entry for this year group of students was broadly average. They successfully built on this base and the school's own value added analysis indicates that overall attainment was better than predicted based on GCSE results. The achievement of this group of students during their sixth form studies overall was, therefore, good.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	90.8 (88.2)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	21.9 (18.4)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per pupil	227.3 (227.6)	253.1 (254.5)

There were 75 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

7. On many A-level courses numbers are reasonably small and the standards reached by the students can vary quite considerably from year to year. Sixth form work seen during the inspection, based on the eight subjects that were inspected in depth, indicated that standards are above average. This improvement over recent years is again a reflection on the improved monitoring structures that have been implemented. Standards were well above average in English and in design and technology. Indeed, in the A-level textiles course, standards are very high. In mathematics, biology, art and design and media and communications studies, standards are above average and they are average in geography. Standards are below average in business studies. Attainment on entry is average, teaching and learning are good and students achieve well overall. On some courses, such as English, mathematics, biology and design and technology, their achievement is very good because of the high quality of teaching offered. No significant differences in achievement between female and male students were discernible. Sixth form students also benefit from the close and sensitive monitoring of their progress.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are good in the main school. They are very good in the sixth form. Attendance is very good, but punctuality to lessons is unsatisfactory. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students enjoy coming to school and have good attitudes to their work.
- Most behave well in and around the school.
- There are very good procedures for following up absences, and these have a positive effect on the rate of attendance.
- Punctuality to lessons is unsatisfactory; a significant amount of teaching time is lost while students move between lessons.
- Relationships are good and create a positive learning environment.
- Sixth form students exhibit very good attitudes and behaviour.

Commentary

8. Attendance rates are well above the national average and have a positive effect on the standards achieved throughout the school. While most students arrive on time, punctuality during the day is unsatisfactory. Many students show a lack of urgency at the start of lessons; with some arriving in up to ten minutes late, diminishing the learning time. Students do have to carry around their coats and belongings and this can add to the time spent in organising themselves between lessons.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	6.2
National data	7.2

Unauthorised absence	
School data	0.3
National data	1.1

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

9. Attitudes and behaviour in the main school, while good, vary considerably between excellent and poor. Students are mostly very positive about school, enjoy coming, and participate in extra-curricular activities. In particular, large numbers are involved in drama and musical activities and productions. In lessons, students are influenced to a great degree by their teachers. Where teaching is good or better, they quickly become positive learners; they are keen to achieve and work hard. In many lessons the supportive relationships established between teachers and students contributed to the good progress that was made. For example, in a Year 11 science lesson, students achieved very well in developing their understanding of a difficult concept, because of the excellent relationship they had with their teacher. As a result, they responded enthusiastically and were determined to do their best.
10. However, in lessons where teaching is less than satisfactory, some students quickly become distracted and disturb others. Even when behaviour is reasonable, attitudes can be less than enthusiastic. For example, in some lower ability modern language sets, where some students have little interest in learning, their negative attitude can affect others.
11. In their pre-inspection questionnaires, and at the meeting held for parents, a number of parents and students raised concerns about behaviour in the school. Following discussions, checks of records and many observations, no evidence of any significant problem was found. Indeed, behaviour was good overall at the start and end of school, at lunchtimes and assemblies and as students moved between lessons.
12. Incidents of bad behaviour are monitored well and appropriate steps taken to help students improve. Incidents of racial harassment, though very few in number, are recorded and followed up appropriately and the school raises the awareness of bullying through the personal and social education programme and assemblies. The number of fixed term exclusions is low and there were no permanent exclusions last year. In conversations with inspectors about how the school deals with bullying, most students acknowledged that, though it does occur from time to time, the school does its best to deal with problems when it becomes aware of them.

Ethnic background of students**Exclusions in the last school year**

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1142	39	0
White – any other White background	12	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	3	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	6	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	5	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	24	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1	0	0
Chinese	8	0	0
Any other ethnic group	9	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	30	0	0

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

13. Students work and co-operate very well together and are sensitive to the feelings of others. Regardless of their background or personal circumstances, all are valued. Personal development is good overall, with particular strengths in moral and social development.
14. Every student with special educational needs has an individual education plan with a target to aim for which is designed to improve their attitudes or behaviour. Some students write and modify their own targets; this helps their self motivation. Daily monitoring of the targets by teaching assistants allows students to improve their behaviour, using a range of agreed strategies which are known to be individually effective.
15. The provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The contribution of religious education to students' spiritual development is very good; in many of the lessons seen, students were given valuable opportunities to reflect on complex issues such as the death penalty and reincarnation, but little of a spiritual nature was observed in other lessons. Students participate in a range of extra-curricular activities, and the highly popular annual activities week engages students in a wide variety of social and cultural pursuits, with visits to places as far away as New York. Drama and musical productions involve many students from all year groups.
16. The personal and social education programme gives good emphasis to developing students' understanding of right and wrong, as well as a more general awareness of wider ethical issues. The concern students have for others less fortunate than themselves is an impressive aspect of school life and they raise considerable sums for charity each year. Overall cultural development is satisfactory. Displays, visits to art galleries and regular visits to France and Germany extend the cultural dimension for students. Art, music and religious education make a good contribution to increasing awareness of other cultures and religions.

Sixth form

17. In the sixth form, attendance is very good and is closely monitored, though the late start to lessons, and subsequent loss of learning time found in the main school, also applies in the sixth form. Other than this, attitudes and behaviour are generally very good and sometimes excellent. Students are enthusiastic and positive about school life. They feel that they are treated as adults and enjoy the freedom and trust placed in them, in particular being able to work in their private study time and use the sixth form facilities unsupervised. They behave very well and there have been no exclusions in recent years. Retention rates on courses are very good, as most students are well advised and have made an active choice to come into the sixth form. Through the sixth form management committee, students get involved in decision-making and planning events such as assemblies and the sixth form ball. The head girl and head boy are particularly impressive in the way they carry out their role.
18. Sixth formers take pride in carrying out community service once a week, helping in departments around the school and at local primary schools. In discussion they talked in a mature way about their plans when they leave school and are clearly thinking sensibly about their futures. Most are polite and friendly; they engage readily in conversation with visitors and enter into discussions in lessons. Relationships are very positive. There are a few who are more reticent in lessons but they are still keen to learn and to make the most of their time at The Misbourne School.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

Overall, the school provides a good quality of education. Teaching is good in all years, including the sixth form. The curriculum is good and there are good opportunities for enrichment. Accommodation and resources, however, are unsatisfactory, despite some recent building works which have resulted in excellent facilities for the performing arts. Students receive good support, guidance and support, but the level of care is unsatisfactory because there are many health and safety issues that need to be addressed. Work with parents and partner schools is good, as is the school's work with the wider community. Very good partnerships have been developed with partner primary schools for the transfer of students into Year 7.

Teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. The quality is good in Years 7 to 11 and it is good in the sixth form. Assessment procedures are good overall. Available data is being used with increasing consistency and this is contributing to the rising standards of the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The overall quality of teaching is good and helps students to learn well.
- A high proportion of teaching is good or better and this is contributing to the above average standards of the school.
- Students with special educational needs who are withdrawn from mainstream classes benefit from excellent support and teaching.
- There remain some pockets of less effective teaching and learning, especially in Years 10 and 11, which need to be addressed.
- Many teachers are highly competent classroom practitioners, but mechanisms for sharing very good practice are in their infancy.

Commentary

19. Much of the teaching and learning seen were either good or very good and nine lessons were graded as excellent. The quality of teaching was stronger in the sixth form, but very good

teaching was spread across all year groups and subjects. Only a small minority of lessons failed to offer teaching and learning of a suitable quality.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 159 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
9 (6%)	35 (22%)	71 (45%)	36 (23%)	6 (4%)	0	0

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

20. The quality of teaching and learning seen during the inspection was consistent both across subjects and year groups, and has improved since the last inspection. The findings of the inspection team mirror the views of parents and students, all of whom had commented favourably on teaching. The quality seen reflects the work that the school puts into monitoring and evaluating its own performance, plus the care that is taken in recruiting staff.
21. Many strengths of teaching can be identified, not least that in most lessons seen teaching was delivered by subject specialists and this made a significant contribution to the learning of all students. Learning also benefited because lessons were well planned, they were challenging, the pace was pitched correctly and the students were given appropriate opportunities to enhance their learning by working independently or collaboratively. This was especially so in Years 7, 8 and 9 and in the sixth form. By contrast, though much good and better teaching was seen in Years 10 and 11, it was noticeable that some teaching lacked boldness and some lessons tended to be too teacher dependent. This trait was most apparent with some lower attaining groups where the teachers employed a 'safety first' policy. This gave an impression of low expectations and such lessons tended to be lacking in terms of challenge, drive and enthusiasm. It was also evident that where very good, or indeed excellent, practice existed, staff are not uniformly used to sharing such practice. In the good and better lessons a range of strategies was used to engage and extend the students' learning. This enabled the students to achieve well. Many staff showed good levels of initiative and enterprise. In some lessons the unsatisfactory nature of the school's accommodation limited the scope teachers had for being innovative. Unsatisfactory access to ICT also adversely impinged on teaching and learning. Far too frequently where use of computers was required, teachers were dependent on students using their own resources as part of home learning.
22. In Years 7 to 11, teaching and learning were good in all subjects inspected, with the exception of ICT where they were satisfactory. In no subjects, however, was the quality of teaching and learning graded better than good. This suggests that the school needs to develop its strategies for disseminating very good, or better practice.
23. The teaching offered to students with special educational needs who are withdrawn from mainstream classes is excellent. It takes full account of their learning difficulties and promotes excellent learning. A very few students in Year 7 who have insufficient literary skills to access the curriculum are the only ones to be withdrawn from lessons for remedial teaching. Provision for them is excellent. It is a very strong feature of teaching that the strategies used by the teaching assistants to help students to learn are designed to support independent learning.
24. Outstanding practice was seen in one lesson, which began with a brisk session in which students used an interactive computer programme designed to improve their reading and spelling skills. All students had a personal literacy programme of high quality in addition to their individual learning programme. Self-assessment in this lesson was helpful to the students, and allowed them to improve their work. Students were helped to improve their reading skills by the group reading of a simple, well chosen play script which they tackled with enthusiasm. They made lively and accurate oral responses to simple comprehension questions, showing significant improvement in their speaking and listening skills. The teacher made good use of a

whiteboard to widen the students' written vocabulary. They were further helped to develop their vocabulary by being encouraged to respond to verbal cues such as "You are being attacked by a lion!" and observe their own expression in a mirror. The words they used to describe how they felt improved their expressive vocabulary. Towards the end of the lesson, students took complete charge of their learning, as they enthusiastically initiated a range of learning tasks. A plenary session of high quality consolidated what they had achieved.

