

INSPECTION REPORT

Icknield Community College

Watlington, Oxfordshire

LEA area: Oxfordshire

Unique reference number: 123244

Headteacher: Mr Richard Hudson

Lead inspector: Val Lynch

Dates of inspection: 25-Apr-2005 to 28-Apr-2005

Inspection number: 268402

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 students:	11 - 16
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	642
School address:	Love Lane Watlington Oxfordshire
Postcode:	OX49 5RB
Telephone number:	01491 612691
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Appropriate authority:	Local Education Authority
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Steve Bolingbroke
Date of previous inspection:	21-Sep-1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Icknield Community College is a small 11-16 comprehensive school. There are 642 students in the school and in most years there are slightly more boys than girls. In Year 9 there are significantly more boys than girls. A higher than average proportion of students join or leave the school during the school year because service families from RAF Benson move relatively regularly. The school is located in the small market town of Watlington. Most students travel by bus from the surrounding villages and some from within a neighbouring local authority. The school has recently submitted a bid to be a specialist humanities college. When students join the school in Year 7 the standards they have reached are average. An increasing number of higher attaining students in the area are joining the school despite parents having a wide choice of schools, both in the private and public sector. The proportion of students whose heritage language is not English is low and none are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of students with special educational needs is average. The proportion with Statements is slightly above average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average but the socio-economic circumstances of the areas are average. The school is involved in two local authority projects, one for accelerated learning, the other for values in education. It has recently received Investors in People accreditation and also has Sportsmark , Artsmark and School Achievement awards.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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10173	Catherine Hinds	Lay inspector	
3268	George Knights	Team inspector	Mathematics
12568	Chris Morris	Team inspector	English
12890	Thomas Jardine	Team inspector	Science
11969	John Hardy	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Work-related learning
15606	Christine Hill	Team inspector	Art and design
32672	Stephen Hammond-Evans	Team inspector	Design and technology
4317	Ken Madrell	Team inspector	Geography Religious education
22458	Gilbert McGinn	Team inspector	Citizenship History
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a rapidly improving school with many **very good** features. Achievement is **good**. Teaching and learning are **good**. The leadership of the headteacher is very **good**. Leadership overall is **good** and management is **satisfactory**. The school provides **good** value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 are improving faster than results nationally and are above average.
- The school has successfully improved the achievement of boys and their attitudes to learning.
- Teaching and learning are very good in art and design and are also very good for students with additional learning needs when they are directly working with support staff.
- Links with local colleges are very good and help to make sure that the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 meets the full range of students' needs.
- The headteacher and governors have a very clear vision for the future of the school as a high achieving school that meets the needs of all students and the community.
- Practice in some subjects and in some other aspects of school life is inconsistent because senior and middle leaders have not had sufficient opportunity nor time to develop their leadership and management roles.

Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Test and examination results have improved and most of the key issues from the previous report have been addressed. The monitoring of teaching and learning has been relatively slow to develop but work is in hand to increase the pace of this.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Achievement is good in Years 7 to 9. In 2004 test results at the end of Year 9 were well above average and much better than in similar schools. In 2004 English results substantially improved, particularly those of boys. English results were well above average and well above results in similar schools. A well above average proportion of students, both boys and girls, gained the higher levels. Results in mathematics and science were above average. In mathematics, results were better than results in similar schools. In science, they were well above results in similar schools. Girls did better than boys in mathematics but their results in science were very similar. An above average proportion of students gained the higher levels in both subjects. Work seen during the inspection confirms the good achievement evident in these results in English and science. Work in mathematics indicates satisfactory achievement. Students with individual learning needs achieve well because teaching assistants know these students well and ensure that their needs are met. Students with a range of emotional or behavioural difficulties and those from traveller backgrounds also achieve well because staff work hard to support them in whatever way they can.

Year 11 results

Performance in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2002	2003	2004	2004
	C	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 students attained similarly at the end of Year 9.

Achievement overall is good in Years 10 and 11. In 2004, the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE grades A* - G improved significantly. Girls' results also improved but boys' results declined and were below average. In the current Year 11 girls are still doing better than boys. In Year 10 the difference is very slight reflecting boys' good achievement by the end of Year 9. Results in 2004 were well above average in art and design and achievement is very good. Results were above average in science, English literature, French and geography reflecting good achievement in

these subjects. Results were below average in English language, mathematics and physical education. However, achievement in English language and physical education on the basis of work seen is good. In mathematics achievement is satisfactory. Achievement is also good in geography, modern foreign languages, music and religious education. Results were significantly below average in ICT, design and technology and history. In design and technology students have not had sufficient grounding in the subject lower down the school to do well at GCSE level and the work seen and achievement are unsatisfactory. In history and ICT achievement is satisfactory.

Students' personal qualities including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is **good**. Attendance is satisfactory and punctuality is good. Students' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are good. A small number of students, mainly boys, present challenging behaviour. Some staff do not use the school's behaviour policy when dealing with these situations.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is **good**. Teaching and learning are good and assessment is satisfactory. Students learn particularly well in art and design and music because they are taught very well in these subjects. Marking of students' work is inconsistent and some teachers do not use homework consistently well to support students' learning. This and the inconsistent use of planners restrict parents in supporting their children's learning. The school provides a good curriculum in Years 10 and 11 as a result of very good and productive links with local colleges. The school does not meet the requirements of the National Curriculum in design and technology in Years 7 to 9 and in ICT in Years 10 and 11. Arrangements for students with individual learning needs ensure full access to the curriculum and that their needs are met. Activities outside lessons are well supported by students. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory but spending on these aspects is limited while the school manages a budget deficit. There are good systems for monitoring students' progress, attendance and behaviour but not all tutors make effective use of the information provided. The school has good links with parents, the community and other schools.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management overall are **good**. The headteacher is very focused on raising the achievement of all students. He has secured the commitment of students, parents and staff to the school and its growth and development. Governors are very knowledgeable about the school and are fully involved in deciding how it should develop in the future. They have not, however, ensured that the school is fulfilling all its statutory responsibilities. The leadership of senior and middle managers is good. Management in this area of the school, although satisfactory, is not as good because systems for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school are underdeveloped which results in some inconsistencies in practice.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents and students value the school and recognise that it is getting better. They rate the headteacher highly. They say that students do well because of the good teaching and the positive ethos in the school. They praise the arrangements for helping new students settle. A few parents and students express concerns about the behaviour of a small minority of students. A few students misbehave but the school works well with these students to meet their needs and improve their behaviour. A minority of students feel that they are not treated fairly. Inspectors believe that this is because aspects of the school's practice are inconsistent. Parents have concerns about the inconsistency in the setting of homework and the inspectors agree with their concerns.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Develop and implement a policy for school review and self evaluation that will ensure consistency in all aspects of school life, so that practice is always as good as the best.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Fully implement the design and technology curriculum in Years 7 to 9.
- Ensure that all students experience a programme of ICT in Years 10 and 11.

- Ensure that assemblies and tutor time meet the governors' expectations for a daily act of collective worship.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Achievement is **good** in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11. In 2004 test results at the end of Year 9 were **well above average** and much better than results in similar schools. GCSE results were **average** and in line with results in similar schools.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Boys and girls did well in their national tests at the end of Year 9 because staff have developed teaching styles that motivate boys.
- Students do particularly well in art and design and music, and both these subjects have improved substantially since the previous inspection.
- Students with individual learning needs make good progress and are successful in national tests and examinations.
- Boys' GCSE results were below average in 2004 because some boys underachieved.

Commentary

1. When students join the school in Year 7 the standard of their work is average. The proportion of students with individual learning needs is average.

