

INSPECTION REPORT

ALDERSLEY HIGH SCHOOL

Wolverhampton

LEA area: Wolverhampton

Unique reference number: 104404

Headteacher: Mr Michael Gernon

Lead inspector: Ms Marjorie Glynne-Jones

Dates of inspection: 10th - 13th May 2004

Inspection number: 263778

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

© Crown copyright 2004

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

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of students:	11-18
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	902
School address:	Barnhurst Lane Codsall Wolverhampton
Postcode:	WV8 1RT
Telephone number:	01902 556868
Fax number:	01902 556869
Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Peter Hepworth
Date of previous inspection:	March 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- Aldersley High is a Specialist Technology College.
- It is a popular, average-sized school with equal numbers of boys and girls, and a small, but growing sixth form, managed in a consortium with three other schools.
- Numbers of students leaving or joining the school mid-course are above average.
- When they join the school, students' standards are below average, and a significant proportion has low literacy skills.
- In the main school, the proportion of students with special needs, including those with statements, is broadly average. Students' needs mainly relate to mild learning difficulties and behaviour difficulties.
- A unit for language and communication difficulties, with 18 places, is based at the school. All the students have a statement of special needs, so bringing the overall proportion to above average.
The school draws its students from local areas in which social disadvantage is above average; this is reflected in the above average proportion of students entitled to free school meals.
- Over a third of the students come from minority ethnic backgrounds, with a high proportion whose home language is not English.
- The school welcomes a small number of refugees and asylum seekers.

Awards and local and national involvement

- School Achievement Award 2001, 2003; Artsmark Silver 2003; Sportsmark 2004.
- Investor in People since 1997.
- Wolverhampton Excellence in Cities Partnership; West Midlands consortium for teacher training.
- Associate pilot school for the Shortened Key Stage 3 programme; pilot school for the 'Aiming High' initiative.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
2918	M L Glynn-Jones	Lead inspector	
9188	J McHugh	Lay inspector	
20709	D MacIldowie	Team inspector	English *
17923	M Shaw	Team inspector	Mathematics *
3735	A Webb	Team inspector	Science *
10817	G Rayner	Team inspector	Information and communication technology * - ICT
21954	T Chipp	Team inspector	Art and design
10941	R Robinson	Team inspector	Design and technology * Health and social care in the sixth form
30978	E White	Team inspector	Geography
20497	V Williams	Team inspector	History Business studies in the sixth form
30911	J Barton	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
12475	S Johnson	Team inspector	Music
27485	M Sims	Team inspector	Personal, social and health education and citizenship English as an additional language
3534	A Braithwaite	Team inspector	Physical education
20716	R Grogan	Team inspector	Religious education
20247	R Parry	Team inspector	Special educational needs

* inspected in the main school and the sixth form

The inspection contractor was:

Penta International
Upperton House
The Avenue
Eastbourne
East Sussex
BN21 3YB

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

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS	10
Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses	
Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	14
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	20
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES	23
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4	
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	51

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a **good** and improving school. Students achieve well because they receive good teaching from a committed staff. Standards are below average. Very good leadership by the headteacher is establishing effective leadership and management throughout the school, strongly focused on enabling young people to achieve their best. The value for money is good.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- ❑ The curriculum has been developed very effectively to provide a wide range of courses admirably suited to the needs of different student groups, thereby raising achievement.
- ❑ Procedures for monitoring the consistency of provision across the school, notably for assessment, are not routinely established or sufficiently rigorous.
- ❑ Racial harmony prevails in this school, supported by students' personal development.
- ❑ There is very good provision in design and technology and in the performing arts - dance drama and music - for all students throughout Years 7 to 9 as well as in GCSE options.
- ❑ Provision is unsatisfactory in mathematics and religious education in the main school.
- ❑ No provision is made for religious education in the sixth form and inability to recruit specialist staff has prevented arrangements in Years 10 and 11 being fully implemented.
- ❑ Arrangements for the professional development of staff, sharply focused on the school's priorities for improvement, are rigorous and effective.
- ❑ Strategies for improving attendance are very successful so that the rate is now above the national average.
- ❑ Students benefit from good links with other schools and the local community.
- ❑ There is scope for strengthening the links with parents, particularly through consultation.

Improvement since the last inspection is **good**. GCSE results have risen faster than they have nationally although Year 9 test results have not kept pace with the national rise. There is very good improvement in teaching and the curriculum, both linked with the previous key issue of raising attainment, as well as in the attendance rate, a previous issue. Although the number of fixed-term exclusions is much the same as reported last time, a sharp rise in the intervening period is currently being successfully reduced. There has not been enough improvement in the provision for religious education, a key issue from two previous inspections, largely due to staffing difficulties.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

Key: A – well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E – well below average
For Year 11, similar schools are those whose students attained similarly at the end of Year 9.
The E* in the table above indicates results in the bottom five per cent in comparison with all schools.

Achievement is **good**. Students' achievement is good in Years 10 and 11 and standards below the national expectation. This finding reflects the 2003 GCSE results, which were above average when compared with the results of schools in similar social circumstances. GCSE results have improved significantly over recent years: in 2003, results for five or more A*-C grades were average when compared with all schools nationally. The 2003 Year 9 national test results in English, mathematics and science were well below the national average overall when compared with results in similar schools. However, the results were average when social circumstances are taken into account. The inspection finding for the current Years 7 to 9, across all subjects, is that standards are below those

expected nationally and that achievement is satisfactory. In the sixth form, the average standards seen overall broadly reflect the 2003 results in the seven courses inspected. In these, three advanced level and four advanced vocational courses, achievement overall is good.

STUDENTS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Students' personal qualities, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects, are **good** overall, and very good in the sixth form. Students' attitudes are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Their behaviour is satisfactory overall in Years 7 to 11, a judgement, which takes account of the high, though reducing number of fixed-term exclusions. The number of these is disproportionately high for exclusions involving students from minority ethnic groups. There have been no permanent exclusions in the last year, which is better than the national picture for the same period. Attendance is good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides a **good** quality of education. This applies to teaching, learning, enrichment, activities and links with other schools. There are particular strengths in the curriculum, the care and guidance for students and the links with the community. Assessment is satisfactory overall, although varied in quality across subjects. The involvement of students in school affairs is satisfactory, as are links with parents, although parents receive good information. The quality of teaching is good in the main school and in the sixth form.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are both **good**. The relatively new senior staff team is led with vision and skilful strategy so that effective systems are being securely established. The quality of development planning is high. Its rigour is not matched by equally effective and analytic routine monitoring and reporting to ensure consistent quality across all subjects in all aspects of provision, particularly assessment and marking. Procedures for periodic self-review of subjects are however, exceptionally good. The able governing body makes a good contribution to shaping the way the school will develop. Governors have a good overview of school strengths and weaknesses, but have been content to receive some rather bland, descriptive reports. Sixth-form governance is unsatisfactory because statutory requirements for religious education are not met. Overall, therefore, governance is satisfactory.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents think well of the school. They appreciate the high expectations for children's achievement and find the information they receive at parents' evenings and review days helpful. However, they do not feel the school works closely enough with parents or helps them to support their children's work. Staff are aware that new approaches need to be explored. Students think well of the school and the way teachers expect them to work hard. Many questionnaire returns show concerns about bullying and behaviour although in discussion students' views were mixed about how well bullying is handled.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

Attention should be given to the following aspects of the school's work through:

- ☐ implementing routine monitoring procedures to ensure that the school's codes and policies are all put into practice equally well, both within subject teams and across the school;
- ☐ further strengthening the improvements underway in the provision for mathematics;
- ☐ strengthening links with parents by regular consultation over developments and concerns;
- ☐ ensuring that arrangements for religious education in the main school are not dependent on a sole specialist teacher;

and to meet statutory requirements:

- provide religious education in Years 12 and 13 and comply fully in Years 10 and 11.

SIXTH FORM SECTION OF THE SUMMARY REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a **good** sixth form, which operates cost-effectively and gives good value for money. In the seven subjects inspected standards are average overall and students' achievement is good. They learn well because both teaching and assessment are good. They bring a maturity of approach to their work. Leadership and management are good and the headteacher's lead in sixth-form developments is strong.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Consortium arrangements offer wide course choice and are of considerable benefit to students.
- Sixth-formers present good role models to younger students.
- Tutorial arrangements for Years 12 and 13 are unsatisfactory.
- There are no arrangements to provide religious education for all students as required.

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	A-level English: good : consistently effective teaching, detailed and helpful assessment, together with the very positive attitude of the students lead to good achievement.
Mathematics	A-level mathematics: good : good teaching, learning and achievement are positive features of the department's advanced work.
Science	AVCE science: satisfactory : good teaching results in satisfactory learning because students' motivation is no better than satisfactory.
Information and communication technology	AVCE ICT: good : students' very good response to the knowledgeable, supportive, teaching results in good achievement.
Humanities	<i>No courses in this group were inspected in detail.</i>
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Product design: good : students attain average standards due to good teaching and learning and very good course leadership and management.
Visual and performing arts and media	<i>No courses in this group were inspected in detail.</i>
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	<i>No courses in this group were inspected in detail.</i>
Business	AVCE business studies: good : standards are improving and now average; achievement is good because of good teaching and independent learning.
Health and social care	AVCE health and social care: good : good achievement results from good teaching and learning in a well led and managed course.
General education	<i>No general courses were inspected in detail.</i>

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Students receive satisfactory guidance. Specialist advice about advanced and other course options in the sixth form is not helpful enough. This is recognised as an area for development. A good start has been made through the joint induction day for current Year 11 students from the four schools in the consortium. Aldersley's allocation of two sixth-form tutors is inadequate to provide the individual tutorial guidance and support needed by students over the two-year course. At Aldersley, subject teachers monitor effectively for underachievement and set individual targets for students, although tracking systems for the sixth form as a whole are lacking.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form benefits well from the school's good leadership and management. The curriculum supports students' capabilities and aspirations effectively by providing a range of academic and vocational courses at different levels. Arrangements in the consortium maximise students' opportunities for advanced study. Courses are managed effectively and assessment is good. However, the arrangements for tutorial guidance are unsatisfactory and there are no arrangements to provide religious education.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students hold the sixth form in satisfactory regard. They are keen to show how they enjoy it and to express their appreciation of staff expertise and support as well as of the range of courses available through the consortium. However, their questionnaire returns and comments in discussion show that about half think that:

- the advice they received was not helpful in preparing them for sixth-form study;
- they did not receive good advice about the options when they leave school.

A majority feels that the school does not take account of their views. Many think that the school council has little impact on issues they feel are important. The school is aware of the need for improvement.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Achievement is good overall: satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, and good in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- ❑ Achievement is good in about half the subjects in Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11.
- ❑ Achievement over Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory in mathematics and poor in religious education.
- ❑ GCSE results have been improving at a faster rate than national results and reflect the school's attention to establishing an appropriate curriculum for this stage.
- ❑ Results in Year 9 tests have not kept pace with the national rise and are not yet reflecting the improvements to the curriculum now underway.
- ❑ Students with special needs and those whose home language is not English achieve well.
- ❑ Beginner English speakers make very good progress.
- ❑ In six of the seven subjects inspected in detail in the sixth form achievement is good.

Commentary

1. When they join Year 7, students' standards are below those expected nationally for their age. The school is fully aware of their Year 6 test results in English, mathematics and science, which for the current Year 7 were at the national average. During the Autumn term the school also tests students' reading skills and cognitive abilities. In the current Year 7 in particular, the two sets of results show marked differences. The latter showing below average capabilities, a little higher in mathematical skills than in English skills. In the other subjects of the curriculum, records of students' work show that attainment on entry was:

- at the expected standard in physical education;
- below the expectation in art and design, citizenship, ICT, music and religious education;
- well below the expectation in design and technology, geography and history.

2. The overall picture of satisfactory achievement in Years 7 to 9 across all subjects of the curriculum reflects the 2003 Year 9 test results in the three core subjects when these are compared with schools in similar social circumstances. Achievement in the work seen in lessons and students' books was:

- good in English, art and design, design and technology, geography, history, ICT and music;
- good for students with special needs and those at an early stage of English fluency;
- very good for beginner English speakers;
- good for students attending the school's learning centre;
- satisfactory in mathematics, science, French, physical education and religious education.

3. In citizenship, no specialist lessons were scheduled during the inspection. The evidence is consequently insufficient to judge overall achievement in Years 7 to 9. However, the small sample of work provided by the school indicated unsatisfactory achievement over time. Much of the work was incomplete and many individual pieces were unmarked.