25. A superb standard of liaison between teachers, teaching assistants and SENCO ensures all students are included in all the activities the school has to offer. Teachers are given specific guidance by the SENCO as to what level of achievement they might expect from any student with special educational needs. Each student is known well by the SENCO, so that there is no possibility of unrealistic expectation or underachievement.
26. Assessment data is used variably in Years 7 to 11 to improve the quality of teaching and learning. In the majority of cases the data is being used well and, other than for ICT and for Years 10 and 11 in modern foreign languages, where the overall assessment procedures are unsatisfactory, all other areas are at least satisfactory. In many subject areas there are good systems in operation using test data on entry to the school as well as throughout Years 7 to 11.
27. The school carried out an audit of systems and procedures in all curriculum areas during the summer of 2003. Prior to that it was recognised that practice was quite variable and the intent was to standardise systems. New procedures now mean that performance data is used effectively for tracking the progress of students, though this system is still in the process of being implemented fully. The marking policy gives clear guidance to teachers and is used effectively in the majority of cases, though there is still some inconsistency in some subjects.
28. The school has developed its own ICT system for monitoring individual students' academic targets, reports of their development and tracking their progress. This new system is now being used by senior staff prior to being made available to the remainder. It is an excellent piece of work and will make performance data available to all. When completed, and when staff have received suitable training in its use, it should provide facilities so that the achievement of all students is heightened.
29. Reports to parents are in a computerised format and are clear and understandable. Grades and targets achieved by students are shown clearly. All students receive two reports per year and this is an effective system.

Sixth form

30. The quality of teaching and learning is good. In the eight subjects on which the inspection focused, teaching and learning were very good in English, mathematics, biology and design and technology. They were good in art and design, geography and media and communications studies and satisfactory in business studies.
31. Sixth formers benefit from the commitment, enthusiasm and subject knowledge of their teachers. In many classes, and especially in Year 13 where staff and students have worked together for longer, learning benefits from the strong mutual respect that has developed. Students attend lessons expecting to be challenged and they respond most positively to the teaching strategies employed. Occasionally, however, some slackness was encountered, especially in terms of punctuality to lessons. Some students have adopted a cavalier approach to their lessons, failing to attend on time. This resulted in lost time, as well as inconveniencing more punctual colleagues. The upshot is that the quality of learning suffers. In other cases, the students are conscious of the efforts that teachers make on their behalf and this was praised by many students.
32. The head of sixth form co-ordinates a good pastoral system that includes good arrangements for assessment through which students' academic progress is regularly assessed and

reported. The process involves students. Individual interviews are conducted by tutors and subject teachers and students' attainment and progress are monitored. The records and reports give a clear statement on attainment, with individual targets for improvement. Parents are consulted and informed about student progress. Suitable strategies exist to help underachieving students to improve.

33. The assessment procedures used for the students in Years 12 and 13 are similar in context to those in earlier years. As in Years 7 to 11 the practice quality is variable. Though some subjects use assessment data most effectively and its use is improving, a minority of subjects use such information less well.

The curriculum

Overall, the quality of the curriculum is good. It is satisfactory in Years 7, 8 and 9, and good in Years 10 and 11. The opportunities for activities outside the classroom are good, but the school does not offer a daily act of worship nor does it fully meet the statutory requirements for ICT in Years 10 and 11. The accommodation and resources for learning are unsatisfactory, but staffing overall is good. The school has a much broader curriculum than at the time of the previous inspection.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 offers students a broad range of learning experience that enable them to achieve well.
- Sixth form students are offered a wide range of suitable courses.
- The school's accommodation is unsatisfactory as it fails to meet fully the needs of the curriculum, though what is provided for the performing arts is excellent.
- The curriculum is enriched by a broad range of experiences outside the classroom, but there are too few opportunities for sixth form students to involve themselves in sporting and recreational pursuits.
- Sixth form students benefit from a wide range of links that the school has with higher education and business.
- The very good opportunities provided in music are a real strength.
- Students in Years 10 and 11 are not receiving their full ICT entitlement.
- The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship.

Commentary

34. The curriculum in Years 7, 8 and 9 is satisfactory. The school provides a wide range of subjects that include drama, plus the opportunity to choose from three foreign languages. The school places emphasis on promoting good standards of literacy. This is supported through subject planning with the result that students improve their writing and speaking skills and achieve above average standards. Students follow a course in ICT, but provision in some subjects, such as science, is unsatisfactory because of the below average time allocated for study, particularly in Year 7. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is good, partly because of the broad range of courses from which students can choose, but also because of the increasing provision of vocational courses, such as the college link, business and media studies. It improves curricular relevance and contributes to the students' good attitudes to learning. ICT provision, however, is poor because elements of the statutory course, such as systems and control are not taught. This was an issue in the previous report.
35. The school provides religious education for all students in Years 7 to 11 and meets the needs of students of different ability well, but the arrangements to meet the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship are not being met because of a shortage of space.
36. Students are provided with a good range of extra-curricular opportunities. A significant number of students participate in music, sporting events and drama. In music for example, students

participate in choirs, instrumental courses and lunch time concerts, whilst in art opportunities are provided for lunch time meetings and curricular visits. These activities not only promote interest, they contribute well to the students' attainment. The annual activities week is a particular strength of the school's planning because students are provided with opportunity to participate in school-based or local activities, whilst others enjoy residential experience in Wales or Germany.

37. Students have good opportunities to extend and enrich their learning through their involvement in a good provision of extra-curricular sport. The activities are open to all students, many of whom attend. Activities take place at lunchtime, after school and at weekends. They include clubs and team practices for most major sports. Students are encouraged to take part in new activities with girls playing soccer and cricket. The school runs a good range of inter tutor group competitions and arranges a full list of inter school fixtures. Students have the opportunity to take part in residential visits and coaching sessions taken by a range of sports development coaches.
38. The inclusion of all students with special educational needs into the curriculum and all activities organised by the school is a major strength, because almost all are fully integrated into lessons. The rest undertake re-integration programmes which are ultimately successful in almost all cases.
39. The school has a good personal and social education programme; it is well planned and taught by form tutors in Years 7 to 11. The programme includes topics on drugs, sex and relationships education, and incorporates many elements of citizenship and careers education. Contributions from outside visitors are valuable and students respond well to specialist advice and guidance. In a very well taught lesson during the inspection Year 11 students took part in the 'Be Real' game, giving them a good understanding of careers training, qualifications and the choices they face in selecting a career path.
40. Overall, the match of teachers to the demands of the curriculum is good. The school has a good range of both experienced and less experienced staff. However, there are weaknesses in boys' physical education as non-specialist staff and supply teachers are limiting levels of achievement. Subjects receive satisfactory support from technicians and administrative staff, however, the quality of support for students with special educational needs is very good.
41. Overall, the school's accommodation is unsatisfactory as it fails to meet fully the needs of the curriculum. However, the new accommodation for music and drama is outstandingly good. There are severe constraints in science, ICT and modern foreign languages and with the library. Science accommodation is poor; laboratories are sited in three separate buildings with the use of an additional remote mobile classroom. Laboratories are poorly presented and this greatly inhibits students' learning. ICT accommodation is unsatisfactory. ICT is taught in small cramped rooms where the shape and layout of the rooms are not well suited to teaching computer skills and constrain learning. There are insufficient numbers of specialist rooms available for the teaching of modern foreign languages and the rooms that are used are shabby, have poor décor and no blinds making for an unsuitable learning environment. The school's library is not well located within the complex of buildings and is not easily accessible to students. Display of students' work about the school helps to compensate for the poor décor, dirty rooms, corridors and poor state of repair of the building.
42. Overall, resources for learning are unsatisfactory and do not offer effective support for most students. However, resourcing is good in music, physical education, religious education, and geography. In science, resources are poor and teachers frequently have to compensate for their lack of equipment by changing the way in which the lesson is delivered. Old and inadequate equipment is used in design and technology and this has a negative impact on learning. The poor network used in ICT means that the system is occasionally not operational. This severely constrains both teaching and learning. Library provision is unsatisfactory, which

is a consequence of a reduced library budget. There is an insufficient number and range of books in most subjects.

Sixth form

43. The school provides a broad range of courses, at different levels that are suitable for the students staying on in the sixth form. There is a good range of traditional academic courses with a small range of vocational subjects. The composition of the curriculum and the balance between academic and vocational provision has been thought through well. Though there is a desire to offer more vocational courses, there is the pragmatic realisation that the school cannot meet all needs and retain financial viability. Thus the school is looking at other ways to meet needs. Current planning is to extend these co-operative arrangements with other local schools, so that opportunities will be increased and this is appropriate for the range of interests and aptitudes of students. Students in the sixth form have the same good opportunities to enrich their studies as other students in the school, but there are too few opportunities for students to pursue sporting and recreational activities. This shortfall was one area criticised by the students. Careers education is good. Students receive guidance about possible post-16 routes before they make their decision to join the sixth form. Links with higher education and local business are good. Staffing provision is good, resources are satisfactory but accommodation is unsatisfactory.
44. Overall, the match of teachers to the needs of the sixth form curriculum is good. Teachers teaching in the sixth form are well deployed and used to good effect. They have very good knowledge and expertise. Teachers receive satisfactory technical and administrative support.
45. Sixth form students use the same specialist accommodation as the main school and they also have their own common room and study area. Both are adequate but untidy, dirty, in need of decoration and unconducive to study. Overall, the accommodation for sixth form students is unsatisfactory. As in the main school, this centres on the inadequacies in the subject areas of science, ICT, modern foreign languages and the library accommodation. The sixth form also use the same teaching and learning resources that are made available to the main school. These are unsatisfactory.

Care, guidance and support

Care, welfare, health and safety are unsatisfactory. Support, advice and guidance for students are good. The involvement of students in the work and development of the school is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The care, guidance and support of all students with special educational needs are excellent.
- There are serious health and safety concerns relating to conditions, particularly in the design and technology department.
- Very good arrangements for the induction of new students into Year 7 help them quickly feel at home.
- Students' progress is well monitored as they move through the school; those with particular difficulties are supported very well.
- Sixth form students are very positive about the help and support they receive, and are well prepared for future choices.

Commentary

46. Though the school has drawn up appropriate policies for health and safety, there are breaches of health and safety requirements, particularly in the design and technology department. The inspection team identified a number of problems. The school is aware of these and is seeking to resolve them. Arrangements for first aid are good and child protection procedures are in

place. Further training in child protection is already planned to ensure all staff are well briefed in identifying and dealing with any concerns.

47. The arrangements for induction of students into Year 7 are very good. Students and their parents were very pleased with how quickly they had settled in and been supported during their first term. Before joining the school, students are visited in their primary schools and at the start of their first term they are 'buddied' with a Year 11 student to help them over the initial few weeks.
48. Key Stage co-ordinators, heads of year and their tutors know students well, monitor their behaviour, attendance and progress. Very effective use of assessment data helps staff keep students on track and identifies potential problems early on. Students in Years 10 and 11 who are identified as being disaffected are given the chance to follow an alternative curriculum that features work-related sessions at a local college. Parents are kept informed if any problems arise. The school is also quick to notify parents when their child has made improvements in their work or behaviour.
49. Students' achievements, both academic and pastoral, are recognised in the termly achievement assembly. Very good support is provided for those with special educational needs through the Learning Support Unit. The Student Support Centre and counsellor provide valuable support for vulnerable students and those with specific difficulties.
50. Careers education and guidance are good and students are able to benefit from the impartial advice on further study or careers opportunities to help them realise their ambitions. This includes one-to-one consultations with the Connexions advisers who are available to all students, including those who may be leaving before the sixth form.
51. Students are given some opportunities to put forward their views, principally through the junior action group for the lower school and the junior management group in the upper school. However, of the students interviewed not all felt they were able to influence decisions about the school.
52. The care, guidance and support of all students with special educational needs are excellent. There is home-learning support after school and the SENCO's office is well staffed and open to the students before school and during breaks in the school day. Students' individual education plans contain their strengths as well as weaknesses and this helps their self-esteem. Daily monitoring achieves the climate of praise necessary to students' learning and helps them if there are difficulties. There are exceptionally good guidelines for student support in lessons.

