

INSPECTION REPORT

WALTON GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL

Grantham

LEA area: Lincolnshire

Unique reference number: 120639

Headteacher: Mrs R Gulson

Lead inspector: Mr R Hancock

Dates of inspection: 20 – 22 September 2004

Inspection number: 268389
Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11–16
Gender of pupils:	Girls
Number on roll:	680

School address:	Harlaxton Road Grantham Lincolnshire
Postcode:	NG31 7JR

Telephone number:	01476 563251
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
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Name of chair of governors:	Mr A Vowles
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Date of previous inspection:	1999
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CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Walton Girls' High School is an arts technology college for girls in the 11–16 age range situated on the outskirts of Grantham, an area where selection is still practised. There is a well established girls' grammar school in the town. Consequently, the school's intake is not comprehensive and the school is in effect a secondary modern school although some parents prefer to send their daughters to Walton High, even if they pass the 11+. The school is popular with parents and significant numbers are keen to send their daughters to the school, even if it means travelling long distances. The school draws on a large number of primary schools. There are several different destinations for students wishing to continue their education after the age of 16.

The school has been an arts technology college since 2002. The school is part of the recently formed Grantham Excellence Cluster and also receives support under the Leadership Incentive Grant. It has won a number of prestigious awards over the last five years and its Investors in People status is well established.

There are 680 students on the roll which has been rising fast and in September 2003 the school admitted a record number of students. Numbers in each year group are roughly comparable. Their social and economic backgrounds are mixed but the area in which they live is reasonably affluent, although there are some pockets of deprivation and about 25 per cent of students are from an area which attracts regeneration funding. The percentage of students who claim a free school meal is 6.3, below the national average. There are few students from ethnic minority families and just one or two are learning English as an additional language. The number of students identified in the SEN Code of Practice is 198, well above the national average at 30.4 per cent. Of these, six students are School Action Plus and eight students have a statement of special educational need. There are three travellers on the roll. Attendance rates are above the national average and have improved considerably since the school was last inspected. Attainment on entry is below the national average and reflects the school's secondary modern context, being skewed towards the lower end of the ability range.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
2715	R Hancock	Lead inspector	
9115	T Clarke	Lay inspector	
14871	B Buteux	Team inspector	English Drama English as an additional language
8552	W. Hart	Team inspector	Design and technology
3274	G Jepson	Team inspector	Special educational needs
24127	J Kidd	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
18912	C Large	Team inspector	Religious education
31821	B McCann	Team inspector	Physical education
17657	M Pipes	Team inspector	Mathematics
16930	J Plumb	Team inspector	History Geography
18846	P Priest	Team inspector	Music Citizenship
20533	D Rogers	Team inspector	Art and design
6432	M Sewter	Team inspector	Science
2183	P Thompson	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT)

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Walton Girls' High School is a good school with many very good features and some clear areas of excellence. Standards are broadly average and the overall achievement of students is good. Their attitudes to school are very positive and their behaviour is excellent. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Excellent leadership is provided by the headteacher. The overall management of the school is good. The governing body provides good support and the school gives very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The excellent leadership of the headteacher.
- A very positive ethos which promotes good achievement.
- The excellent behaviour of the students.
- Teaching and learning of very good quality.
- The overall strength of the performing arts, especially its community involvement.
- The school's strong links with parents.
- Students' under-achievement in ICT.
- Inconsistencies in the use of assessment.
- The under-achievement of higher attaining students in some lessons.

The school has made good progress since it was last inspected in 1999. The quality of teaching and learning has considerably improved. Standards are higher and students' achievement is greater. Leadership and management have both been strengthened. The school has acquired specialist status which is transforming the quality of education it provides.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2001	2002	2003	2003
	-	C	C	C

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

Overall, students' achievement is good and borders on the very good. Although their standards are below average when entering the school, students make good progress and the overall standards they reach by the end of Year 9 are in line with the national average. Achievement is good. Overall standards reached by the end of Year 11 are also average. Achievement is good. Results of National Curriculum tests for Year 9 in 2003 in English, mathematics and science were average in comparison with all schools. The trend of improvement is above the national trend. Overall GCSE results were also average, but the proportion of students achieving 5 or more grades at A*-G was above average and it was very high for those achieving 1 or more grades at these levels. In comparison with schools that score similar results in Year 9, the school is average but, in comparison with other secondary modern schools, results are above average. However, the trend of improvement at this stage is below the national trend and higher attainers, in particular, could achieve still more by the end of Year 11. Students with special educational needs achieve well. Students who are gifted and talented flourish in areas such as art, music and modern languages.

Provision for the development of students' personal development is very good and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is consequently very good. Students' attitudes are very positive and their behaviour is excellent. The school places great stress on developing the all round capability of its students and is very successful in accomplishing this. Attendance is very good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The overall quality of education is very good. The quality of teaching and learning is very good.

The school has created a very good ethos for learning. Excellent teaching and learning were observed in lessons in a number of different subjects and there is no difference between the quality of lessons in Years 7-9 and Years 10 and 11. Particularly good teaching and learning were observed in lessons in dance, French, music, religious education and physical education. There were no unsatisfactory lessons. Most lessons have very clear aims and make use of learning activities which take account of the full range of students' abilities and the different ways in which they learn. The curriculum has good breadth and balance and is strengthened by a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Students are very well cared for and supported. The guidance they receive is very good. The school is constantly reaching out to its wider community so that full benefit is derived from its arts technology status.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of leadership and management in the school is good. The headteacher provides excellent leadership because she has ensured that the school has created a strong ethos for learning in which achievement is both expected and valued. The school has moved forward strongly since the last inspection because the headteacher has worked closely and very effectively with the governing body to help the school achieve specialist school status. This is having a powerful effect on the quality of what the school offers, not only in the field of the performing arts but also on the quality of learning generally. A striking feature of this development has been the wide range of well managed initiatives that benefit the community and enrich the school. Governance is good. The school is well managed and very efficiently run but there are some inconsistencies in the use of assessment and ICT is not fully effective. The school gives very good value for money.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Almost all parents have a very positive view of the school. They like the fact that students are encouraged to achieve at all times in lessons but that they also benefit greatly from a well rounded education. The students enjoy school and appreciate the worth of their teachers. It is common to see students taking pleasure in learning.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Ensure that the quality of teaching and learning improves in ICT so that standards are raised.
- Ensure that the use of assessment:
 - i. helps the school to track the progress of students;
 - ii. assists teachers in setting effective targets to promote learning;
 - iii. enables teachers to challenge the most able students to reach higher standards.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Overall, standards are in line with national averages by the time that students leave the school. They make good progress and, given that overall standards are below average when they join the school in Year 7, their achievement is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The achievement of many students, particularly those of moderate ability, is very good by the time they leave the school.
- Standards in dance, music, French, physical education and religious education are above average.
- Some higher attainers could do better in public examinations
- Standards are not high enough in ICT.

Commentary

1. The overall standards of students when they start the school are below average but, by the time they reach the end of Year 9, their standards are in line with the national average in English, mathematics and science. Students also make good progress in most of their other subjects.
2. In 2003, National Curriculum test results in English, mathematics and science were in line with the national average. Results in English show fluctuations over time – in 2000 they were above average and in 2002 were well above average – but results in mathematics and science have been more stable. On the basis of students' prior attainment, results in English were well above average and results in mathematics and science were also above average. The overall trend of improvement in tests in these subjects is above the national trend. Provisional results for 2004 indicate improvements in performance in mathematics and science. Mathematics surpassed its targets, the school recorded its best ever science results with more students reaching Level 7 than ever before and English results were maintained.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	33.7 (36.6)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	34.6 (33.8)	35.4 (34.7)
science	33.1 (33.4)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 140 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

3. In the 2003 GCSE examinations, overall attainment in comparison with all schools was in line with the national average. In terms of the proportion of students achieving five or more A*-C grades, students' overall performance was average. For the proportion achieving five or more A*-G grades it was above average and for the proportion achieving one or more A*-G grades the school was in the top five per cent of all schools. This indicates that the school is successful in helping students to achieve well, especially those who are of moderate ability or who are well below average. It meets with a measure of success in helping many of its more able students to achieve

five or more A*-C grades but some of its most able students could achieve more. When compared with those of other schools whose students achieved similar results in the National Curriculum tests in Year 9, which includes many schools with a much higher proportion of able students, results in 2003 in terms of the proportion of students achieving five or more grades at A*-C were well below average. Nevertheless, they were still well above average for the proportion of students achieving five or more A*-G grades and still in the top five per cent of all schools for the proportion of students achieving one or more A*-G grades. The trend of improvement was below the national trend, a further indication that the school can make improvements in some aspects of its performance at this level.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	48 (43)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	93 (97)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	35.1 (35.5)	34.7 (34.7)

