

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **STOPSLEY HIGH SCHOOL**

Stopsley, Luton

LEA area: Luton

Unique reference number: 109713

Headteacher: Mrs G Bryan

Lead inspector: Mr A Briggs

Dates of inspection: 25<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> April 2005

Inspection number: 268472

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

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

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

### **Terms that may be used in this report**

*Students in Years 7, 8 and 9 are at Key Stage 3, having transferred in most cases from their primary schools after Year 6. Students in Years 10 and 11 are at Key Stage 4 of their education. Students in Years 7 to 11 follow courses and Programmes of Study set out in the National Curriculum. A course of religious education is a requirement for students and students of all ages at school.*

*At the end of Year 9, students aged 14 take national tests in English, mathematics and science. In all subjects of the National Curriculum, teachers also make their own assessments of what the students know, understand and can do at age 14. At the end of Year 11, students can take the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) and National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) qualifications.*

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

*The Key Stage 3 National Strategy is designed to support schools to address the learning needs of 11-14 year old students. It operates across all subjects as a whole-school improvement strategy. It provides a platform for professional development across the school through its emphasis on teaching and learning. It supports personalised learning by promoting an approach in which careful attention is paid to students' individual learning styles, motivations and needs. Lessons are designed to be varied and enjoyable within a clear structure.*

*The term ASDAN stands for Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network. The purpose of the course is to promote the personal and social development of learners through the achievement of ASDAN awards, so as to enhance their self-esteem, their aspirations and their contribution to their community and develop evidence for approved qualifications.*

## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Type of school:	Secondary
School category:	Foundation
Age range of students:	11-16
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	956
School address:	St Thomas' Road Luton
Postcode:	LU2 7UX
Telephone number:	01582 870900
Fax number:	01582 870928
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr W Taylor
Date of previous inspection:	19 <sup>th</sup> April 1999

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

Stopsley High School is about the same size as other secondary schools and educates boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 16. There are 956 students on roll; these numbers represent an increase on those quoted in the previous report as a result of the school's growing popularity. There are broadly equal numbers of boys and girls on roll. The school serves the immediate area of Stopsley and the north east parts of Luton.

The majority of students are white, although there are small groups of students from many different ethnic backgrounds. The school population reflects a wide socio-economic background but is average overall. Students join the school in Year 7 with average standards in English, mathematics and science. The percentage of students identified as having special educational needs is above average and the percentage of students with statements of special educational need is average. Most students are on the register because they have moderate learning difficulties, or physical, emotional or behavioural difficulties. The vast majority of students move onto further education with most going to Luton Sixth Form College or Barnfield College.

In addition to being a specialist Sports College, Stopsley High School is part of the Excellence in Luton initiative and received the Sportsmark award in 2002. In 2003, it achieved the FA Charter Standard, 'Artsmark Gold' award, Healthy Schools award, and the Investors in People Award.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
15208	A Briggs	Lead inspector	
9053	V Phillips	Lay inspector	
22423	J Lövgreen	Team inspector	English
1503	T Browne	Team inspector	Mathematics
32785	W Allt	Team inspector	Science
10817	G Rayner	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT); geography
2501	R Allison-Smith	Team inspector	Art and design
3674	G Marriott	Team inspector	Citizenship; history
33368	V Greatrex	Team inspector	Design and technology
34087	M Gerard	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
11746	R Coulthard	Team inspector	Music
22042	J Challands	Team inspector	Physical education; special educational needs
33428	P Stumpf	Team inspector	Religious education
2496	A O'Sullivan	Team inspector	English as an additional language

The inspection contractor was:

**e-Qualitas Limited**

Langshaw  
 Pastens Road  
 Limpsfield Chart  
 Oxted  
 Surrey

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

## **REPORT CONTENTS**

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS</b>	
<b>STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS</b>	<b>8</b>
Standards achieved in subjects and courses	
Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
<b>QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL</b>	<b>12</b>
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
<b>LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES</b>	
<b>SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS</b>	<b>38</b>

## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**The school provides a satisfactory and improving standard of education** and sound value for money. Standards are average and students achieve satisfactorily. Teaching, learning, leadership and management are all satisfactory.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are

- The headteacher is driving the school forward by focusing very strongly on learning and raising teachers' and students' expectations of what they can achieve
- Students do very well in physical education and music because of really effective teaching, but results and achievement in science have lagged behind other subjects
- The school has not fully taken into account how well it does compared to similar schools across the country, so assessment is not always used to best effect to improve teaching, learning and achievement
- The school's decisive use of its specialist status to raise students' aspirations results in high quality lively activities outside the school day drawing on very good local links, and promotes high attendance
- The school takes good care of students; it uses 'Student Voice' well to seek their views
- Lessons do not consistently encourage original ideas, critical thinking and independent learning
- Not all subject leaders implement school policies and procedures consistently, including the system of behaviour management, with too little focus on success and what students do well

**Progress since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.** Many of the weaknesses identified in the previous report have been tackled successfully, with the exception of the amount of time given to religious education and providing a daily act of collective worship. Standards have been maintained. A recent strength of the school is the gaining of Sports College status and this greatly enhances many aspects of the school's work.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2002	2003	2004	2004
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	B	B	C	D

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

**Students' achievement is satisfactory overall.** Students arrive with standards that are average and maintain these standards so that they are still average by the end of Year 11. The results of Year 9 tests were average, though not rising as fast as national figures. The achievement of boys and girls is similar. Students with special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented achieve as well as their classmates. Students have underachieved in science over time because of problems with staffing and management. In Years 10 and 11, students underachieve in religious education because not enough time is spent teaching the subject. Levels of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills are average.

**Students' personal qualities and their overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good.** Students' attitudes and behaviour are good. Attendance is well above average and punctuality is good.

### QUALITY OF EDUCATION

**The school provides a satisfactory quality of education.**

**Teaching and learning are satisfactory** with much that is good. Teaching in music and physical education is a strength of the school; it is here that the best teaching and students' achievement are found. Teaching is good in geography in all years and in art and design in Years 10 and 11. Students learn best in these subjects. Teaching is satisfactory in all other subjects, although there

have been some problems over time in science. Marking of students' work is satisfactory and usually informs students what they need to do to improve, but is inconsistent.

The curriculum is satisfactory. It is broad and from next term is planned to provide a good combination of vocational and traditional courses. Provision for work-related learning is satisfactory. There is a very good range of extra clubs and activities, particularly in sport and performing arts. Resources and accommodation are satisfactory and provide a sound learning environment. Through its specialist status, the school has very good links with community groups and with local schools and colleges and these have a positive impact on learning. Other links are good. Provision for the care and welfare of students is effective and arrangements for providing support and guidance are satisfactory.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are satisfactory overall**, with good leadership by the headteacher. The headteacher's evaluation of the school is broadly accurate and highlighted many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the inspectors. Nevertheless, the school does not compare its performance enough with schools outside Luton. Managers do not check on teaching rigorously enough. Leadership and management of key staff are satisfactory. Subject leadership is generally good and management satisfactory. Leadership and management of the Sports College are excellent. They are of high quality in music and physical education, but management is unsatisfactory in religious education, because not enough time has been given to the subject and in science where students underachieve. Governance is supportive and satisfactory overall.