Sixth form

53. Students value the good quality support provided and readily approach subject teachers to discuss concerns and advice. Teachers are generous with their time in helping with any problems or worries, so that students feel well supported and grow in confidence. One student remarked 'Teachers go out of their way to help you'. Sixth formers are given good guidance when selecting their courses and the retention rate on the courses is very good. Throughout the sixth form their progress is monitored carefully and they are set realistic targets that motivate them.
54. The very good work carried out by careers staff ensures that students in Year 13 are offered appropriate information about progression to higher education and the world of work.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has good links with parents, who are generally satisfied with what the school has to offer. There are good links with the community and other schools and colleges.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents support students' learning well.
- The excellent quality of the liaison between the school and parents of students with special educational needs helps the achievements of such students.
- The school acts positively and deals effectively with any parental concerns.
- Parents' views are important to the school, though more could be done to seek their views on a regular basis.
- The school has a good range of community contacts and links with other schools, which enhance students' education.

Commentary

55. The school has good relationships with parents who generally appreciate what it provides, especially the levels of care and concern for individual students. The school is popular and is significantly over-subscribed. Most value the benefits of a good education for their children and ensure they attend regularly. While not all are actively involved in the daily life of the school, the vast majority support students' learning by monitoring home-learning, attending regular meetings to discuss progress and supporting activities and productions. The Misbourne Association is a small but committed group which supports the school through fundraising and social events.
56. The school places a strong emphasis on a positive partnership with parents. It values their opinions, and operates an 'open door' policy, encouraging parents to make contact as soon as they have a concern. While it does consult them on relevant issues, such as the appointment last year of the headteacher, it recognises that more could be done to seek their views regularly on matters that affect the whole school. Parents generally appreciate the information they receive. Newsletters every half-term keep them informed and most can access further information about activities on the school's website. Each term parents receive an interim report on their child's progress, with a full report at the end of the summer term. The annual reports are satisfactory, with the best examples giving parents specific information about how their children can improve their work. While they welcome the opportunity to talk about their children's work and progress at the annual review day, a number of parents complained that they had difficulty making appointments with subject teachers.
57. The school has good links with the local community and uses these to enrich the learning experiences of students. A range of visitors, such as the local police and drug action team share their expertise and experience with students. Coaches from local sports clubs come in to help both in lessons and with extra-curricular activities. Representatives from local businesses support the school's industry day and work experience programme and the business studies department has good links with a number of local firms.
58. There is good contact with other schools and colleges. Over many years the school has built up effective working relationships with the many primary schools from which it draws its students. This not only contributes to the pastoral care of students, but also improves curriculum continuity. Through the local schools consortium, each subject department is linked to departments in other local secondary schools, enabling staff to discuss developments in their subject.
59. In the provision for special educational needs, the partnership between the students, the school and parents is regarded as fundamental to successful learning and is promoted very effectively by the school. The excellent quality of liaison between parents and teachers, and the careful attention which is paid to the wishes of students with special educational needs helps their achievement.

Students' views

60. Sixth form students are mostly positive; they feel well supported, teaching is very good, and that teachers are helpful and supportive. Many, however, would like more opportunities to take part in sporting and other recreational activities.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall, the school is well led and managed. The headteacher provides very good leadership in establishing the school's ethos and raising standards. The leadership and management of other key staff are good. Governors carry out their responsibilities satisfactorily, though statutory requirements are not met for a daily act of collective worship or in some aspects of provision for ICT in Years 10 and 11.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The strategic planning by the headteacher is making a significant contribution to school improvement.
- The school's focus on improvement is strong and the vision is shared by all.
- The teamwork of staff is significantly contributing to the success of the school.
- Poor accommodation allied to poor maintenance means that many classrooms and other teaching and social areas are shabby and they do not provide a conducive environment for learning and social development.

Commentary

61. The work of the governing body is satisfactory. Governors have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. They are very supportive and committed to the continuing improvement of the school. They have been influential in supporting the school's fight for improved finance. They are currently reviewing their practice and intend that this will enhance their ability to ask more searching questions. They have a business-like approach to their work and carry out their responsibilities properly.
62. The leadership of the headteacher is very good. Although he has been in post for only ten months, he has established robust systems with which to monitor and evaluate all aspects of the school. His vision is very firmly based on continuous improvements in students' learning. As a result, staff are becoming increasingly well informed and able to make good decisions regarding their responsibilities.
63. Leadership overall is good. Whole-school planning is focused well on improved achievement for students. The school's much improved assessment systems are beginning to be used very effectively to identify strengths and weaknesses in pupils' progress. Whole-school priorities are clearly reflected in departmental development plans and in the work of departments. There is a strong sense of teamwork throughout the school and performance management is being used well to improve students' learning.
64. The management is good. The school functions smoothly as an orderly and open community. The use of targets to focus and evaluate aspects of the school are increasingly well used at all levels to support students' progress. The high quality of teamwork, mutual support and emphasis on staff development have ensured that standards continue to rise. The national problems related to recruitment and retention of staff have been eased by the school's successful practices in training new teachers. The systems introduced by the new headteacher to hold all staff to account ensure clear links between whole-school priorities, the work of departments, students' achievement and finance. However, the good practice that is emerging in many departments, with respect to the use of data and the monitoring of teaching and learning in order to improve provision, is not yet reflected consistently in all departments.

65. Maintenance of the site is poor. There are aspects of the school that are in a state of poor repair and, as a result, some significant health and safety issues. This aspect of the school is being vigorously addressed by the senior management team.
66. The school has a deficit budget. However, the headteacher and governors have realistic plans to remove this over three years. The revised method of displaying financial accounts for governors is vastly improved and enables them to hold the school to account much more effectively. There are, in addition, improved methods for collecting information with which to demonstrate the efficiency of different parts of the school. These ensure that everyone reflects on their practice and is supported to develop and improve. Although the school is beginning to embrace the principles of best practice very effectively, there is scope for governors to use this data more productively in holding the school to account.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	3,832,141
Total expenditure	3,867,854
Expenditure per pupil	3,157

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	-118,108
Balance carried forward to the next	-153,821

67. The new headteacher's strategic planning is very good and there is a strong emphasis on improving students' learning. The commitment of staff is outstanding. The standards in the school continue to rise. Since the last report, issues relating to monitoring and evaluation have been well addressed. There are, however, significant barriers to improvement relating to the inadequate accommodation, the poor maintenance of the site, students' access to information and communication technology and a deficit budget.
68. The professional development of staff is good. There has been a concerted effort to give opportunities for the development and progression of teachers throughout the school. This has been evident in the number of teachers who have taken up new roles of responsibility within the school. The impact of professional development has also developed the understanding of many teachers so that they are more aware of strategies to raise standards. This is having a good impact on teaching and learning. The induction of new and newly qualified teachers is generally good. However, there is some inconsistency across departments.
69. Leadership and management of the provision for students with special educational needs are both excellent. The nominated governor takes a great interest in the department and is well briefed and aware of strengths and difficulties. Statutory requirements are fully met. All students who come in contact with teachers and staff are highly valued, and thrive as a result of this care and attention. Leadership is dedicated to the highest possible standards of achievement in all areas of school work. It is self-critical and imaginative with a clear vision of further developments in provision and how they might be achieved. The creation of a like-minded team of staff, and the excellent standard of liaison with classroom teachers and a range of social care agencies are key strengths. Teaching assistants are well trained to give specialist help.
70. Since the last inspection, there has been a very good level of improvement in the provision for special educational needs. Provision is now very good. Assessment systems are now excellent. Some excellent examples of teaching and support were seen during this inspection. The recent development of the student support unit is a significant strength. The development of students' independent learning has been a principled and imaginative response to the criticism of adults intervening too soon in the learning of students with special educational needs, which was a criticism in the last report.
71. Resources are good and include a battery of helpful specialist tests and well adapted learning materials. There are texts written from the viewpoint of a person with Asperger's syndrome, for

example, which help those on the autistic continuum to learn. Accommodation is currently being adapted to better serve the needs of physically disabled students.

Sixth form

72. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Sixth formers enjoy many successes and most students appreciate the experience and move on to appropriate higher education courses or employment. The careers provision is good and, while not always appreciated by the students, it has been suitably planned, especially in terms of preparing students for their higher education applications. The governors have a satisfactory understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the sixth form and have a clear vision about how this provision might develop further. Their vision is similar to that of the head of sixth form.
73. A caring and supportive ethos has been established and students are advised well and realistically about their options when entering the sixth form. A suitable taught curriculum has been established and this caters very well for the students' needs, including providing for gifted and talented students. This is reflected in the range of universities to which the students apply. The quality of provision in the sixth form is improving especially as monitoring procedures became more firmly embedded. Assessment data is being used more routinely to set students target grades and monitor their performance against such targets, though this should be done with more consistency in departments. One area for development highlighted by both the inspection team and by the students is that there too few enrichment opportunities exist. Students study their examination options but little else. Though some extra-curricular activities are offered via performing arts, sporting and recreational opportunities are severely limited. Many students told inspectors that they would welcome better opportunities to participate in such activities.

WORK OF THE STUDENT SUPPORT UNIT

Though no other features for the inspection were specified, the work of the school's student support unit was sampled.

74. The unit contains a constantly changing number of students who need extra support because a range of social, behavioural and medical difficulties. In the week of the inspection, seven statemented students with emotional and behavioural difficulties were fully integrated, with appropriate support, into all lessons. One student was receiving monitoring and another receiving help from a medical professional. Two school refusers were being taught in the unit after a reintegration programme had failed. The range of standards of students supported by the unit ranges from well below average to those likely to obtain five good GCSE grades and the unit works hard to raise students' self-esteem by successfully helping them to produce work of high quality.
75. The quality of teaching and learning seen in the unit was consistently good. There is excellent liaison with school departments so that students are able to keep abreast of mainstream learning. Lessons are sensitively taught, with the teacher nurturing students' fragile motivation by the development of positive relationships. Specialist help from the school is on hand to help higher attainers if it is required. The unit uses school textbooks and schemes of work in all teaching and learning. The monitoring of academic and behavioural standards is excellent. Well-trained support assistants aid achievement, but further development of their ICT skills is currently a priority.
76. Inclusion is excellent and a key strength of the unit. The students' curriculum follows that of the rest of their age group in the school and is seen as a key element in preparation for integration. In addition, a range of social care agencies provides guidance and support for students in the unit. The school counsellor provides further support of very high quality.

77. Leadership of this unit is very good and has created an ethos in the school in which students in the unit are free from stigma. Management is very good, with liaison a particular strength. Staffing is good. Teachers and teaching assistants work well as a team. The bright accommodation, cleaned daily by the teaching team, provides a haven for some vulnerable students during the school day. It is well supervised and very welcoming. This provision is a strength of the school's work.

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

- Good leadership has brought about good improvement since the last inspection.
- Teaching is good overall: students usually learn and achieve well, and standards are well above average.
- Inconsistencies in teaching affect the quality of some learning: subject to further regular monitoring and sharing of good practice, the capacity for improvement is good.