There were 92 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

- In 2003, GCSE examination results in English and English literature in terms of the proportion of students achieving A*-C grades were in line with the national average. They were below average in mathematics and science. They were also just below the national average in design and technology. However, results were above average in art and French. They were very good in music. The school has been providing more 'out of hours' support for students in Years 10 and 11 and has improved its revision programmes. Examination results for 2004 have still to be validated and the school has a number of appeals outstanding but the indications are that, at the very least, 50 per cent of students will have achieved five or more A*-C grades, the highest in the history of the school and exactly meeting the school's target for 2005. Results in GCSE examinations have risen significantly since the last inspection. When the GCSE examination results are compared with those of other secondary modern schools, they are well above average.
- Students with special educational needs achieve well. Those who are gifted and talented do well generally and flourish in subjects such as art, dance, music and French. Standards are not yet high enough in ICT. The school has made good progress since the last inspection because it has raised overall standards and further improved the achievement of its students.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

The behaviour of students is excellent. Their attitudes and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are very good. Attendance and punctuality are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' behaviour is excellent and their attitudes are very good.
- Attendance and punctuality are very good and the school's action to promote them is excellent.
- Relationships throughout the school are excellent.
- Students have very high levels of self-esteem.
- Students' cultural development is good but their awareness of modern multicultural Britain is more limited.

Commentary

6. Students' attitudes are very good. From their arrival in Year 7, students enjoy coming to school, arrive promptly to lessons and are always ready and keen to learn and are eager to take part in the many activities on offer to them. Students are enterprising and prepared to take responsibility, helping around the school, expressing their considered views through the Student Forum, and acting as prefects. Older students support younger ones effectively when they first arrive at the school. Students of all ages play a significant role in assemblies which often explore aspects of school life which directly affect them, such as bullying. Their self-esteem is very effectively promoted by the school's use of merits and awards.
7. The behaviour of students, both in the classroom and around the school, is outstanding. They are extremely polite and courteous to one another, to adults at the school and to visitors. They move around the school and leave their classrooms and the assembly hall in an orderly manner. No student has been excluded for the past seven years. Staff have high expectations of students' conduct and students do not let them down. There is little evidence of bullying or other forms of harassment. All groups of students interviewed acknowledged that bullying, mostly verbal, does sometimes take place, but felt the staff took any incidents seriously and deal with them effectively.
8. Students are very confident and have excellent self-esteem. Relationships between students and between adults and students are excellent and mutual respect is a feature of the school. Attendance and punctuality are very good. At the last inspection attendance was in line with the national average and the report indicated that the school needed to improve the level of unauthorised absence. This has been addressed because the school's action to promote good attendance is excellent and has been responsible for the improvement. Parents and carers support the school very well in its efforts and do their very best to ensure that their children attend. The very good attendance and punctuality have a positive effect on students' learning.
9. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. They have a very good level of self-knowledge and spiritual awareness. They develop spirituality in lessons and in assemblies and have the opportunity to reflect. They show excellent respect for the feelings, values and beliefs of others and students' behaviour shows that they distinguish clearly right from wrong. Their sense of morality is underpinned by the ethos of the school. They know the responsibilities of living in a community, for example, the school takes part in outside charity events and supports primary schools in discouraging bullying. Students appreciate their own cultural traditions very well, but the ethnic mix in the local community is not very wide, so there are few opportunities to learn at first hand about the cultural traditions and ways of life of others, especially in terms of urban living in contemporary Britain.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	1.2
National data	7.2

Unauthorised absence	
School data	0.2
National data	1.1

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Asian
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
583	0	0
2	0	0
11	0	0
2	0	0
2	0	0
1	0	0
2	0	0
1	0	0
1	0	0

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

THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Provision for students with special educational needs is good. The curriculum is good because it is kept under regular review to ensure that it meets the individual needs of students.

Teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching is very good. Lessons are very well planned, learning activities engage the interest of students and time is used well. Students learn very well. They know how to work together and to plan. Assessment practice is very good in some subjects but is inconsistent taking lessons as a whole.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The high degree of very good quality teaching and learning.
- The quality of teaching and learning in dance, French, history, geography, music, religious education and physical education.
- There is no unsatisfactory teaching.
- The quality of teaching in ICT needs further developing.
- Assessment practice is inconsistent.

Commentary

10. In the school as a whole the quality of teaching and learning is very good. In over a half of lessons it is very good or excellent. In four out of five lessons the quality of teaching and learning is good or better. It is never less than satisfactory. Very good, and sometimes excellent, lessons are common in dance, French, music, physical education and religious education. Good teaching and learning are features of most lessons in English, mathematics and science. Taking subjects as a whole, there are no significant differences in quality between the lessons taught in Years 7 to 9 and those taught in Years 10 and 11. This represents a big improvement since the last inspection. Although uneven, the quality of assessment is satisfactory overall.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 117 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
15 (13 %)	48 (41%)	31 (26%)	23 (20%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0 %)

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

11. When teaching and learning are at their very best, lessons move along rapidly, students are clear about what they have to learn, respond with enthusiasm and greatly enjoy the very well planned and imaginative activities which stimulate their interest. As a result, they take pleasure in developing new skills, deepening their understanding and acquiring further knowledge. In most lessons students learn with enthusiasm. They enjoy what they are asked to do. Their attitudes are very positive and their behaviour is excellent. Whether working as individuals or collaborating, their commitment to learning is helping them to reach good standards in all years. Teachers care about their students and always encourage them to do well. Work is marked regularly and students are often given good guidance as to how they can improve their work further. Teachers have the highest expectations of students, set challenging targets that most students aspire to and encourage them to achieve more than they might otherwise do.
12. Nearly all lessons are well planned, especially good use is made of time, firm discipline is established, a clear focus maintained and lessons are very well rounded off, often with sessions which reinforce what has been learned. Homework is used effectively to reinforce learning. Students with special educational needs learn well because teachers are aware of what they find difficult or still need to know and set about addressing such areas of weakness. Teachers exercise great patience in understanding the needs of those who find learning especially difficult. They work very well with learning support assistants. Students who are gifted and talented have some very good opportunities to show what they can achieve, especially in subjects such as dance, French and music.
13. In about one in five lessons the quality of teaching and learning is not of the same high standard. These lessons are well organised and have a clear purpose but lack pace and vitality. Consequently, learning does not possess the element of excitement that distinguishes the best lessons. In some lessons, higher-attaining students are not challenged enough and as a result their standards are not as high as they need to be. Not enough use is made of ICT in teaching and learning and many opportunities are missed to help students learn about the application of computers and to develop their skills in using them. Teachers of English are helping students to develop their literacy skills. Their work is reinforced by teachers in other subjects who are also adept at using their lessons to develop concepts such as numeracy and citizenship.
14. The school's use of assessment is satisfactory but has areas where it is not well developed. Whilst the use of assessment in some subjects such as dance and physical education is very effective, its use is inconsistent in the school as a whole. The school has good awareness of this weakness and has drawn up some well thought through plans to address it.