Key Stage 3

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2004

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	36.2 (31.2)	33.5 (33.4)
Mathematics	36.8 (35.6)	35.7 (35.4)
Science	34.6 (34.5)	33.2 (33.6)

There were 120 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. Results in national tests have improved at the same rate as results nationally. In 2004 English results substantially improved, particularly those of boys. Their results were much better than boys nationally. English results were well above average and well above results in similar schools. A well above average proportion of students, both boys and girls, gained the higher levels. Results in mathematics and science were above average. In mathematics, results were better than results in similar schools. In science, they were well above results in similar schools. Girls did better than boys in mathematics but their results in science were very similar. An above average proportion of students gained the higher levels in both subjects. Work seen during the inspection confirms the good achievement evident in these results in English and science. Work in mathematics indicates satisfactory achievement. Although students do well in tests, there is not enough emphasis on using and applying mathematics in the mathematics scheme of work.
3. Teachers' assessments were well above average in history and physical education and above average in design and technology, art and design and music. These assessments were over-generous in history and physical education, and particularly so in design and technology where standards are below average. Teachers' assessments were below average in geography and modern foreign languages. In these subjects students' work seen is better than this. In most subjects, with the exception of design and technology, achievement is at least satisfactory and is often good. In design and technology students' achievement is limited

by the narrowness of the experiences provided. Students with individual learning needs achieve well because teaching assistants know these students well and make good use of their links with departments to ensure that students' needs are met. Students with a range of emotional or behavioural difficulties and those from traveller backgrounds also achieve well because staff work hard to support them in whatever way they can.

Key Stage 4

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	50 (49)	52.0 (52)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	91 (81)	89.0 (88)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	98 (95)	96.0 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	34.0 (32.5)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 129 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

- GCSE results in 2004 were average and in line with those in similar schools. Results have been improving at a similar rate to results nationally. In 2004, the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE grades A* - G improved significantly. Girls' results also improved but boys' results declined and were below average. When this group of students were in Year 9, girls did better than boys but the gap had widened by the time they finished Year 11. The school knows that this group of boys underachieved as they progressed through the school. Results were well above average in art and design and above average in science, English literature, French and geography. Results were below average in English language, mathematics and physical education. In English language and mathematics, the school entered a higher proportion of the year group for the examination than other schools. This included a higher than average proportion of lower attaining students, which will affect results, particularly when the cohort is so small. Results were significantly below average in ICT, design and technology and history. In design and technology students have not had sufficient grounding in the subject lower down the school to do well at GCSE level. The work seen and achievement are unsatisfactory. Achievement is very good in art and design. Achievement is good in English, science, geography, modern foreign languages, music, physical education, drama and religious education. In mathematics achievement is satisfactory. In Year 11 girls are still doing better than boys. In Year 10 the difference is very slight, reflecting boys' good achievement by the end of Year 9.
- Language and literacy skills are good. Students in Years 10 and 11 have benefited from the schools' focus on literacy. Lower down the school some students find listening difficult but this improves with maturity. ICT skills are good because all students have now experienced a separate taught course in Years 7 to 9. Numeracy skills are satisfactory.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attendance is **satisfactory** and punctuality is **good**. Students' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are **good**. Personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is also **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' attitudes to work in class are good, and help them to achieve well.

- Students enjoy the school and get on very well with each other.
- Students become increasingly confident as they progress through the school.
- Cultural development is promoted well in art and design and music.
- A small number of students, mainly boys, present challenging behaviour. Some staff do not use the school's behaviour policy when dealing with these situations.

Commentary

6. Most students have positive attitudes to learning and enjoy a good quality school life. The atmosphere in the school is calm and positive. Most students have a real desire to succeed and take advantage of opportunities to enrich and extend their experiences and personal development. Students feel confident and have high self-esteem. The positive relationships between teachers and students make a good contribution to their personal development.
7. Students respond well to the high expectations of good conduct in and out of lessons and behave well in informal situations. They behave well when moving around the school and are very aware of the needs of others at these busy times. Students are calm, polite and move promptly to their lessons. Lunchtimes provide very good opportunities for students to socialise. Inspectors were impressed by the civilised atmosphere, good behaviour and in the way that students related so well to each other. A small minority of students, mainly boys present challenging behaviour that is not always dealt with well by some teachers. The school have recently introduced a variety of strategies to reward and promote sensible approaches to work, but these have yet to impact fully on the whole school. The monitoring of behaviour is satisfactory and support for teachers who have difficulty coping is provided. As yet this has not gone as far as helping teachers to change their teaching practice to better meet the needs of the most challenging students.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of students

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	609	49	1
White – Irish	1	0	0
White – any other White background	12	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	2	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	7	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	4	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	1	1	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	0	0
Black or Black British – African	1	0	0
Parent/student preferred not to say	2	0	0

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

8. The school takes a firm line on exclusions to deter students from inappropriate behaviour and sends a clear message about what is acceptable behaviour. This action has seen the number of fixed term exclusions reduce during the past year.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year 2003-2004 (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data:	7.1	School data:	0.8
National data:	6.9	National data:	1.1

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

9. Attendance has improved dramatically since the previous inspection and is broadly average except for Year 10 where attendance is below average. Strategies to improve, record and follow up absence have been introduced and show positive improvements in the attendance of students. The strategy of phoning parents on the first day of absence is having a positive impact with over half the parents calling the school with information. The individual tracking and monitoring of absent students are good but not all staff are as rigorous as they could be. Punctuality is good with nearly all students arriving by bus in good time for the start of the school day. Promptness for lessons is good with calm lesson changes and movement around the school.
10. Personal development is fostered well and the school has many strong departments that strive to boost the social development of students, notably in English, and physical education where group discussions and working in a variety of groups help students understand and relate to each other and others. Spiritual development is satisfactory, with no daily act of worship and missed opportunities in the tutor period where students could explore and reflect on beliefs and values and understand emotions and feelings. Moral development is well supported by the values education programme that helps students to explore the differences that exist in society and the difference between right and wrong. Social development is good and includes an extra-curricular drama club organised by the students, which helps develop their sense of responsibility and self esteem. Cultural development is clearly promoted well through subjects such as art and design where positive images and art work of other cultures is readily shown and discussed. The music department involves students in the music of many cultures offering samba and drumming workshops for many in extra-curricular time. However, all these aspects are developed effectively through the school's ethos, expectations and wider enrichment, as well as through the formal curriculum.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is **good**. Teaching and learning are **good** and the curriculum is **satisfactory**. Arrangements for students' care, welfare, health and safety are **good**. The school has **good** links with parents and the community and **very good** links with other schools and colleges.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are **good**. The assessment of students' work is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students learn particularly well in art and design and in music in Years 10 and 11 because they are taught very well in these subjects.
- Occasionally students do not learn enough because some teachers do not manage unsatisfactory behaviour successfully.
- Students with additional learning needs make good progress because they are supported well.

- The marking of students' work is inconsistent and some teachers do not use homework consistently well to support students' learning beyond the classroom.

Commentary

- Teaching and learning are good and are better than at the time of the previous inspection. In particular, the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching is much lower than previously. Students learn very well in art and design because they are taught very well, as are older students in music. In art and design, excellent attention is paid to the needs of each individual student, with a very good variety of individual, pair and group work to support learning. Similarly, very good attention is paid to developing each individual's skills for those students studying music in Years 10 and 11. Teaching and learning are good in English, science, modern foreign languages, history, geography and physical education throughout the school and in music for younger students. In all other subjects, teaching and learning are satisfactory. Details of lessons observed during the inspection are set out in the table below.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 84 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3 (4)	13 (15)	40 (48)	24 (29)	4 (4)	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.

- Generally, teachers match tasks and activities well to students' needs and this is why learning is successful. Students respond well, showing interest in their learning. Occasionally, however, this is not the case and teaching is unsatisfactory. In these lessons, often in classes for students of lower ability, behaviour is unsatisfactory because students are not interested in, or engaged by, the activities provided by their teachers.
- Students with additional learning needs learn very well when they are taught in one-to-one or small group situations and where teaching assistants are supporting them. In other class lessons, they learn successfully because their progress is closely monitored to ensure that their needs are met.
- Although students learn well, they are often too dependent on teachers to guide their studies. Taking personal responsibility for their learning, and developing good independent study skills, is a feature of many lessons in physical education and art and design. In English, students take responsibility for collaborating well in small groups and this improves their personal learning. Elsewhere, these skills are not well developed. Additionally, independent learning is slowed because homework is not used well, other than in art and design, either as a means of extending work in lessons or preparing for future activities.
- The assessment of students' work is satisfactory overall, but varies considerably from teacher to teacher. Whilst most subjects have good systems for assessing work at the end of topics, day-to-day assessment is less successful. Teachers are aware of this and are currently working together to improve their assessment skills and to encourage students to become more involved in assessing their own work and that of their peers. The main weakness, currently, is in the marking of students' work. Too often teachers are not doing this in enough detail and consequently students do not have a clear indication of what they need to do to improve their work.