4. There are differences in the pattern of achievement in subjects in Years 10 and 11. Achievement differs significantly in mathematics where it is unsatisfactory at this stage, and in religious education where it is poor. In mathematics, the main reason is that lesson planning does not take sufficient account of students' different attainment levels. In religious education, the school

makes no provision for the subject in Year 11 and the time allocation in Year 10 is low. However, in science, achievement improves to good. In citizenship, the evidence from a wider sample of work as well as discussion with students, but without evidence from lessons, indicates unsatisfactory achievement. Students with special needs and those at an early stage of English fluency continue to achieve well in Years 10 and 11.

5. Over Years 7 to 11, students' skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT are satisfactory. However, in too many subjects students' work shows that the use of ICT is not routinely established.

6. The school sets ambitious targets for students' results, drawing fully on its knowledge of individual aptitudes and progress. In the Year 9 tests in 2003, results in mathematics and science were close to the targets set. The English target was not reached. At GCSE in 2003, two targets were exceeded: those for 5 or more A*-C grades and for average point scores. The target for 1 or more A*-G grades was met. This is a good picture overall. There are thorough analyses of students' performance by ethnicity. However, the numbers in each minority ethnic group are too small for valid statistical comparison.

Sixth form

7. In the seven subjects inspected in detail achievement is:

- good in A-level English, mathematics and product design; and in VCE business studies, ICT and health and social care;
- satisfactory in VCE science.

8. In science students' satisfactory motivation is not strong enough to spur them on to greater effort. Students with special needs gain ASDAN* credits at bronze, silver and gold levels and a small number go on to courses in higher education. Both these are notable achievements.

** Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network*

Across the school Years 7 to 13

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	31.4 (32.3)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	32.5 (32.1)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	31.4 (29.4)	33.6(33.3)

There were 139 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

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	47 (40)	(50)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	81 (77)	(90)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	97 (95)	(96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	29.5 (30.3)	37.2 (34.7)

There were 152 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

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	82.5 (82.4)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	21.9 (14.5)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per student	156.0 (146.9)	258.2 (263.3)

There were 35 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students' attitudes and behaviour, including their moral, social and cultural development, are good overall: satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, and good in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form. Their spiritual development is satisfactory. Attendance is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- ❑ Harmonious relationships exist between all students in this ethnically diverse school community.
- ❑ Students respond to the high expectations established by the strong conduct code for behaviour in lessons, which makes a significant contribution to the positive working atmosphere found in most classrooms.
- ❑ Predominantly in Years 7 to 9, the behaviour of a small, but significant minority adversely affects their learning and that of others in their class.
- ❑ Younger students value the support from sixth-formers who act as mentors and help with reading.

Commentary

9. Students feel that their school encourages them to do their best socially and academically. They generally move round the building in a sensible manner. Lunchtime in the dining hall is a pleasant experience. However, a significant minority does not always respond positively and, in spite of the well-established code of conduct, fails to live up to the school's expectations. In a small number of lessons, predominantly in Years 7 to 9, this group adversely affects the learning of the class by taking up too much of the teacher's time and attention. Nevertheless, in most lessons, students settle well and readily involve themselves in the work. Working relationships are good and students are confident that their teachers are always ready to help. Students in Year 11 welcome this help and attend voluntary revision classes in significant numbers. However, students' attitudes to citizenship and religious education are unsatisfactory. This is shown by the lack of care taken over written work and by their comments in discussion in Years 10 and 11. Students of all ethnic groups and those with special needs interact well when tasks require them to work in groups. They are supportive of each other and are careful not to offend when commenting on others' work, as seen in music. Students feel safe in school. They are pleased that issues that concern them, such as bullying, are discussed during tutor periods.

10. Working in small groups for part of their week improves the attitudes and personal development of students with special needs and those attending the learning centre. Teachers' very good knowledge of individuals increases the self-confidence of these students. They become more independent, listen with greater accuracy and contribute well in discussions. They behave very well in these lessons.

11. Across year groups, students readily take on roles of responsibility. Matters of concern are debated at school council meetings, at which all years are represented. Students are pleased to cite instances where, through the council, they feel they have contributed to change, for example over

improved hygiene procedures in the dining hall. However, they do not feel well informed of the reasons why other suggestions from the council are not implemented. Significant numbers of sixth-formers help slower readers and, as mentors, provide very good support for students in Years 7 and 8. Recently trained peer mediators in Year 8 are proud to be chosen for this role and receptionist duties are taken very seriously by members of Year 7.

12. Students' personal development benefits from and contributes to the school's ethos through such very good opportunities. However, their spiritual development is just satisfactory, the major weakness being the lack of opportunities for exploring religious values and beliefs in Years 10 and 11. Arrangements for collective worship have improved since the last inspection. However, the inspiring presentations in year assemblies are not matched by daily development in tutor periods of the 'theme for the week'. Students' self-esteem and sense of responsibility for others contribute notably to creating a sense of community in most subjects. Opportunities for personal development are helpfully identified in subject planning. Students' cultural development is developed well across the curriculum, and is particularly rich in performing arts. The programme of enrichment days, activity days and residential visits is effective in fostering personal growth, for example, through spiritual reflection for students who each year visit the battlefields of Flanders.

Sixth form

13. Sixth-formers are well-motivated, mature young people who provide very good role models for students lower down the school. This is especially so in English, product design, ICT and health and social care. Students are keen to help their community and, having applied to be prefects, assist in the running of the school at breaks. Others volunteer to help in ICT classes and support younger students in becoming proficient readers. They take the lead in the school council. The head boy and head girl attend governing body meetings where students' affairs are a standing item. Students' interest in the wider world is clearly demonstrated by their innovative methods of raising money for charity. They appreciate that their increasing maturity is recognised and feel the school provides a good balance between staff supervision and their independence. While valuing the help they receive from their teachers, students nevertheless have strong views about the ways in which their studies should be enhanced. In particular they would like greater assistance when choosing their sixth-form courses and greater recognition of their views and concerns.

Across the school Years 7 to 13

Attendance

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.9	School data	0.4
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

14. Attendance is good. The rate is above the national average and shows very good improvement since the last inspection. The low rate of unauthorised absence is a very good achievement. Procedures for monitoring attendance, together with good support for families with attendance problems, have resulted in this improvement. Punctuality is satisfactory. Sixth-formers are required to attend school for lessons and to manage their own study time effectively. Their attendance at lessons on the Aldersley site is good.

Exclusions

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	541	27	0
White – Irish	4	0	0
White – any other White background	9	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	73	8	0
Mixed – White and Asian	10	1	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	15	2	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	84	4	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	38	3	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	5	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	5	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	85	15	0
Black or Black British – African	11	1	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	8	3	0
Chinese	1	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0
Parent / students preferred not to say	12	0	0

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

Exclusions

15. The current high rate of fixed-term exclusions is much the same as reported at the last inspection. However, since then there has been a sharp rise which now is being successfully reduced. The school is exceeding its targets for reducing fixed-term exclusions (expressed as student days lost), set through the Excellence in Cities partnership. In the last year there were no permanent exclusions, a good improvement since the last inspection. The action to support students at risk of exclusion takes account of the needs of students from minority ethnic groups who were represented highly in the exclusions figures for the previous academic year.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a good quality of education. This applies to teaching, learning, enrichment activities and links with other schools. There are particular strengths in the curriculum, the care and guidance for students and the links with the community. Assessment, the involvement of students in school affairs and links with parents are satisfactory. .

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good in the main school and the sixth form. Assessment is satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form.

These findings are set in the context of eleven teachers being covered by the school during the inspection week as a consequence of Easter resignations, long-term entitlement leave and sick leave. The cover was provided both by permanent staff and supply teachers. No citizenship lessons were scheduled during the inspection.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- ❑ Good quality teaching in Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11 is leading to good achievement.
- ❑ There has been significant improvement in the quality since the last inspection.
- ❑ In almost all the subjects inspected there were examples of very good teaching from which teams benefit.
- ❑ The unsatisfactory teaching seen involved both permanent and temporary staff.
- ❑ Students attending the learning centre benefit from very good teaching.
- ❑ The commitment and drive of language support staff provide inspirational role models for collaborative teaching.
- ❑ There is good assessment practice in the sixth-form subjects inspected.
- ❑ Across Years 7 to 11 there is too much variation in the quality of assessment.

Commentary

16. The improvement in teaching since the last inspection is a consequence of wise appointments and very good procedures for subject teams' self-review. The proportion of good or better lessons has more than doubled. The quality now is good at each stage: it is best in the sixth form and gets better over Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11. In almost all the subjects inspected in Years 7 to 11 the quality is good. The exceptions are French and religious education where the quality is satisfactory, and mathematics where it is unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11. The proportion of lessons judged to be satisfactory or better is much the same as reported at the last inspection. On this inspection, unsatisfactory teaching was seen in lessons taught by both permanent and temporary staff.

17. In about a sixth of lessons teaching was very good. Such quality led to very good learning in a number of ways.

- Lessons got off to a pacey start so that students' interest was immediately grabbed and sustained.
- The teacher's very confident introduction, with brisk questions and answers, reminded students most effectively of their previous learning.
- Very enthusiastic and authoritative guidance on a one-to-one basis took students' learning forward.
- A rapid pace was sustained in a very good range of activities so that students stayed on task throughout, enjoying the work.
- The teacher's very good analysis of the current standards of individuals underpinned the planning.
- A lively approach led to high levels of interest.
- Students worked confidently because of the teacher's expertise, shown through demonstrating, explaining and evaluating strengths and weaknesses in individuals' work.
- Very effective individual guidance was given in a revision session.
- Excellent management and control, which allowed the teacher to move round the class checking progress, stimulated marked improvement over the lesson.

18. Good teaching was seen on one or more occasions in all subjects. In these lessons, the pace, both of teaching and learning, and students' interest and concentration were generally sustained, but not with the same degree of energy and commitment seen in very good teaching. The methods such as question and answer were not as sharp and did not stimulate learning in depth. Generally, the school's policy for managing behaviour is put into practice effectively so that students' learning is enhanced. The management of behaviour is a particular strength in English, science, history and business studies. It is satisfactory in mathematics in the main school, and in ICT, French

and religious education in Years 7 to 9. In the majority of lessons teachers take account of students' special needs by matching methods and tasks well. Special needs support teachers are very effectively used in English and science in Years 10 and 11. Subject teachers' level of awareness of the needs of students at an early stage of English fluency and their use of the very good individual language profiles provided by the language support department are however too varied. In nearly all subjects, teachers have good subject expertise. In the main school, their subject command in geography and history is very good.

19. There were a number of recurring features in satisfactory lessons which restricted the learning.

- The limited variety of teaching approaches and types of learning activities did not stimulate committed, effortful learning.
- Lesson timing did not allow for sufficient reinforcement of what had been covered.
- Staff did not always know their teaching groups well, a consequence of staff absence.
- Because of students' negative attitudes, teachers had to work hard to achieve even satisfactory learning in some classes
- Teachers' skills in behaviour management were insufficiently developed.
- Learning support assistance was not allocated to some groups where it was much needed.
- Low expectations resulted in unchallenging tasks being set.
- Students had no opportunity to review their learning at the end of the lesson.

20. Where unsatisfactory teaching was observed, lessons lacked purpose and clear objectives. The planning was not focused on learning so that students' involvement and achievement were low. Little learning took place when the planning took no account of individual learning needs so that everyone's expectations were low. No attempts were made to pull the work together at the end. In a poor lesson, the work was not linked to previous learning and lacked challenge so that students' learning was very limited.

21. Assessment varies in quality from unsatisfactory to very good. Where the quality is very good in geography and history it is integral to learning, consistent, and very informative to students. Such quality supports students' achievement well. Special needs assessment is very good and teachers draw on the information in their planning. The quality of assessment in the language support department is very good, although not consistently drawn on in subject teachers' planning. The quality of marking is too variable in mathematics, science, French and citizenship in all years, and in physical education in Years 7 to 9. In these subjects the use of assessment to help teachers plan work and improve achievement is weak. National Curriculum levels given at the end of Year 9 are not always accurate or consistently applied.

Sixth form

22. In all seven sixth-form courses inspected in detail the quality of teaching is good. Teachers have very good command of their subject in English, mathematics, science, design and technology: product design, business studies and health and social care. Students' learning is supported well by good assessment, and in English and business studies, by very good assessment practice. All subjects provide regular, systematic and detailed guidance to students on how well they have carried out work. In the vocational courses in particular, this provides effective opportunities for students to achieve well in their coursework. The students are fully involved in the assessment procedure so that they have a clear understanding of their progress and how they can improve.

Summary of the teaching observed during the inspection in 132 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1 (1%)	21 (16%)	68(51%)	34 (26%)	7(5%)	1(1%)	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.