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

Parents are satisfied with the school. They are very happy with the arrangements for settling into school and feel their children enjoy school. They feel that their children are making good progress because teachers expect students to work hard. Parents are not happy about the way that the school keeps them informed or seeks their views and the inspection team shared these concerns. Students believe it is a good school but feel some aspects could be improved. They know they are expected to work hard and most feel trusted and valued. Many feel they are not treated fairly by some teachers and the inspectors agree. Students have serious concerns over the behaviour of a few students in lessons, but inspectors saw no evidence of serious disruption to learning.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

The most important things the school should do to improve are

- Concentrate relentlessly on inspiring students to learn through extending the variety of teaching approaches
- Celebrate success in lessons so students really want to do well, rather than focusing on disciplinary procedures that they find discouraging
- Raise the level of students' critical thinking and independent learning
- Take speedy and decisive action to deal with inconsistencies in teaching and learning identified by regular checks on their quality
- Ensure that all aspects of the school's work are evaluated against a national rather than just a local picture, so that staff, parents and students know how well they are doing
- Raise students' achievement and examination results in science

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Ensure students are given the required time to study religious education and have a daily act of collective worship

## **PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS**

### **STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS**

#### **Standards achieved in subjects and courses**

Standards are average by the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Students' achievement is satisfactory in all years. Parents are pleased with the progress their children make.

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

- Students achieve very well in physical education and music in Years 10 and 11 and well in art and design and geography, because of effective teaching
- Students have not achieved well enough in science because of disruption to staffing and weaknesses in management
- Standards in physical education are well above average because of high-quality teaching and great opportunities for students to practise their skills outside lessons
- Students' achievement is unsatisfactory in religious education in Years 10 and 11, because of lack of time to develop knowledge and understanding

#### **Commentary**

1. Results in the end of Year 9 national tests, in 2004, were in line with the national average. Results in English, science and mathematics dropped significantly from previous levels. Girls performed better than boys in English and maths and boys did slightly better in science, where girls appear to under-perform significantly. The school exceeded its targets for the proportion of students reaching National Curriculum Level 5 in English and mathematics, but missed the target for science. When compared to similar schools, results in English were average, whilst results in mathematics and science were well below average. The trend in results over the last four years is below the national picture.
2. The standards seen in Year 9 were average overall. In geography, music and physical education, standards were above average. In all other subjects standards were average, apart from science where they were below average but improving. Students achieve satisfactorily. Boys and girls achieve similarly. Students with special educational needs and those identified as particularly gifted and talented achieve as well as their classmates.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	34 (35)	33 (33)
Mathematics	35 (36)	36 (35)
Science	32 (33)	33 (34)

*There were 179 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

3. Results in the 2004 GCSE examinations were average but below those of 2003. The poor results in science had most effect on the proportion gaining five or more A\* to C grades, as the science examination is worth two grades. As a result, the proportion of students who left with five GCSE pass grades above C was well below average when compared to similar schools. The proportion of students gaining A\* to C grades in mathematics was in line with the national average whilst those in English and science were below. The school did not meet most of the targets it had set. The trend in results was below the national trend.
4. The standards seen in Year 11 are average overall. Standards in physical education are well above average. In art and design, geography and music they are above average. Standards in science are below average, but showing clear signs of improvement due to improved teaching and management. In relation to their attainment at the beginning of Year 10 and their capabilities, students' overall achievement is satisfactory. Students achieve very well in physical education and music because they work very hard in response to very effective teaching. Students achieve well in art and design and geography. In most other subjects achievement is satisfactory. In science,

though students are now doing better, they have not made enough progress because of the effect of staffing difficulties. In religious education, students underachieve because not enough time is spent teaching the subject.

**Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2004**

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	47 (45)	52 (52)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	91 (95)	89 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	98 (99)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	35 (36)	35 (35)

*There were 174 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

- Those students identified as gifted or talented achieve satisfactorily. Higher-attaining students occasionally do better because teachers focus on these students in lessons. Those students in the middle band of attainment do not do quite as well because the work is not always matched well enough to their needs. Girls and boys usually achieve as well as each other, although girls did better in the 2004 GCSE results. Girls generally work harder than boys to complete coursework. Students with special educational needs make progress in line with other students because both teaching and support staff have a good understanding of their specific needs and adapt teaching and support to use a wide range of resources and activities. Students at an early stage of learning English benefit from individual support which enables them to access the curriculum and achieve satisfactory standards in Year 9 tests and GCSE examinations. In lessons observed, their achievement was satisfactory. There has been helpful support in raising achievement from the local education authority through the excellence in Luton initiative.
- Standards of literacy, numeracy and ICT are average. Students make adequate progress in the development of their literacy, ICT and mathematical skills because of a more consistent approach across the school to improving these skills.