The curriculum

The curriculum is **satisfactory**. Opportunities for enrichment, including extra-curricular activities are **good**. Accommodation and resources are **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school provides a good curriculum in Years 10 and 11 with a good range of academic and vocational courses.
- Arrangements for students with individual learning needs ensure that they have full access to the curriculum and also have their needs met.
- The school does not meet the requirements of the National Curriculum with respect to design and technology in Years 7 to 9 and ICT in Years 10 and 11.
- Activities outside lessons are appreciated and well supported by students.

Commentary

16. In Years 7 to 9 students study a good range of subjects but the curriculum in design and technology is limited. There are not enough opportunities for students to use ICT to support their designing and making processes. They also have very limited opportunities to explore the use of different materials and do not study graphics. ICT is part of a rotational arrangement of courses within design and technology and this results in different groups having different amounts of time for ICT.
17. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is based on three programmes made up of different subject choice. These programmes provide a coherent and well-planned experience for all students. The school has good links with local colleges who provide opportunities that the school cannot provide itself. This is no mean achievement on behalf of the school and students as the distances involved are considerable. Currently places at the colleges are limited by local funding arrangements. The school is so committed to these arrangements that it plans to use its own resources to supplement this funding to ensure students' needs and career plans are met.
18. A well-planned personal, social, health, careers and citizenship course is taught by tutors. Careers education is a strength within this programme. A large number of teachers teach the course and there is a lack of clarity about who is responsible for monitoring the lessons. As a result the quality of what students experience is too variable. The school does not have a daily act of collective worship.
19. The school has good arrangements for supporting students with individual learning needs. The expectation is that they will be in all lessons. They only have time out of lessons if special sessions are needed to help them overcome specific difficulties. The school makes good use of expertise within the local authority to help teaching assistants and teachers to develop their expertise in meeting specific needs such as dyslexia. The school also has a counsellor and a behaviour mentor who provide very valuable support for students.
20. As the school is in such a rural location with most students travelling by school bus, it is not easy for them to participate in activities outside lessons. However, the school makes good use of lunchtimes and after school time to provide a good range of activities, particularly in sport. It also arranges a number of visits to theatres and visits abroad. One day a week the school runs late buses and provides some more unusual activities run by outside organisations or by students themselves.
21. Accommodation is satisfactory and gradually areas of the school are being upgraded. Resources are adequate but the school has a deficit budget and is therefore not able to purchase enough ICT equipment for use in all subjects nor the large equipment needed in design and technology. Governors are also unable to improve the accommodation as fast as they would like to

Care, guidance and support

Standards of care, welfare, health and safety are **good**. Students receive **good** support, advice and guidance from their teachers. There are **satisfactory** procedures for involving students in the school's work and development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are good arrangements for ensuring students' health and safety.
- Students feel safe in school because of their good relationships with teachers.
- Good induction arrangements help new students settle quickly.
- There are good systems for monitoring students' progress, attendance and behaviour but not all tutors make effective use of the information provided.
- Students receive very good advice to help them make decisions about subject choices and career paths.

Commentary

22. The school has good procedures for ensuring the safety and well-being of students. The statutory requirements for health and safety are met in full. Child protection procedures meet requirements and are well known to staff and followed appropriately. There are effective arrangements to ensure the safety of students when they use the Internet.
23. Students feel secure that their form tutors know them well. The good relationships that exist within the school help to raise students' self esteem and confidence, and this makes a strong contribution to their personal development. Students receive good pastoral guidance from tutors and this provision is effectively supported by access to a school counsellor. The counsellor also trains Year 10 students who act as peer educators and run an after school club.
24. The school has a good system of target setting and monitoring students' progress. The newly introduced school enrolment day provides a good opportunity for students and parents to be involved in the setting of academic and personal targets with tutors. The progress of students towards these targets is well monitored by the use of termly report cards. However, some students get better support than others because tutors' use of the information on these cards is too variable.
25. There is good liaison with primary schools and parents commend the induction arrangements for Year 7 students joining the school. Students benefit from clear and helpful guidance in Year 9 when they are choosing courses for Years 10 and 11. From Year 7, careers education is included in their personal, and social education programme. The quality of careers information and guidance is very good. The work experience programme is very well organised and students have easy access to expert help and guidance including a well-resourced careers library.
26. Care, welfare and guidance for students with special educational needs are very good. There are good links with feeder primary schools. The broad range of support is very well co-ordinated as students move through the school. Individual education plans are used effectively to monitor and inform progress. The newly introduced student support services are working well.
27. Most students feel the school is interested in their views. The school is currently developing its procedures for harnessing students' views. Recent improvements to the school council have made it a more effective forum for this purpose. The school council is now a well-organised and democratic group that represents all tutor groups. Students feel the school council is taken seriously and that they now have a clear involvement in the development of the school.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has **good** links with parents, the community and other schools and **very good** links with colleges.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very productive links with local colleges secure increased curriculum choice and flexibility.
- Improved links with primary schools benefit staff and students.
- The school works particularly well with the parents of students who are experiencing difficulty in school.
- Reporting systems are very good but reports lack detailed information on specific subjects in Years 7 to 9.
- Inconsistency in the use of homework, and in the promotion of planners restricts parents' ability to support their child's learning at home.

Commentary

28. The school is committed to working in partnership with several colleges. This enhances the range of courses offered and secures students' commitment to the school and the colleges. Very regular and carefully managed liaison between co-ordinating staff promotes students' well-being. Students rate the courses highly and consequently approach their future education or career with increased confidence.
29. Parents praise the school's arrangements for transfer from primary school. These are good, and enable new students to settle quickly. The school has very productive links with its neighbour primary school, which benefits both sets of adults and children. Recently, the headteachers of both schools have spent time in each other's school. Following this, the primary school introduced 'values education' based on the work at Icknield Community College, and display improved in the college as a result of lessons learnt from the primary school. The school is strengthening the partnerships with other local schools, securing increased involvement for staff and students. Student-related transfer of information with partner schools and colleges is productive and systematic.
30. Despite the large growth in student numbers, staff know the students and their families very well and involve parents quickly when any intervention is necessary. Staff communicate particularly well with the parents of students with any special educational or additional needs. The school negotiates any modifications to the curriculum for individual students very carefully with parents and the student. Students remain committed to their education as a result of this genuine partnership. Very active parent governors ensure that parents' views are included in school development planning. Parents report that any concerns are handled very effectively using the correct procedures.
31. The school provides good information for parents. Teachers produce grade cards six times each year in addition to a detailed annual report. Parents can therefore check their child's progress constantly. Most teachers particularly those in English, mathematics and science give good detail about the skills students acquire related to the curriculum covered. Reports do not contain all the required information in art and design and music in Years 7 and 8 and ICT in Years 10 and 11. Inconsistency in the precision of target setting is a feature of what are otherwise high quality reports.
32. A few parents express concerns about the school's use and promotion of homework. Inspectors agree with these concerns because there is too much variation in the quality, quantity and timing of homework. Some staff do not promote the students' use of planners sufficiently well and this limits the help that parents can provide.

33. The school demonstrates a genuine commitment to raising its profile in the community. It is now working closely with a number of local organisations such as the parish council. Staff include aspects of the locality in the curriculum so that students take an increasing interest in their environment through, for example, surveying traffic in Watlington. The school makes good use of local people to enrich the activities it provides. A local musician runs an exceedingly popular drum club and organises monthly gigs so that Icknield students play alongside students from other local schools. The school also runs an extremely successful Senior Citizens' Christmas Party.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are **good**. The leadership of the headteacher is **very good**. The leadership of other senior staff is **good**. Management is **satisfactory**. Despite the fact that governors have not ensured that the school meets all its statutory requirements, governance is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher's inspirational leadership is clearly focussed on raising the achievement of all students.
- The governors use their knowledge of the school very effectively to shape its vision and direction.
- All students and staff are equally valued and are committed to the school.
- The way senior leaders support and challenge middle leaders is not yet fully developed.
- Systems for monitoring the work of the school lack rigour and result in inconsistencies.