The curriculum

The curriculum provides a very good range of opportunities for all students. There is a very good range of enrichment activities in the main school. Staffing and learning resources are satisfactory; accommodation is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- ❑ Very good planning ensures that the curriculum meet the needs and interests of all students as they move through the school.
- ❑ A wide range of activities enriches the curriculum with very good participation in the arts and excellent opportunities in the community for design and technology.
- ❑ There is good provision for students with special needs and those at an early stage of English fluency.
- ❑ The consortium arrangement with three other schools greatly extends the range of sixth-form courses.
- ❑ No provision is made for religious education in the sixth form.

Commentary

23. A very good programme of performing arts enriches the curriculum in Years 7 to 9. This course, together with extra-curricular arts activities, makes a strong contribution to students' personal and social development. Excellent activities in design and technology extend students' experience, for example through engineering challenges in construction and aerodynamics. The school is participating in a national pilot scheme for Years 7 to 9. This involves accelerated work in English, mathematics, science, design and technology and ICT. Careful monitoring of the first pilot groups in Year 7 has identified the criteria for selecting students as an issue for attention. In Years 10 and 11, the range of courses is very wide and caters for students of all capabilities. It includes a good number of vocational courses from which all students must select one. Very good arrangements are made for students for whom an alternative work-related curriculum is appropriate. This is enabling some individuals to complete their school career who would otherwise be at risk of failure. However, within this comprehensive curriculum, the school's arrangements for religious education in Years 10 and 11 are not being fully put into practice so that the school is in breach of statutory requirements. This is in part a residual effect of recently resolved staffing difficulties, but also a consequence of insufficient exploration of ways to overcome the staffing issue.

24. There are sufficient specialist teachers for all subjects and courses, although with temporary cover arrangements, mostly by specialists, for eleven staff absences or vacancies. There is satisfactory provision of support staff and very good provision of technical staff for ICT, including trainees from a nearby university. Local primary schools benefit from this technical support through the school's outreach work. Overall, resources for learning are satisfactory. Provision is very good in the wide range of design and technology courses and in ICT. However, book stock in English is unsatisfactory, and in music, lack of computers and software restricts students' achievement. Accommodation is good overall. Facilities for design and technology are excellent and for physical education very good. There are weaknesses in drama, where the teaching area is too small, and in the Business Centre (the vocational courses base), where there is poor sound separation from adjacent work spaces. Both these areas are poorly ventilated. The quality of students' work is adversely affected by these limitations.

Sixth form

25. The consortium arrangements enable the school to offer a very wide range of advanced academic and vocational courses. These provide very good continuity with courses offered in Years 10 and 11. The ASDAN course in communication skills promotes very good equality of access to sixth-form study. Arrangements for the personal development of sixth-form students are optional and many do not take part in the few activities provided. Discussions are underway in the consortium to rectify this weakness in provision. There are no arrangements for meeting the requirements for religious education in Years 12 and 13.

Across the school Years 7 to 13

26. Students with particular individual needs are very effectively supported in a number of ways, a demonstration of the school's strong commitment to inclusion.

For those with special needs

- small group work for additional literacy support, utilising ICT software;
- in-class support in some subjects;
- paired reading in Year 7 supported by trained Year 10 students;
- lunchtime and after-school classes for practising reading skills;
- a sixth-form ASDAN course promotes communication and life skills;
- students with statements for language and communication difficulties benefit from the specialist skills of visiting teachers.

For those with behaviour needs

- the learning centre supports students by helping them to understand their behaviour so that they can make a positive contribution to their own learning in class;
- good planning in design and technology, geography, history, modern languages, music, in English in Years 7 to 9 and in ICT in Years 10 and 11, although in other subjects the planning is insufficient for need.

For gifted and talented students

- this group of students has been identified through meetings and discussions with all teachers;
- although there is a growing awareness of the needs of these students, in the majority of subjects work is not always planned specifically for them nor sufficiently challenging.

For students at an early stage of English fluency

- there is specialist language support across a range of subjects, especially in humanities and French;
- no language support is allocated to science;
- detailed language profiles are provided for all subject staff, although levels of awareness vary across subject teams.

Care, guidance and support

Provision for students' care, welfare, health and safety is very good. Students in the main school receive good support advice and guidance; in the sixth form this is satisfactory. Students play a satisfactory role in the school's work and development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent support is provided for targeted students by learning mentors.
- The school's arrangements for child protection are very good.
- Targeted groups of students benefit very well from attachment to the learning centre or the work-related curriculum programme.
- In the sixth form, allocated tutorial time with personal tutors is lacking.

Commentary

27. A school strength is the pastoral support network for targeted students with needs varying from limited organisational skills to more complex emotional needs. Students speak highly of the excellent support given by learning mentors. They are taught how to help themselves. Each has a unique file to share with their family containing records of each success, however small, so helping to raise self-esteem. Very good educational and emotional support is provided in the learning centre, in many instances improving the attendance and behaviour of those who attend. For students at risk of disaffection because general academic qualifications are inappropriate for their needs, a very good work-based learning route is available. This enables them to achieve nationally accredited qualifications alongside GCSEs.

28. Very good links with outside agencies and professionals such as the school nurse, the Connexions Service and counsellors from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, ensure helpful impartial advice on a variety of issues. The tireless efforts of the home-school liaison officer and educational welfare service have been instrumental in the school's improved attendance figures. Arrangements for child protection are very thorough and up-to-date.

29. Arrangements for students' induction into Year 7, as well as into other year groups, are good. For Year 6 students, visits to the school and a team-building day help them quickly to feel part of the school. Good careers advice at well-judged points in their school life, together with experience of the work-place, helps students to make the right choices for their future.

Sixth form

30. Both the induction arrangements for students joining Year 12, and the preparation sixth-formers receive for when they leave school - about the work-place and study in further or higher education - are too limited. Tutorial guidance is available from two staff, but only on request. Consequently, adequate information and support for all individuals are not ensured. In discussion, students identified this as an area they would like to see improved. They receive good guidance from their subject tutors with whom they have very good relationships.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Links with parents are satisfactory, and with other schools and colleges, good. Links with the community are very good in the main school and satisfactory in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- ☐ Links with the community support students' development very well in the main school.
- ☐ In the sixth form, links with the local business community are not sufficiently established.
- ☐ Transfer from Year 6 to Year 7 is managed well.
- ☐ Parents receive good information about their child's progress through regular 'Review of Progress' meetings and annual reports.

Commentary

31. Very good links with the local community help young people to appreciate and develop the skills that enable them to become good citizens. For example students took part in a litter-pick along the walkways from school to the local housing estate to improve their local environment. Neighbourhood community wardens canvassed students' views on the proposed use of a recently purchased community building. Work-related learning for students with vocational aptitudes directly benefits from good links with local organisations so that placements are found without difficulty. Good links with local primary schools ensure a smooth transition from Year 6, enabling students to settle quickly into new routines. These wide-ranging links are of mutual benefit to the community and the school and contribute positively to students' learning.

32. Parents speak highly of the half-termly reviews of progress, RoPs, and the STAR review days (Student Targets, Assessment and Review). The STAR days provide an opportunity for parents to share in their children's target-setting interviews with form tutors. Currently in place in Years 7 and 10, there are plans to extend this to all year groups in the following academic year. The special needs department maintains good contact with families, and parents make valuable contributions to their child's annual reviews. Parents receive helpful written information. This includes friendly newsletters as well as a very informative annual report from the governing body. Annual reports about students' progress are generally very good. A new format shows some variation in quality between classes and year groups, but all reports clearly indicate where individual strengths and weaknesses lie. They give a clear indication to parents about whether progress is sufficient and what their child needs to do to improve in specific subjects.

Sixth form

33. Good links within the sixth-form consortium allow students to apply freely for courses from the wide range offered. Planning by the four schools has ensured that timetable disruption is minimised. However, common procedures for induction and providing information about the courses available are at an early stage. Visits to university open days, as well as good links with Wolverhampton University, ensure that students are aware of the opportunities for further study available locally. Opportunity for the involvement of members of the local business community is limited, and a weakness of the business studies course.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good overall. There is good management and good leadership by key staff and very good leadership by the headteacher. Governance is satisfactory overall, while unsatisfactory in the sixth form because of the statutory breach with regard to religious education.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- ❑ The headteacher's strong vision for the success and well-being of students is moving the school forward very effectively.
- ❑ Effective management systems are being established that maximise the advantages of shared responsibility and team-working in developing coherent and inclusive practice.
- ❑ Procedures for routine checks and reports on the consistency in the quality of provision across the school are not securely in place, notably for assessment, including marking.
- ❑ The school is well supported by committed governors who have a good overview of school strengths and weaknesses.
- ❑ There are no arrangements in the sixth form to meet the requirements for religious education and those in Years 10 and 11 do not comply.

Commentary

34. The senior staff group works effectively through small 'sub-teams' to develop the quality of provision across the school. Development planning is of five-star quality and the implementation of new approaches and procedures is managed with thoroughness. Staff are supported well through these processes. However, this quality is not matched by the attention given to routine monitoring term by term, on a school-wide basis, for example of the quality of teaching and learning. The new teaching and learning policy, a potentially powerful agent for improvement, gives no indication about how its effectiveness will be monitored, evaluated and reported to governors. This shortcoming is reflected in the varying quality of assessment and marking across subject teams, which ranges from very good to unsatisfactory. It is evident in the unsatisfactory quality assurance of the citizenship curriculum. Good assessment data, identifying individual attainment, needs and targets, are collated soon after students arrive at the school. A wealth of information is gathered. The analyses of data, accessible on staff laptops, provide a sharp tool for monitoring individual progress and achievement.

However, they are not being used as such across all school teams to equal effect because they are not reader-friendly enough. Procedures for periodic subject self-review are of high quality. The schedule is drawn up in terms of perceived need to review. In ICT, the last self-review was in 2000; the next is planned for the current year. This gap has been too long given the lack of routine school monitoring and evaluation in the intervening period, which has prevented timely intervention where matters need attention.

35. In the majority of curriculum teams both leadership and management are good, and in design and technology, geography, music, special needs and the learning centre they are very effective. Senior staff are managing the challenging circumstance of needing to cover for eleven staff (including three team leaders for art and design, French and humanities), on a middle- to long-term basis, strategically and in an up-beat way. Priority is being given to sustaining management systems, and working satisfactorily. This is true in art and design and French, although the temporary lack of a subject specialist lead is having some adverse effects on students' work. The school's concerns about students' achievement in mathematics and science in Years 7 to 9 have been tackled imaginatively. An assistant headteacher with responsibility for leading and managing both subjects was appointed at the start of the current academic year. Good improvements are being secured.

36. The governing body supports the school well, giving generously of its time and expertise to school meetings and events. There is good practice in the arrangement for link governors' involvement in 'their' subject's periodic self-review. Governors contribute effectively to school developments. This is facilitated through holding a second termly meeting of the full governing body to allow time for such considerations. However, the termly reports to the governing body from the headteacher and from curriculum teams are rather like newsletters, bland and descriptive, and lacking in analytic rigour. There is not enough evidence in governing body minutes and papers of how decisions and plans have been made, nor of how governors find out for themselves how well things are progressing, other than through subject reviews. Nonetheless, governors are kept well-informed of the main issues facing the school, although committee papers vary in the helpfulness of comparative information and data to substantiate evaluations. In general, governors have a good overview of strengths and weaknesses in the school's provision with regard to staffing and premises, and a sharp eye is kept on the budget. With respect to the governing body's statutory duty for the curriculum, requirements for religious education are still not met in full in Years 10 and 11, a weakness now persisting over three inspections. There are no arrangements for meeting the requirements in the sixth form. The reasons are not only recurring recruitment and staffing difficulties, which have been tackled with fortitude, but also a lack of wider exploration of ways to provide for the leadership, management and teaching of the subject, for example, within humanities.

37. Arrangements for the continuing professional development of staff are very good. Training opportunities are clearly linked to the school's development plan and are rigorously evaluated. Procedures for accessing training are explicit and fair. Good practice is being shared throughout the school. For over seven years the school has enjoyed 'Investor in People' status and it receives consistently good assessments. In the language support department however, there is considerable knowledge and experience which has not been utilised in training across the school. There are clear and comprehensive procedures for performance management that are effectively implemented. However their effect on raising standards and improving the quality of teaching is not equally effective across the school. Arrangements for induction are thorough, comprehensive and generally well appreciated by newly appointed staff. The school makes a very effective contribution to initial teacher training.

38. A recent audit found that the school's accounts are controlled and monitored effectively, and that other financial records are largely accurate and effective. The school makes very good use of its funding, from which students generally receive equal benefit across all year groups. Good account is taken overall of best value considerations although there is scope for improvement in the consultation of parents and students. The school is aware of this.