The curriculum

The curriculum is of good quality. Students enjoy learning as there is a creative approach to the curriculum which is adapted to suit their needs. Extra-curricular activities are a strength. Better provision is required for ICT.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision for personal development, social and health education is very good.
 - Support for learning outside the school day is very good.
 - Participation in the performing arts and physical education is outstanding.
 - The use of ICT support is underdeveloped in most subject areas.
 - Weaknesses in accommodation in some subject classrooms create difficulties.
15. The curriculum is broad and balanced as all statutory requirements are met and all subjects are taught for appropriate amounts of time at each stage. In Years 7-9, the personal development of students is good because of the well-structured and effective PSHE programme in the curriculum. This is enhanced by the emphasis in subjects on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students. There is a very strong programme of extra-curricular activities which caters for a very wide range of interests. Activities are supported very well by the students. The well-planned daily assemblies contribute strongly to the all round development of students and provide a strong community aspect. Students with special educational needs are well monitored within the curriculum and their learning needs identified.
16. Links with primary schools and with colleges of further education help ensure that the curriculum is compatible with early learning and with future career and training prospects. In Years 10 and 11, the curriculum promotes the abilities of the students in preparing for the next step either into further education or employment. There is very good careers guidance and a whole school approach to developing the maturity of students with very good care and support from all staff in terms of making the most of individual abilities. The curriculum is enhanced by the very good liaison with the local college, particularly with work related learning courses and the increased flexibility programme. These provide extensive opportunities to suit the needs of a wide range of abilities and aptitudes and enable successful students to achieve important external accreditation such as National Vocational Qualifications.
17. The curriculum in the performing arts and in physical education is very good with a very good attendance rate in the extra-curricular activities. There are extensive opportunities for all levels of ability and they provide the stage for the gifted and talented to produce some outstanding work. Citizenship is taught as a discrete subject but is also an important element in the teaching in all subject areas. It plays an important role in the very good respect that all students have for each other. The particular skills, subject knowledge and interests of teachers and support staff are well matched to the curriculum.
18. The school addresses literacy issues well. The promotion of mathematics across the curriculum is satisfactory. ICT is insufficiently developed in the curriculum and is not routinely used in most subject areas as a facility to enhance learning and lesson presentation. Accommodation is satisfactory with some relatively new and impressive subject facilities. However, there are problems in some subject areas such as drama, ICT, mathematics and music where limitations have a negative impact on the school's determination to help students reach the very highest standards. Accommodation is very well maintained and cared for by efficient and dedicated support staff.

Care, guidance and support

The school supports its students very well. They are very well cared for. They receive very good guidance on all matters affecting their personal development and also very good advice in relation to career opportunities and their further education and future training needs.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Procedures to help students transfer from primary school are excellent.
- Students' overall progress is carefully monitored.
- The school ensures that students work in a healthy and very safe environment.
- Provision for students' feedback on lessons and other aspects of school life.
- Students receive very good guidance on further study and career opportunities.
- The detailed tracking of students academic progress in the school as a whole has still to be refined.

Commentary

19. Provision for students' care health and safety is very good. Proper child protection procedures are in place and are under the supervision of a very experienced assistant headteacher who is well trained and thoroughly up to date with all recent requirements. Health and safety procedures are very good and this aspect is regularly monitored by the governing body. Anyone who is sick or in any way injured is dealt with caringly and with skill. Medicines are carefully administered. The school does not have a medical room and although this is not a significant weakness, it remains a need for the future. The school nurse attends twice weekly and is readily available to give advice to students.
20. Students have very good and trusting relationships with many adults in the school. Even Year 7 students, who have only been at school for two weeks, know to whom they would go with any problems. The overall development of students is very closely monitored, both academically and socially, through form tutors, year leaders, assistant headteachers and the headteacher, but the detailed tracking of students' progress has still to be developed. Overall, students know their targets and what they should do to improve their work. The school involves parents by issuing detailed annual reports on students' overall progress and by arranging open evenings when parents can discuss their child's progress with form tutors. Some parents expressed concern that there were fewer opportunities for the average student to win awards. The inspection team found no evidence of this and the school encourages all students to do well in all aspects of school life and is ready to acknowledge the achievement of all. From Year 7 onwards the careers programme enables students to receive very good guidance on career opportunities and courses of further study after they leave school.
21. Students are well involved in the running of the school. Their views are sought by means of the Student Forum and the school often acts on them. A very strong feature is the regular feedback from students on lessons in all subjects as well as other aspects of school life. Teachers consider these carefully and are able to take the views into account when planning. Because the school also encourages students to evaluate all major initiatives, such as the science fair and work experience, it is in a very good position to know whether it has been effective or not.
22. Induction arrangements for students entering Year 7 are excellent. An assistant headteacher visits a very large number of primary schools in the autumn term to prepare for a smooth transition for students, well before places have been allocated. In the summer of Year 6, students visit the school for induction days and members of staff also have the opportunity to talk to parents. Excellent use is made of information from the primary school to ensure that tutor groups work effectively. When Year 7 students start the school they benefit from a well established 'buddy' system with students from Year 11 which supports them through their induction year. The induction process helps students to settle quickly into the school. Those students from Year 7 who were interviewed spoke very highly of the process.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's links with the community and other schools are excellent. Links with parents are very good. Parents are very well informed. The performing arts faculty works very effectively with the wider community.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school has excellent links with the community.
- Links with other schools and colleges are excellent.
- Parents are provided with excellent information about the school.
- The school has very good procedures for ensuring that any concerns that parents might have are very well dealt with.

Commentary

23. The school's links with parents are very good. Parents are very happy and satisfied with the school and it is even the choice for a number of families whose daughters have passed the entrance examination for admission to grammar schools. The level of satisfaction came through strongly at the parents' meeting and in the parents' response to the questionnaires. The school provides excellent information for parents, both about the school and their child's progress. A few parents had expressed the wish that consultation evenings should be more orientated towards seeing the subject teachers rather than the form tutors. However, the school adopted the current system a short time ago and feedback from questionnaires suggest that most parents like it. The major concerns raised by one or two parents in the parent questionnaires have been dealt with properly by the school. The parent teacher association (PTA) supports the school well.
24. Links with the local and wider community are excellent and impact very positively on students' learning. The school receives a range of visiting speakers who make presentations on a wide variety of topics and initiatives and who lead assemblies. There are particularly strong links with representatives of the business community who help students very effectively by assisting them to prepare a curriculum vitae and to make the best of themselves at interview. There is evidence that many visitors have been very impressed by the attitudes and outlook of the students.
25. It is clear from talking to local primary school headteachers that the school has established excellent links with their schools. Much of the effective liaison is the result of initiatives and services provided by the school's performing arts faculty which, through its imaginative and very successful dance, drama and music productions, is making a strong impact on the wider community. Students visit many of the primary schools and present plays on social issues such as bullying and drug abuse. The primary school links have a two-way effect, impacting on the learning of pupils from the primary schools and the students from the secondary school. Some students also undertake work experience at primary schools and teachers greatly value their service.
26. Links with colleges and other secondary schools are excellent. Some of the links with the local college of further education form a major part of the school's work related learning programme and the shared and linked provision is excellently managed. This learning supports those students wishing to take part in less academic courses and is raising their self-esteem. The school has further strengthened this aspect of its work since it was last inspected.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The headteacher provides excellent leadership and ensures that leadership throughout the school is very good. The school is well managed. The governing body provides good support.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher provides excellent leadership.
- The school makes very good use of students' evaluations of their learning.
- There are inconsistencies in the way in which assessment is used.
- The management of ICT is not fully effective.
- Financial management is strong.

Commentary

27. The leadership provided by the headteacher is excellent because she has worked effectively with other staff to create a very strong ethos in which learning can flourish. This enables students to respect themselves and one another, to work hard, to enjoy what they do, to increase their knowledge, deepen their interests and to develop their skills. There is an insistence on creating and maintaining high standards and if areas of the school fall short of this, strong action is taken to address the weaknesses. New initiatives are eagerly grasped and the headteacher has a readiness, not only to see how new developments can benefit the school, but to recognise their value for the wider community. Evidence of extensive consultation indicates that the headteacher has worked effectively to ensure that she is working as one with students, teachers, parents and the governing body. The leadership provided by other key staff is good because they work enthusiastically to help implement a common vision. A very good feature is the very thorough arrangements for students to feed back to the school their views on how subjects are taught and how they best learn. They are also expected to give their views on other aspects of school life. These responses help the school analyse its strengths and weaknesses and to act on this knowledge.
28. The school is well managed. Planning processes are now well developed, a major step forward since the last inspection. The school improvement plan identifies major priorities for action, who will be responsible for taking initiatives, gives an indication of costs and provides some criteria to help the school know if its proposals are successfully implemented. The staff handbook is a helpful manual setting out all organizational aspects of the school and containing a good range of policies to help staff share common practices. Departmental plans reflect whole school priorities and most departments are well run. Areas which are especially well managed include the performing arts and the school's provision for gifted and talented students. The area of special educational needs is also well managed. The school has still to manage effectively its assessment policy to ensure the consistency of best practice. The resourcing of ICT and the implementation of an effective policy for its implementation have still to be addressed.
29. The school is well governed. Governors are proud of the school and work hard to support it in many practical ways. They support the initiatives undertaken by the headteacher and have a broad knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses through regular reports of progress from the headteacher. They take advantage of training opportunities and ensure that the school fully complies with statutory requirements. Governors have a clear view of the future direction in which they want the school to go.
30. Support staff are very well motivated and very efficient. Financial management is very good. The preparation of the budget is consultative and expenditure is closely monitored. The school always

seeks to get value for money when purchasing resources and services. There are no shortages of resources in the school. Accounting procedures are thorough and any recommendations in auditors' reports are few, relatively minor, and always acted on. The school's expenditure is higher than that of most similar secondary schools but grants are used very effectively to promote effective learning. Given that the students enter the school with standards that are below average and that by the end of Year 9 they have made good progress and that by the end of Year 11 their achievement is greater than that of students in most secondary modern schools, and they have so many opportunities to develop, the school gives very good value for money.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	£1,971,953
Total expenditure	£1,939,794
Expenditure per pupil	£3,501

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	£68,440
Balance carried forward to the next	£32,979

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

- Teachers are committed to raising standards for students of all levels of ability.
- Students' well developed speaking skills underpin their achievements in other subjects.
- In some lessons students are insufficiently challenged to achieve as well as they could.
- Students enjoy good relationships with their teachers and work together well.
- ICT skills are not used effectively enough for students to develop as independent learners.