Commentary

34. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. He has a clear vision of where the school is going and knows how he intends to get there. He has identified the priorities for improvement taking the history and context of the school into account in conjunction with governors and staff. These priorities now form the basis of the school improvement plan. This sense of purpose and high aspirations are reflected in the school aims and prospectus. The acquisition of Artsmark, Sportsmark and Investors in People status and the submission for specialist school status indicate his ambitions for the school. His high profile around the school provides a good role model for staff. He inspires, motivates and influences staff, students and parents. Both parents and students feel the school is well led. His decision to focus training on improving teaching and learning has been welcomed by staff who have responded positively. He has encouraged curriculum change that will improve students' achievement such as improving the transition from primary school, raising standards and making the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 more flexible and relevant.
35. The governing body is very supportive of the school but is also prepared to challenge the senior management team. Governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school very well through their work on committees and taking part in the process of school self-evaluation. They play a full part in strategic and improvement planning by contributing to the school five-year plan. They receive regular reports on the extent to which the plan has been implemented as part of their monitoring of the school. The governors know they have not ensured that the school meets statutory requirements in some respects. The design and technology curriculum in Years 7 to 9 does not meet the requirements of the National Curriculum but plans are in place to do so by September 2005. Not all students experience a programme of ICT in Years 10 to 11. Plans are in place to monitor the curriculum to ensure that this situation is remedied next year. There is a policy to provide a daily act of collective worship but practice is inconsistent.
36. There is a strong commitment to treating all members of the school community equally, which is recognised by parents. There is an expectation, reflected in the prospectus, that all students

can succeed. The headteacher and other senior staff show respect for staff and students. There is a focus on improving teaching to respond to all students' learning needs. Special educational needs students achieve well due to the very effective leadership and management of that department which is focussed on raising students' achievement. The school has taken students excluded from other schools and given them an individual programme that enables them to succeed.

37. The five assistant headteachers all carry a heavy work-load due to the budget deficit. All teach for about 60 per cent of the week. Three are also heads of department and one is the special educational needs co-ordinator. This means they have relatively little time to carry out their duties. They know staff and students very well but until recently they had not been expected to hold staff responsible to them to account or to develop the leadership and managerial skills of middle leaders through their departmental links. The system of accountability for heads of year and the careers co-ordinator is not sufficiently rigorous to establish secure practice in tutor time in a morning or in personal, social and health education lessons.
38. Monitoring and evaluation of aspects of the school's work are not sufficiently thorough with the result that some policies are inconsistently applied. There is no school policy on monitoring and evaluation. Assistant headteachers find time is short to monitor and evaluate performance management, initial teacher training, the gifted and talented programme or the school timetable. The formal monitoring of teaching in some departments such as science and humanities is limited to the observations required for performance management. The way some staff manage incidents of misbehaviour is variable. Schemes of assessment and the marking of students' books are inconsistent. Likewise, the unsystematic use of homework and student planners is restricting parents' ability to support independent learning.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2004 to March 2005

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	2 220 312	Balance from previous year	-90 000
Total expenditure	2 178 436	Balance carried forward to the next	-48 124
Expenditure per student	3 565		

39. Financial planning and management are good. The school has managed to improve whilst running a deficit budget. The governors' finance committee meet regularly. Its members are well informed and monitor expenditure carefully. The deficit budget is well managed and is on target to be eliminated by 2006. There are weaknesses, for example, the annual school development plan does not identify the resources required to carry it out or specify success criteria. The school compares its results with those of similar schools, it consults widely with students and parents to understand their needs, and it seeks competitive costs when considering staff development opportunities. The principle of challenge is not so well established, bearing in mind the deficiencies in accountability and monitoring and evaluation. The school provides good value for money.

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

Work-related learning

Overall, the quality of provision for work-related learning is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are good links with the Education Business Partnership who provide personnel to support a range of activities.
- The school has a good work experience programme.
- Links with local colleges provide an innovative programme of vocational courses.
- The school has not carried out an audit of subjects to establish subject contributions to work-related learning

Commentary

40. Provision for work-related learning is good. The school has close links with the local Education Business Partnership, which supports the co-ordinator by providing personnel to interview students as part of their preparation for work. The school has a well-organised work experience programme where students are encouraged to find their placements, which are risk-assessed by Oxfordshire Work Experience Team. Students gain a good insight into the world of work. It is recognised that the work-related learning programme is still developing mainly through a series of separate activities including the introduction this year of an enterprise day for all students in Years 7 to 10.
41. The school has a work related learning co-ordinator who has been instrumental in developing a range of vocational courses involving two local colleges. The arrangement enables students to take vocational options that are not available within the school. The options include motor vehicle studies, health and social care, business, engineering and ICT. Those attending Henley College follow vocational GCSE courses and those attending Bicester College follow NVQ courses. Evaluation carried out by the school illustrates that the college programmes have a positive impact on the students involved. Most students involved show increased levels of interest in their learning and feel more prepared for the next stage of their education. The school has yet to carry out an audit across subjects in order to establish where else enterprise education is taking place. However, in business studies and aspects of ICT students gain an insight into the world of business. They develop an understanding of enterprise through business simulations. In other areas students are expected to carry out self-assessment and peer assessments. These activities have a positive impact on the development of enterprise skills. Students understand negotiation and the need to be sensitive to the views of others.
42. The range of programmes and activities currently in place together with a coherent and comprehensive careers guidance curriculum show a strong commitment to the further development of work-related learning. Subject contributions are neither monitored nor co-ordinated in order to ensure equitable provision. Staff in departments have not yet had the opportunity to identify how they can contribute to work-related learning.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There was a very marked improvement in Year 9 results in 2004 and achievement is now good. Boys' results in GCSE English language are low compared with girls.
- Very good questioning underpins the consistently good teaching and involves all students in lessons.
- Their good knowledge of the students allows teachers to allocate time and support productively.
- Very good leadership of the department has ensured high morale and a common approach.
- Guidance in marking on how to improve is inconsistent and does not inform students sufficiently.

Commentary

43. Results in Year 9 tests in 2004 showed a great improvement on the preceding two years and were well above average and the average for similar schools. Standards of work seen during the inspection were above average. This represents good achievement for students whose standards when they entered the school were average. The difference in standards between boys and girls in Year 9 has been reduced to markedly less than the national pattern. GCSE English language results for girls in 2004 were above the respective average but for boys were below average. These results should be viewed in the context of a much higher entry rate than occurs nationally. English literature results were above average. Work seen during the inspection is in line with national expectations of an average standard for English language and above expectations for English literature. This demonstrates good achievement for students who started the GCSE course with below average attainment. Achievement of students of all abilities is good.
44. The good achievement manifests itself in a number of ways. In speaking and listening, by Year 9, students discuss confidently in groups and listen attentively to others. By Year 11 they use discussions to try out ideas and by sharing ideas they deepen their understanding of issues. In reading, most Year 9 students identify essential characteristics of a whole range of different types of texts. In Year 11, all students identify important aspects relating to theme and character and the highest attaining students show an unusually well developed facility for taking into account wider background and cultural issues when discussing fiction. Year 7 students generally use a good and imaginative range of vocabulary although weaker students are less adept at spelling and punctuation. The highest attaining Year 11 students write effectively to create mood and atmosphere using approaches borrowed from their reading.
45. Teaching and learning are good. No lessons are less than good and a number are very good or excellent. A real strength of teaching in English is the way in which teachers use a variety of questioning techniques to involve the whole range of students. In addition, they frequently use supplementary and extra questions to build on learning and extend understanding. Such approaches are used with students of all abilities. Very good relationships allow students to feel confident about attempting difficult work. The close knowledge that teachers have of their students has a major impact in the classroom. They use such knowledge when allocating their time and support during lessons and accordingly work effectively with individuals. Expectations of students are high and this is reflected in the range of activities and pace of lessons. Although lessons are well structured, the summary or plenary sessions are on occasions too rushed. Marking of work is usually detailed with careful identification of

strengths and weaknesses. Written guidance on how to improve, however, is too inconsistent with the attendant variation in how well students are informed.