Financial information for the whole school

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	2 716 311
Total expenditure	2 767 679
Expenditure per student	3 341

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	129 915
Balance carried forward to the next	78 547

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

- Achievement is good because most teachers have high expectations of behaviour and learning.
- Most teaching is planned well, enabling students to build on previous skills and knowledge and take part in a good variety of learning activities.
- Teachers' enthusiasm is infectious and it makes most students keen to do well.
- Data from assessments are not consistently used to evaluate students' progress or the effectiveness of teaching.
- Monitoring does not ensure that all students have a good balance in their programme of study.

Commentary

39. In 2003 the GCSE English results were below the national average and the literature results well below. The performance of boys was closer to boys' national average than that of girls to girls' national average. From 2001 there has been a decline in results in English, and from 2000 in literature. In the Year 9 tests in 2003 results were below both the national average and that for similar schools. They were average when compared with schools in similar social circumstances. Results in Year 9 have varied between above and below average in recent years.

<i>Achievement</i>	<i>good</i>
<i>Standards</i>	<i>average</i>
<i>Teaching and learning</i>	<i>both good</i>
<i>Leadership and management</i>	<i>both satisfactory</i>

40. Students in Year 9 entered the school with below average literacy skills but now they attain average standards, indicating good achievement. Most students speak clearly and listen well to teachers, although a minority have a low level of concentration. Their reading aloud improves over Years 7 to 9, both in clarity and fluency. In written responses to literature such as 'Macbeth' they show sound grasp of plot and character. The most capable students write in a mature style, adapted to suit different purposes and readerships. Students with special needs make good progress with their literacy skills. Those from different ethnic groups work well together and achieve as well as their peers. Effective teamwork between subject teachers and support staff ensures that those whose home language is not English improve their language skills and take an increasingly full part in lessons. The standards in the current Year 11 confirm good progress from students' lower starting point when they were in Year 9. Students listen well to each other and develop their thinking skills through discussions in pairs and groups. Boys are generally more forthcoming than girls. The more capable students write enthusiastic and perceptive essays on 'Romeo and Juliet', making good use of apposite quotations. When studying films such as 'Psycho' they confidently use the technical language of media studies. In their original writing most students are particularly successful in narrative and personal pieces. Students with special needs improve their written work through careful redrafting, often word-processing it to improve the presentation. Generally, however, students in all years do not have sufficient opportunity to enhance their work with ICT.

41. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, but it is variable. The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- good planning enables students to engage in a variety of tasks that build on previous skills and knowledge;
- teachers share objectives with students so they can evaluate their own progress;
- teachers' enthusiasm is infectious and students are pleased when they succeed;
- students usually respond well to teachers' high expectations of behaviour and achievement;
- a good pace is established and maintained through clear instructions and time limits;
- relationships are cordial and positive, so students confidently take risks and develop their thinking;
- marking is often regular and encouraging, but too often teachers give no specific advice on how to improve;
- some teachers depend too much on the students' ability to listen to them without any visual aids to understanding;
- in a small number of lessons teachers' expectations of students are too low.

A small number of disaffected students under-achieve, although teachers' good management usually prevents them from distracting others.

Leadership and management

42. There are appropriate priorities for developing the subject, although these are not yet fully implemented. Measures to improve the completion of GCSE coursework are effective. However, the time allocation in Years 10 and 11 is too small for all students to gain the full benefit of studying for two examinations. Monitoring of lessons and students' work, and a potentially effective system for reviewing students' progress, are being established. By encouraging all students to consider spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues, English makes a valuable contribution to their development as young citizens. Year 7 students on the pilot short course have a varied and challenging range of learning opportunities. However, although selected on the basis of their Year 6 test results, the spread of ability in this group is too wide for this pilot to be effective in the current year. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Standards are higher and satisfactory progress has been made in the accuracy of writing and opportunities for independent study. Work is now better suited to the capabilities of higher and lower attainers.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

43. The majority of curriculum subjects have a policy for developing literacy skills, although written work is not always marked for spelling and grammar. There are good opportunities in many subjects for students to practise speaking and listening, for example in pair work in ICT. They read from a range of different texts and are required to write in different forms such as notes, reports and creative writing. Overall standards of literacy are below average, but generally, students are not held back in their subjects by a lack of skill in reading or writing, except in mathematics.

Modern foreign languages

The school teaches one modern foreign language, French.

Provision in French is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching is raising attainment in Years 7 and 8, although standards are below average.
- Students with special needs are well catered for so that they achieve well.
- Current predictions for students' GCSE grades indicate that the recent decline in results is being halted.
- Numbers of students studying a modern language in Years 10 and 11 are low.
- Staff absence in the autumn term and since the start of the summer term has had some adverse effects on achievement.

Commentary

44. GCSE results in French in 2003 were well below the national average. Students' performance was worse in French than in their other subjects. The results for both boys and girls were well below their respective national averages, although girls performed better than boys. Current predicted results indicate improvement from the falling trend since the last inspection. In 2003, teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 showed attainment well below the average reported nationally.

<i>Achievement</i>	<i>satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11</i>
<i>Standards</i>	<i>below average by Year 9 and by Year 11</i>
<i>Teaching and learning</i>	<i>both satisfactory</i>
<i>Leadership and management</i>	<i>both satisfactory</i>

45. Attainment is better than indicated by the 2003 examination results where students' performance was affected by staffing difficulties. Standards overall are improving steadily, particularly in Year 8, where they are close to the national expectation. The achievement of lower attainers is often good. Students with special needs and students whose mother tongue is not English achieve well because they receive good support, both from subject teachers and support staff. However the progress of higher attainers and gifted and talented students, particularly in Year 9, is often unsatisfactory because the work in lessons is not challenging enough. There is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls or between different ethnic groups. In Year 9, higher attainers do not show sufficient competence in their use of the main tenses. Students generally lack confidence in speaking and, with the notable exception of one group in Year 8, do not produce extended speech. Higher attainers in Year 11 write fluently, but their writing lacks variety in vocabulary and structure.

46. Most teaching is at least satisfactory. On occasion teaching by departmental staff is unsatisfactory, although in a third of the lessons seen the quality was good. The main features are:

- students are helped to learn effectively in most lessons, although their learning is not always reviewed;
- teachers plan well with clear targets, although these are not sufficiently adapted for students' different capabilities, particularly those of higher attainers;
- in half the lessons seen, French was not used effectively by teachers;
- good use of ICT was observed, although this is not a feature of all lessons;
- support staff play a significant role because their contribution is always planned well;
- in a small number of lessons teachers use French in a challenging way and expect students to use it for basic communication;
- work is regularly assessed, but targets are not related to National Curriculum levels or GCSE assessment criteria, so that students are not clear about how well they are doing;
- marking is regular but does not always show students how to make improvements.

Where teaching is unsatisfactory, ineffective classroom management affects learning adversely particularly in Year 9.

Leadership and management

47. There is a clear vision for future development, good planning and evidence of steady improvement. Subject staff work well together and are well supported by their line manager. A consequence of the absence of the subject leader since the start of term however, is insufficient support for supply staff. There are some adverse effects on students' achievement. The lack of clear policies for teaching and learning means that individual needs are not routinely planned for. Schemes of work do not set high enough targets for students. Data from assessments are not used to monitor the department's effectiveness. Progress since the last inspection is unsatisfactory. The fall in result

in 2003 was largely due to staffing difficulties. However, recent stability is leading to steady improvement.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- ❑ Weaknesses in the teaching in Years 10 and 11 lead to students underachieving.
- ❑ Students' negative attitudes in Years 10 and 11 adversely affect their learning.
- ❑ Arrangements for assessment are unsatisfactory, although good use of data is beginning to be made to help teachers plan work more effectively.
- ❑ The recently appointed subject leader is establishing a secure base for future improvement, with evidence of good headway being made.
- ❑ Students in the Year 7 class following the pilot short course for higher attainers achieve very well.

Commentary

48. In 2003, GCSE results were significantly below the national average. Students did less well in mathematics than they did in other subjects, by a much greater margin than was true nationally. There has been a falling trend in recent years. The predicted grades for 2004 suggest that the decline is halted. The Year 9 test results in 2003 were well below the national average and well below the average for similar schools. When students' social circumstances are taken into account, these results were average. Year 9 results are improving at the same rate as national results.

<i>Achievement</i>	<i>satisfactory in Years 7 to 9</i> <i>unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11</i>
<i>Standards</i>	<i>below average by Year 9</i> <i>and by Year 11</i>
<i>Teaching and learning</i>	<i>satisfactory in Years 7 to 9</i> <i>unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11</i>
<i>Leadership and management</i>	<i>both good</i>

49. Students' attainment is below average when they join Year 7. In the Year 7 class of higher attainers following a pilot short course students are achieving very well because expectations are high and they respond very well to challenging work. Students with special needs achieve as their peers do, although they do better when additional support is provided. Students at the early stages of learning English achieve well when they receive additional support because this ensures that they understand all aspects of the work. When such support is not present their achievement is similar to that of others. There is no evidence that students from minority ethnic groups achieve differently to their peers. In Years 9 and 10, boys achieve more than girls because they have better attitudes towards their work. When students need to describe what they have done orally and, more particularly, in writing, their work is adversely affected by their weak literacy skills. When using computers, students have adequate skills for the tasks set.

50. Where teaching is on occasions very good, there is very good achievement because expectations are high and work is demanding. Teachers select a variety of activities which stimulate and sustain students' interest. By contrast, where teaching is not effective in about a quarter of lessons, teachers do not plan sufficiently for students' different levels of attainment. The range of activities is limited to explanations from the teacher and written exercises. In such lessons, students lose concentration and a minority disrupts the learning of others. The main strengths and weaknesses of the teaching are:

- too frequently teachers are not aware in detail of what students can already do and so the work set is either too easy or too difficult;
- in a minority of lessons, acceptable standards of behaviour are not clearly established;

- subject teachers and learning support teachers work well together;
- in too many lessons students lack interest because they are not made aware of the uses of the mathematics they are learning;
- the best comments in teachers' marking are very helpful, but many teachers do not provide enough detail;
- in too many lessons best use is not made of the time available to maximise students' learning;
- teachers have sound knowledge of the subject.

Leadership and management

51. The new subject leader is a member of the senior management team and has responsibility for both mathematics and science. He has identified clearly how to improve the work of the department, determining appropriate priorities and setting developments in motion. Detailed analyses of test results have indicated the areas where teaching is not effective enough, and these are being given specific attention. Target-setting is being refined and is now linked well to regular testing. Consequently students are beginning to know how well their work is progressing. A good team approach is being developed. Although not involved in the teaching of the subject, the subject leader monitors the work of his team effectively. There is regular observation of lessons followed by developmental comment to teachers. Good practice is beginning to be shared by the team of teachers. However, it is early days for these developments to bring about improvement in students' achievement, although there is positive progress in Years 7 to 9. Improvement since the previous inspection is unsatisfactory. GCSE results have declined, although predictions for 2004 suggest that this is halted. The weaknesses in teaching identified in the last inspection report are not all eradicated, although this is underway. In too many lessons expectations are still not high enough. Nonetheless, the capacity for improvement is good.

Mathematics across the curriculum

52. Students are sufficiently competent in mathematics to meet the demands of work in other subjects. The school has an effective policy for the use of mathematics across the curriculum as shown by the helpful classroom displays of the use of mathematics in particular subjects.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- ❑ Experienced, committed teachers know their students well and have high expectations of them.
- ❑ No special needs support teachers are timetabled with lower attaining groups in the subject.
- ❑ Effective management of students' behaviour and learning enables lesson time to be used productively.
- ❑ The good leadership of a number of initiatives is helping to raise standards.
- ❑ Good assessment and records facilitate monitoring, but marking is inconsistent and lacks comment on how to improve.

Commentary

53. In 2003, the combined results of the GCSE and GNVQ courses were below the national average, although in line with the predicted results. The results gained by boys and girls were much the same. For all students the trend is one of improvement. In the 2003 Year 9 national tests, the rising trend of recent years was maintained, although results were below the national average. Based on students' prior attainment, these results were approaching national levels for similar schools. They were average when compared with schools in similar social circumstances. Girls out-

performed boys in these tests for the first time. This was the result of early identification of under-achievement and effective remedial action.

<i>Achievement</i>	<i>satisfactory in Years 7 to 9</i>
	<i>good in Years 10 and 11</i>
<i>Standards</i>	<i>below average by Year 9</i>
	<i>average by Year 11</i>
<i>Teaching and learning</i>	<i>both good</i>
<i>Leadership and management</i>	<i>both good</i>

54. Students' attainment on entry is below the national average as measured by the school's testing in Year 7. Students who arrived with national test levels of 4 and 5 are not performing to these one year later. The work of higher-attaining groups is at the expected level, not above it, while below the expectation for middle, as well as lower groups. In Years 10 and 11, no differences were seen in the achievement of students from minority ethnic groups. Longer-term analysis indicates that girls are now doing better than boys, helped by the school's recent work on this issue. Students with special needs match their classmates in oral and practical work. Their coursework folders are often of a good standard due to extraordinary patience and prolonged effort both by teachers and by the students themselves. No support was seen for these students in any of the lessons observed. Higher attainers and gifted and talented students have been identified and are well provided for. They respond to increased challenges by producing a higher standard of work. Laboratory discipline is good, with careful observance of the required safety measures. Practical skills develop steadily from Year 8. Knowledge of fair tests and what constitutes a variable in a test is noticeably weak in Year 7, so that much basic work has to be revisited before progress can be made.