Commentary

31. In 2004, students reached broadly average standards in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9. This represents good achievement because standards are below average when students start in Year 7. As a result of well planned lessons and appropriate support for students' individual learning needs, most make good progress by the end of Year 9. Speaking and listening skills are well developed and students have good discussion skills and explain their ideas clearly. They take part in oral presentations and public speaking competitions which enhances their confidence, self-esteem and pride in performance. This strength is a strong basis for their achievements in other subjects. Students read fluently and write competently for a variety of purposes.
32. Encouraged by their enthusiastic teachers, most students, particularly the higher attainers, make steady progress and achieve satisfactory results in the GCSE examinations. However, a significant minority are insufficiently challenged and do not achieve as well as they could. Consequently, achievement is satisfactory overall by the end of Year 11. Students with special educational needs, and the few who speak English as an additional language, are well supported and make good progress.
33. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Students have good relationships with their teachers and their written work is improving as a result of new learning strategies that have been introduced. They are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning because at the beginning of each lesson teachers explain what they expect students to understand and the skills that they will be developing. Teachers' use questioning skilfully to encourage students to think for themselves and to search out the meanings from the texts that they read. Occasionally, teaching relies too heavily on worksheets which limit students' use of language. All work is marked carefully with advice for students on ways to improve their writing. Assessment systems are being reviewed and developed to track students' progress, to identify underachievers, and to identify those in need of more challenging work.
34. The resources available are used profitably but students need more opportunities to use ICT on a regular basis. Good wall displays throughout the department celebrate the learning achievements of all students, particularly their successes in public speaking competitions. Students' learning is

enriched by the extra-curricular opportunities provided through debates, extra classes and support groups as well as productions with performing arts groups. The team of dedicated teachers is well managed by the newly appointed subject leader who is implementing innovative schemes to raise standards and to implement the achievement of students of all abilities. For these reasons there has been good improvement since the last inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

35. Standards of literacy are good. Provision for developing speaking, listening, reading and writing skills in subjects other than English is also good. Students' fluent use of language and well developed listening skills equip them effectively to learn confidently in all subjects. Teachers provide good opportunities for students to explain their ideas coherently and to explore different viewpoints by encouraging them to work with one another. As a result, students of all abilities are learning to develop logical, well presented arguments. For example, in geography and history lessons, teachers' skilful questioning techniques provide good support for the development of students' speaking skills. Key words are displayed in all subject areas and students are encouraged to use correct terminology in class discussions and in written work. Students read a range of texts with good understanding and select relevant information which they record carefully and neatly in their writing. To improve further, students should be given more challenging opportunities for a wider range of written presentations.

French

Provision in French is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in GCSE examinations are above average and students achieve very well across all years.
- Teaching and learning are very good and teachers use a variety of methods to include all students in what the subject has to offer.
- Leadership is excellent and ensures a sharp and accurate evaluation of performance in all areas of the faculty's work.
- The quality of display is outstanding and students show pride in the presentation of their assignments.

Commentary

36. GCSE examination results in 2003 were above average and all students in both the full and short course achieved a grade. Results look even better in 2004, although they have still to be validated, because three quarters of those entered reached grades A*-C. Work seen during the inspection mirrors this performance and students write and speak confidently and accurately in French. Standards at the end of Year 9 are broadly in line with expectations and, in some cases, are higher than this. Most students are using three tenses correctly and understand French spoken at speed.
37. Students make very good progress from Years 7 to 9 and achievement is very good. They assimilate new vocabulary well, work successfully to improve their grammatical accuracy and begin to write increasingly complex French. Similarly, students in the GCSE examination years make very good progress in their conversational skills and their pronunciation is secure. Students with special educational needs achieve very effectively, too, and often surprise themselves at just how much they can understand and just how well they can express themselves in the language.

Furthermore, the outstanding display in the faculty areas motivates all students to present their work with real pride.

38. Teachers have a profound understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their students and of how they prefer to learn. Accordingly, they employ a wide range of strategies to meet individual needs and challenge is both relentless and realistic. They offer detailed advice on how improvements may be made to ensure students grow in confidence and are fully aware of their target levels and grades. In an excellent Year 10 lesson on *Les Emplois*, for example, teacher expectations were so high, and in-class support so effective, that all students, irrespective of their ability, were able to give opinions on their preferred jobs. The quality of teaching and learning is very good and was outstanding in a quarter of lessons.
39. Leadership is excellent and there is a clear vision for development based on a regular and well-founded assessment of progress to meet agreed targets. There are high levels of commitment to the students, the teachers and the subject. Management is very good and teachers are now looking to ensure that assessment practice is more consistent. The faculty has made very good improvement since the last inspection because standards are higher, achievement is more marked and the quality of teaching and learning is even better. As a consequence, the subject is well placed for further success.

Example of outstanding practice

An excellent Year 10 French lesson in which the students in an all-ability class were practising their oral and written skills in a new topic concerned with jobs and opinions about them. Teacher expectations of what students could achieve were high and students were offered a wide variety of methods to meet their learning needs. As a result, by the end of the lesson each student was able to give an opinion on which jobs she would enjoy and which she would not. From the moment they entered the room, students were expected to begin work and pace was very fast. The rapid starter, which revised letters of the alphabet, numbers and classroom instructions in French, involved the use of individual whiteboards and students, therefore, had instant feedback on their performance. The new vocabulary was introduced by flashcards and its assimilation was reinforced by paired activities in which students were required to question each other about which words were represented by which visual resources. As the lesson progressed, students of lower ability were supported very effectively by a teaching assistant. Moreover, their learning was increased by excellent teacher-prepared resources, which were designed to challenge them at a realistic level. Higher-attaining students had their needs met too: on every occasion when they answered a question quickly and correctly, the teacher required even more thought and, quite rapidly, these students constructed increasingly more complex sentences. The lesson developed as a constant dialogue between teacher and students, students and teaching assistant and between the students themselves. The levels of industry were high and, at one point, just before the final segment of the lesson, the room was a sea of spoken French. As the students said, 'we have to work hard in this lesson, but we enjoy it and we know we are making progress.'

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well and standards are improving.
- The faculty is very well led and is managed effectively.
- The quality of teaching is good overall but varies in quality.
- There is sometimes too little challenge for higher-attaining students.
- There is a good team spirit but the faculty is too dispersed.

40. This is a good and improving faculty. It is very well led and managed effectively. Standards are rising and the achievement of the students is good overall. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. The faculty has the capacity to improve further.
41. Overall, students achieve well during their time in the school. Although standards are below average when students enter the school, they are close to the national average by the time they leave. Students make good progress in Years 7 to 9 and achieve well. Standards by the end of Year 9 are close to the national average. Progress in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory and in the GCSE examination most students achieve results which are close to those predicted for them. Results for 2004 have still to be validated; although 44 per cent of students achieved a GCSE grade of C or better, 36 per cent were awarded grade D. The new head of faculty is now focusing attention on these borderline students to raise overall standards.
42. The few higher-attaining students do not achieve enough. There are insufficient opportunities for independent learning, including the use of ICT. There is too little emphasis on problem-solving and course work standards are not high enough. The average and lower-attaining students, however, benefit from clear teaching of strategies to get to the correct answer. Those with special educational needs are well supported by support assistants.
43. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, but varies from satisfactory to very good. The characteristics of the better teaching include: good awareness of the learning needs of each student; developing understanding through good questioning; expecting good effort; and setting targets above predictions to challenge and stretch. All the teaching shows good expectations of neatness and presentation; good student management; high expectations of courtesy and good behaviour. In some lessons, the pace is too slow and there is not enough mental challenge, especially in the opening sessions. Learning mirrors the quality of teaching and is never less than satisfactory but often lacks sufficient challenge and fun.
44. The recently promoted head of faculty has made a very good start. She is a good role model for staff and students. Her impact on the lesson planning and teaching of her colleagues is at a very early stage of development. There is a good team spirit but the faculty is widely dispersed without an office base for teachers to learn from each other. Nevertheless, she has deployed her teachers astutely to meet perceived needs using the strengths of her colleagues. Her management is good and improving. She is working very well with senior colleagues to use data to inform planning. Overall, assessment is satisfactory and data is analysed well but the use of assessment to inform lesson planning has still to be developed.