46. Students respond to their English lessons enthusiastically and are keen to participate in activities and share their ideas. The good learning is closely related to their very good attitudes to the subject. The English curriculum covers more than National Curriculum and examination requirements. Social and moral issues are well addressed. Students in GCSE English literature are given very good cultural and historical background to the fiction, poetry and drama they read. Although not very extensive, ICT is used to good effect. A very low attaining Year 11 group, using laptop computers, were very well motivated when drafting their writing. Support from teaching assistants for students with special educational needs is well integrated in lessons.
47. Very good leadership by the head of department has created and maintained a genuinely enthusiastic team of teachers who exhibit a common sense of purpose and work hard to continue to raise standards. Good management of the department has ensured there has been a focussed approach to improvement. Good use has been made of the local authority advisory service. The creation of a single gender teaching group has helped to address boys' previous underachievement in Year 9. A recent department review was used to develop questioning skills. Monitoring of marking has not been close enough to ensure parity of practice. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

48. Standards of literacy are good and support learning in all subjects. Students are slightly more skilled in reading than in writing. Provision for the development of literacy is good. The teaching of literacy is good in all subjects apart from mathematics and design and technology, where it is satisfactory, and in art and design, where it is very good. In most subjects good use is made of word banks of key vocabulary. Particularly good structured support for writing is given in science and geography. In several areas there is a real focus on close reading of texts. A Year 9 lower ability French class analysed news headlines to identify the implied meaning beyond the literal. The teaching of literacy and language skills to students with special educational needs is very good and a support teacher in English provides very focussed additional help for small groups of students. Attention to literacy issues in marking is inconsistent within and across subjects.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE examination results are above average.
- An above average number of students study a language in Years 10 and 11.
- Students are clear on how to progress in their learning.
- Girls achieve significantly better than boys, particularly in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

49. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2004 were slightly below average. However, achievement overall is good since over one third of students take two languages in the curriculum time allocated for one. The gap between boys and girls' results was in line with that seen nationally. Standards by the end of Year 9 for the current cohort are above average. Lower attaining students make commendable efforts in class and perform in line with the national average. In GCSE in 2004 the proportion of students gaining grades A* - C in French was above average. These results maintain an improvement in standards. However, the number of students gaining A* - B was below average. Girls' results overall were significantly

higher than boys. In the lessons sampled there were clear signs of the most able boys narrowing the attainment gap.

50. Teaching and learning are good. All teachers are expert in the languages that they teach and they provide a good model for students to imitate. Lessons are planned well and taught briskly with a range of tasks. Students are supported well in their learning. In the classes where they are present, support teachers work effectively alongside class teachers, ensuring that all students receive a significant amount of individual attention. At GCSE level, teachers demonstrate a good knowledge of the requirements of the examination and students are well supported in their preparation. However, the more able students are not always sufficiently extended and opportunities to set more challenging tasks are sometimes missed. As students move through school they develop a clear understanding of what they need to do in order to progress. Although marking is effective in helping students to progress it is not always up to date.
51. Leadership and management are good. The previous head of department provided a focussed leadership, which contributed to the raising of standards and a large number of students studying a language in Years 10 and 11. A new head of department has recently been appointed who is developing a view of how to move the department forward while maintaining the progress initiated by his predecessor. Areas that are currently underdeveloped are the monitoring and evaluation of performance and the development of practice to raise the achievement of boys and the most able students. Although the majority of students study a language in Years 10 and 11, the status of the second language is unclear at present with no students in the current Year 10 studying more than one language. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good, because attainment at GCSE is now above average and teaching and learning have improved, particularly in relation to the less able students.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are improving, especially in the development of students' mathematical skills and techniques.
- Not enough work is done to improve students' understanding of the mathematical ideas they are studying.
- The department is successfully improving the achievement of boys, particularly in Years 7 to 9.
- The head of department has a very clear view of what needs to be done to secure further improvement.
- The marking of students' work is inconsistent.
- Teachers do not use homework well as a means of improving students' study skills.

Commentary

52. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2004 were above average and maintained a pattern of improvement in recent years. Given that students gained average results in tests immediately before joining the school, this represents good progress. Students did not do as well in mathematics tests as they did in English and science, but results were above average when compared with similar schools. Students currently in Year 9 are working at average standards overall, representing satisfactory achievement. They do best in learning basic skills and techniques and less well in the development of mathematical understanding or the application of general mathematical strategies.
53. In 2004, GCSE results were below average overall, as they had been in the previous two years. Girls did much better than boys. Students did less well in mathematics than they did in their other subjects. However, all students took the examination and almost all doing so gained at least a G grade. Those students approaching the end of Year 11 are working at

average standards, representing satisfactory achievement since they were tested two years previously. As with younger students, they apply basic skills and techniques relatively well but their mathematical understanding and application of general mathematical strategies are less strong. In all years, good work has been undertaken to attend to previous under-achievement of boys and hence the gap in standards between boys and girls is narrowing. Students with special educational needs make similar progress to their peers. They make good progress when they receive one-to-one support from teaching assistants.

54. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, but are too variable in quality to secure good achievement. Teachers place a strong focus on the development of basic skills and techniques. The main benefit of this approach is improved results in national tests at the end of Year 9 and improved standards of work in these aspects of the subject in all years. This approach has, particularly, helped improve the attainment of boys. However, not enough attention is paid to the development of mathematical understanding, or to helping students make links between different aspects of the subject. In the best lessons, teachers encourage students to put forward and test their ideas, thus improving their mathematical thinking, but this is not consistently a feature in mathematics. Students do not listen to one another well and are not good at explaining and describing their work. This is recognised as a weakness in the department and steps are being taken to improve these skills. The frequency with which homework is set, and the relevance of tasks, vary considerably in the department. As a result, homework does not play an effective part in helping students develop good independent study skills. Students' attitudes to mathematics are satisfactory. When teachers help students to take part in lively discussions and to try out their ideas, students enjoy lessons and strive to do well. When teachers present activities that are not well matched to students' needs then students show little interest in the subject. Where, in addition, teachers do not have good class management skills, behaviour becomes unacceptable and further limits learning. Assessment of work at the end of topics is satisfactory, giving both teachers and students a clear overview of how well students are doing. However, the assessment of students' work from lesson to lesson is not well developed. The quality of marking varies considerably from teacher to teacher and generally lacks the detailed guidance necessary to guide students on how to improve. Marking does not always identify errors made and hence students do not recognise and correct these mistakes.
55. Leadership of the department is good and management is satisfactory. The head of department has a clear vision of what needs to be done to bring about further improvement in the work of the department. Teamwork is improving and all members of the department are committed to supporting one another. The head of department is a very good role model as a classroom teacher. The department is managed well on a day-to-day basis. As yet, however, not enough use is made of the monitoring of performance to guide plans for further improvement. Similarly, the department does not yet have well-developed procedures for monitoring the work of teachers, either internally or through whole-school review processes. This has meant that progress in identifying professional development needs of members of the department has been slow. Nevertheless, improvement since the previous inspection has been good, especially in improving test results in Year 9.

Mathematics across the curriculum

56. Standards in mathematics across the curriculum are average. Students are confident in using the skills and techniques developed in mathematics to support their learning in other subjects. The school has yet to develop a whole-school approach to the development of students' mathematics skills in other subjects and thus opportunities are lost to consolidate mathematics learning across the curriculum.

SCIENCE

The provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well in science.
- There is a stable team of subject specialists able to teach all sciences.
- Students' good attitudes and behaviour allow teaching time to be well used.
- Teachers' efforts to improve literacy have helped raise standards in Years 7 to 9.
- The needs of students with special educational are well known to all staff.
- There is insufficient formal monitoring of teaching and students' work to inform improvement.