Commentary

78. In 2003, test results at the end of Year 9 were well above average, representing good achievement by most students. GCSE results in both English and English literature were well above average, representing good achievement given students' above average performance in national tests two years before.
79. Standards in work seen are well above average by Year 9 and well above average by Year 11. The standard of speaking is a particularly strong feature. The ability to give an extended reply to questions, to speak with clarity and use a sometimes sophisticated range of vocabulary is apparent among higher attainers in all year groups. Most students have good techniques for planning and preparation and produce well-structured and thoughtful writing as a result. Vocabulary and analytical skills are not so strongly developed among average or below average attainers and these students often have persistent spelling problems. Such weaknesses make it more difficult for them to reach the higher levels of attainment.
80. Achievement is good throughout the age range because of several effective aspects of the department's approach. In Years 7, 8 and 9 programmes of work have been thoughtfully adapted in the light of the Key Stage 3 strategy's framework for teaching English. As a result students benefit from interesting work that is carefully structured to meet the needs of all, including those with special educational needs and higher attainers. In all years students receive effective help and encouragement through support in the classroom and good marking of written work that explains what they need to do to improve and sets suitable targets for improvement. They also have frequent opportunities to reflect on and evaluate their own progress and thereby understand their share in the responsibility for learning.
81. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. In addition to the contributions to achievement mentioned above, teachers usually manage students well and cultivate good attitudes by praising students' effort and listening carefully to their responses. Some teaching does draw attention very well to the moral or spiritual aspects of texts, and when this happens students respond perceptively and sensitively. Teachers also vary lesson activities and as a result lessons are productive: students develop all the key subject skills well. Their ICT capability is not so strongly developed because of problems with access and software, but the department is doing what it can to improve this situation. Teachers' knowledge of and enthusiasm for their subject often provide a good 'role model' for students so that they have confidence in and enjoy their learning. In some lessons the pace of learning slows because teachers do not ensure that paired or group discussion have sufficient focus or purpose.

Opportunities are missed for students to review or record their work in some way so that learning is not sufficiently consolidated. Sometimes lack of direct questioning allows some students to avoid participation and involvement. Inattention creeps in and attitudes suffer. These weaknesses in an overall good picture of teaching and learning occur mainly among the department's relatively inexperienced, new or non-specialist teachers.

82. Good leadership is responsible for the good improvement made since the last inspection: despite staffing changes and uncertainties that still to an extent persist, standards are higher; achievement continues to be good, teaching quality and curriculum development have been sustained. The process of establishing a consistently effective teaching team is being managed well overall. Further regular monitoring and sharing of good practice are required to iron out teaching inconsistencies and weaknesses so that all students are taught equally effectively. Assuming these developments, the capacity for further improvement by the present team is good.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

83. Most subjects make a good contribution to the development of students' language and literacy skills. A strong feature is the way subjects emphasise the proper use of important subject vocabulary so that students learn to use it effectively themselves. In subjects such as mathematics, modern foreign languages, geography, design and technology and religious education, teachers also expect accuracy in writing and develop research skills well. Geography and history teachers encourage writing in a variety of styles. They use 'frameworks' to support the needs of different students in organising and extending their writing. In science, though satisfactory because of the opportunities for speaking, the opportunities for extended writing are limited and teachers are inconsistent in use of key scientific vocabulary. As a result, literacy skills are less well developed.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of leadership is very good resulting in a shared commitment to raise standards and the profile of languages in the school.
- The quality of the curriculum has been improved by the recent addition of a Spanish course.
- There are too few opportunities for learning to be enhanced through the use of ICT.
- The GCSE examination results in 2003 are below average.

Commentary

84. Students performed better in their other subjects than they did in languages and very few students achieved higher grades. Results in the 2003 examinations were below average in both French and German. In French boys performed significantly worse than girls. These lower than expected results were partly due to staffing difficulties which have now been resolved. These outcomes represent unsatisfactory achievement for the students concerned.
85. Standards seen in French and German in Year 9 are above average. Students studying Spanish in Year 7 have also made a good start. Most students in Year 9 speak confidently with good pronunciation and have good listening and reading comprehension skills. Higher and middle attaining students can use the past and immediate future tenses in speaking and in writing. Students understand and respond well to explanations and instructions in the foreign language. They are developing good grammatical understanding and can apply grammatical rules in their own language. This represents good achievement. In Year 11, standards are also above average, which also represents good achievement. In both French and German, students have produced a variety of coursework tasks on topics such as healthy living, famous

people and brochures for their area. Higher attaining students write at length using complex language, a range of tenses and can give opinions with reasons. Average and below average attaining students can also write at length although less accurately and using simpler language. Students can tackle listening and reading tasks across a range of topics and in speaking they take part in role-plays and talk about themselves and their experiences. Some weaker students, however, have less confidence in speaking and their responses are more limited.

86. Overall, teaching in the department in Years 7 to 11 is good with some examples of very good teaching and one excellent lesson. All teachers have very good subject knowledge and use the language effectively in the classroom, providing a good model for students' own language. Teachers plan a range of activities so that students learn at a good pace and both boys and girls contribute confidently. Teachers explain learning objectives and plan effective plenary activities so that students reflect on their own learning. In Years 7, 8 and 9 marking and assessment are effective so that students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. However in Years 10 and 11, students are often vague about GCSE grades and how they can improve their performance. Although teachers provide a range of opportunities for both collaborative and independent learning, including extension tasks and independent reading, there are too few opportunities for students to use ICT to support their language learning.
87. The curriculum provision in modern foreign languages is good and the introduction of Spanish is motivating for students. There are, however, some external influences that limit the scope for provision to be better than good. The department's accommodation is limited and the one teacher with no base is not always able to access the language resources fully. There are insufficient resources, including overhead projectors and ICT facilities to support good learning. Timetabling language lessons on consecutive days and in Year 10 two lessons on the same morning does not support the department's efforts to raise standards. The uptake for languages in Year 10 is low.
88. The department has undergone reorganisation and the recently appointed head of department offers very good curriculum leadership and management and this is already leading to improving standards and a wider curriculum. The department work very well as a team with a shared commitment to raising standards and raising the profile of languages in the school. Departmental documentation is very good, including the schemes of work for all languages and they are reflected in consistent classroom practice. A number of strategies have been introduced to raise standards at GCSE which still require further development. Because of changes in the department including staffing, it is not possible to make an accurate judgement about improvement since the last inspection, but the evidence that is available suggests it has been good.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of leadership in the department is very good, and there is strong teamwork.
- Teaching is good resulting in good achievement by students.
- Standards are improving especially in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- Aspects of numeracy need to be developed to reduce the students' reliance on calculators.
- Restricted access to ICT facilities is impinging on teaching styles.

Commentary

89. Results in the national tests in 2003 in Year 9 were above the national average. The proportion of students gaining at least Level 6 increased significantly. Compared with students in similar schools, achievements were very good. In the GCSE examinations, the proportion of students gaining the higher grades was average, with girls continuing to perform better than boys. The

improvement shown by students since their tests in Year 9 was satisfactory. Students' overall performance in mathematics was lower than in most of their other subjects.

90. Students' standards on entry to the school are above average. In work seen during the inspection, standards were above average throughout the school, but particularly in Years 9 and 11. Students in all year groups and at all levels of attainment are achieving well, because they are developing their levels of prior learning and are becoming more confident as mathematicians. There is no significant difference in the work of boys and girls. Students with special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented are well known to their teachers. Work is generally provided at the appropriate level so that all students are challenged to think and to improve their mathematical understanding. Teachers make a good contribution to the development of students' literacy skills and there is regular practice in the use of number. Nevertheless, a significant minority of students in mathematics lessons are too reliant on a calculator for basic number operations.
91. The quality of teaching and learning is good throughout the school; with a number of very good lessons. Teaching is effective across the ability range. Planning is very thorough; in the best lessons it includes consideration of how students will learn, as well as the content of the lesson. Relationships between teachers and students are very good; this leads to enjoyment of lessons and learning. As a result, students develop very positive attitudes to mathematics. Teachers are very positive about the benefits of modern technology, but there is insufficient access to computer rooms for whole class use; this is impinging on teaching styles. Teachers use key words effectively, and make a good contribution to the development of students' literacy skills. Occasionally, teachers talk for too long and do not allow sufficient time for students to learn by working independently, or working in groups with their peers. The very good display of students' work enhances classrooms, in contrast to the rather stark corridors. Marking is regular, and includes good use of 'target statements' to encourage students to improve. Routine assessments of students' work are used to predict examination performance. However, there is little reference to national levels when commenting on the standard of work.
92. Curriculum leadership of the department is very good. The newly appointed head of department leads by example, and has established very good routines within the department. Teachers are hardworking, keen to improve, and work very well together, sharing ideas and resources. They have very good command of their subject. Organisation of the work of the department is very efficient, and there are appropriate priorities for future developments. The monitoring of teaching and marking, and the use of data are increasing and there are clear strategies for improvement.
93. Since the last inspection, the department has made satisfactory progress. Standards have remained above average in Year 9, but in the last two years they have been lower than normal in Year 11. However, leadership of the department is now very good, and school records and lesson observations at all levels of attainment indicate that standards are rising. The department has a good capacity for improvement.

Mathematics across the curriculum

94. The numeracy co-ordinator has developed a comprehensive school policy for the development of mathematical skills across the curriculum. There have also been numerous training opportunities for teachers. As a result, many subjects have developed their own policies, and identified topics in which students use mathematics. There is increasing consistency in the application of mathematical processes. This gives students more confidence in areas such as the use of formulae, and the analysis of graphs.
95. Students' mathematical skills are generally above average and many of them show pride in their ability to manipulate number. However, a significant minority are over-reliant on the use of calculators. At the beginning of mathematics lessons, there are often opportunities for students to practise the manipulation of number, but otherwise there is insufficient encouragement for

them to work without a calculator. There is good support for the development of mathematical skills in business education, geography, and science.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is science is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Overall students in all years achieve well and gain good results, with boys doing especially well in their GCSE examinations.
- Where teaching is thoughtful and well planned, students respond with enthusiasm, progress in lessons is marked and learning is at least good.
- In a minority of lessons, especially in Years 10 and 11, teaching is too teacher centred and the students are not sufficiently challenged and the pace of learning declines.
- For standards to rise further students should be encouraged to offer more detailed written answers and the use of ICT should be extended.
- Poor accommodation and provision of resources, including access to ICT limits teaching and learning.

Commentary

96. Students' standards in science on entry to the school are above average; they were also above average in the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003. This represents satisfactory achievement overall. Boys performed particularly well. In the 2003 GCSE examinations, standards were above average overall, but were well above average in the attainment of grades in the A* to C range. Boys did particularly well in reaching the highest levels. These outcomes are indicative of good achievement.
97. In work seen during the inspection, standards in Years 7, 8 and 9 were above average. Students of all abilities are able to concentrate well and participate enthusiastically in the learning. Higher attaining students were given greater independence and more challenging tasks and students with special educational needs were able to participate fully in the lesson and to contribute to class discussion. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are also above average and students are achieving well. In Year 10 lower attaining students planning a coursework practical assignment were able to use appropriate scientific vocabulary to prepare a detailed plan and were supported by a range of resources to produce good quality investigations. In Year 11 a middle-attaining set evaluated an investigation into electrical resistance using challenging concepts and formula to calculate resistance. In this lesson high expectations and challenge resulted in good standards.
98. Teaching and learning are good overall but they are variable, particularly in Years 10 and 11 where the quality of the students' experience is too teacher dependent. Some teaching is of a high quality and learning benefits; but, in other lessons, the quality is more mundane. Lessons are too teacher centred, the pace of learning slows and the students have less enthusiasm for science. In some lessons learning support assistants also make an effective contribution to learning by offering at least good support to students with special educational needs. In the most effective lessons, teachers succeed in gaining high levels of student involvement. These sessions are lively, with good verbal exchanges between the students and their teacher. Learning clearly benefits as a result. Teachers are also beginning to make use of numeracy and literacy techniques but these need to be more clearly identified within the department's schemes of work. For standards to rise further, more opportunities for writing in depth should be offered. At present, very little extended writing takes place in lessons or in home-learning set by the department. Students' skills in speaking and listening are very good and are often used effectively in lessons, for example in a Year 8 lesson when students contributed their ideas about 'energy resources' articulately. The provision of ICT in science lessons is unsatisfactory

and limits teaching techniques and learning opportunities. The marking of students' work is at least good overall but there is an element of inconsistency. Where this occurs, students are not always sure of the grades used by teachers.