The main strengths and weaknesses in teaching are

- individual students are effectively supported or extended because teachers know them well;
- although experimental work is popular, students' written evaluations show that many lower attainers follow instructions, but without understanding the process;
- the data projector/lap top combination in all laboratories has resulted in livelier, faster-paced lessons, drawing on techniques such as video-clips, simulations and animated diagrams;
- although a small minority of students lack the self-discipline to conform to the expected standard of behaviour, the school's system for dealing with them works effectively;
- the availability on disk or on line of all the information needed by GNVQ students capitalises on their ICT skills and provides easy access for revision and working at home, although sometimes inhibiting their wider reading;
- emphasis on the spelling, pronunciation and use of correct scientific terms is improving students' scientific literacy;
- a small number of Year 7 lower attainers, who were recruited to the short course on the basis of their Year 6 national test levels, are not benefiting from the programme.

Leadership and management

55. The recently appointed subject leader has introduced several initiatives which, supported by the rest of the staff team, are improving standards. The monitoring which results from good assessment records is improving standards, notably with a group of under-achieving girls identified earlier in the current year. Improvement since the last inspection is good, except that the amount of available storage space has been considerably reduced. Results are rising and the planned appointment of two additional science teachers is targeted at effecting further improvement.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

No Year 9 lessons were timetabled during the inspection. Judgements about achievement, teaching and learning in Year 9 are therefore based on analysis of work and discussion with students.

Provision in information and communication technology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well because the teaching is effective in improving learning skills and capability.
- While technical support is very good, there is insufficient learning support for students with special needs.
- Management is well-organised, but leadership is too fragmented to be fully effective.
- The use of computers across all subjects is satisfactory overall, but unsatisfactory in a minority.

Commentary

56. In 2003 most students succeeded in gaining a GNVQ qualification. None secured a distinction, but about a third gained a merit grade, with the remainder gaining a pass grade. Teachers' Year 9 assessments in 2003 were slightly below, but close to those reported nationally.

<i>Achievement</i>	<i>good in Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11</i>
<i>Standards</i>	<i>average by Year 9 and by Year 11</i>
<i>Teaching and learning</i>	<i>both good</i>
<i>Leadership</i>	<i>satisfactory</i>
<i>Management</i>	<i>good</i>

57. On entry to Year 7 students' attainment is below expectations. This is also true of their learning skills. Many find it difficult to sustain concentration and pay attention to the teachers, so they need constant attention and reassurance. The progress that they make in these areas is a significant factor in their good achievement by Year 9. Average standards are sustained by those who go on to do the GNVQ course. Most students use appropriate software effectively. There is no significant variation in the achievement of students of different attainment levels, ethnicity, or between boys and girls. The department is beginning to acknowledge gifted and talented students in its planning and to make satisfactory provision for them.

58. The main features of the teaching and learning are:

- teachers' have good awareness of students' needs so that, while not all lessons include activities at different levels, good individual guidance is given and teachers know what they expect from each individual;
- relationships are conducive to learning because teachers balance assertiveness with cheerfulness and sensitivity, usually securing a positive response;
- systematic, regular and detailed feedback in the GNVQ course helps students know how well they are doing and how to improve;
- clear explanations and the involvement of students in demonstrations enhance their confidence and concentration;
- the achievement of a small number of students is unsatisfactory on occasion because teachers do not always check that all are fully involved in their work or paying attention to explanations and demonstrations.

Learning in the Year 7 lessons observed, although satisfactory, did not get under way quickly enough, due to the time taken to settle students down. In these lessons, teachers found it difficult to

provide the individual attention required because of the size of the classes and the level of need. No learning support was available in these classes.

Leadership and management

59. The department is well organised. Effective steps are being taken to improve assessment in Years 7 to 9. Staff and resources are managed well to maximise their effect on achievement. Very good technical support ensures that ICT equipment makes an effective contribution to the curriculum. However, the school's policy for determining the frequency of regular departmental reviews has resulted in too long a gap since the last review in 2000. Although leadership is characterised by the strong commitment of all involved, it is not fully coherent due to its fragmented nature. Several members of staff have an ICT role, but are supervised by different line managers. There is no system for regular communication between all ICT staff. Consequently an overview of provision is lacking among subject staff. Not all have the opportunity to contribute to strategic decisions. While there have been good improvements in the provision of resources since the last inspection, with the school's technology college status having a clear and positive impact, these have not yet secured more than satisfactory improvement in achievement.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

60. The use of ICT across the curriculum is satisfactory. The school meets its statutory responsibilities, with all subjects providing some opportunities to use computers. The best provision, which is good, is in science, citizenship, design and technology, French, and special needs. The use of ICT is unsatisfactory in geography, history and music. In geography and history, while some good activities take place, these are not planned in a coherent way. In music, equipment is lacking. Although the school has taken some steps to audit its provision across the curriculum, it does not have a full picture of this. When students use computers their competence usually meets expectations. Many show above average capability, for example when word-processing in English or using design programmes in design and technology.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- ❑ Very good assessment underpins teaching and learning so that students achieve well.
- ❑ An effective range of activities leads to good learning, particularly in Years 7 to 9.
- ❑ Insufficient use is made of the comprehensive data on assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of planned work.
- ❑ There is insufficient use of ICT to encourage independent learning.

Commentary

61. GCSE results in 2003 were well below the national average. However, they maintained the significant improvement since 2000 when no students reached higher grades. These results represent satisfactory achievement when compared with students' attainment at the end of Year 9. Teachers' Year 9 assessments in 2003 showed that students were reaching standards close to those reported nationally.

Achievement

good in Years 7 to 9

Standards

and in Years 10 and 11

***below average by Year 9
and by Year 11***

Teaching and learning
Leadership
Management

both good
very good
good

62. Students join Year 7 with low levels of geographical knowledge. The very well structured curriculum in Years 7 to 9 enables them to make good gains in knowledge and skills. Their spiritual and moral education is effectively developed in geography lessons as they study sustainable development. They write powerful poems empathising with earthquake victims. Work seen in Years 10 and 11 indicates that all students are achieving well. Higher attainers use information effectively. Middle and lower attainers describe processes and recall facts well, but are not so adept at manipulating information to explain cause and effect. However, in the school's new curriculum plan for Years 7 to 9, learning activities that develop this skill are built into every topic. All students in these years show an increasing awareness of what is required which provides a very good foundation for further studies. Students' use of ICT is too limited and in general students do not use the Internet for personal research. The department has identified those students it considers to be gifted and talented and is beginning to consider how to plan specifically for them.

Strengths and weaknesses in the teaching are:

- lessons engage students' attention and include a good variety of graduated tasks which develop their understanding well;
- target sheets and teachers' marking set high expectations for students' work;
- assessment tasks are fully integrated into the curriculum so that students are fully aware of their progress and what they need to do to improve;
- resources reflect the needs of all students so that they learn well;
- teachers' class management fosters good relationships so that all students, including those with special needs and those from minority ethnic groups, work well together and make good progress;
- inadequate access to computers restricts students' use of ICT to enhance their work;
- opportunities are lacking for students to widen their geographical experience through fieldwork.

Leadership and management

63. The subject leader sets very high standards for herself and the department. The mutually supportive team applies standards consistently and has been effective in raising standards. The new 'study frameworks' have led to improved standards in Years 7 to 9 and are indicative of the knowledgeable and innovative leadership of the curriculum. Although the work of the department is monitored well, teachers do not evaluate students' performance and provision in the subject using national and school data. Improvement since the last inspection is very good. GCSE results have risen significantly. Students are actively involved in their learning and are developing the ability to apply information well when writing essays. Assessment procedures are helping students to achieve well because they are soundly linked to teaching and learning.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well because of good teaching and their positive attitudes to work.
- Due to good leadership and management staff work very well as a team.
- Very good relationships contribute significantly to students' good learning.
- Facilities for visual aids are lacking in specialist rooms so that students' understanding of the key teaching points in lessons is restricted.
- A coherent ICT programme and easy access to computers are lacking in all years.

Commentary

64. Examination results in this popular GCSE subject are below average but improving. In 2003 boys performed better than girls. Students perform well in comparison to their Year 9 standards and do much better at GCSE than in most of their other subjects. In 2003, teachers' Year 9 assessments were at the reported national average.

<i>Achievement</i>	<i>good in Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11</i>
<i>Standards</i>	<i>below average by Year 9 average by Year 11</i>
<i>Teaching and learning</i>	<i>both good in Years 7 to 11.</i>
<i>Leadership and management</i>	<i>both good</i>

65. On entry to Year 7 students' history skills are well below average. By Year 9 they have a secure grounding in historical skills. Most have a satisfactory understanding of the main events and people of the periods studied. However, their knowledge of chronology is weak and their use of source materials is insufficiently developed in Years 7 and 8. Higher attainers, especially gifted and talented students, are not always sufficiently stretched. Lower attainers work at the level expected by their prior attainment. Students with special needs make good progress, particularly when they receive specialist support. By the end of Year 11 students have developed further their skills in analysing historical evidence. This is the result of good quality teaching by subject specialists and students who mostly work well throughout Years 10 and 11. Students' interpretation of historical sources shows noticeable improvement, but critical evaluations are not sufficiently developed. The best independent GCSE coursework is of a high standard, although absence impedes the progress of a small minority of students.

66. The strengths and weaknesses in the teaching are:

- the quality is rarely less than satisfactory and mostly good;
- teachers are committed, caring and supportive of students;
- well-structured lessons, teachers' good knowledge of the topics and strong classroom management are the features of the good teaching;
- the best teaching is lively, challenging, and has good pace and high expectations;
- questioning is skilfully used to extend students' knowledge and understanding of issues and events;
- inadequate use is made of visual aids to illustrate and reinforce learning;
- there is a strong emphasis on developing thinking skills;
- very good procedures for assessment, involving tracking, targeting and self-evaluation, are beginning to have a positive effect on students' progress.

Leadership and management

67. The subject is well led and competently managed. Very capable staff work very effectively as a team. Curriculum planning and assessment are very good, particularly for the national strategy in Years 7 to 9, because they focus directly on students' learning needs. The lack of a coherent programme for ICT, as well as inadequate access to computers, significantly hinders the development of ICT skills. Fieldwork in France and visits to the Imperial War Museum lead to very effective learning, but there are insufficient visits to local and regional historical sites. Resources are well selected, but the lack of an overhead projector and video monitor in each specialist teaching room restricts students' learning opportunities. Progress since the previous inspection is good. Standards have risen well and a more flexible approach to teaching has led to good improvements in learning.

Religious education

No students are currently studying GCSE courses. The subject is timetabled in Years 10 and 11 as citizenship/religious education. No lessons were scheduled during the inspection, but it is clear from students' work that the Year 11 course has been wholly focused on citizenship. Failure to recruit staff, despite the school's best efforts, has resulted in Year 11 students studying little religious education since they were in Year 9. The Year 10 course contains religious education modules in one term, an allocation well below the recommended time. This course will continue into Year 11 in September 2004. Issues are not considered as required from the viewpoint of another faith besides Christianity.

Provision in religious education is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- ❑ Current arrangements are not ensuring that statutory requirements are fully met in Years 10 and 11.
- ❑ Recurrent periods without a subject leader have held back the development of the subject.
- ❑ Marking of students' work in Years 7 to 9 is very good but there is no framework for assessing progress over time.
- ❑ ICT is not being used to support students' learning.

Commentary

<i>Achievement</i>	<i>satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 poor in Years 10 and 11</i>
<i>Standards</i>	<i>below average by Year 9 well below average by Year 11</i>
<i>Teaching and learning</i>	<i>satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 no evidence in Years 10 and 11</i>
<i>Leadership and management</i>	<i>both unsatisfactory</i>

68. Standards are below average on entry and remain so by Year 9. Year 9 students have a reasonable knowledge of Christianity but only a weak understanding of basic beliefs and practices in other religions. There is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls, nor in the performance of students from different ethnic groups. Gifted and talented students have not been identified, but the work of some higher attainers lacks sufficient expression and justification of their own views. Many homework assignments, intended to develop writing skills, are incomplete, particularly for projects in Years 7 and 8. Teachers help students with special needs to cope with tasks and materials, although these are not specifically designed for them. In some classes, students' achievement is better now that they have a regular teacher, but in others negative attitudes still have to be turned around for students to work to their capability. In Years 10 and 11 students' attitudes are fairly negative, so the strategy has been to emphasise citizenship aspects in most lessons. The work shows satisfactory reasoning about solutions to moral dilemmas, but only slight consideration of relevant religious teaching.