Commentary

57. The results of the 2004 national tests at the end of Year 9 were above average, a significant improvement on the 2003 results. Boys and girls attained equally well. Compared with schools with students of similar prior attainment, the results were well above average. In the 2004 GCSE examinations the proportion of students gaining grades A*-C was above average, similar to 2003, but much better than 2002. Girls attained significantly better than boys. In the previous year boys attained better than girls.
58. Standards are above expectations at the end of Years 9 and 11. Students enter the school in Year 7 with attainment that is average in science. They achieve well during Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11. This good achievement is due to many factors such as teachers' good subject knowledge, methods that require students' active involvement in learning and students' willingness to work. Particular attention to literacy in Years 7 to 9, such as the use of key words in context, writing frames and spelling, has also helped to raise achievement. Students with special educational needs achieve well due to the good support they receive from teachers and teaching assistants who use their individual education plans effectively to meet their targets. Higher attaining students achieve well. The proportion gaining the highest grades at GCSE was above the national figure in 2004.
59. Teaching and learning are good in all years. Teachers are well qualified in the full range of science subjects, which means that they teach with confidence and explain scientific concepts with clarity. Lessons are well planned to ensure students are actively involved in their learning. Pace and challenge in lessons are generally good although on occasion they are insufficient. A wide range of teaching and learning styles are used, including practical sessions, which students particularly enjoy. Revision lessons are enlivened by the use of a different approach to consolidate knowledge and understanding previously taught. Students' positive attitudes to learning means that they are willing to carry out set tasks with interest and help set up and clear away apparatus. Very good relationships between students and teachers means that the atmosphere is pleasant and teachers can concentrate on learning. ICT is insufficiently used to teach and learn science due to the lack of resources.
60. Leadership and management are good. All teachers are keen to improve standards. The head of department is fully supported by teachers, technicians and teaching assistants who co-operate well with each other. Technicians provide an efficient service in spite of the lack of storage space and the dispersed preparation rooms. The department has been successful in raising standards by implementing the National Strategy for science in Years 7 to 9, identifying areas of weakness at GCSE and using consultants and advisers. Students have been surveyed to identify strengths and weaknesses. The use of assessment to improve learning is well underway. The monitoring of lessons and students' work is largely informal and does not always identify points for improvement quickly enough such as inconsistencies in the quality of marking and the lack of science specific targets to help students improve their work. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Standards have improved and the quality of teaching is better. There has been some improvement in the provision for ICT and the accommodation. The head of department does not have time to monitor and evaluate teaching.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement in Years 7, 8 and 9 is good.
- During their time in the school, students develop into competent and discerning users of computers.
- Teachers have a good command of their subject.
- Statutory requirements are not fully met in Years 10 and 11.
- A proportion of students in Years 9 and 11 do not receive written reports on their progress.
- Use of a limited range of teaching methods does not always engage and motivate students.

Commentary

61. Students enter the school with competence in some but not all aspects of ICT. During the first three years students make good gains in their skills and knowledge reaching the expected level of attainment by the end of Year 9. Girls perform better than boys, although the gap is reducing. GCSE results in ICT were well below average in 2004. However, the quality of work seen during the inspection matches national expectations. The continuing upward trend is reflected in the work seen. Students with special educational needs receive good support from teachers and teacher assistants. This has a positive impact on their learning and enables them to achieve at a similar rate to other groups of students. The very small number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve equally well.
62. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teachers have good subject knowledge that ensures students learn to use the technology effectively. Teachers understand the demands of the course followed in Years 10 and 11 and that is reflected in the improved standards. Students' learning is enhanced by encouraging them to assess their work. Teachers provide helpful guides to National Curriculum levels for those in the lower years. Good relationships between teachers and students contribute greatly to the learning and effective management of students. In the better lessons students respond well to the wider variety of teaching methods and become fully involved. Teaching assistants with specialist subject knowledge make a positive contribution to lessons. In the least effective lessons learning objectives are not sufficiently thought through and planning takes little account of the teaching methods to use. Because teachers in some lessons do not always plan to meet the needs of all students, learning is not as good as it could be. Occasionally the teacher's contribution dominates the lesson, which affects the quality of learning as students' attention drifts. Students set their own learning targets but currently the targets tend to be vague. This is a new initiative and a step in the right direction.
63. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There is a clear commitment to the success of the students and a desire to improve the subject. Development planning is in place showing some vision for the subject. Schemes of work contain insufficient detail about how topics will be taught. There is frequent contact between the small number of staff and some monitoring of teaching is carried out. Self-evaluation takes place and data is analysed, however, the use of data to inform future planning is not well developed. Whilst accommodation is good the lack of storage space has an adverse effect on the general organisation of the subject.
64. As ICT is taught within design and technology in Years 7, 8 and 9 where different aspects are taught in a rotational arrangement, there is a disparity in the time allocated for different groups. Over the year the time for some students is below that recommended by the National Strategy. The arrangement also means that there is a lack of continuity of learning across the year. In Years 10 and 11 most students take some form of accreditation in ICT. However, a proportion of the year do not take an ICT course and their ICT development is not monitored or assessed. This means that the school does not fully meet the statutory requirements for ICT.

65. Many of the good aspects identified in the previous inspection report remain, for example, staff expertise and relationships with students. Teaching has improved, particularly in Years 7, 8 and 9. In Years 10 and 11 statutory requirements are still not fully met. However, the increased investment in equipment has produced good improvement since the previous inspection

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

66. Use of ICT across the curriculum is satisfactory. Most staff in the school have a satisfactory working knowledge of computer technology to support learning. However, opportunities to book the facilities are not always taken and so opportunities for students to use their ICT skills are missed. Statutory requirements are met in most subjects but not in history, or in design and technology where students have no opportunity to experience computer-aided designing or computer-aided manufacturing. Students identified with special educational needs use specialist software to support their learning. There has been a marked improvement in the provision in religious education. The school has made a considerable investment in hardware in order to improve equipment levels. The ratio of computers to students is not as favourable as the national average. The school has, however, invested in a quantity of laptops that are accessible to a number of curriculum areas. Modern foreign languages and English both take full advantage of this facility.

HUMANITIES

History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students in Years 7 to 9 achieve well as a result of good teaching.
- Assessment procedures are used well in Years 7 to 9 to guide students towards improvement, but not in Years 10 and 11.
- The positive attitudes of the students promote good learning.
- Teachers' expectations are inconsistent.
- Computers are rarely used as a valuable resource.

Commentary

67. Standards in Year 9 are above average. This represents good achievement by all students, given that they enter the school with skills in history that are average. Teachers' assessments in 2004 judged standards to be well above average. These assessments were a little over generous. Students understand key events and have well developed skills of enquiry, using their good literacy skills. More able students in Year 9 write well at length and some are beginning to explain the different interpretation of events and to analyse sources for reliability and usefulness. However, most students have not acquired these more advanced skills.
68. GCSE examination results in 2004 were significantly below average and the lowest in recent years. Girls performed better than boys, but much lower than girls nationally. However, evidence from the inspection is that standards by Year 11 are just below average and students achieve satisfactorily. This is the result of some effective changes to teaching and a reflection of the current Year 11's higher ability. Students use their enquiry skills, acquired in earlier years, to satisfactorily research and record evidence for coursework. More able students write well-structured essays with balanced arguments. Students with special educational needs achieve as well throughout the school as other students.
69. Overall, teaching and learning are good. They are better in Years 7 to 9, where thorough assessment procedures, including helpful marking, are used well to inform students of their progress and how to improve. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan a range of

activities well, effectively using a variety of resources that stimulate students' learning. However, the use of computers has yet to be developed as a resource, an issue in the previous report. The emphasis in the teaching on developing independent enquiry in the students promotes good skills of research, extended writing and of working by themselves. However, inconsistency in teachers' expectations means students' skills of critical analysis and interpretation are not always fully developed. Good learning is encouraged by the students' attitudes to work, which are always positive, except for the rare occasions when their behaviour is mismanaged. Although teaching is good in lessons in Years 10 and 11 as a result of effective planning and good relationships with the students, their progress is not tracked rigorously and early enough. Consequently, they are unsure of their current progress and how to improve and so do not achieve as well as students in Years 7 to 9.

70. Leadership is good. The head of department has a clear vision and is a good role model in setting high standards of teaching and expectations of students. The stronger emphasis on developing enquiry skills and the good assessment procedures has raised standards in Years 7 to 9 since the previous inspection. Management is satisfactory. Good practice has been shared through close monitoring of teaching. However, monitoring of the performance of GCSE students, central analysis of assessment result in Years 7 to 9 and the use of ICT, are undeveloped. Literacy, citizenship and the progression to higher skills in history, are inadequately emphasised in departmental documentation. The subject has made satisfactory progress since the previous inspection.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good leadership of the department is improving teaching and learning.
- The use of geographical language is under developed.
- Good quality resources help students learn well.
- Marking is inconsistent.
- The curriculum is good and is enhanced well by fieldwork.