Mathematics across the curriculum

45. Students' skills and in handling numbers and mathematical concepts such as shape and space, manipulating formulae and problem solving across the curriculum are satisfactory. However, confidence in using numbers is below average with, too often, undue reticence at the prospect of getting an incorrect answer. The first, short session in many lessons contains elements to reinforce mental agility, including calculations. However, in mathematics lessons, the sharp mental arithmetic session is not well enough established or conducted at a sufficiently brisk pace.
46. In other subjects, students are encouraged to improve their number work; for instance by weighing and understanding ratios in food technology, angles and coordinates in geography, counting on and back on time lines in history and interpreting data using graphs and tables in science. There is excellent linking with mathematics in modern languages. Superb displays show that some mathematics has been taught in the medium of French. This has reinforced technical vocabulary, not only in mathematics but also in French.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching and learning is good and engages students' interest.
- Leadership and management are good and help students view science in a positive light.
- Students' behaviour is exemplary and attitudes are very positive.
- Achievement is good in all years.
- The monitoring and evaluation of teaching are not fully established and the use of assessment requires further development.

Commentary

47. Results in the Year 9 National Curriculum tests were in line with the national average in 2003 and better than results in similar schools. Results look to have improved slightly again in 2004. They have been close to the national average for the past four years. Achievement for all students at the end of Year 9 is good. The proportion of students gaining grades A*-C in the GCSE double award examinations in 2003 and previous years has been well below the national average. Although results for the 2004 examinations have not been validated, they seem likely to be below average although there appears to have been good improvement and no students have been ungraded in the past two years.
48. Standards in Year 9 are generally close to the national average and achievement is good. Standards by the end of Year 11 are satisfactory and this represents good achievement for many students during their time in the school, including students with special educational needs, higher attainers and those who are gifted and talented. Students in Year 10 work very well together when conducting investigations. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and some practice is outstanding. The clear explanation of learning objectives and the successful use of 'starter' and plenary activities, based on the national strategy, have been well developed. Teachers' thorough and detailed planning of lessons and good use of questioning, help students to learn well. Their enthusiasm is reflected in the energy and interest with which students respond.
49. The quality of leadership and management is good overall. High aspirations are evident and the team of teachers and other colleagues is well supported. They work effectively to ensure that the perception that students have of the subject is a positive one. The technician provides very good support to teachers and students in practical science, a clear improvement since the last inspection. There is a keen sense of purpose, and specialist knowledge and understanding are high. However, the evaluation, monitoring and sharing of good practice are not yet sufficiently developed. Schemes of work, policies and other documentation are not fully in place. There is a lack of structure to the department and responsibilities are not always clear.
50. Since the last inspection, there have been changes in staffing and resources which have brought about recent improvements in the way the curriculum is organised. New and splendid accommodation makes a positive impact on teaching and learning. The use of ICT has also improved greatly. Appropriate routines for the central recording of assessment data have been established. The faculty is now developing the use of data to help students to achieve more and to track their progress. There is too little of the day-to-day atmosphere of problem-solving and inquiry, and of the excitement of discovery, particularly in the lower school. Students' work of very good quality is on display throughout the department. During the past year, several local activities, such

as the 'Science in the Community Day', have helped to promote the subject. There have been good improvements since the last inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards need to be improved.
- Attitudes and behaviour of the students are good.
- Schemes of work in Years 8 and 9 need to be revised and improved.
- The knowledge of the specialist teachers is good.

Commentary

51. Standards on entry to the school are well below the national average. Standards at the end of Year 9 are also well below the national average with half of the students reaching the expected standard. However, as a result of the introduction of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy twelve months ago, standards in Year 7 have improved. In addition, very recent changes to the scheme of work in use at the beginning of Year 9 have the potential to improve standards. Standards seen during the inspection varied considerably but were generally below average. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, and sometimes good progress, when they receive extra help from teachers and learning support assistants.
52. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. The specialist teachers have good knowledge of the subject and are well supported by a very good technician. All teachers have good relationships with the students and give good help and advice to individuals in practical lessons. Classes are well managed and the attitudes and behaviour of the students are good. Teachers give good demonstrations of the work using computerised overhead projectors. The teaching methods used by some of non-specialist teachers are inappropriate and lead to slow pace. There is a lack of continuity in the schemes of work. They need to be revised and improved, particularly in Years 8 and 9. There is over-use of team learning in which students tackle assignments in groups, which does not give the most able sufficient opportunity to progress appropriately.
53. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are well below the national average. In 2003, the results of the GCSE examinations were well below the national average with under a third of students obtaining A*-C grades. Most students obtained A*-G grades. In 2004, the unconfirmed results show the proportion of students obtaining A*-C grades was worse but overall achievement is broadly satisfactory.
54. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. Because of the well below average standards at the end of Year 9, students are not well prepared for the challenges of GCSE examination work. All teachers emphasise key word and concepts well but, in too many lessons, the pace of work is too leisurely and the students are not sufficiently challenged. Teachers' expectations are too low. Whilst there are good examples of coursework, most students are capable of achieving more.
55. The quality of leadership has recently been improved and is now good. The management of day-to-day activities is satisfactory. The computing facilities are very good but the accommodation is only just adequate. Changes since the last inspection are broadly satisfactory. Standards have been maintained but the students' progress and the quality of their learning have declined.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

56. The application of ICT in other subjects is satisfactory. There has been a lack of access to the computing facilities in the past but the recent introduction of radio-linked laptop computers has the potential to rectify this. Applications in English and mathematics are limited but the use of laptops has led to some good applications of ICT in science. Good applications also occur in design and technology, especially in food technology, and in citizenship and music. The use of computing in business education is extensive. Applications in art, geography, history, modern languages and physical education are satisfactory but the co-ordination of the use of ICT in other subjects is insufficiently developed.

HUMANITIES

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and lessons have lots of pace.
- The exciting range of activities used in lessons results in good achievement.
- GCSE examination results are not high enough.
- Insufficient use is made of ICT.
- The tracking of students' progress over time is not yet well developed.

Commentary

57. The outcomes of teachers' assessments in 2003 showed that standards attained by the end of Year 9 were in line with the national average. Too few students have followed a GCSE examination course in recent years to make a comparative judgement against the national standard. However, through its self-evaluation procedures the school recognises that a proportion of students have not done as well in GCSE examinations as they ought and a key priority in the departmental development plan is to raise standards at this level.
58. Attainment on entry in Year 7 in historical knowledge and skills is below average. In Year 9, standards are average and this shows good achievement when measured against students' attainment on entry. By Year 11, standards are close to the national average and achievement is good. Significantly more students are following a GCSE examination course in Year 10 and their standard of work is better than in Year 11. Students' enjoyment of the subject, the fun they have in learning through exciting activities such as debating arguments and miming their presentations, and their very good behaviour, are significant contributory factors to their good achievement.
59. By Year 9 students have well developed enquiry skills and are able to analyse sources and discuss the differences between fact and opinion at a level expected of students of their age. Most students in Year 11 have satisfactory reasoning skills and a good grasp of the importance of analysing sources to find out if what is written is 'typical' or not before making a judgement about accuracy or degree of bias. These skills are developed effectively in Year 10 and students in this year group have a better knowledge of historical facts.
60. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. A proportion of teaching is excellent. Some lessons, such as the Year 10 lesson on the differences in tactics between the suffragettes and the suffragists, are inspirational. In such lessons learning is excellent. All teaching is characterised

by a fast pace of delivery, high expectations, outstanding subject knowledge and excellent relationships. These features make a very valuable contribution to students' learning. Because of high quality teaching assistant support and flexible planning, students with special educational needs make good progress. Teaching makes a valuable contribution to raising students' spiritual and moral awareness. Insufficient use is made of ICT to support teaching and learning but assessment is much better than at the time of the last inspection although there are still inconsistencies across classes in marking students' work and comments on marked work do not always spell out to students exactly what they need to do to improve.