69. The main features of the mostly satisfactory teaching in Years 7 to 9 are:
- detailed lesson planning with objectives, starter activities to engage students, and plenary reviews of learning;
 - too much reliance on worksheets which are not adapted for lower and higher attainers;
 - thorough, constructive marking of students' work, showing how they can improve;
 - adequate development of literacy skills through focus on key words, opportunities for reading aloud and project work;
 - although ICT is encouraged for research and word-processing projects, it is little used in lessons to support learning.

Leadership and management

70. This is the third consecutive inspection to report that statutory requirements for religious education are not met. Despite the school's best efforts to recruit staff on four occasions over the last eighteen months, an appointment was not made until January 2004. The newly appointed specialist teacher is well supported within the humanities team. However, given the recurrent difficulty in recruiting specialist staff, the school has not sufficiently explored other ways of ensuring that students receive their entitlement to religious education teaching in Years 10 and 11, for example through involving humanities teachers. Citizenship has replaced religious education in the core curriculum in Years 10 and 11. Consequently, religious education is not making its expected contribution to older students' spiritual, moral and cultural development. Improvement in the subject's position following the previous inspection has been eroded by the prolonged absence of subject leadership, rendering it unsatisfactory. Religious education is lagging behind other humanities subjects, both in developing the quality of teaching and learning as well as in devising a system of formal assessment of students' attainment in order to monitor their progress.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- ❑ Teachers' very good subject knowledge and presentation skills successfully encourage good learning.
- ❑ Students' positive attitudes to work and their good behaviour contribute to their success.
- ❑ An excellent, innovative curriculum inspires students' endeavours.
- ❑ The very good leadership and management show clear vision for developing the subject and raising standards.
- ❑ Gifted and talented students are insufficiently challenged and this has an adverse effect on their achievement.

Commentary

71. In 2003, GCSE results were below the national average. Standards were similar in previous years. Results in resistant materials improved to above average in 2003, and in graphic products were at the national average, both representing good achievement. The 2003 Year 9 teacher assessments were at the average reported nationally, although observation showed standards below the national expectation.

Achievement	good in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11
Standards	below average by Year 9 and by Year 11
Teaching and learning	both good
Leadership and management	both very good

72. Standards on entry to Year 7 are low. By Year 9, the quality of practical work is good. Students experience very good variety through designing and making functional products that utilise many different materials. Both boys and girls are adept at manipulating machines and hand tools to cut, join, mix and modify materials. Students have good awareness of health and safety issues. Higher attainers' work shows good graphical skills, with clear annotation of drawings. The work on display is of a similar standard for boys and girls. There is good use of ICT for research via the Internet. Students have opportunities to develop skills in electronics and robotics and to take part in national competitions. Standards in Year 11 are improving. There is good quality work in all areas. Higher attainers use ICT well to present graphic designs and analyse research results. In lower attainers' work there is a lack of detail and development of original ideas. Underpinning skills and knowledge of designing and making are weak for a minority of Year 11 students. Those from minority ethnic

groups are integrated well and they achieve well. Because teachers know students with special needs well and ensure that they participate fully in activities, they usually make the same good progress as others. Gifted and talented students respond well to the tasks presented to them although these are not challenging enough.

73. Strengths and weakness in the teaching are:

- teachers are very knowledgeable, extremely hard working and well-organised, and they plan individual lessons thoroughly;
- learning objectives are very clear and reviewed at the end of lessons to ensure that students have a good understanding of what they have learned;
- teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve and students respond well;
- teachers' introductions and methods, including seating plans, encourage students' active participation;
- significant emphasis is placed on providing high quality displays that establish high expectations;
- thoughtfully planned resources support students very effectively in tackling complex tasks;
- assessment arrangements are good overall, although a small number of Year 11 students are uncertain about how to improve their work in order to achieve higher grades.

Leadership and management

74. The department is very well led and managed, which has ensured good improvement since the last inspection. Funding is used effectively to enhance learning. Staff are well-qualified. They share a focus on continual improvement, supported by the extensive development plan. Teaching is monitored very well. Data from assessments are used effectively to monitor students' performance and set targets. Teachers and technicians work cohesively as a team. There is excellent enrichment of the curriculum through many contacts with the external community. A very effective commitment to teacher training is shown by strong liaison with the West Midlands Consortium, and regular successful placements in the department.

75. Students in Years 7 to 11 are challenged and excited by an excellent design and technology curriculum.

Example of outstanding practice:

This curriculum ranges widely from 'Towers of Hanoi' made in wood and plastic, to bridge structures, metal candlesticks and textile hats in different textures. It stimulates very high interest and good achievement. No-one is left out. Computer aided manufacture starts in Year 7 with students using the laser cutter. ICT is well sequenced throughout the curriculum. Eager, enthusiastic Year 9 students listen avidly, discuss, make group decisions and organise themselves very efficiently to tackle the imaginative work in food technology. Each student has carefully prepared ingredients and equipment to make a rice or pasta dish from around the world. There is discussion why dishes were chosen and their significance in the diet of the particular country. Even the shyest gain confidence and join in. At the end of this bustling, exciting lesson, students analyse each other's work in a mature manner and give helpful and constructive feedback. Year 9 students undertake more advanced designing with specialised computer packages. Electronics work, interlinked with resistant materials and ICT, provides an excellent range of experiences. Expertise from outside the school enriches the curriculum and is helping to raise standards. The quality of discussion on GCSE coursework, stimulated by a visiting mentor, is stunning.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

The subject leader left the school at the end of the spring term. Pending a new appointment, the timetable was rearranged, resulting in a change of teacher for several groups. Consequently staff were less familiar with the students in the new groups, as well as their work, than might be expected at this stage in the academic year.

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- ❑ Established and effective management systems and documentation are supporting the department well during a difficult transition period.
- ❑ There is a significant amount of work that is unfinished or poorly presented across the year groups.
- ❑ Assessment procedures are very good, but lack graded examples to standardise judgements and ensure accuracy.

Commentary

76. GCSE results in 2003 were well above the national average. In comparison to their other GCSE subjects, these results were more than half a grade higher for boys and a full grade higher for girls. Teachers' Year 9 assessments in 2003 were broadly at the average reported nationally, with girls attaining almost one grade higher than boys.

<i>Achievement</i>	<i>good in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11</i>
<i>Standards</i>	<i>average by Year 9 above average by Year 11</i>
<i>Teaching and learning</i>	<i>both good</i>
<i>Leadership and management</i>	<i>both satisfactory</i>

77. Students' attainment is below the national expectation when they join Year 7. They achieve well so that by the end of Year 9 they reach standards that are broadly at the national expectation. They show good control of tone as they develop their observational drawing skills. Higher attainers incorporate the styles of well-known artists into their work and present their researches well. By the end of Year 11, students' drawing skills remain strong, alongside well-observed pastel portraits and well-composed collage work. Gifted and talented students benefit from contact with artists in residence, galleries and university departments. In workshops arranged with a local art gallery a small group of Year 10 students created very atmospheric computer images. Students of all capabilities and backgrounds, including those with special needs and those whose home language is not English, achieve well in the development of skills and ideas.

78. While the teaching and learning seen was good, there is evidence in students' work of teaching of very good quality. The significant features seen in lessons are:

- a very good range of planned activities include work pitched at an appropriate level for both higher and lower attainers;
- very effective demonstrations, especially in teachers' own specialisms, increase students' confidence in exploring techniques;
- good one-to-one guidance helps students of all capabilities to achieve well;
- assessments are not always accurate because there is no collection of graded pieces of work to which students and staff can refer;
- students are not always clear about the standards they are achieving.

Leadership and management

79. In the interim period pending staff appointments, good documentation and established procedures are generally proving effective in supporting the day-to-day work in the subject. The senior management team has taken reasonable steps to manage the transition by assigning staff to

oversee the management of the department. These arrangements have not ensured a specialist lead however, particularly for guiding all students effectively through the final stages of preparing their folders of work for GCSE. Assessments of students' performance and the take-up at GCSE are not currently analysed in an easily accessible form, so limiting the effectiveness of planning. A new, ICT-based assessment monitoring system, due for installation later in the current year, is set to rectify this. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Issues raised about the narrow curriculum have been successfully resolved by running short ceramics and design courses in conjunction with the technology department. The quality of teaching has improved and GCSE results have risen significantly.

Performing arts

80. The performing arts department includes dance, drama and music. In Years 7 to 9, all students follow a weekly programme of lessons in each of the three subjects. Music was inspected in detail as a National Curriculum subject. The work in dance and drama was sampled and four lessons observed in each subject.

Dance

81. Standards are above average and students' achievement is very good. Their understanding of how to create dances is good and they enjoy working together. Written work is of a good standard and supports the practical work. Students' experience of collaborative working, using themes and music from a range of cultures, makes a significant contribution to their personal development. No Year 11 dance lessons or activities were scheduled during the inspection week. Standards of practical work in Year 10 are above average. The GCSE examination is being taken for the first time in the current term.

82. Teaching is very good overall and excellent in GCSE work. Very good planning is a particular strength and, together with high expectations, ensures that students progress very well in lessons. Assessments are carefully carried out and used for planning work. Staffing and accommodation are good.

83. A demanding technical study was given to Year 10 dance students, alongside a task requiring high level skills in observation and analysis of performance.

Example of outstanding practice:

Students are engrossed. The teacher's confidence in her personal expertise shows. She makes clear her very high expectations for concentration and the highest standards of performance. What she says invariably helps students see how to make an improvement - and achieve it. All the tasks have been prepared individually, and all offer a high level of challenge, including those for the most able. Consequently, students are working at above average levels of performance, demonstrating accuracy of timing and movement. The most able show good control and tension, with fluidity in their movement. When students share the strengths and weaknesses they have observed in performance, they do so with consideration and sensitivity. Their points for improvement are well chosen. The teacher's comments ensure that they give increasing attention to detail and accuracy, necessary for achieving the highest examination grades.

Drama

84. Standards are average and students' achievement is good. No Year 11 GCSE work was observed as the students had already completed the examination and submitted their course work to the board. The 2003 results for the small entry show a good number of grades A*-C with a good proportion of As and A*s. In Years 7 to 9, boys and girls achieve equally well as do students from different ethnic groups. Students with special needs respond positively to the essentially practical nature of the work and achieve well.

85. Teaching and learning are good overall with a significant amount that is very good. Lessons are planned well and very well managed. Students enjoy good relationships and collaborate very well in group work. Resources such as video and digital photography are very effectively used to illustrate teaching points and engage students' interest. In practical work, very good help is given to individual students. This is particularly effective in ensuring that students with special needs and those whose home language is not English make good progress. Higher attainers, such as those identified as talented, are well challenged and given opportunities to work at a higher level, both in class and in extra-curricular activities. Drama makes a strong contribution to students' literacy development. There is a good emphasis on vocabulary, with keywords listed for every unit of work. Students read scripts and are given tasks involving creative and descriptive writing, in addition to the many opportunities for speaking and discussion. Marking is conscientious and assessment of students' work is systematic. Students are given good information about how well they are doing.

Performing arts

86. Leadership and management are very good. An effective team has been created with a good vision of what the department should aim for. Innovative schemes of work, dealing with important moral and social issues, make a very significant contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There is very good monitoring and support of staff, particularly helpful to those who are not drama specialists. The curriculum is considerably enriched by good opportunities for extra-curricular work, theatre visits and workshops involving visiting professional groups. The school's high level of involvement in the arts has been recognised by a Silver Artsmark award. Drama accommodation is however unsatisfactory. It is badly ventilated and too small, and so unsuitable for a subject involving so much physical activity. There is insufficient specialist equipment to support students' learning. Improvement since the last inspection is good. The time allocation has been significantly increased and is now very good. The consistency of teaching quality has been improved and there are now dedicated specialist teaching areas for dance and drama.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- ❑ Teaching is consistently good, ensuring good progress in lessons.
- ❑ A complete change of teaching staff has been smoothly accomplished without detriment to the department's effectiveness.
- ❑ Marking is good and keeps students well informed about their progress and how to improve.
- ❑ Resources for ICT are inadequate and limit what students can achieve when composing, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- ❑ A lack of pace in some lessons reduces the amount of time for practical work.

Commentary

87. The number of students taking GCSE in 2003 was too small for valid comparisons with national averages. All students gained a graded pass and about half a higher grade A*-C. Teachers' Year 9 assessments in 2003 indicated standards at the average reported nationally.