Commentary

71. Teachers' assessments in 2004 at the end of Year 9 were average and show an improving trend over the last three years. Standards in the current Year 9 are average. Students have a good knowledge and understanding across all aspects of physical and human geography. They describe features well and have a developing knowledge of place. The use of geographical language and their ability to explain formation and causes is weaker. In 2004, GCSE results were above average and show an improving trend over recent years. Standards in the current Year 11 are above expectations. Students have a good knowledge and understanding of topics such as tourism, population and farming. Written work is well supported by good diagrams and maps. However, in physical geography students' use of geographical language is weak.
72. Students arrive at school with standards that are average. The achievement of students in Years 7 to 9 and those who opt for the subject in Years 10 and 11 is good. This is because of the good attitudes they show to learning and good teaching. The achievement of students with special educational needs is good. Boys and girls of all abilities now achieve equally well. Overall, the performance of girls had been better than boys, but recent changes to the syllabus and more support with coursework are improving the performance of boys.
73. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use a range of effective approaches in the classroom. Resources are used very effectively to make lessons interesting and help students consolidate what they have learnt. Very good use is made of the data projector to engage students and help them develop a good understanding of topics.

Good features in lessons are starter activities, good quality explanations and the use of challenging questions. Assessment procedures are good and students know how well they are doing against national levels. However, the quality of marking is inconsistent and some students have little guidance on what they need to do to improve. Relationships in the classroom are good and students display good attitudes to their work.

74. The leadership and management of geography are good. Detailed planning and high-quality documentation provide good direction for the subject and improving teaching and learning. In the classroom, the head of department is a good role model for students and staff. Procedures to review the work of the department are developing but there are no formal processes for monitoring and evaluating the work of the department. The curriculum is enhanced by fieldwork that helps students develop a better knowledge and understanding of topics studied. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. The quality of teaching has improved and standards are rising. There is now more use of ICT to support students' writing and research.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Dedicated and committed subject specialist staff support students well.
- There are very good resources to support students in Years 10 and 11.
- In the lower sets in Years 8 and 9 there is some unsatisfactory learning.
- The programme of educational visits and visiting speakers is limited.

Commentary

75. In 2004, teachers' assessments for students at the end of Year 9 showed standards above expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. Standards of work seen in Year 9 are average. Students have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the major world religions studied. They express well their own views and beliefs on topics such as death and animal rights. In 2004 about one-third of the students were entered for a full course GCSE. Results were average and achieved within the time allocated to the short course. All other students were entered for the short course GCSE. Results were below average. In both the full and short course GCSE's girls' results were better than boys. Standards of work seen in Year 11 are above average. Students show a good knowledge and understanding of Christian and Islamic faiths. Students enter the school with standards that are average. Achievement across Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory and in Years 10 and 11 it is good. The achievement of students with special educational needs is good. Boys and girls of all capabilities are now achieving equally as well. Changes to topics studied in Years 7 to 9 and better support with coursework and revision skills in Years 10 and 11 have improved the standards achieved by boys.
76. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Most teaching is delivered by dedicated and committed subject specialist staff who use their knowledge well to explain topics and successfully develop students' understanding. Good features of teaching are the use of starter activities, the effective use of classroom assistants and high quality resources. Students are engaged and show a high level of interest in the work. In Years 10 and 11 teaching is consistently good and students' acquisition of knowledge and skills is very well supported by the use of detailed revision booklets and good guidance with coursework. Relationships are good and most students are well behaved and display good attitudes to learning. However, in the lower sets in Years 8 and 9 teachers do not use strategies that meet the needs of the students. Activities are too easy and fail to capture their interest, and this results in unsatisfactory attitudes and poor behaviour. In Years 7 to 11 students' learning in religious education makes a good contribution to their social, moral, cultural and spiritual development. Assessment is good and students know how well they are performing against local and national standards. Marking is good and students have good guidance on how to improve.

77. Leadership of religious education is good. The head of subject has provided good direction for the subject through detailed written guidance for Years 7 to 11. Although the curriculum is well planned students have insufficient opportunities to learn through educational visits or from visiting speakers. Management is satisfactory. Procedures for reviewing the work of the department are developing but there are no formal processes for monitoring and evaluating students' work. Whilst there is a good supply of textbooks and teacher produced resources access to computers is limited. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. There is now a dedicated room for religious education and good assessment processes have been put into place.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum for Years 7 to 9 is restricted and does not offer all students the range of experiences in the National Curriculum.
- Students' ability to generate ideas and to design is underdeveloped.
- Students are poorly equipped for the examinations in resistant materials as they have little experience of metals and processes.
- Students' good attitudes and behaviour contribute to effective teaching.

Commentary

78. GCSE results were significantly below average in 2004. Current standards seen in Years 7 to 9 are below average and represent unsatisfactory achievement. Students arrive in Year 7 with below average standards in this subject and are presented with a severely restricted curriculum that does not cover all of the compulsory aspects of the programmes of study for the National Curriculum. With these experiences it is not possible for teachers' assessments to be above average as they were in 2004. Drawing, designing and the development of ideas are weak and students have difficulties in presenting their ideas. Standards seen in Years 10 and 11 indicate below average standards and represent unsatisfactory achievement. Teachers have not created a firm foundation of knowledge, skills and understanding of a variety of processes and materials lower down the school. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 are over generous and inaccurate. Work seen is below average rather than above.
79. The teaching and learning observed are satisfactory in all years, with the best teaching seen in food technology. Here, there was good pace, challenge and success for students. Teachers give individual feedback to students with a great deal of praise. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is very restricted. It does not give students the experience of using metals as a constructional material. No experience is offered in textiles, systems and control, and computer aided designing linked to computer aided manufacture. Designing and development of students' ideas are not emphasised enough, with many students having difficulty in expressing and presenting ideas. This element of the curriculum is not taught at present in a systematic way. Little emphasis is made on modern materials and products. The restricted knowledge base of students presently studying for GCSE resistant materials technology means that many would find answering questions in the examination difficult as they have not seen at first-hand the processes and techniques used to join, work and finish in metals and other materials. The food technology area does, however, show good progression, with students building up the skills and knowledge over the five years. Students in food technology show a positive attitude to learning, enjoy lessons and behave well. Students with special educational needs are identified and helped to make progress in all aspects of the subject.

80. Leadership of the subject is unsatisfactory. The task is made more difficult as the subject leader is not a design and technology specialist and does not teach any groups within design and technology. He has only been in post for a short time. The severely restricted curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is unsatisfactory. The management of the subject is satisfactory with new systems in place for effective evaluation of teaching and assessment. The department is generally well organised. Improvement since the previous inspection has been unsatisfactory. Standards and achievement have fallen. The curriculum and experiences for Years 7 to 9 have considerably reduced since the previous inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

The provision for art and design is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management by the head of department are successfully raising standards.
- High expectations challenge students to do their best.
- The support for students with special educational needs is very good.
- Very good assessment and marking ensures students know how well they are doing and how to improve.
- Teaching for some younger students can lack pace.

Commentary

81. The above average standards in 2004 for students in Year 9 show very good achievement, given their below average standards when they entered the school. GCSE results in 2004 were well above average and students achieved well. Students with special educational needs do as well as others and those deemed talented in art achieve very well.
82. Teaching and learning are very good. All lessons are very well planned to build students' knowledge, understanding and skills. There are very clear targets for the lesson so that learning can be assessed. Occasionally lessons for some younger students do not follow the planning, so that learning opportunities are lost. Materials and the work of other students are used very well to broaden thinking and show what can be achieved. Teachers have good class discipline even when the pace is too slow for some students. Individual advice and the excellent support from teaching assistants, sensitively given, help students gain confidence to develop their work. Teachers use the outcomes of assessment and information from tracking students' achievements to guide their planning. Lessons, especially for older students, are challenging and interesting. Students enjoy their art and speak with pride about their work. Teaching uses questioning very well to check understanding and demonstration for new skills. Students learn very well from excellent photographic examples, especially to reinforce teaching and learning about tone and monochrome. Students have very good opportunities to work together, to develop their independent learning skills and to take responsibility for their own learning. From teachers' helpful assessments of students' work, students have a very good understanding of what they need to do to improve.
83. Leadership is very good with a clear vision for the subject, and an open, frank and accurate evaluation of how well the subject is doing. Standards have risen and continue to do so. Management is good with a strong emphasis on raising standards and the profile of art in the school for boys and girls. However, some aspects of less effective teaching are still to be fully addressed. Improvements to the curriculum, especially for older students, are having a big impact on standards and achievement especially for boys. Monitoring of teaching and learning is thorough. A successful department has raised standards steadily, for all students, over the last three years. Improvement since the previous inspection has been excellent.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is very good because of very good teaching.
- Positive and knowledgeable leadership has secured very good improvement since the time of the previous inspection.
- Reports to parents do not contain enough information about students' standards and achievements.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to students' cultural development.