61. Leadership of the subject is very good. Management is satisfactory. Monitoring of teaching and learning leads to the sharing of the best practice within the department and so to improved standards. However, procedures for tracking students' progress over time are not yet developed. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is very good because of challenging teaching and learning.
- GCSE examination results are improving.
- Insufficient use is made of ICT in learning.
- The tracking of students' progress is not fully developed.

Commentary

62. Teacher assessment in 2003 showed that standards by Year 9 exceeded the national expectation. The high standards found in 2003 look to have been maintained in 2004 although results have still to be validated. Too few students have followed a GCSE examination course in recent years to compare the school's results against the national average. However, the proportion of students who achieved grades A*-C in 2004 was very high and significantly better than in 2003.
63. By Year 9, standards attained exceed the national expectations and given that attainment on entry in Year 7 is below average demonstrate very good achievement. Most students have developed the skill of extracting relevant information from a range of sources, including textbooks, worksheets and the Internet to produce very good quality enquiry work. Such research activity was very well illustrated in a Year 8 class embarking on an investigation into the types of plate movement in their study unit on volcanoes and earthquakes. Higher-attaining students produce well-written notes. All students, including those with special educational needs, make very good progress with their writing because of the effective strategies used and the excellent teamwork between the teacher and teaching assistant to support and challenge such students. Almost all students draw clear annotated maps and diagrams and use graphs well to summarise statistical data. Speaking and listening are particularly well developed because groups of students are encouraged to take turns in making presentations of their findings to the rest of the class. In a Year 7, class a student with very complex special educational needs was skilfully helped to make an oral presentation to the rest of students in the class. This is inclusion at its very best.
64. Attainment by Year 11 exceeds the national expectation. This is because students' achievement throughout Years 10 and 11 continues to be very good. Students' coursework is very good and includes clear descriptive writing and the use of graphs and diagrams to enhance presentation. Because students enjoy their work they take pride in their presentation. They use correlation techniques such as scatter graphs effectively to establish trends in their gathered fieldwork data.

Evidence from this coursework indicates that students have been well grounded in fieldwork methods, including the analysis of data to test hypotheses. Their knowledge of geographical models and their usefulness is good. However, the use of computers to support learning, although evident, is somewhat inconsistent and could be used more frequently to enhance the development of important ICT skills.

65. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good. It ranges from excellent to satisfactory. The best teaching is exciting and inspirational. In these lessons, no more could possibly have been done to stretch and include all students in learning the planned outcomes and developing the planned skills. The students worked collaboratively and helped each other as required. Students respect one another and this results in a dynamic and exciting learning environment in which all are fully included and valued for their contributions. Where otherwise satisfactory, teaching has shortcomings because planned objectives for the lesson are not always made sufficiently clear to all students and this impedes learning for some of them, as observed in a Year 9 lesson which was meant to focus on developing students questioning skills. In this lesson, some students floundered because they did not understand the purpose of what they were doing.
66. Leadership and management are very good. The weaknesses identified at the time of the previous inspection have been addressed. Assessment is considerably improved but the department has recognised that it could be better at tracking student progress over time. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Religious education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Relationships are of high quality and students' attitudes are excellent.
- Very good achievement of students in the GCSE Short course examination.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good and most is very good.
- Students lack opportunities to encounter members of faith communities.
- There are insufficient opportunities for the use of ICT in the curriculum.

Commentary

67. By the end of Year 9, students' attainment is in line with national averages and the expectations of the Local Agreed Syllabus for religious education. Significant strengths of their work include the ability to understand religious ideas, such as symbolism and identity, and to reflect on the feelings of others.
68. By the end of Year 11, students' attainment is well above national averages. All students are entered for the GCSE Short Course examination and results are consistently well above average, both for those students gaining A*-C and for those gaining A*-G.
69. The overall achievement of all students in the school is very good. By the end of Year 9, the achievement of all students is good. They make good progress in lessons and over time. Students with special educational needs are well supported and encouraged. All students respond well to teachers' high expectations and the highest-attaining students are challenged appropriately. Knowledge and understanding of religious beliefs and practices grow well as students move through Years 7-9. Students are not yet confident in making judgements about their own progress and what they need to do to improve.

70. Achievement by the end of Year 11 is very good. Students' attitudes and efforts are exemplary. They are clear about the requirements of the examination and gain in confidence and self-esteem as they move through the course. Occasionally, lower-attaining students struggle with the demands of note taking but are confident enough to seek help. Gifted and talented students are well challenged.
71. The quality of teaching and learning by the end of Year 9 is good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and plan well. They have a good understanding of how students learn and use a wide range of teaching and learning styles. Students develop their skills effectively because of opportunities for group work, discussion, research and creative expression. Lessons are usually well paced, although on occasions learning could have been reinforced more strongly at the end. Students' class and homework is regularly marked. Teachers have established a good, balanced programme of assessment tasks and are beginning to develop effective ways of helping students know what standards they are reaching and what they need to do to improve. The department now needs to move forward in this respect and is well placed to do so.
72. The quality of teaching and learning by the end of Year 11 is very good. Its strengths lie in the very good understanding of the syllabus, the very good attitudes to work shown by the students and the very high expectations of teachers. Students have regular practice at answering examination questions requiring them to explain and evaluate issues they have studied.
73. The leadership and management of the department are very good. There is a strong sense of teamwork, a commitment to move forward and the ability to do so. The enthusiasm, dedication and energy of the leadership are a major factor in the success of the subject. The curriculum is well balanced and makes major contribution to the spiritual and moral development of students. The department has made good progress since the last inspection.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent leadership and very good management create a very effective team ethos.
- Standards of attainment in food technology are well above average.
- Students have high regard for the team of specialist teachers.
- Designing and making are very well taught.
- Too few students are currently working on examination courses.
- Computer-aided design, manufacture and control have only just been introduced.

Commentary

74. Standards of attainment by the end of Year 9 and by the end of Year 11 are above average. Standards of attainment in 2003 in GCSE examinations and tests taken at the end of Year 9 were close to average. Standards have improved. Students are very good at generating design ideas by carefully examining commercial products. They use computers very well for market research and wider investigative work. Students work safely as required. Older students capably illustrate their explanations with both sketches and models. However, too little work is currently being done with ICT for designing, making and controlling. Greater accuracy and precision is needed in resistant materials. Insufficient work is done with metals.

75. Achievement by the end of Year 9, by the end of Year 11 and overall is very good. This is because students listen carefully, complete work set and enjoy their learning not only within but also outside lesson time. Some do, however, rely too much on their teachers. Gifted and talented students speak confidently about their designing and making. Students with special needs benefit extremely well when interacting with the teacher and using attractive resources, made in one instance specifically for the individual student by the same teacher. All students were seen to work hard and achieve very well.
76. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers' questioning made the students think about technical terms so they made better decisions. Working very well together teachers provided 'on the spot' guidance to make the next step the best one for the individual. Marking is accurate. Committed teachers sought to enable students to gain confidence so they became more independent. Very good comparisons with real life were made in lessons so the students were almost always engrossed.
77. Excellent leadership and management have recently re-established an enthusiastic team. In an excellent learning environment students progressively adopt their teachers' enthusiasm. Business enterprise and local, high-tech industry add excitement. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. Agreed priorities for the improvement of the provision are very good. Too few students are currently on examination courses. Access to the main library and the range of available texts is restricted. The team has the capacity to sustain this very good improvement.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is very good and all students learn very well as a result.
- Behaviour and attitudes are very good as a result of teachers' very high expectations.
- Standards in Year 9 are above average.
- The use of assessment is inconsistent and monitoring is insufficiently developed.
- The GCSE examination course in fine art is a constraint to learning for many students.

Commentary

78. GCSE examination results in 2003 were in line with the national average when compared with similar schools and above average when compared to all schools. Examination results in the textiles course continue to be very high and showed further improvement in 2004 although these results have still to be validated. Results on the fine art course fell well below the national average in 2003 but are likely to show significant improvement in 2004. In previous years, as the result of very good management, results in both courses achieved similar high standards. On the textiles course, students learn to use a wide range of techniques very successfully, to research and experiment widely and to achieve very high standards of finished work.
79. In the art and design course, standards of drawing and painting are satisfactory but need to be developed and refined. Students learn the importance of research and experimentation but this aspect is not developed as fully as it needs to be. The department has wisely taken the decision to discontinue the GCSE examination course in favour of a course which will broaden learning experiences and help to raise standards of achievement further. Achievement at the end of Year

11 is good overall. Standards in Year 9 are above the national average. As students enter the school with standards of art that are below average, this represents very good achievement.