<i>Achievement</i>	<i>good</i>
<i>Standards</i>	<i>average</i>
<i>Teaching and learning</i>	<i>both good</i>
<i>Leadership and management</i>	<i>both very good</i>

88. Students join Year 7 with attainment that is below the expectation. Boys and girls and students with different levels of prior attainment all achieve well. Students with special needs and

those whose home language is not English are fully integrated into all activities and profit from the practical approach to the curriculum. In Years 7 to 9, students hold independent parts well in ensemble playing. Students' compositions show a good understanding of graphic scores and their representation of pitch and time. They have a satisfactory grasp of rhythmic and melodic notation and create simple melodic and rhythmic lines and patterns. Students' literacy and numeracy skills are adequate for the requirements of the subject. In Years 10 and 11 students show a good understanding of musical styles related to the genres they have studied and have a good knowledge of technical vocabulary. When performing in groups they hold independent parts securely and keep together well. Their composition work is limited by an over-emphasis on chords at the expense of melody.

89. Strengths and weaknesses in the teaching and learning are:

- good planning that results in well-structured lessons with good progression;
- insistence on high standards of behaviour leading to productive working;
- very effective use of resources that engages students' interest;
- detailed marking, giving good suggestions for improvement;
- good use of self-evaluation by students so that their learning is consolidated;
- practical work that is well graded and matched effectively to students' differing needs;
- teachers' musical skills used well to illustrate points and demonstrate performance techniques;
- students' positive approach to sharing instruments and their help for each other in group work;
- inadequate ICT resources adversely affecting the quality of GCSE composition work;
- a loss of pace in some lessons because organisation takes too long or time is spent dealing with minor behaviour problems;
- lack of variety in some lessons with too much time spent on the same activity;
- written tasks that are not sufficiently matched to differing individual needs.

Leadership and management

90. Music is led and managed very effectively as part of the performing arts department. The newly qualified staff are very well monitored and supported. The performing arts leader provides a very good role model and has created a music team that is effective despite its limited experience. A good contribution is made to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through performing and listening to music and studying music of differing cultures. Social skills are developed during class and extra-curricular work. There is satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. Teaching and learning have improved and standards have been maintained. However progress in the use of ICT is unsatisfactory and there is still room for improvement in the opportunities for extra-curricular activities. The number of students learning instruments has declined significantly since the school began charging for instrumental lessons in Years 8 and 9. At the start of the current term this decision was revoked by the governing body.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **satisfactory**.

Year 11 lessons in general physical education were not observed because students were on study leave.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- ❑ A wide curriculum and very good facilities provide a good range of opportunities for all students.
- ❑ Students behave well and relationships are harmonious.
- ❑ The assessment of students' performance is not accurate in Years 7 to 9 and is not used to help students improve.

- ❑ Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan interesting tasks that promote sound development of students' skills.
- ❑ Teachers do not make consistent demands on students to use technical language and to contribute to their own learning.

Commentary

91. In 2003, GCSE results were significantly below the national average. Students achieved their predicted grades and did as well in physical education as in the other subjects they studied. Teachers' Year 9 assessments in 2003 indicated standards that were well above the average reported nationally, although these assessments were not secure.

<i>Achievement</i>	<i>satisfactory in Years 7 to 9</i>
<i>general PE</i>	<i>satisfactory in Years 10 and 11</i>
<i>GCSE course</i>	<i>satisfactory</i>
<i>Standards</i>	<i>average by Year 9</i>
<i>general PE</i>	<i>average by Year 11</i>
<i>GCSE course</i>	<i>well below average</i>
<i>Teaching and learning</i>	<i>both good</i>
<i>Leadership and management</i>	<i>both satisfactory</i>

Commentary

92. From standards at the national expectation on entry to Year 7, students make steady advances in the skills of games and athletics. Most know how to prepare for activity, but do not understand why this is necessary or relate this preparation to their work on a healthy lifestyle. Students are not confident in their use of technical language. These weaknesses are often the result of variations in the quality of the teaching. Achievement is satisfactory in Year 10 as students develop an understanding of tactics in games. They act as officials and coaches, but this is not a feature of all lessons. Very few girls follow the examination course. Students of all attainment levels work well together and progress at the same rate in lessons. Those with special needs and from minority ethnic groups achieve as well as others. Teachers do not identify students whose home language is not English. Talented students make satisfactory progress, particularly through the extra-curricular programme.

93. The strengths and weaknesses of teaching are:

- teachers have good subject knowledge and plan tasks that help students make sound progress;
- any misbehaviour is well managed so that all can learn in lessons;
- a significant minority of students are too dependent on the teacher and do not practise enough for themselves in order to improve;
- good use of homework contributes to students' development of ICT skills;
- assessments, particularly in Years 7 to 9, are neither accurate, shared with students, nor used in planning for different groups, so that students have little idea of how to improve without teachers' help.

Leadership and management

94. Following a period of decline since the last inspection there has been satisfactory improvement in recent months. The department benefits from the thorough self-review process used across the school. Its improvement plan is a good guide to raising standards. Progress measured against the improvement targets has been steady, but lacks urgency. Staffing is stable and the curriculum team leader is building a confident team. Together with the good curriculum and very good facilities, this places the department well to raise standards.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

No courses in this group were inspected in detail. Lessons were observed in business studies, health and social care, and leisure and tourism. In business studies, teaching, learning and progress were all very good and students were working at a standard above expectations. In health and social care, students were working at a standard below the expectation. They were not making sufficient

progress in the lesson although the teaching was satisfactory. All features of the leisure and tourism lesson were good: teaching, learning and progress. Students were working at a standard above the expectation.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

There is insufficient evidence to report in detail on provision in these programmes.

Personal, social and health education and citizenship are taught through tutor periods in Years 7 to 9, dedicated study days 'off-timetable', specific citizenship lessons in Years 10 and 11, and through all the subjects in the curriculum. No off-timetable days or citizenship lessons were scheduled during the inspection. Samples of work for Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11, together with additional work in Years 10 and 11, were analysed and a discussion with students in Year 11 took place.

Citizenship

95. The small sample of work for Year 7 shows attainment below the standard expected when students join the school. Although the sample shows that students develop a good understanding of key topics such as human rights, charity and media over Years 7 to 9, their written work is often unfinished and unmarked. No records are available giving a comparative evaluation of the achievement of different groups, of students with special needs, gifted and talented students or those whose home language is not English. The larger sample of students' work in Years 10 and 11 shows good use of ICT to research local government, moral questions and the media. Lower attainers' work shows inadequate knowledge of these topics. That of higher attainers shows a good understanding of political processes. However, as in Years 7 to 9, too much written work in Years 10 and 11 is unfinished and unmarked.

96. Planning for personal, social and health education and citizenship is very good and ensures progression from year to year. It incorporates good contributions to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The planning has helped the staff team responsible for the teaching to approach the work confidently. However, in all year groups the quality of marking is unsatisfactory so that students do not know how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve. In Years 10 and 11, students' comments in discussion, together with the lack of care evident in their written work, reveal negative attitudes to the subject. School records show that attendance on off-timetable days has been lower than the average school attendance.

97. Senior managers who coordinate the curriculum are committed to the development of the programme, but the arrangements for its quality control are unsatisfactory. There are inconsistencies in the quality of lesson content and in the marking of work evident in students' books. Time is helpfully set aside for team planning but not for evaluating the effectiveness of the course. Assessment procedures are unsatisfactory. While students in Years 10 and 11 have a specific citizenship lesson each week, the weekly 25-minute form period is inadequate in Years 7 to 9. Good cross-curricular links are in place, for example in history and drama. Community links are well established. The off-timetable enrichment days provide a range of innovative activities and stimulating speakers.

Personal, social and health education

98. Although there is regular liaison between tutors, staff have not received sufficient training to deliver the programme effectively. Enrichment days are well planned to be progressive, with recurring themes such as diversity, drugs and sexual health. There are good contributions from a range of outside agencies and speakers, for example the police, the courts, the army, Aberystwyth University, and Wolves Study Club. Topics are reinforced through assemblies, for example through linking a Year 8 assembly on cultural diversity with a diversity day.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

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

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	1	100.0	65.2	100.0	11.1	50.0	20.6
Business studies	1	100.0	76.4	0.0	16.3	30.0	26.2
Communication studies	1	100.0	86.4	0.0	23.8	40.0	32.0
French	2	50.0	78.2	0.0	18.9	10.0	27.6
History	2	100.0	80.7	50.0	19.5	50.0	28.6
Information technology	1	100.0	67.0	0.0	10.9	30.0	21.4
Mathematics	3	0.0	61.9	0.0	17.1	0.0	22.1
Other social studies	2	0.0	69.7	0.0	16.7	0.0	24.1
Vocational studies	1	100.0	62.8	0.0	12.3	20.0	20.8

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	6	100.0	98.6	50.0	50.27	86.7	87.5
Business VCE	7	100.0	88.6	0.0	20.6	57.1	60.1
Communication studies	8	75.0	99.4	25.0	37.8	62.5	82.1
English literature	6	100.00	99.5	50.0	46.5	80.0	86.5
Design and technology	2	100.00	97.8	0.0	35.0	80.0	77.9
Health and social care VCE	8	50.0	93.2	0.0	22.3	32.5	63.5
History	2	100.00	99.0	50.0	44.6	90.0	84.6
Information technology VCE	18	88.6	87.2	17.1	27.9	65.7	64.9
Mathematics	5	100.00	96.7	20.0	55.6	64.0	88.8
Music	1	100.00	98.8	0.0	38.9	40.0	81.1
Other social studies	2	50.0	97.4	50.0	42.7	60.0	81.8
Physics	1	100.00	96.7	0.0	44.6	40.0	81.7
Science VCE	7	100.00	88.3	57.1	9.6	97.1	58.5
Travel and Tourism	5	80.0	90.0	0.0	19.5	40.0	62.2

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was on English literature.

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Consistently effective teaching and students' very positive attitude lead to good achievement.
- Very good relationships between teachers and students establish a productive partnership in learning.
- Students receive very good support and advice.
- Teachers' very good subject knowledge gives students confidence in them.
- Students' interest is maintained by a good variety of learning activities.

Commentary

100. In 2003, the results in A-level English literature were close to the national average, indicating good achievement over the two-year course by the small number of students taking the examination. English is becoming an increasingly popular choice for both male and female students.

Achievement	good
Standards	above average
Teaching and learning	both good
Leadership and management	both good

101. Students increase their understanding of the set texts through group discussion and presentations to the class, both of which encourage independent learning. They listen to each other's ideas with respect, although some presentations are too brief to do credit to the quality of research that went into them. The most capable students write well-structured and clearly argued analyses of Shakespeare's presentation of characters such as Richard III. They support their arguments with close reference to the text, and confidently include their personal responses to the play in performance. Other students show sound understanding of the themes and situations in novels such as 'The Handmaid's Tale', but do not always express their ideas clearly and accurately. In their discussions on Blake's poetry they take a serious interest in social, moral and religious issues. Students value the subject for its interest and usefulness and consider that they are very well taught and guided. Most students work hard and organise their work well. Many make good use of background material from the Internet, which they annotate and refer to in their written work.

102. The teaching of English is good because:

- teachers use their very good subject knowledge to clarify students' understanding;
- very detailed marking and individual guidance give students good knowledge and understanding of their progress;
- in class discussion, skilful questioning draws out sophisticated responses from the students;
- teachers plan lessons well, giving students a variety of activities that maintain their interest.

Leadership and management

103. Staff provide good role models for students as enthusiastic scholars. There is a clear vision for development. Good use is made of data from assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of provision. This is backed up by good monitoring arrangements. Standards have improved since the last inspection and the subject has become increasingly popular.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

104. Standards in the key skill of communication are good. In most subjects students meet the requirements of advanced courses. Students' writing is sometimes careless in product design, although their oral work is good.

MATHEMATICS

The focus of the inspection was on A-level mathematics.

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well in relation to their prior attainment.
- Teachers know their students well and their high expectations challenge students to learn.
- Students are well motivated and persevere with their work.
- The small numbers opting to study the subject limit the range of viable modules.

Commentary

105. A-level results in 2003 were below average. Numbers taking the examination were small. All students gained a pass grade. No student took the subject in 2002.

Achievement	good
Standards	below average
Teaching and learning	both good
Leadership and management	both good

106. As students enter the sixth form with GCSE results well below the national average, their achievement is good. They show a secure understanding of basic and more complex mathematical techniques which allows them to undertake advanced level work effectively. Year 13 students apply statistical techniques appropriately, but when carrying out an investigation cannot identify fully how their work might be extended. Year 12 students have a sound grasp of the methods they will use in later study. Students write clear descriptions and evaluations of their work. They use ICT confidently and appropriately to aid their studies.