99. Leadership within the science department has been disrupted because of recent staff turnover, but is now good and showing signs of becoming more effective. The relatively new head of department and other key staff have the support of the team and are developing strategies to share the good practice which exists within the team. The scheme of work is at an early stage of development and does not address current limitations in the teaching of literacy, numeracy, and ICT. It must also identify how the department contributes to citizenship. Insufficient time is allocated to monitoring of standards or to sharing good practice and some of the exciting and effective teaching techniques being used are not experienced by all students.
100. The department has made satisfactory progress since the previous inspection. Standards in national tests and examinations have remained above national averages. One major impediment facing the department is that the accommodation and provision of resources are poor and have a negative impact on teaching and learning. There is insufficient provision of laboratories and a number of science lessons are taught in other subject areas. Provision of preparation and storage areas is also poor. Old and worn-out equipment was observed during the inspection, and several lessons had insufficient equipment for class practical activities to proceed. Access to ICT is also poor.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are enthusiastic in using ICT both in their lessons and at home.
- There is good use of ICT in both mathematics and modern foreign languages but, overall, students do not use ICT skills sufficiently within the curriculum to enhance their learning.
- Only a minority of students study ICT in Years 10 and 11; the statutory curriculum is not covered fully.
- The shortcomings of the computer network do not allow teachers to complete their work effectively. Learning is affected seriously, as is student achievement.
- Major issues about ICT, raised in the last inspection, have not been addressed.

Commentary

101. Students enter the school with average skills in the subject. The standards being achieved in Years 7, 8 and 9 in the ICT work observed was average overall. This indicates satisfactory achievement. Similar standards were also reported in the last inspection. The standards of ICT used in subjects of the curriculum where application of skills and knowledge are required were lower than those specific lessons of ICT. No students were entered for the full GCSE in ICT in 2003, but 70 sat the GNVQ intermediate exam, for which no national comparative data is available. Currently Year 10 and 11 students are following a GNVQ ICT course. Standards on this course in Year 11 are above average. Students are able to articulate their views and describe their work very effectively. A great proportion of the students have computers at home and these are used in a significant way to help students reach higher standards. Given their levels of prior attainment, these students are achieving well.
102. The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, but in Years 10 and 11 it is good. Where the teaching is good one witnesses good preparation, enthusiastic delivery, very good question and answer sessions designed to reinforce and extend learning and the use of good materials and equipment. In most instances teachers had insecure subject knowledge. In addition, two instances were seen where the lesson planning contained an excessive amount of instruction and insufficient student activity. There are two quite major issues that restrict the

quality of learning. Firstly, the rooms are small; it is difficult to accommodate 30 students and ensure all have access to their own computer. Plans are in place to change this in the near future. Secondly, the network is very unreliable and malfunctions at regular intervals. These two factors hinder achievement significantly and affect the standards of work being produced by the students. In no observed lesson was there a support member of staff to help students with special educational needs despite the large class sizes. In a number of instances it would have been very beneficial for someone to support individual students working on appropriate tasks.

103. The previous report from 1998 was critical of the management of the subject and it was said at that time that it was a 'temporary problem'. The problems remained and have only started to be addressed suitably with the appointment of a permanent and full-time teacher at the start of the spring term, some four weeks prior to this inspection. The management problems manifested themselves in issues such as non-compliance with statutory orders in Years 10 and 11. A recent audit of provision has shown a plan for subject development in the future addressing the critical issues raised here. The audit has revealed a considerable need for staff training in most curriculum areas of the school. Improvement since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory as many of the deficiencies identified then have only started to be addressed very recently. As the head of department is new to post, no judgements about leadership and management can be made, suffice to say that too little has been done in the past to address identified issues, but there are signs that with the new staffing structure a more robust approach to leading and managing the subject is being adopted.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

104. There has been unsatisfactory progress in the use of ICT across subjects since the last inspection. Teachers have received some training in ICT and there has been some improvement in resources, but this has not been extensive and the school's network system is not of a good quality and is unreliable. These issues combine to adversely affect the quality of teaching and learning in many subjects of the curriculum. Nevertheless, some good work was seen using ICT in both mathematics and modern foreign languages. Hitherto the monitoring and evaluation of students' progress in their use of ICT in other subjects of the curriculum has not been done systematically and there has been too much reliance on students developing their skills, knowledge and understanding by using their own computer equipment at home. This raises issues about equality. There is clear evidence that the new headteacher and the new head of ICT want to see a dramatic improvement, but the present quality of resources, including the quality of the school's computer network, serve as an impediment to improvement.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- 2003 GCSE examination results are well above average; a result of good teaching.
- Teachers have very good knowledge, high expectations and enthusiasm for the subject.
- Students have good, positive attitudes to the subject and teacher student relationships are good; both enhance learning.
- There is not enough regular observation of teaching to support, share and extend good practice.

Commentary

105. Results in the 2003 GCSE examination were above average, which represents good achievement from their prior attainment. Boys and girls do better in geography than they do in most of their other subjects.
106. Students join the school with a wide range of geographical experiences showing geographical standards are broadly average. By the end of Year 9 standards are above average and given their starting base, students are achieving well. By the end of Year 9, students have an above average knowledge and understanding of a wide range of topics and have a good foundation of geographical skills. Students understand simple ecosystems and know the importance of energy systems within the natural cycle. They successfully use a wide range of terms like those associated with mapping, creating graphs, migration and the rainforest. However, low attaining students take time to grasp temperature and rainfall graphs. By the end of Year 11, students' standards are above average which shows that they are achieving satisfactorily. Many students use ICT well to present work in assignments and in their research. They build successfully on knowledge and skills learned in Years 7, 8 and 9, as exemplified in a lesson on flooding on the lower stretches of the River Thames. Standards of classroom work are reinforced by practical work and regular fieldwork. Files and the work of high attaining students demonstrate high quality research skills and analysis. Boys and girls perform equally well, while students with special educational needs achieve as expected.
107. Overall, teaching and learning are good. In Years 7, 8 and 9 teaching and learning are good and in Years 10 and 11 they are satisfactory. In Year 11, teaching is undertaken by new teachers and whilst being satisfactory, it does not contain the same variety of interesting tasks and is not structured as tightly as that for the younger students; consequently students do not achieve as well. Teachers show very good geographical knowledge and apply it well in their teaching with high expectations, as seen in a Year 10 lesson on Thames flood defences where the high quality and challenge of questions made students evaluate and analyse the impact of the Thames Barrier. Students usually know what is expected of both their behaviour and work. However, where teaching is occasionally unsatisfactory, students behave badly and this constrains learning. Overall, students respond well to the support and encouragement given in most lessons, consequently the quality of learning is good. Resources are well used and provide a good stimulus for learning. For example, Year 10 students successfully evaluated a quality video clip about flooding on the River Thames. Work is regularly marked showing both evaluative comments and encouragement; consequently students know what they need to do in order to improve. Teachers manage classes well and, as a result, lessons proceed smoothly and much is achieved. Students' books and home-learning reflect very positive attitudes as they produce high quality work and assignments. They successfully use computers in presenting their work. Overall, students have good attitudes to the subject and they are motivated to do well.
108. The subject is well led and managed. The department work well together as a team supporting and complimenting one another with a commitment to improvement. The head of department has a very clear vision for the development of the subject. There is insufficient observation of teaching to support and share good practice within the team. Since the previous inspection there has been good improvement, particularly in raising standards and improvement in GCSE results.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are achieving well because of good teaching.

- Students know how well they are doing and how to improve because of good assessment systems.
- Very good leadership of the subject leads to good student attitudes and high staff morale.
- Not enough attention is given to meeting the needs of high attaining students.

Commentary

109. Results in the 2003 GCSE examination were below average, but those of the girls were in line with the national average for girls. Students did less well in history than they did in their other subjects. Results are below those of recent years because of significant changes in the examination leading to lower standards. This is now being addressed.
110. By the end of Year 9 the standards that students reach are above average. This represents good achievement given their average standards on entry to the school. They produce well-drafted, extended writing in studies of the Romans in Year 7, with above average standards of grammatical accuracy. Students understand the nature of historical evidence and can distinguish between primary and secondary sources, but some do not evaluate the evidence fully enough. Students achieve well and make gains in range and depth of knowledge of topics. They are knowledgeable about political developments, the nature of trench warfare and why censorship was necessary to achieve victory in the First World War. The minorities of students, more so lower attainers, under-achieve because of unsatisfactory attitudes in completing and taking care in presenting work. This is compounded by grammatical inaccuracies. At the end of Year 11 standards are average. This represents good achievement for this group of students, since they have improved their examination skills. Studies of developments in medicine show students have knowledge of people like Pasteur and understand the impact of technology on the improvement of health. GCSE coursework is above average standard, except for some students who do not evaluate sources of evidence in sufficient detail.
111. The quality of teaching and learning is good, overall. The quality of teaching observed during the inspection was good in Years 7, 8 and 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Learning is effective because the aims are relevant and lessons structured so that students are interested and achieve well. Resources are well used, albeit that there is over-reliance on reprographic resources. Teachers expect much of students in effort and commitment and this leads to a positive response and good achievement. The marking of work is excellent. Care is taken to evaluate content and support is given to support grammatical accuracy so that students are improving their standards of writing. In some lessons, however, learning is too teacher directed with the result that students are passively involved and learning is slower than is to be expected. Teachers support students with special educational needs well and they achieve well over time, but not enough is done to provide more challenging tasks for higher attaining students.
112. The quality of leadership and management is good. The subject leader gives clear guidance and strong support to teachers so that teacher morale is high. Very good progress is being made in developing procedures to assess and monitor students' progress. Consequently most students are achieving higher than previously and standards are rising. Planning is well linked to whole-school initiatives and shows vision about future developments and expectations. The subject has made good progress since the last inspection, particularly the higher standards evident in Years 7, 8 and 9.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is challenging and involves the students. As a result students learn well and enjoy their lessons.
- Significant improvement has been made since the last inspection.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- In a small number of lessons, teachers need more strategies for helping quieter students to develop more confidence in asking and answering questions.
- More emphasis must be placed on religious views on moral and ethical issues in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