80. Students learn to draw, use colour and manipulate a range of other media with confidence as a result of very good teaching strategies and better than average time allocation. At present, there are few planned opportunities for the use of three-dimensional materials. Homework, supports learning and is set and marked regularly. Students with special educational needs make good progress but there are few planned opportunities to challenge gifted and talented pupils. Provision for ICT meets statutory requirements, although resources are few. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good, and, on occasions, outstanding, in all years. Teachers have very high expectations of all students. Good planning, as well as the effective use of visual aids and demonstrations support learning and have a positive impact on achievement. Students are very well behaved, work hard and clearly enjoy their lessons. Improvement since the last inspection has been good and includes the appointment of a full time specialist learning assistant who makes a significant contribution to learning. Additional learning opportunities and community links are very good.
81. A more consistent approach to the use of assessment procedures and more rigorous monitoring of learning outcomes will help to identify areas of underachievement and improve the quality of target setting, as an aid to learning. Students in Years 7, 8 and 9 are not sufficiently informed of their levels of attainment or the means of improving them. The department has been well led and managed by a highly experienced and dedicated specialist. A new head of department and additional specialist began this term. This new, experienced and enthusiastic team, share the vision and the determination to maintain high standards and make further improvements in the provision. The well presented displays of art work in classrooms and public areas make a very significant contribution to the school ethos.

Dance

Provision in dance is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent standards of teaching.
- High quality planning.
- Very good standards.
- Excellent facilities which are used very effectively.

Commentary

82. Standards are well above average throughout the school and especially good in Year 10 and 11. GCSE examination results are above average. Students start with a wide range of previous experience. Despite the fact that some have not danced before, all students make good progress. The achievement of students is very good.
83. The quality of teaching and learning is excellent. Very thorough schemes of work, detailed attention to assessment, and good planning for continuity to give coherence to the development of dance over time, are all evident. Documentation is of a high order. Accurate records are maintained of students' attainment and progress. Assessment is well integrated with teaching and learning and students are constantly evaluating their work. Lessons move fast and all students are very well challenged. They thrive on this and produce work which shows that they are engrossed and often elated by learning effectively about form, movement and space. Even the occasional non-participant is brought into the development of learning through feeding back to

students on such aspects as their use of properties in exemplar work. The excellent facilities are very well used to help students to concentrate and to move with precision. Excellent use is made of audiotape to provide stimulus in lessons and of video to assess the quality of students' work.

84. Improvement since the last inspection has been good because dance is now more firmly established in the performing arts faculty and standards have further improved. Work is enriched by a strong community dimension and extensive production work for an audience. Excellent use is made of first rate facilities. This subject is very popular with students. High standards are set and achieved.

Drama

Provision in drama is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students show a good knowledge of dramatic theory.
- Examination results are not yet high enough on the GCSE examination course.
- Cross-curricular themes are well developed
- Accommodation is limited.

Commentary

85. The school presented students for GCSE examinations in drama for the first time in 2004 and although results have still to be fully validated they appear to be well below national expectations. Nonetheless, students' coursework was commended for its understanding of drama conventions. This reflects the thorough approach to the development of theory in the work of the department. In the lessons observed, students demonstrated an awareness of such aspects as audience and the need to create a dramatic climax to establish the purpose of their improvisation. However, too much time was spent on discussion which limited the time for exploration of the topic through experimentation.
86. In Years 7 to 9, students have an opportunity to enjoy drama and to develop their skills. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Students are provided with a range of lively activities which they enjoy and use effectively to develop the basic skills of speech and movement. In Years 10 and 11, the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Students in Year 11 have a secure knowledge and intellectual understanding of the main elements of a drama performance because they use technical terms confidently and discuss the effects that can be created with lighting, sound and stage properties. They can create drama based on challenging issues such as alcoholism and bullying, which contributes to the moral and social development of all students through their performances at school assemblies. They do not get enough opportunities to learn through the application of drama skills to the dramatic process.
87. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory and an examination course has been established but standards and provision for drama lag behind the other performing arts. Space for practical activities is limited and this is constraining the quality of work that students produce.

Music

Provision for music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Outstanding GCSE examination results are achieved with increasingly large numbers.
- Very good teaching with high expectations enables all students to do their best.
- Very good leadership generates widespread music activity beyond lessons.

Commentary

88. Standards are very high overall. Increasing numbers of students choose to study on the GCSE examination course, yet the ten-year record of all candidates attaining A*-C grades is maintained. Of the 43 candidates in 2004, 22 were still in Year 10 and eight were Year 9 students who all gained A* or A grades. The 36 students currently in Year 10 include a few who are less motivated when they start the course and lack developed instrumental skills. The conditions for learning are so good that the scene is well set to enable even more students to attain at the highest level. Six students are following the AS course in 'out of hours' time.
89. The outcomes of teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 show standards well above the national average. Although the intake includes many with scant experience of music, as well as some able instrumental learners, high standards were seen even in the very early stages of a Year 7 class. Very fast progress was evident in improving singing, learning technical terms and concepts and some imaginative interpretation of scores. Performance practice is a strength, as is the use of standard notation. Notable written work from younger students includes projects on Chinese music and culture and in Year 10 some compositions presented in computer-aided scores.
90. Achievement is very good overall. Students in each year respond to personal targets very well and to challenges beyond the norm. Most thrive on the high expectations made of them. The most able students achieve their potential through extra tasks. Regular homework for all boosts achievement. Students who need simpler tasks or adapted materials, including those with special educational needs, respond equally well. The achievement of many students in GCSE examination work is outstanding. Achievement is sometimes limited in lessons in the smaller of the two music rooms because the space prevents certain styles of teaching.
91. The quality of teaching is very good throughout the school. It is very enthusiastic, energetic and efficient. Learning is very good because the process is exciting and enjoyable. Lessons are enjoyable experiences, with all students fully engaged, and made to feel good about themselves because they are constantly praised and encouraged. Literacy is supported effectively as students learn and recall terms and concepts. As is the case with drama, links are made to other subjects which help understanding and boost intelligence. Teachers' very good subject knowledge and skills, including ICT, are a great asset because they are used to the advantage of students' learning. There are opportunities to reflect quietly on the expressive and spiritual dimension of music.
92. Leadership and management are very good. The leader has very good knowledge and experience of music education beyond the school and is supported by the very good teamwork of the faculty and by the senior leadership team. The leader is determined, constantly seeking to raise levels of achievement and attainment for all students by revising schemes and expanding provision. Extra-curricular groups vary through the year, with choral and staged work currently

paramount. Instrumental teaching is properly monitored. Liaison is good with the music service's area manager on site. Visits and visitors regularly enrich the curriculum. Development planning includes extending ICT provision and improving systems of assessment, both of which are necessary.

93. Since the previous inspection, high standards have been maintained and improvement has been very good – very high standards on the GCSE examination course with many more candidates and 'fast-track' routes now in operation. Music now benefits from the supportive base of the faculty of performing arts and from its specialist school status. There is now clerical and technical support. The proportion of students who benefit from vocal and instrumental lessons has fallen, a result of increased charges to parents, though the school supports financially where necessary.

Physical education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment is well above average, particularly in examination classes.
- The quality of teaching and learning is of a consistently high standard.
- The combined provision for physical education and dance outside normal lessons is excellent.
- The positive approach shown by all students contributes significantly to the progress that they make.
- The leadership and management of a highly committed team is excellent.

Commentary

94. Teachers' assessment indicates that in 2003 the attainment of students by the end of Year 9 was well above average. Standards in the present Year 9 are also well above average. In the 2003 GCSE examination, all 13 students entered gained A*-B grades, figures that are well above the national average. This high standard was repeated in 2004 (results have still to be validated) where all 10 physical education students achieved the higher grades, as did the four candidates who took dance at GCSE examination level. It was not possible to observe any lessons in core physical education in Year 11 during the inspection. The number of students taking the GCSE examination in Year 11 is much higher than last year. Standards are well above average in both the practical and theoretical elements of the syllabus. In dance, where the number of examination candidates has also increased significantly, standards are also well above average.
95. Faculty assessment shows that standards on entry are below average. By the end of Year 9, most students have improved their level of skill considerably in a range of different activities. This represents very good achievement. Achievement is also very good for those students following the two examination courses. Students with special educational needs, including those specifically identified within the physical education faculty, also make very good progress. A small number of students with more acute difficulties receive very helpful and sensitive in-class support.
96. The quality of teaching and its impact on learning are consistently very good. In some lessons in both physical education and dance, teaching and learning are excellent. In many lessons, teaching is stimulating, vibrant and challenging. Teachers succeed in creating a climate for learning that produces an excellent response from students. This combination, linked to exemplary behaviour in all lessons, is a key factor in what is achieved.
97. Students spoke very appreciatively about the extensive range of opportunities that exist for activities outside normal lessons in both physical education and dance. Students support these

activities in large numbers. Teams and individuals have enjoyed recent successes in athletics, cross-country, gymnastics, hockey, netball, rounders and tennis. The faculty emphasises 'sport for all' but also runs a specific club for gifted and talented gymnasts, as well as holding sessions for students who are less confident with different aspects of physical education.