**Students’ attitudes, values and other personal qualities (ethos)**

Attendance is very good and students’ punctuality, attitudes and behaviour are good, which is a very secure foundation for success at school. The school fosters students’ personal qualities well, so, overall, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.

**Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students are happy to come to school, willing to work and responsive to good experiences on offer
- ‘Discipline for learning’ focuses less on successful teaching, learning and self-discipline than on what goes wrong, so the school community thinks standards of conduct are lower than they are
- Students find that it can be hard to start afresh and shake off the past after making mistakes
- The school’s determined effort to raise attendance ensures that levels stay well above average
- The wide range of extra-curricular activities, including those made possible by the school’s specialist status, enriches students’ experiences and helps develop their personal qualities effectively

**Commentary**

- Parents and students are pleased with their choice of school. Students are ready to work and to try out different activities in and out of lessons, particularly those they find lively and interesting. They are keen on practical work and lessons in subjects such as design technology, physical education, dance, music, and art where they enjoy active learning. They are less enthusiastic about lessons where there is little to do other than copying from the board and out of books, particularly a few science, English and mathematics lessons that they find dull. One parent stated “Most teachers teach subjects in the most interesting way possible, but some don’t and students dread those

subjects.” This results in a willingness to do as instructed rather than any great love of learning for its own sake. It is linked to the way that the school’s ‘discipline for learning’ (DFL) system has developed, with a stronger focus on sanctions to discourage bad behaviour than on dynamic teaching and celebrating success to inspire students to want to learn and behave well. The school celebrates students’ achievement in regular newsletters to parents and through a system of awarding merits. However, chances to praise students for trying to do the right thing are often overlooked, whereas small offences are noticed, which, at times, disrupts the flow of the lesson when teachers pay too much attention to them and not enough to what they want students to learn.

8. Exclusion rates are kept as low as possible in line with local and national guidance, but as found nationally, boys of black origin are excluded disproportionately. The school is trying to deal with the issues of including these boys in school life fully and raising their aspirations and esteem through initiatives such as the ‘Black Boys Can’ project and imaginative sport, dance and mentoring work. It also involves them in helping staff and other students to understand and value different heritages, for instance through the ‘Diversity Group’, where older students work with younger ones on issues of discrimination, prejudice and mutual respect. The school recognises that it still has work to do to help everyone understand how differences in beliefs, values and traditions shape behaviour.

**Ethnic background of pupils**

**Exclusions in the last school year**

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	685	27	1
White – Irish	2		
White – any other White background	24		
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	22	2	
Mixed – White and Black African	3		
Mixed – White and Asian	8		
Mixed – any other mixed background	28	6	
Asian or Asian British – Indian	49		
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	27		
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	14		
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	9		
Black or Black British – Caribbean	23	3	
Black or Black British – African	24	2	
Black or Black British – any other Black background	11	5	
Chinese	10		
Any other ethnic group	4		
No ethnic group recorded	3		

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

9. Students interviewed formally and informally during the inspection made far more positive comments about the school than those made in writing beforehand. Overall, students are happy with school life. They are confident that the school does not have a culture where bullying and racism are tolerated, although one or two instances of conflict in the recent past were harder to resolve than usual, which made a few students feel uneasy about how matters are handled. As in most schools, they are critical of how others behave, although they point out that the DFL system encourages faultfinding. At the heart of dissatisfaction expressed in written comments is a firm view that not all staff treat students fairly, which they see as both a cause and effect of some misbehaviour. They resent labels such as ‘a difficult year group’ or a child who is ‘trouble’, which

haunt their efforts to do better and put past problems behind them. One child stated “If I could change anything, I would change the grudges people hold against you – like if you’ve been bad in the past, they will always expect you to be bad.” Staff did refer to ‘difficult’ or ‘bad’ groups during the inspection, on occasion, clearly expecting the worst, not best of them. However, in most cases, staff encourage and value the ideas and effort of students of all backgrounds.

**Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)**

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	5.6	School data	0.6
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.*

10. The school makes strenuous efforts through diligent work by the attendance officer and pastoral team to leave parents and students in no doubt that unnecessary absence and lateness will not be tolerated. As a result, attendance levels are high and not a key factor in modest achievement.
11. Students with special educational needs have a positive attitude to lessons. They are confident they will succeed because they have good and effective support and because both learning support staff and teaching staff are aware of students’ specific needs. These students have very good relationships with other students and with members of staff.
12. The school makes good use of extra-curricular activities, trips, visits and practical subjects to nurture team spirit, social skills and a sense of community. It is working hard on ways of developing greater understanding of other cultures, although some of this work is hampered by lack of time to explore world faiths fully in religious education lessons in Years 10 and 11. Chances to foster a sense of occasion, questioning and reflection are overlooked in tutor time and assemblies where some teachers pay scant attention to the theme for the week or thought for the day. At times, well-framed questions stimulate students to think for themselves about human values, which encourages spiritual awareness well. This was evident in an assembly where the head teacher told the story of Midas and gave away old currency to help students see that money can be worthless. Otherwise lessons rarely involve inspirational teaching or a buzz of excited debate and intellectual curiosity. Personal qualities such as thoughtfulness and courtesy develop well in response to the good example set by positive, smiling staff who take time to praise and encourage students for the good things they do.

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a satisfactory quality of education. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. The curriculum is satisfactory with very good opportunities for enrichment. The quality of support and guidance for students is satisfactory. The school works very well with the community through its Sports College specialist status. It works well with other schools and colleges to support students' achievement. Links with parents are satisfactory.

### Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory and satisfactory attention is given to the assessment of students' work.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good in physical education and music in Years 10 and 11, leading to very good achievement
- Teaching has been unsatisfactory in science and, as a result, students underachieve
- Teachers have very secure subject knowledge that they use effectively to contribute to students' achievement
- Planning of work that meets students' needs and provide opportunities for them to think for themselves is a strength of a number of subjects, but is not consistent throughout the school
- The quality of homework and how often it is set are also inconsistent
- Marking of students' work does not always inform them how well they are doing or what they need to do to get better

### Commentary

#### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 120 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
1 (1%)	21 (18%)	53 (44%)	41 (34%)	3 (2%)	1 (1%)	0

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

13. The quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9 is good in physical education, geography and music. It is satisfactory in all other subjects. In Years 10 and 11, teaching is very good in physical education and music and good in art and design and geography. Teaching is satisfactory in all other subjects.
14. When teaching is most effective, teachers thoroughly prepare their lessons, good resources are used, there is plenty of variety and students are required to be active in their own learning. For example, in an excellent Year 8 geography class, the teacher's highly energised imaginative input resulted in students learning far more facts and technical vocabulary about tropical rainforests than expected. Students were enthused and thoroughly enjoyed the lesson, displaying excellent attitudes to work because of the meticulously planned range of exciting activities.
15. Students learn really well in physical education and music in Years 10 and 11 because of the high quality teaching they receive. In physical education, for example, students achieve well because there is a valuable emphasis on improving team skills and competitive activities. Teachers use a wide range of strategies and styles that involve students in individual and group activities. Consequently, students often learn much more than expected.
16. Teachers have good relationships with students and know them well. This enables students to learn within a secure and caring environment. Students know they can ask questions and staff will take time to support them; many teachers give time outside of the normal school day. Behaviour is generally managed well and most teachers have high expectations of students. Occasionally, some teachers misuse the discipline system and issue final warnings too soon. This is resented by the students and does not help the management of behaviour in lessons. Some teachers do not treat the students with respect and do not always value their opinions.