113. Standards in the GCSE short course in 2003 were well above average. A small group of students was entered for the full course GCSE and their standards were significantly above average, with 10 out of 11 achieving an A* grade. A similar group sat the entry level certificate and though there are no national comparisons, they all achieved well in the context of prior attainment.
114. Standards are currently above average in Year 9 and in Year 11. Although these standards are not as high as those seen in 2003, as group sizes are larger and cater for a wide ability range, achievement is good for all groups of students throughout the age range. The short course has been established at the school for a relatively short period of time and the department is now in a position to begin to identify patterns and trends in order to achieve more consistent results. By the end of Year 9, students know and understand the main beliefs and practices of the major world religions. They have a very good understanding what these beliefs mean to people of faith. They understand moral complexities and show tolerance and respect for those around them. Progress in these years is particularly fast. Students also achieve well in Years 10 and 11 because the teaching enables them to build well on previous learning. Standards in literacy are above average. Students have some opportunities to word process their work or research on the Internet and their standards in these areas are average. Too little work involving numeracy was seen to make a judgement.
115. Teaching and learning are good overall with many very good, and occasionally excellent, features. A major strength of the teaching is the way in which teachers make learning exciting as a result of high levels of challenge and the opportunities that exist for students to become involved in their learning. Teaching is enthusiastic and knowledgeable. As a result, students take the subject seriously and clearly enjoy their lessons. In a Year 8 lesson on reincarnation, for example, students told the inspector that religious education was 'cool' and showed high levels of understanding of the Hindu concept of 'samsara'. Another strength of the teaching is the contribution made to students' personal development, especially spiritual and cultural development. In all lessons seen, students showed high levels of spiritual awareness and clearly understood why many questions in religious education are unanswerable, but still important to ask. Teachers help students to build a moral framework for their lives and clearly relate this to the modern world. This was evident in lessons on the death penalty in the United States and the morality of the recent Iraq war. Although in most lessons teachers make very good use of questions, occasionally they rely too much on volunteers and need to develop more strategies for including those who are less confident verbally. In some lessons in Years 10 and 11, more emphasis must be placed on religious arguments on moral and ethical issues.
116. Leadership is very good, with very clear vision and direction. Management is also very good. This is because, in a short period of time, the head of department and her team have tackled the many criticisms made during the last inspection and have taken the department in a new direction without ignoring the strengths that also existed. Team work and the sharing of

concerns and good practice are very strong features of the department and very good improvement has been made since the last inspection.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' very good design work leads to imaginative, high quality products.
- Good teaching promotes good learning and independence.
- Students achieve very well in external examinations at the end of Year 11.
- Students enjoy lessons because they are well matched to their interests.
- The curriculum for students in Year 7, 8 and 9 is too narrow and limits achievement.
- Unsatisfactory accommodation and resources, including access to ICT are impeding teaching styles and the quality of learning.

Commentary

117. In the 2003 GCSE examinations, standards in design and technology were well above average. In the work of current students, standards in Year 9 are above average and they are well above average in Year 11. Students perform very well, especially in external examinations. Results since the last inspection have shown continual improvement. Standards are particularly high in graphics, food technology and textiles. The examination results in resistant materials are not as high as in the other technology subjects, but are improving.
118. Students' achievement in Year 9 is good; it is also good in Years 10 and 11. The quality of students' design work is particularly high and is the result of high levels of research and analysis coupled with very good graphics skills. The achievement of students in Years 7, 8 and 9 is limited by the length of projects, particularly in Year 9. Nevertheless many students put enormous effort into their work and make very good quality products, all of them different. By the end of Year 11, higher attaining students produce work of excellent quality. This is due to on-going refinements of their designs based on feedback from peers and teachers. Although students have good literacy skills, the lower attaining students are limited by weaker writing skills. These students make insufficient use of ICT to present work. Students have good numeracy skills. Although students with special needs and those from ethnic minorities achieve as well as others, girls tend to produce work of a higher quality than boys.
119. Overall, teaching and learning are good. They are often very good or excellent. Teachers' good understanding of their subject is evident in the rigour with which they question students. This helps students to understand and to solve their own problems and ensures that lessons have a good pace. In the best lessons, teachers expect students to improve their first attempts. Students' designs show clear development, based on analysis of new information. Teachers use effective starter activities to focus students on the purpose of the lesson. At the ends of lessons, they check and reinforce students' learning. New skills are taught as they are needed. There is a skilful balance between directing students' learning and developing their independence skills. Students enjoy lessons because the activities are relevant and challenging. Home-learning activities support students' learning well. In satisfactory but less successful lessons, the teachers have insufficient oversight of the progress of individual students. Where the lesson was judged unsatisfactory, the teacher spent too much time talking and there was too little involvement of students. In some resistant materials lessons, unsatisfactory classroom management leads to unsafe practices. There are good systems for assessing students which promote and support their achievement well, particularly in Years 10 and 11.

120. Leadership and management of the subject are good. There is insufficient use of ICT partly because of the difficulty of access to hardware. The accommodation remains unsatisfactory, as it was at the time of the previous inspection and limits students achievement in many ways. Otherwise, there have been good improvements, despite recruitment problems and limited resources.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design and music are reported in full below. In two **drama** lessons sampled in Years 10 and 11 teaching was very good overall and students were learning and achieving very well as a result. Students worked very well together, constantly evaluating and refining their tasks. Particularly in Year 11, they demonstrated above average skills in movement, use of space, characterisation and group creativity and cohesion. Teachers in both years developed these skills very well by their supportive suggestions and constructive criticism. Results in GCSE drama dipped in 2003 because of staffing difficulties, but present standards are above average. The course is very well led and managed, and drama makes a significant contribution to the life of the school. The high quality of drama accommodation gives the subject the status it deserves and helps raise standards by showing students that they and their work are valued.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well because of the quality of teaching offered.
- Teachers have high expectations and set challenging tasks to raise standards.
- There should be more opportunities offered to use ICT as a tool to improve learning.
- The use of assessment data to set targets and monitor students' progress must be employed with greater consistency.

Commentary

121. Students attained average standards overall in their GCSE art and design examination in 2003, though the proportion gaining grades in the A* to C range was below average. Present students in Year 9 are working at above average levels. Given their broadly average standards on entry to the school, their level of achievement is good. Standards in the current Year 11 are above average. This too represents good achievement compared to the National Curriculum levels attained at the end of Year 9 in 2002. Students with special educational needs are achieving as well as their peers and talented students are given extra-curricular opportunities that enrich their work.

122. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good throughout the school, but is very good when team teaching is used, such as in a Year 10 lesson seen during the inspection. All students learn effectively when teachers' expectations are high and challenging tasks are set. This was seen in a Year 9 lesson where students were taught to silk-screen print images like those seen in the 'pop art' work of Andy Warhol. They then made observation drawings of familiar household objects. The final outcome was to produce one sheet containing all their work where the students showed they had learnt the skills of design presentation. When opportunities occur for team teaching, students make very good progress: as a result, Year 10 students experienced a wider range of teaching methods than is usual. The resulting standard of their mixed media compositions was well above expectations for students of that age and experience.

123. The literacy skills of speaking and listening are developed well in discussion sessions. Sketch books have evidence of good annotation and some good extended descriptive writing, but there are insufficient opportunities to learn using ICT. For standards to rise further, a more consistent use of assessment data is needed. Currently there is uncertainty about what constitutes a national average standard and this leads to inaccurate levelling of students work.
124. The leadership and management of the department are good. Evaluation of the past reasons for boys achieving less well than girls has led to changes in the way the subject is taught and course content to make what is studied more appealing to boys. The head of department has built a team determined to raise standards. The day-to-day running of the department is smooth. Improvement since the last report is good.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The students' positive attitudes and the good teaching they receive both contribute significantly to their achievements.
- The students' performing skills are promoted by a very good range of extra-curricular opportunities.
- For standards to rise further, more use needs to be made of ICT in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- Students are not aware of the levels they are achieving in their work, or what they need to do to improve.

Commentary

125. For the small number of students who sat their GCSE examinations in 2003, results were similar to the national average. Though these results are not as high as the 2002 results there has been a gradual improvement over recent years. There was no noticeable difference in the attainment between boys and girls. Students join the school in Year 7 with varied previous experience and their overall knowledge is below the expected level, in particular in composition. However, with the benefit of good teaching, well structured programmes of study and students' positive attitude to the subject, progress is brisk and achievement overall is good, leading to improving standards.
126. Standards in the GCSE examination groups are above average. Students have a good understanding of the structure of compositions and compose pieces in a variety of different styles. They have developed a sense of chronology; discussing with understanding, different styles of music and the main composers for those periods. Students with special educational needs are fully integrated into lessons and they too achieve well.
127. Teaching and learning overall are good. Teachers are committed and enthusiastic, conveying their passion for the subject to engage students' attention and interest quickly. Teachers have good practical expertise, using their skills effectively to demonstrate techniques and inspire students. The planning of lessons is thorough with appropriate work to include all students. There are occasions, however, when the first part the lesson tends to be too teacher directed, resulting in students becoming restless. During practical activities, students do become more engrossed and learning improves. Teachers have good relationships with students and manage them well, creating an ethos where students are prepared to seek help when required and are confident during performances. Learning, on occasions, is slowed when students are not given clear targets at the beginning of lessons, resulting in some students coasting and not working to their full potential. Students in the GCSE groups successfully use ICT to support their composition skills; however, use is underdeveloped in Years 7, 8 and 9. New assessment procedures have been established to track progress, but students are not always informed of the levels they are achieving or ways to improve their work. The wide range of extra-curricular

ensembles is providing a rich and varied musical experience with challenging activities for gifted and talented students. This provision contributes to improving standards.

128. The leadership and management of the subject are good. There is a vision for the future development of the subject and a clear understanding on the need to maintain and improve standards. Teachers are well supported and the procedures for mentoring newly appointed teachers are good. The improvement since the previous inspection is good.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

In Years 10 and 11, lessons seen covered both the GCSE course in physical education and the course attended by students who are not following the GCSE option. This course is referred to as 'core physical education'.

Provision in physical education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average in GCSE physical education, with students achieving well, but for further improvements to occur, especially in core physical education, the quality of teaching must be more consistent.
- Good teaching is contributing to the rise in standards witnessed in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- The department's development plan must be more focused on raising standards.

Commentary

129. Results in the 2003 GCSE examinations were above average. In core physical education, standards were average. This was because teachers' expectations in core physical education are not high enough. By the end of Year 9 standards are average. Across all years the standard of many girls' work is better than that of boys.
130. Students enter the school with below average standards. Standards for present Year 9 students are broadly average, representing good achievement. In work seen in Years 7, 8 and 9 some good teaching has produced good achievement. Students in gymnastics lessons are able to create different balances demonstrating varied body shapes and tension. They can work co-operatively when planning paired balances. By the end of Year 11 standards in GCSE physical education and dance are above average, again representing good achievement. This is because of the emphasis teachers place on raising standards, which results in the students developing good basic techniques and individual learning skills. In basketball, for example, they are developing good passing and receiving techniques while under pressure of defenders and are confident about using a range of different defence formations in game situations. In core physical education standards and achievement are satisfactory. Students with special needs generally achieve at the same rate as their peers.
131. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. In Years 7, 8 and 9 students particularly benefit from knowledgeable teachers. Teachers target the work well to the standards students are at, with students often working with different equipment and on different tasks. Where learning is not as good, teachers do not use assessment for students to know what they can do and how to improve through target setting. Students do not consistently develop an understanding and use of physical education terminology. In GCSE physical education and dance lessons the teachers use a variety of teaching styles, which motivate the students, and keeps them on task. The students are developing good independent learning skills and can effectively work on tasks, which involve them in taking responsibility for their own work. Teaching is less effective, though satisfactory in core physical education in Years 10 and 11. Students are not always focused on learning because teaching lacks challenge. A large number of students enhance their performance in sport through a good extra-curricular programme.

132. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The head of department has good management systems; however, the department's development plan gives insufficient detail about how standards can be improved and more thought must be given to ensuring greater consistency in the teaching of core physical education in Years 10 and 11. Assessment procedures are good with appropriate recording systems. Analysis of this data must now take place to further inform curriculum development. Satisfactory progress has been made since the last inspection.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

No subjects were inspected.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

133. During the inspection too few lessons were seen to make overall judgements about the provision for citizenship and the quality of teaching and learning. Citizenship is taught through subjects of the curriculum, including personal, social and health education, and also through a wide range of extra-curricular activities such as assemblies, activities day and planned citizenship days in Years 7, 8 and 9. Visiting speakers from organisations such as the Citizens' Advice Bureau, Shelter, the NSPCC and the Army supplement this provision.
134. Where lessons were seen, there was a clear citizenship focus. In a religious education Year 10 lesson, for example, students looked at the concept of a 'just war' in Christian theology and linked it to a class vote on the morality of the recent Iraq war. A scrutiny of students' work, however, shows that standards are broadly above average and that achievement is good.
135. Leadership is very good. The teacher in charge of citizenship has a very clear vision of what must be done to take the subject forwards. Management is good. Clear progress has been made with the introduction of the subject. Teachers are committed and have worked hard to develop interesting programmes of relevance to the students. In a small number of cases, however, developing skills of enquiry and communication and developing skills of participation and responsible action are not linked specifically enough to knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens. The co-ordinator has carried out an effective audit of both curricular and extra-curricular activities to map their contributions to the subject. Assessment of the subject is a strength. Most subjects include two or three citizenship assessment tasks for which they have clear guidelines. These are recorded in a database and form the basis for a citizenship grade, which is reported to parents, at the end of Year 9.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, eight subjects 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 2002, the latest year for which national comparisons are available.

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	18	100	96.1	33.3	48.7	83.3	85.1
Biology	7	100	91.6	0	36.3	51.4	74.1
Business Studies	22	100	96.4	9.1	32.8	66.4	76.5
Communications Studies	68	100	98.3	29.4	36.8	79.1	81.1
English Literature	15	100	98.5	50	43.7	86.7	84.3
French	5	100	96.2	20	46.1	56	83
Design and Technology	12	100	95.3	8.3	35.5	78.3	76.5
Geography	10	100	97.1	20	40.5	70	80.9
History	7	100	97.1	42.9	41	82.9	81.2
Other Social Sciences	11	100	94.3	18.2	38.9	72.7	77.7
Physics	5	100	92.8	0	42.8	52	78.6
Sports/PE Studies	6	100	95.4	0	29.5	50	73.2
Leisure and Recreation	10	100	86.9	10	12.6	74	58.3
Travel and Tourism	11	100	88.1	18.2	15.7	80	61.4

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
Biology	5	20	81.6	0	33.2	4	33.2
Business Studies	7	71.4	89.1	14.3	31.7	22.9	35.4
Communications Studies	17	94.1	94.2	23.5	36.1	32.9	38.5
English Literature	8	100	94.4	37.5	37.9	40	38.9
German	6	33.3	87.6	0	34.7	6.7	35.6
History	5	100	91.8	20	37.2	36	37.8
Mathematics	7	42.9	74.2	0	34.3	11.4	31.3
Other Social Studies	19	0	57.9	32.5	83.2	18.4	33.6
Physics	5	0	40	36.2	82	8	34.3

Sports/PE Studies	6	0	16.7	27.7	88.2	5	33.8
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ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English literature is reported in full below. A Year 12 lesson in **French** was sampled. Good teaching ensured materials were matched to students' ability so that they were able to tackle a text and to express opinions about the effects of television in society. The teacher provided a very good model of language and students responded to a range of instructions and explanations in French.

English literature

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average.
- Teaching is very good overall: a committed and knowledgeable team ensures that students are actively involved in and given responsibility for their learning. They achieve very well as a result.
- Very good support, guidance and assessment procedures help students reach high standards.
- Curriculum leadership is very good, with a clear focus on creating a challenging but supportive environment that raises standards.

Commentary

136. Examination results in 2002 were above average and improved to well above average according to provisional results for 2003. In both years students achieved well in relation to their standards on entry to the course. All students also obtained at least a pass grade in these examinations.
137. Standards are well above average in work seen by the end of Year 13. Students are achieving very well in relation to their prior attainment. They do so because of the very effective provision in terms of background material, guidance on tackling assignments, substantial writing practice and a very good assessment process. These are apparent both in the classroom and in students' work, which shows very good improvement in content, style and accuracy over time. Year 12 students are achieving very well and standards are above average at this stage of their AS-level course. They are acquiring analytical skills and developing confidence in their ability to make judgements at a rapid rate.
138. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. They convey this with enthusiasm and students respond with enjoyment in their learning. Students also respect teachers' expertise and thus have confidence that their learning is significant. Teachers have, or are developing, very good relationships with students so that a pleasant but purposeful learning atmosphere exists in the classroom. The best teaching involves all students actively and ensures that they take responsibility for their share of the learning. This was the case in a very good Year 13 lesson where groups in turn presented the results of their analysis of a soliloquy from Shakespeare's *Othello*. As a result they learned very effectively from each other and the teacher's timely interventions helped them to focus on key aspects of the speech very well.
139. Curriculum leadership is very good. The teaching team is very effectively deployed and shares a common purpose in raising standards. Improvement since the last inspection is good because high standards and the quality of teaching have been maintained.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

140. Provision for the development of key skills in language and literacy across the curriculum is good. There is evidence in subjects like English, geography and law that students are encouraged to use literacy skills to improve the quality of their written work and oral discussions. When this happens such skills support their learning and enable them to achieve well in their examination courses.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers are well qualified, the quality of teaching is very good and examination results are improving.
- The quality of work is further enhanced by the excellent relationships students have with their teachers.
- Students work hard in class, and present their work clearly.
- The number of students in teaching groups is relatively low, but retention rates are excellent.
- For standards to rise further, more opportunities should be offered to use ICT.

Commentary

141. Students enter the AS-level course in Year 12 with a wide range of attainment in the GCSE examinations. Standards in AS and A-level examinations have generally been below average recently. At AS-level, they remained below average in 2002; students' achievements were satisfactory, based on their GCSE grades. There was a significant improvement in overall standards in 2003. There was only one candidate in the A-level examination in 2002 and no national comparison is possible on such a small sample. Results in 2003 improved considerably on those in previous years and the students' achievements were good. A high proportion of students gained much higher grades than anticipated.
142. Standards seen during the inspection in lessons, and in the quality of work in students' folders, are above average. This is higher than in recent years and is because recruitment has improved and the recently appointed head of department is inculcating higher standards. Students concentrate well and show pride in the quality of their written work. They respond well to the challenge of the A-level course and clearly enjoy the subject. For example, in a very good Year 12 lesson, students showed good ability to sketch graphs of algebraic functions. In Year 13, they were confident in using the equation of a circle to identify the co-ordinates of the centre and the length of the radius. Minor arithmetical errors restricted the accuracy of their answers, but they show good understanding of the mathematical principles involved. Both lessons were characterised by excellent relationships between teachers and students. As a result, students are confident to ask when needing help. In terms of their prior attainment at GCSE, the students are achieving very well. Although the take-up for mathematics is moderate, course retention rates are excellent.
143. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall, rising to excellent on occasions. Teachers have very good command of their subject and their planning is very thorough. They teach rather than 'lecture', involving students fully in the development of the lesson and helping their understanding of the theory. There is very good progression in both the scheme of work for the course and within each lesson. Very effective use is made of lesson 'starters' to make students think and to consolidate work from previous lessons. A particularly good example required students to develop the trigonometrical ratios for angles of 30, 45, and 60 degrees in surd form, testing both their understanding and a range of skills. Assessments of students' work are regular and provide useful guidance about how to improve. All students know their target grades; these encourage them to aim high. They clearly appreciate the quality of teaching and advice they are given. There is good use of keywords to support literacy

development, but insufficient use by students of ICT, partly through difficulty in gaining access to a computer room.

144. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. Organisation of the work is very efficient, so that there is a sense of purpose throughout lessons. There is increasing use of data to monitor the work, including comparison of GCSE grades with AS and A-level performance. This provides information about the value added during the A-level course. Standards are rising, and there are clear indications that the number of A and B grades will increase at both AS and A-level. Overall, there has been good progress since the last inspection.

Application of number

145. There are no classes in the sixth form for key skills and no timetabled lessons for the small number of students wishing to repeat their GCSE examination in mathematics. However, some support is provided for students through attending Year 11 lessons, or during the lunch break. In spite of this relatively low level of support, students in AS and A-level lessons throughout the curriculum do not experience particular difficulties in manipulating number. They are capable in geography of interpreting data, for instance, and in physics of rearranging equations, and undertaking calculations using standard form. In business education, they use calculators to arrive at figures for costs versus income. Overall standards are above average.

SCIENCE

The focus was on biology, but physics and chemistry were also sampled. In **physics** standards in the 2002 A-level examinations were well below average. In a good lesson about sub-atomic particles, overall standards were average. Students showed interest in the work and readily entered into discussions about evidence for the existence of these particles. In **chemistry** an excellent lesson was seen on infra-red spectroscopy, overall standards were well above average. Students demonstrated considerable knowledge and understanding of the concepts involved. They worked very enthusiastically and co-operatively with their teacher in a highly effective lesson.

Biology

Provision in biology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There has been considerable recent improvement in standards because of excellent leadership.
- Students are achieving very well because of the very good teaching offered.
- The quality of learning is further helped by the students' positive attitudes and the very good relationships with their staff.

Commentary

146. In 2002 A-level examinations results were well below average. No students obtained A or B grades, however all students entered passed with at least an E grade. In 2001 A-level examination results were well above average.
147. The standard of work seen in Year 12 and Year 13 lessons during the inspection was above average. There are no differences in the standards of male and female students. The improvement over the 2002 examination results is because of stricter and more rigorous recruitment strategies. Given the students' levels of prior attainment, they are achieving very well. The pace of the lessons was very good and occasionally excellent and appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills were all thoroughly covered. In an excellent lesson about

the role of hepatocytes, Year 13 students worked independently to review the functions of the liver. All students were totally focused on the challenging tasks set. In another lesson, Year 12 students worked particularly effectively in small groups to discuss transport across cell membranes; learning was stimulated by animations down-loaded from the Internet. In all lessons observed, students actively participated in their learning with great commitment and enthusiasm.

148. The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good and some lessons are excellent. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, plan their lessons well and consistently ensure that students are actively engaged in the teaching and learning process throughout. In a Year 13 lesson students were preparing their own presentations on different aspects of the topic. Teachers very effectively reviewed and consolidated students' prior learning before introducing new content and ensured students were actively thinking at all stages of their lessons. This led to high challenge and good pace. Students' folders of work are very well maintained and many students presented their work exceptionally well. Folders included evidence of personal research from the Internet and well organised notes including newspaper articles and information leaflets. Folders also contained evidence of appropriate numeracy skills, for example Year 13 folders included calculations using the Chi Square Test. Teachers marked work with perceptive and challenging comments to progress the students' learning. Overwhelmingly, standards were above expectations.
149. Considerable improvement has been recorded since the recent appointment of a new head of department. The quality of leadership offered is excellent and this is impacting on the quality of work seen. Course retention rates are excellent and good improvement has been made since the last inspection, though, as indicated above, the bulk of this occurred very recently.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

No subjects were inspected in this curriculum area, though one ICT lesson was observed. The quality of teaching was good and the students responded well.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

150. The use of ICT across subjects in the sixth form is satisfactory. The potential to use ICT to further enliven teaching and raise standards is hindered by the lack of an overall policy designed to promote use and by the unsatisfactory quality of resources and the unreliability of the network. Nevertheless, in some subjects good use of ICT is made; for example, in art and design and geography, though there is a tendency to rely on students using their own home-based resources. Overall, more must be done to promote better use across the whole curriculum.