98. As a result of excellent leadership and management, teachers work extremely well together in an atmosphere of shared commitment and enjoyment. Very good improvement since the last inspection has resulted in the successful introduction of the GCSE examination course, the inclusion of the Junior Sports Leaders Award as an option for older students, improved assessment procedures and the recent appointment of a faculty teaching assistant. The commitment to further improvement is clearly evident and the faculty is in a strong position to build on the progress already made. Since the last inspection, the faculty has also achieved the Sportsmark award.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Courses in business studies, child development and travel and tourism were sampled.

Business studies

99. Over a third of the students take the GCSE examination course in business studies. In 2003, the results of the examinations were well below the national average with only a third of the students entered obtaining A*-C grades. The majority of students obtained A*-G grades. The unconfirmed results of the 2004 examination look to be better. One lesson was sampled. In Year 11, students were seen learning to produce an advertisement and job description relevant to a type of company selected by the teacher. The quality of learning was satisfactory. Groups of students were working on different types of companies. The attitudes and behaviour of the students were good. The quality of the teaching was satisfactory.

Child development

100. A third of the students take a recently introduced GCSE examination course in child development. The course has not yet been examined. One lesson was sampled in Year 10, in which students were seen learning very well about the family structure and functions. The students showed good appreciation of the problems faced by families in contemporary society. The attitudes and behaviour of the students was excellent. The quality of teaching was very good.

Travel and tourism

101. Over one student in eight takes the new GCSE examination course in travel and tourism. In 2004, the course was examined for the first time. The unconfirmed results show that standards were slightly below the national average figures for the previous year with just under half of the students obtaining A*-C grades. Most of the students obtained A*-G grades. One lesson was sampled. In Year 11, students were seen giving a talk to their class colleagues about some aspect of the administration at a local hotel. This was very well done. The students had visited the hotel in earlier lessons. Their oral skills were good and all enjoyed the lesson. The quality of the teaching was very good.

Work-related learning

The effectiveness of work-related learning (WRL) is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The attitudes and commitment of the students are very good.
- The range of activities and courses is good.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the various activities are not yet well developed.

Commentary

102. Standards vary considerably but are broadly in line with the national average overall. All students undertake two weeks of very effective work experience with local employers at the end of Year 10. In 2003, most students were judged to have completed the experience well. The students gain maturity and confidence as a result of their work.
103. All students take at least one applied or vocational course in Years 10 and 11. The majority take GCSE or Applied GCSE examination courses in business studies, child development, travel and tourism or ICT. In 2003, the results in business studies were well below the national average. In 2004, the results in business studies were better and those in travel and tourism broadly in line with the expected national average. The courses in child development and ICT have yet to be examined. Lesson observations show that standards are broadly in line with the national average and sometimes good.
104. One in nine students choose to take Level 1 and Entry level courses as a part of an Increased Flexibility Programme (IFP) at the nearby college of further education. Some on this programme are in danger of self-exclusion. In 2004, nine out of eleven students obtained the NVQ in hairdressing or the Foundation Certificate in either health and safety or food hygiene. One has been nominated 'student of the year' for her work in hairdressing. Other Level 1 and Entry level courses have yet to be examined. Very small numbers of students have just begun Applied GCSE courses in engineering and health and social care as a part of the IFP. Overall achievement is good.
105. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and sometimes very good. Whilst the range of activities and courses is comprehensive, learning by means of written assignments in the Applied GCSE examination courses is not well suited to those students with literacy problems. Students have opportunities to link what they have learnt in the classroom to work situations and realistic simulated practice in commercial kitchens and workshops in the college. They also have opportunities to take part in the enterprise day, mock interviews and a mini-enterprise project. As a result, the attitudes and commitment of the students are very good. The period of work experience is planned and organised well. The majority of work placements are found by the school through the very effective links it has developed with local employers. Students are prepared for their work experience as a part of the careers programme. The majority of the students are visited by tutors and they discuss what they have done and achieved in debriefing sessions at school. Work is recorded in Progress Files. Resources are good. The monitoring and evaluation of the various activities need improvement but the overall quality of leadership is good. It is planned to appoint a co-ordinator. The school has yet to develop a policy for work related learning.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

106. Provision is very good. The programme is comprehensive. There is good progression in the schemes of work. Lessons were sampled and indicate that the subject is mostly very well taught. The students speak well of their work in this area. Both leadership and management are very good. The school has improved its provision since the last inspection and progress has been good.

Citizenship

Provision for citizenship is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The ethos of the school reflects very well the aims of citizenship.
- Leadership is very good, passionate about the subject, which is managed well.
- GCSE examination was piloted here and thrives with very high standards.
- Teaching and learning are very good with excellent achievement by students in Year 11.

Commentary

107. Standards are very high overall. All students now follow the short GCSE examination course over two years. In 2004 the vast majority gained grades A*-C. This is a very high standard. Walton was a pilot school for the examination and has four years of experience in teaching it. Students now in Year 11 show a high level of maturity in discussing discrimination in job applications, respecting each other's differing views while expressing their own clearly. Standards in Years 7,8 and 9 are high. Work seen from Year 9 students on personal finance is particularly good. Many use ICT for eye-catching and informative posters. No careless work was seen, though literacy on entry is clearly below average for some students.

108. Achievement is very good overall. It is excellent in the GCSE short course. There are now regular lessons in all years, an opportunity for continuous development. Students enjoy lessons, relishing opportunities to debate issues, which relate new learning to their own lives. Self-assessment sheets are of good quality, so that students are aware and proud of their progress. Active citizenship is not confined to extra-curricula work. Students in Year 11, on a partly work-related timetable, have come to know pupils from a special school who visit some lessons. Their sense of achievement is palpable as they engage very well with secondary age students with severe learning difficulties and start to learn British sign language. Democratic processes are practiced to recruit a student forum, now chaired by a student. Discussion often results in desired changes which improve conditions. There is often too little time for effective feedback to the electorate. The student leadership group, chosen by staff from student applications, shows commendable initiative and responsibility in supporting younger students. They learn about care and tact in voluntary work. Community work and support for charities abound.

109. Teaching and learning are very good overall and sometimes excellent. Learning in Years 10 and 11 benefits from teaching by the co-ordinator and an advanced skills teacher in citizenship. Very good questioning demands sustained thought from students. After such challenges, most students come to realise that it is hard to resolve conflicting priorities. In Years 7,8, and 9, teaching and learning is good overall. In the few lessons with less experienced teachers, learning is satisfactory. Teachers lack sufficient confidence and subject knowledge to engage students fully so that concepts such as autocracy remain unclear for less able students and the achievement of all is limited. Homework is set and marked regularly, with the accent on praise

and encouragement. However, work in other subjects, valuable for learning in citizenship, is not yet taken into account in the assessment process.

110. Leadership and management are very good. The leader is passionate about citizenship. With very good support from senior leaders, the subject is very well established with an increasingly high profile. Display, visits and visitors and activity such as public speaking enrich learning. Further development is planned, including training, to improve still further designated teaching for lower school students. Reports to parents of Year 9 students convey the achievement of individual students. Ways should be found to add the standards attained.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	3
How inclusive the school is	1
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3
Value for money provided by the school	2
Overall standards achieved	4
Pupils' achievement	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	2
Attendance	2
Attitudes	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	1
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The quality of education provided by the school	2
The quality of teaching	2
How well pupils learn	2
The quality of assessment	4
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	2
The quality of the school's links with the community	1
The school's links with other schools and colleges	1
The leadership and management of the school	3
The governance of the school	3
The leadership of the headteacher	1
The leadership of other key staff	2
The effectiveness of management	3

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