107. Strengths and weaknesses in teaching are:

- teachers know how each student prefers to learn and so tailor the work to individual needs;
- work is pitched at a demanding level so that good use is made of the time available for learning;
- students are encouraged to form their own ideas and test them out so that their understanding is secure;
- teachers have a very good understanding of course topics and the most effective ways of teaching them;
- students are not offered any choice of topic because of the small numbers taking the subject.

Students have positive attitudes to their work, enjoying the challenges set. These attitudes make a telling contribution to their achievement.

Leadership and management

108. The new leadership of the subject is effective. The subject leader is a senior manager with responsibility for developing the work in mathematics and science. Although not timetabled to teach the subject, he has ensured that staff work well as a team. Careful analysis of results is being used

to monitor the progress made by each student. Expectations are high. There is a clear view of what is achievable and how to achieve it. The course runs efficiently because of good management. The good achievement of students contrasts with the unsatisfactory progress reported at the last inspection and is the prime evidence of good improvement. A second key improvement is the quality of problem-solving and development of ideas now prominent in students' learning experience. These were reported previously as unsatisfactory.

Mathematics across the curriculum

109. In all subjects, students have sufficient mathematical skills to allow them to cope with the demands of their courses. Although the school arranged for all students who did not gain a grade C or higher in GCSE mathematics to take a course to bring them to this level, no students are attending these sessions. The objective of this provision is to prevent the future choices of students being restricted because they have not reached the required level in mathematics

SCIENCE

The focus of the inspection was the VCE science course.

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- ❑ Experienced, committed staff enable students to work effectively towards their potential.
- ❑ Good procedures for assessment and monitoring identify under-achievement early and enable suitable remedies to be applied.
- ❑ Good resources for practical work ensure that coursework is done comprehensively and in good time.
- ❑ Students do not gain full advantage from the tutorial-style teaching because they lack independent learning skills.

Commentary

110. In the 2003 examinations, one physics A-level and four AVCE students all obtained passes in the A–E range.

<i>Achievement</i>	<i>satisfactory</i>
<i>Standards</i>	<i>below average</i>
<i>Teaching</i>	<i>good</i>
<i>Learning</i>	<i>satisfactory</i>
<i>Leadership and management</i>	<i>both good</i>

111. In the work seen, students' standards were adversely affected by imperfectly known previous work and poor motivation. Hand-written work is often untidy; final coursework is only sometimes word-processed. From the small sample of work seen, students' notes are often merely rough annotations on an information sheet provided for them. Little evidence of independent work was seen.

112. Strengths and weaknesses in the teaching are:

- teaching is purposeful and as brisk as students' limited concentration skills will allow;
- considerable effort goes into motivating the students who make little effort to acquire information independently;
- when basic facts are successfully recalled, students have difficulty in applying the knowledge to unfamiliar situations and have to be led through processes step by step;
- students lack confidence in practical work and simple decisions are frequently referred to the teacher;

- by constant supervision and encouragement, staff attempt to overcome students' lack of motivation and keep the lesson pace going to ensure completion;
- students' lack of curiosity and involvement in their work prevents them from reaping the full benefits of small-group teaching.

Leadership and management

113. There is a cohesive team approach from the three staff who teach the course. They provide very good role models for students. Frequent monitoring of teaching ensures common standards and effective teaching. Very good use is made of data from assessments and results to evaluate the effectiveness of provision. There is good access to all resources, particularly to ICT facilities, and this is a great improvement on the situation reported at the last inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus of the inspection was the VCE course in information and communication technology.

Provision in information and communication technology, ICT, is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Knowledgeable, supportive teaching of very well motivated students secures good achievement.
- Not enough is done to monitor and encourage the very small number of less committed students.
- Leadership and management succeed well in promoting achievement.
- In most of the seven subjects inspected in detail ICT is not a strong feature of sixth-form work.

Commentary

114. The 2003 AVCE results matched the national average generally, although results were below average for the highest grades A and B. Most students gained better grades in this examination than in their other subjects.

<i>Achievement</i>	<i>good</i>
<i>Standards</i>	<i>average</i>
<i>Teaching and learning</i>	<i>both good</i>
<i>Leadership and management</i>	<i>both good</i>

115. Students are matching their good achievement in earlier years by sustaining improvement from a below average starting point. In coursework assignments, most students meet the requirements. They provide for the needs of users in a way that shows their realistic understanding of technical possibilities. Little work shows capability at the very highest level, however. Web page designs for example, do not include good hyperlinks or interactive features. They show competent, but limited, knowledge of web language.

116. The main features of the teaching and learning are:

- good encouragement of independent research and making choices;
- strong subject expertise, leading to clear explanation of course requirements and good guidance for achieving well in coursework;
- effective support through systematic, regular and detailed feedback on students' work, with opportunities created to improve it;
- students' very good committed response, often demonstrated by turning up early for lessons, contributes strongly to their achievement;
- teachers' inadequate monitoring on occasion of situations in which a small number of students, less well motivated than the great majority, waste time.

Leadership and management

117. There is a clear sense of direction and a strong commitment to the subject and to students' success. Resources are used well and with imagination to enhance achievement. For example, a small, dedicated network has been provided to allow students to undertake practical work for the network management part of the course, without risk of negative effects on the school's curriculum network. The department works as a cohesive and flexible unit, with a strong sense of team. This is important in minimising the impact on achievement of the unavoidable absence of key staff.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

118. The use of ICT across the curriculum is generally satisfactory. All the subjects inspected in detail provide at least adequate opportunities to use computers. ICT is a strength in only a few because computers are often used in an incidental, rather unimaginative way. In English and in health and social care, use tends to be limited to word-processing coursework and in science, to using the Internet for research. The best opportunities are in business studies and design and technology, where good integration in planning ensures regular and productive utilisation of ICT. When students use computers they demonstrate the generally expected levels of capability.

HUMANITIES

No subjects in this group were inspected in detail.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

The focus of the inspection was the A-level course in design and technology: product design.

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- ❑ Teachers' very good subject knowledge and high expectations lead to good learning.
- ❑ Very good relationships and a high level of co-operation contribute to good achievement.
- ❑ Students' good choice of projects and good application to work support good achievement.
- ❑ Industrial visits are not used sufficiently to support learning.

Commentary

119. In 2003, the AS-level results showed improvement from students' GCSE standards. They were better than the 2002 results. In 2003 the very small number of students taking the examination gained grades A to E.

<i>Achievement</i>	<i>good</i>
<i>Standards</i>	<i>average</i>
<i>Teaching and learning</i>	<i>both good</i>
<i>Leadership and management</i>	<i>both very good</i>

120. Higher attaining students are working above the expected level as shown by their predicted grades and current standards of coursework. Students in Years 12 and 13 make considerable gains in knowledge and understanding, for example, when developing graphical techniques and skills and in research methods. Very good standards of freehand sketching, good annotation and very good use of colour are seen in Year 13 work in particular. Higher attainers make particularly good use of specialist software in their projects. Practical work, including modelling, is of a high standard. Key

skills are developed well with technical language used frequently in oral contributions. However, there is some carelessness over spelling errors in the work, sometimes in the headings of sections.

121. Strengths and weaknesses in the teaching are:

- lessons are well planned to include whole group and individual teaching, so generating good learning;
- teachers are very knowledgeable and well organised;
- students participate very well in discussion, thereby increasing their understanding;
- independent learning skills are effectively developed through careful targeting of individual students' work;
- students have good knowledge of how well they are doing because of regular assessment and feedback from teachers;
- the high level of discussion and the challenging work increase students' confidence, preparing them very effectively for future study or the work-place.

Leadership and management

122. There is clear direction for the work of the subject. Students' work and progress are checked regularly. Good improvement has been made since the last inspection, especially with regard to the use of computer-aided design.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

No courses in this group were inspected in detail. Lessons were observed in the A-level film studies course. Year 12 students were working at the expected level. Teaching, learning and achievement were satisfactory in a well-prepared lesson, although students showed little enthusiasm and few volunteered a contribution. In Year 13, standards were well above expectations. Teaching, learning and achievement were very good. Confident, knowledgeable teaching led to very good attentiveness and very confident responses.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

No courses in this group were inspected in detail. A lesson in the VCE travel and tourism course was observed. Students were working above the expected level. Teaching, learning and achievement were all good, despite the sound disturbance from an adjacent room, caused by inadequate insulation, which hindered concentration.

BUSINESS

Business studies

The focus of the inspection was the VCE business studies course.

Provision in business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards of work are improving well and achievement is good over Years 12 and 13.
- Good supportive teaching leads to good independent learning.
- Very good relationships between students and teachers result in productive learning.
- Not enough use is made of local business links or work-related learning opportunities.
- The accommodation is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

123. Recent examination results have shown improvement. Results in 2003 were just below average, all students gaining a grade A-E. Most students complete the course.

Achievement	good
Standards	average
Teaching and learning	both good
Leadership and management	both good

124. Standards are higher in Years 12 and 13 than in recent examination results. Students' good achievement is due to consistently good teaching and their own very positive attitude to work, particularly in Year 13. The vocational business studies course in Years 10 and 11 provides a very good foundation for the advanced course. Students work conscientiously to improve standards in their course-work and many re-take examinations to improve their grades. Critical analysis is progressively developed over Years 12 and 13, but few students read around the subject. Key skills, including the use of ICT, are good.

125. The main features of the teaching are:

- lessons are well planned to enable students of different attainment levels to make good progress;
- teachers' very good subject knowledge underpins their presentation and discussion and lends clarity to their explanations;
- good use of case studies and examples within the students' experience enable them to apply theory and extend their learning;
- very good relationships between students and teachers ensure productive learning;
- lessons have clear purpose, good pace and suitably high expectations, so that all but a few students are well motivated;
- few students take advantage of the good opportunities to contribute in discussion and develop their ideas;
- work assignments are very thoroughly marked and students find this particularly helpful in identifying areas for improvement.

Leadership and management

126. There is a very good sense of direction. The work of the department is continually under review in order to seek improvements. Curriculum planning is good, although it lacks an element of work-related learning and links with local industry are insufficient. Resources, including the presentation facilities, are good, but ICT facilities are inadequate for supporting independent study. The specialist accommodation is unsatisfactory. Noise interference from lessons and other activities in the adjoining partitioned, but not sound-insulated work-space, disturbs the teaching and students' independent study.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The focus of the inspection was the AVCE health and social care course.

Provision in health and social care is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' good subject knowledge and enthusiasm effectively encourage good learning.
- Work is well matched to individual needs and promotes good achievement.
- Students' attitudes to learning are very good and they are eager to improve their work.
- The use of ICT, other than for word-processing, is not much in evidence in students' work.
- Accommodation is inadequate in size and sound insulation for the activities necessary for the course criteria to be met.

Commentary

127. Results in 2003 showed a fall from those in 2002. The standards seen in students' work show improvement, with higher predicted grades for the current Year 13. The work seen indicates good achievement in Years 12 and 13 from students' low results at GCSE.

<i>Achievement</i>	<i>good</i>
<i>Standards</i>	<i>average</i>
<i>Teaching and learning</i>	<i>both good</i>
<i>Leadership and management</i>	<i>both good</i>

128. Students' knowledge and understanding of topics are secure. In both Year 12 and Year 13 students show good speaking and listening skills. Extended writing is well established in assignments and technical language is used appropriately. In both years, students talk enthusiastically and confidently about the topics. There is an eagerness to discuss how their studies relate to work experience and their future career hopes. The Internet is used well to gather information for research. Word-processing skills are good, although only a few other uses of ICT are evident. Students manage their own studies effectively, show high levels of independence and co-operate very well. The achievement of students from minority ethnic groups and of those with special needs equals that of their peers.

129. The good teaching helps students to learn quickly because:

- teachers' very good subject knowledge and thorough planning promote rigorous learning;
- challenging delivery of topics and good use of visual material and questions set a brisk pace for work, encouraging good, independent learning;
- individual needs are well known to teachers who work in effective partnership with students;
- good assessment of students' work follows course criteria carefully and helps students' understanding.

Leadership and management

130. Teachers are well qualified. There is a good team approach to the course, with a clear vision as to its purpose and how to teach it. Improvement since the last inspection is good and the course is now well established to meet students' needs. Currently it attracts only a few male students. The accommodation is unsatisfactory for many of the activities outlined in the course scheme.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

No courses in this group were inspected in detail.

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	3	3
Attitudes	2	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2	4
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	4
How well the curriculum meets students' needs	3	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		3
Accommodation and resources	4	4
Students' care, welfare, health and safety		3
Support, advice and guidance for students	4	3
How well the school seeks and acts on students' views	4	4
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		4
The quality of the school's links with the community	4	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3	3
The leadership and management of the school		3
The governance of the school	5	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).