17. The teaching and learning of students with special educational needs are good. Students' needs are well known by teaching staff and in many lessons a wide range of teaching activities and resources are used. Arrangements for assessing, recording and reporting the progress of students with special educational needs are very good and meet statutory requirements. Individual education plans are not extensively used by staff to set subject targets although all staff have a very clear knowledge of all students' special educational needs.
18. When teaching is less effective, teachers are focusing too much on making sure students complete certain tasks. Teaching can be quite stimulating and students can appear to be very busy, but they may not be extending or improving their knowledge or skills enough. An increased focus on how students learn is beginning to take effect. However, students are not involved enough in their own learning because teachers do not always give them enough opportunity to work ideas out for themselves or develop important higher-order thinking skills. Teachers do not always share their expectations for learning with the students. When planning their lessons, teachers do not always make enough use of the wealth of assessment data that is available to them. This results in work not matched closely enough to the needs of students. For example, many lessons are planned to ensure the highest attainers are stretched but few are geared to cater for average attainers and it is this group of learners that do not always do as well as their classmates. There are not yet enough opportunities for teachers to observe each other's lessons in order to share more effectively the skills and good ideas that different teachers have to offer.
19. Assessment is satisfactory. In most subjects, teachers have been developing well-organised systems for assessment. The school's computerised record system is a valuable tool. Work is marked regularly and students are usually aware of the overall quality of what they have done. However, this is inconsistent; in the best practice, students know clearly how to improve their work, but in some cases they are not given enough information from teachers. A developing strength is the involvement of students in self-assessment and the use of various stickers and forms specific to the students' learning. Assessment information is used well when it guides teachers in their planning, as for example in music and physical education. However, assessment is unsatisfactory in religious education, and evidence in art and design is not used well enough to ensure students build on their previous achievements. The use of assessment has much improved since the last inspection. Nevertheless, the use of assessment to help improve the quality of teaching and learning and so raise achievement is an appropriate school priority.
20. The work teachers set for homework and in lessons does not always build on what students already know or have just learned. The quality is not consistent even within departments. Although there is a schedule for issuing homework not all teachers stick to it and students find this frustrating. Marking of homework is also inconsistent and ranges from a cursory tick to detailed and helpful comments.
21. The National Key Stage 3 Strategy has been well implemented, with extensive training and monitoring of its impact. Consistency in teaching and learning is improving as a result and, teachers have developed improved strategies to check how well students are doing and offer them better support. Increased work with the Luton excellence initiative is also beginning to improve the quality of learning.

### **The curriculum**

The curriculum is satisfactory overall. New courses in Years 10 and 11 are offering students better choices in relation to their needs. Extra-curricular and study support programmes are very good. Provision for students' personal, social and health education, including careers education is good. The school does not meet requirements for a daily act of collective worship, or with the time allocated to teaching religious education in Years 10 and 11. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- New courses and increased flexibility in Years 10 and 11 have improved the breadth and balance of the curriculum
- Extra-curricular and enrichment activities, especially in sport and music are very good
- Learning and study support, both in class and after school, are good, but the library is short of books
- The wide-ranging personal, social and health education programme provides well for students' development, but teaching is inconsistent
- The school does not comply with the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship
- Insufficient time is allowed for religious education in Years 10 and 11