HUMANITIES

The focus was on geography, but other subjects were sampled. One lesson was sampled in **law**. Standards were average and all students were achieving well owing to knowledgeable and challenging teaching. One lesson was sampled in **philosophy and ethics**. Standards were average and all students were making clear gains in their understanding because of knowledgeable and patient teaching. **Psychology** was also sampled. In a Year 12 lesson students achieved well because of good teaching and the positive relationship they had established with their teacher.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning are good; teachers have very good knowledge and high expectations of their students.
- Students have very good and positive attitudes to the subject and teacher-student relationships are very good; both enhance learning.
- Fieldwork and practical work make a significant contribution to learning.
- Students' work needs to be even more closely monitored to ensure sufficient demands are made to improve examination results.

Commentary

151. The 2002 examination results at AS and A2 examinations were below average. However, the results in 2003 showed an improvement.
152. Present students in Year 13 embarked on their A-level course with below average standards. They are now working at an average standard; this represents good achievement. Students have a wide range of knowledge about both the physical and human environment. Their understanding about global issues is supported by their work and assignments; these are well researched through ICT. They successfully apply Butler's model about the life-cycle of a seaside resort. High attaining students see how it can be adapted and used by planners. Students successfully observe photographs of soil degrading and give reasons for what they observe. Students achieve well in developing geographical skills. They have the opportunity for a residential field course in Dorset, which enables them to develop and apply these skills in coastal work. The standard of most students' work is improving as their analytical skills develop.
153. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have very good knowledge of topics and this makes a significant contribution to the good achievement made by students. Lessons are well prepared and supported through a good range of resources that assist learning well. Students' assignments are carefully assessed and written comment is made on quality and how to improve. As a result, students' essay writing skills progressively improve. Occasionally in lessons, students spend too long on mundane tasks and learning is less effective. Very good relationships and very positive student attitudes enhance learning.
154. The subject is well led and managed and teachers are appropriately deployed to teach the components of the AS and A-level courses. Course retention rates are excellent and assessment systems are in place to track and review progress, however, there is insufficient rigour and targeting of students to ensure they gain the best examination results. The subject has made good progress since the previous inspection.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very good overall, but are excellent in A-level textiles.
- Students achieve very well because of the very good and challenging teaching offered.
- The quality of accommodation is unsatisfactory and imposes extra burdens on teaching staff and students.

Commentary

155. In the 2002 A-level examinations, standards in design and technology were above average. Similar results were gained in 2003 but these outcomes are not validated so no national

comparisons can be made. During the inspection lessons were seen in textiles and graphics. Students' work in these subjects was also analysed. In both courses, standards are well above average. The students are working very hard, are enthusiastic and their levels of achievement in relation to their prior learning are very good. Indeed, in textiles some of the work being produced is of an excellent standard and is a reflection of high quality teaching which serves to challenge and inspire.

156. The quality of teaching and learning in these two areas is very good overall, with some excellent teaching in textiles. The staff are knowledgeable and enthusiastic and have extensive knowledge of examination requirements. Though some of the accommodation is of an unsatisfactory quality, teachers and students overcome the obstacles that this presents, though it does pose additional problems and makes it harder for teachers to deliver such high quality and stimulating lessons with consistency. Relationships in the teaching groups are very good and this helps both the pace and quality of learning. There is much mutual respect and this serves to encourage the students to be experimental and innovative in their work. Such boldness is reflected in the standards being reached.
157. Leadership and management are very good. The staff work very well as a team and clearly enjoy their work. Levels of evaluation are very good and this contributes to the maintenance of high standards. All aspects of the courses are thoroughly prepared and there is a strong desire throughout to ensure that the students are challenged and independent work encouraged.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on art and design and media and communications studies, but two lessons were sampled in **performing arts**. Standards overall were above average and students achieved well. The quality of teaching and learning was good, with teachers transmitting their enthusiasm for the subject and students responding positively.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Challenging teaching that demands independent learning is raising standards.
- Tutorial reviews motivate students to realise their full potential.
- Though ICT is often used well, there are too few opportunities to use computers in lessons as a tool to develop further the qualities of teaching and learning.

Commentary

158. GCE A-level results in 2002 were in line with national averages overall, but were below average for grades A and B. Present standards, especially in Year 13, are above average and in relation to their prior attainment, students are achieving well, though boys make less progress than the well motivated girls. Students are producing highly individual solutions to challenging tasks set for their coursework units and this is helping to raise standards.
159. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, though in some lessons it is very good. Students' learning is particularly effective when teachers use a tutorial system to review progress. Teachers' evaluations tell students what standard they have reached. They are then set precise, time constrained written targets for improvement. Students use ICT extensively to carry out the research of various artists' work. This is well evidenced in their course work sketch books. However, opportunities to use ICT in lessons are limited; much of the use is by students in their own homes. The standards being reached are also helped by the very good and committed attitudes of the students. Students and teachers develop strong trusting and

caring relationships. This was particularly apparent through the very good support students receive for their applications to art college.

160. The curriculum leadership of art is good. The monitoring of students' progress is a particularly strong feature. The dedicated studio space motivates students well and gives them the opportunity to use the space during their free time. Teachers' thorough preparation of students for external examinations ensures that they achieve well. Recruitment and retention on courses is very good. Standards are further enhanced by the department's very good community involvement. For example, five students were involved in a worthwhile project to paint a mural in a local primary school. Also, students have the opportunity to enrich their learning of highly technical processes through a joint venture with another school. Students are offered many opportunities to visit art galleries and other venues that have a strong visual impact.
161. The department has built on the strengths reported in the last inspection and improvement since that time has been good.

Media and communications studies

Provision in media and communications studies is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Consistently good teaching and learning enable students to achieve well.
- The subjects are well managed and leadership is good.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory and is impinging on the quality of teaching and learning.
- Technical resources, including access to ICT are unsatisfactory and are adversely affecting the quality of teaching and learning.

Commentary

162. The school entered 44 students for A-level media studies and a further 33 for A-level communications studies in 2002. Standards were broadly in line with the national average. Unvalidated results for 2003 show a drop in communications studies and a significant improvement in media studies.
163. For current students, standards are above average. Students are making good achievement in both subjects and reaching standards above those suggested by examination results. Year 12 students are already achieving well in media studies. In one lesson they were seen analysing the chases in James Bond films using good skills of technical analysis. They commented on editing, special effects, 'mise en scene' and camera angles and made well informed plans for editing a chase sequence independently. In communications studies, students are already showing good achievement in their production of communication texts for a specific audience. In Year 13, students use erudite texts well to support their knowledge of academic theories, and apply theory to practical situations such as how a news editor decides what to publish. In communications studies, they use the four main cultural theories to answer such questions as "Is fashion social control or social change?" in a context of cultural and individual practice. Independent technical work is a strength, in both subjects, but some written work is poorly presented by hand and shows few signs of redrafting.
164. Teaching and learning are consistently good. The teachers' knowledge of both subjects is of a high order and they meet regularly to share and extend their knowledge. Their professional involvement in the external examination process has led to an excellent knowledge of examination requirements, which fully informs their teaching. Lessons are well planned to support collaborative skills. In a Year 13 communications skills lesson on Post Colonialism, for example, students' collaboration on the analysis of stills from "The Birth of a Nation" led to particularly good achievement. Active learning is a well-planned feature of lessons. In a media studies lesson on genre theory, students were helped to model the work of a producer as they

analysed the appeal of successful films and wrote a brief plot likely to succeed commercially. Lessons are well planned to provide plenty of variety and allow students to take an active part in proceedings. This improves their technical confidence. The students are specifically taught technical terms so they are able to analyse and describe what they see, and this improves their skills of analysis and helps them to work independently in both subjects. Students learn well because lessons are varied and interesting. They are well motivated by cultural issues and are prepared to take an active part in lessons. Their capacity for extended concentration helps them to achieve well.

165. Both subjects are well managed. Leadership is good. Monitoring of teaching, learning and the delivery of the curriculum are significant strengths. Unsatisfactory accommodation, however, leads to unequal sharing of resources and this limits teaching styles and, on some occasions, students' progress. There are too few computers available to students and this adversely affects opportunities for the learning of key skills and the redrafting of coursework. The absence of textbooks limits achievement in communications studies though lessons are adequately supported by written material.
166. There has been a good level of improvement since the last inspection. This large department is now well led and managed. The number of students taught by the department has increased. Media studies has been successfully introduced and is now well established as an improving subject within the school.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Two lessons were sampled in **physical education**. Standards were average, with the students achieving well because of the good quality of teaching offered.

BUSINESS

The school provides courses in GCE AS and A-level, E-business and GNVQ Intermediate level. The focus of the inspection was GCE AS and A-level courses. One lesson was sampled in **GNVQ** business and judged to be satisfactory.

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students relate theoretical studies to the business world because teachers identify it in planning.
- Students know how well they are doing because they are regularly assessed against GCE AS and A-level standards.
- Students underachieve because they make insufficient effort and their understanding is not challenged enough in lessons.
- The standards of assignments are lower than usually seen because students do not explain answers in sufficient detail.

Commentary

167. Results in the 2002 A-level examination were below average and students did less well in business studies than they did in their other subjects. Results in 2003 are similar to the previous year. Results in 2002 AS-level were below the national average. Given the students' prior levels of attainment, these outcomes represent satisfactory achievement. Course retention rates are very good and it is unusual for students not to complete their course of study.

168. For present students, standards are below average. They have a range of knowledge of business terms such as the supply and demand for products and understand how business might be financed and organised. They are able to apply mathematical skills accurately to produce and read data of a sales revenue budget, but do not show depth of understanding of the benefits and drawbacks of such budgets. Written work is well organised but lacks depth in analysis and theoretical study is not well supported with exemplar evidence. In Year 12 some students' knowledge of prior learning is weak, such as how business is classified because they do not apply themselves to study. Year 13 students know about the principles of effective communication in business and how it affects employee motivation and business efficiency, but do not show depth of understanding in discussion. Weaker students do not confidently recall knowledge about barriers to communication and its application to business. Most students commence this course with below average levels of prior attainment, so in these circumstances their achievement is satisfactory.
169. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teachers are well qualified and have a range of business experience that adds relevance to students' learning. Lessons have clear aims; they are well planned and build on students' earlier studies. In some lessons however, learning is very teacher-centred and not enough is expected of students in academic rigour and challenge so they do not achieve high enough in the lesson. Regular testing is incorporated into learning so that teachers are well informed about how well students achieve, but there is insufficient practice in extended writing so they do not incorporate enough analysis in their work.
170. The quality of curriculum leadership is satisfactory. The schemes of work are current and provide clear guidance about learning intentions. They give substantial advice about how to improve students' literacy skills, but do not provide enough information about opportunities for the use of ICT. Students make insufficient use of ICT in their studies, particularly in research of topics. Planning embraces broad strategies for the whole school but insufficient focus is placed on sixth form developments and how to raise standards. Overall satisfactory progress has been made since the previous inspection in curriculum development and subject documentation, but standards are lower than was previously reported.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

No subjects were inspected or sampled in this curriculum area.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

No subjects were inspected or sampled in this curriculum area.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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