Commentary

84. Attainment at the end of Year 9 is above average. This represents good achievement because standards in Year 7 are average. Students in Year 9 perform confidently and rhythmically, and have a secure understanding of a range of styles drawn from different cultures. Their composing skills are less well developed. Results in the 2004 GCSE examination were above average. Attainment in Year 11 is well above average and this represents very good achievement because students of a wide range of abilities enter the GCSE course. Students in Year 11 are well prepared for the examination and produce competent, musical performances. Their composition work shows individuality and a secure understanding of the styles in which they are working.
85. Teaching and learning are good overall, with very good teaching in Years 10 and 11. Teachers are assertive and confident, and lessons proceed at a good pace that secures the concentration of students. There is very good support and challenge provided for students of all abilities, enabling them to learn individually and in groups. The spacious classroom is well-managed and teachers use imaginative activities which help students to learn from each other and to remember musical facts. High quality classroom instruments enable students to develop a good understanding of music from western and non-western cultures. Relationships are generally positive, although some Year 7 boys misbehave when the activities do not motivate them. Insufficient use is made of homework in Years 7 to 9 to reinforce and extend learning. ICT is very well used in Years 10 and 11 and helps students to explore musical styles in their compositions. In Years 7 to 9 the use of ICT is underdeveloped.
86. Leadership and management are good. Purposeful leadership has resulted in much higher standards than seen at the time of the previous inspection. Major issues have been addressed, and progress has been very good. The curriculum is planned carefully, and good links are made with other arts subjects. Reports are inadequate because at the end of Year 9, they do not state the National Curriculum level attained in music. They provide general comments on progress, but do not say enough about specific achievements.
87. Instrumental tuition is managed effectively and the number of students taking advantage of the provision is above average. There are a limited number of regular extra-curricular activities, but those that exist are of high quality. The school provides good opportunities for students to perform in public. A highly successful drum club that is open to all enables students to extend their understanding of music from different cultures.

Drama

88. One Year 8 and one Year 11 drama lesson were observed. In both lessons standards were above average and students achieved well. The Year 8 students demonstrated good role-playing skills using gesture, movement and intonation to portray aspects of characters from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The Year 11 students were given a very good task as they were required to apply GCSE assessment criteria to each other's essays and in addition to assessing the essays provide guidance on how to improve. Students demonstrated both a good understanding of the assessment criteria and the ability to communicate clearly with tact

and due regard for the feelings of the writers of the essays. In both lessons, there was good achievement and learning because of good teaching. Objectives were well explained and the very good atmosphere engendered confidence amongst students. Very good extra-curricular provision enhances students' understanding of theatre and performance and their personal and social development.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in Years 7 to 9 and in non-examination lessons in Years 10 and 11 are above average.
- Students achieve well because of the very good relationships they have with their teachers.
- Teaching is good and characterised by very good subject expertise.
- The good leadership and management of the department have led to very good improvements.
- Irregular allocation of lessons leads to a lack of continuity and progression in students' learning.

Commentary

89. Results in 2004 were below average because all students are given the opportunity to take the examination instead of a small number of selected students. Most boys entered the course with below average standards and their results were below average. Girls' results were above average. Boys achieved as well in physical education as they did in their other subjects and most girls achieved better. The attainment of current GCSE students is average and their achievement is good. Most students, especially boys, reach higher standards in their practical activities than in the theoretical aspects of the course.
90. Students have inconsistent experiences before joining the school but their standards when they first come to the school are mostly average in games activities and below average in movement skills. By the end of Year 9, students attain above average standards in most activities and their achievement is good. Teachers' assessments in 2004 were well above average and over generous. Boys and girls in Year 7 participate in dance lessons as well as their physical education activities and this helps to raise standards in movement activities. Students improve their level of performance in games and athletic activities because teaching focuses well on skill acquisition. The evaluative skills of students are also well developed because teachers give students many opportunities to observe and give feedback to others. In non-examination lessons in Years 10 and 11 students attain above average standards because teaching is consistently good. Teachers continue to develop students' evaluative skills and to build their techniques in games activities. The achievement of students with special educational needs is in line with those of their peers in most cases. As part of the good extra-curricular programme, which is attended by almost 40 per cent of students, a few individuals and teams achieve high standards in district and county competitions.
91. Teaching and learning are good throughout all year groups because most students have very positive attitudes and very good working relationships with their teachers. The best lessons have good pace, allowing students maximum time on activities. Teachers frequently use challenging questions to actively engage students and to maximise their learning. Teaching is not always matched to the wide range of abilities in each group and higher attaining students are not set specific tasks with clear outcomes that will extend their skills. There is a lack of continuity in some students' learning as a result of whole school timetabling. At one time in the week, three different year groups are taught at the same time. Some students are taught with different groups of students in each of their lessons and timetabling has allocated some teachers to a group for only one of their two lessons.
92. The head of department provides good leadership and management and clear direction for the subject. Teaching is monitored regularly and the head of department leads by very good

example. Very good improvements have been made since the previous inspection. The school has gained Sportsmark status. The newly refurbished courts provide much improved facilities. Dance has been successfully introduced into the curriculum, including at GCSE level. There has been good development in assessment and self evaluation and positive links have been made with the school sports co-ordinator programme.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Personal, social and health education

93. The personal, social and health education programme supports students' personal and social development. It is taught, in conjunction with the citizenship programme, by form tutors, weekly in an extended form period and fortnightly in an hour's tutorial period. The programme is very well planned across all the years and ensures that issues such as sex and health education and drugs awareness are covered well. Although a lesson could not be observed, the scrutiny of students' work indicated that their knowledge and understanding ensure that they are well informed. The subject makes a good contribution to the moral and social development of students, especially when teachers encourage students to express their views.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject is well led and the citizenship course is very well planned.
- There is considerable variation in the quality of teaching with several unsatisfactory lessons.
- There are good procedures for assessing students' achievement and progress.
- Not enough is done to monitor the teaching of the subject.
- There are not enough opportunities for students to participate in community-based activities.

Commentary

94. By the end of Years 9 and 11 standards are in line with national expectations. Given students' standards on entry to the school, this represents satisfactory achievement across the years. By Year 9, students have a sound knowledge and understanding of how to become responsible citizens. By Year 11, they demonstrate a good understanding of concepts such as law and order, the work of the European Union and the importance of the United Nations. In the one lesson seen across all years, students gained a basic understanding of the forthcoming election and an awareness of the main political parties. Skills of enquiry and communication vary according to the effectiveness of the teaching.
95. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, but there is too great a variation in practice. In some of the lessons observed, teachers' knowledge and confidence enabled students to develop the important skills of enquiry and communication. When students are effectively challenged to develop their attitudes towards citizenship through well-controlled group discussions, they learn and achieve well. They are encouraged to think about their own responses to issues. In some lessons, teaching relies too much on worksheets and little attention is given to helping students to express their own thoughts and feelings. The failure of some teachers to manage behaviour effectively or to stimulate constructive discussion leads to unsatisfactory learning, all of which occurred in Years 7 to 9. This seriously constrains the development of the important citizenship skills of listening and developing a tolerance of others' views. There are good procedures for assessing, recording and reporting students' achievement and progress in all years. This includes effective arrangements for students' own assessment of their learning and experiences.

96. Leadership is good. The enthusiastic subject leader has a clear vision and recognises the contribution that the subject makes to students' personal development. An audit has been carried out to identify the contribution to citizenship through other subjects. A well-planned programme is in place for all years that covers the necessary topics of study. Management is satisfactory. Suitable resources are efficiently provided. There is clear identification of the subject in tutorial periods and students are well aware that they are studying citizenship. However, monitoring and evaluation of the subject is not developed enough to ensure consistency in the teaching of the subject. Nor is there strong enough emphasis on citizenship in subjects as few departments have incorporated it into their schemes of work.
97. Not enough opportunities are currently provided within the wider community for students to participate fully in active citizenship. Some students are involved in year and school councils, local arts and sports events and have responsibilities in school, but numbers and opportunities are limited, especially during the Wednesday afternoon activities session. Satisfactory progress has been made in the development of citizenship and this provides a firm base for further success.

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

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

poor (6); very poor (7).