## **Commentary**

22. In Years 7 to 9, the school offers a balanced, basic National Curriculum with personal, social and health education. Statutory requirements in areas such as careers education are complied with. The provision is satisfactory overall.
23. In Years 10 and 11, the curriculum is more innovative. The introduction of more creative and vocational courses as well as non-GCSE courses offers students greater flexibility and choice to meet their needs and aspirations. Students can begin a second foreign language and follow courses such as sports studies, which incorporates coaching and leadership qualifications, and the ASDAN course. More vocational courses are planned for 2005, which will further improve the balance of the curriculum.
24. Planning and management of the curriculum in subjects are satisfactory overall, with strengths in English, physical education, geography, music and the vocational GCSE courses in art and ICT. However, insufficient time is allocated to complete the Locally Agreed RE Syllabus in Years 10 and 11. This fails to meet statutory requirements. The school does not comply with the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship. The impact of the school's specialist sports college status is strongly evident in the quality of curriculum and extra-curricular provision in physical education and sport. The curriculum is effectively managed internally and is regularly monitored by the governors' curriculum committee.
25. The good personal, social and health education programme incorporates a wide range of elements, including citizenship, careers education, work experience and the statutory sex, drugs and alcohol education. Key themes are revisited in several years and teaching units are well planned for the tutors who teach the programme. The programme is well managed with good staff development, though the careers programme is not sufficiently monitored. Teaching is variable and dependent on how interested the teacher is.
26. The curriculum is enriched by a very good range of extra-curricular activities, with particular strengths in sport, where there is a high take-up rate in a wide variety of sports - a feature much appreciated by students. Students participate in a range of musical activities such as the choir, band and musical productions. Visits enhance the curriculum in English, science, art, history and modern languages. Revision and booster classes are provided in most subjects. Curriculum enrichment overall is very good and a strength of the school.
27. All students have good access to the curriculum. The current pattern of choices for Years 10 and 11 has become more flexible. Students whose first language is not English can access the curriculum with the help of specialist support. Students with statements of special educational needs receive good support as do all others on the school register of students with special educational needs. Support from teaching assistants is very good for these students. For some students who have difficulty accessing the main curriculum there is an accredited key skills course in which students make good progress.
28. The match of teachers and support staff to subjects is satisfactory. This is a significant achievement, given the higher than average recent turnover of staff, and the need to expand the teaching force as the school has grown in size and popularity. Past staffing issues have had a negative impact on standards in science, English, modern foreign languages, geography and graphics. Most of these have now been successfully resolved. The school has been imaginative and successful in

promoting its use of graduate teacher and initial teacher training candidates to fill vacancies, and in helping some non-teaching staff to grow in their roles and responsibilities.

29. The accommodation provides a sound learning environment. It is well maintained and many areas are attractively decorated with students' work. Resources are satisfactory, although there is not enough access to ICT for some subjects.
30. The library is attractive, welcoming, very tidy and helpfully-organised. Computers, video and audio resources enhance the range of what is available. Books are neatly displayed and in good condition, but there are too few. Fiction stock is good, but non-fiction and literature sections show imbalance and are inadequate to fully stimulate a love of browsing, reference and research. This is reflected in below-average borrowing rates. There is barely enough money spent to replace and update books, and certainly not enough to extend and develop the current stock.
31. Since the last inspection, provision for ICT has improved, time for music has been increased and the range of option subjects in Years 10 and 11 has improved. There is still insufficient time for religious education in Years 10 and 11.

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

The school takes good care of students' welfare, health and safety. It provides satisfactory guidance and support for students based on its use of information about how well they are doing. The school seeks students' views actively and takes them into account well. Improvement has been satisfactory.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good teamwork among key staff and high quality day-to-day care ensure that students feel happy and confident that they have someone to turn to with their problems
- Care is more successful in making students feel safe and secure than in using information about their progress effectively to focus relentlessly on urging them to aim higher and achieve more
- Induction is praised by parents and students because it benefits from very strong links with local primary schools fostered by specialist school status
- The 'Student Voice' and 'Diversity' groups are very good instances of how students air their views and influence school life, although other students have fewer, meaningful chances to be heard

### **Commentary**

32. Heads of year and student support staff work hard to make all students feel able to cope with school and any personal problems, whatever their background circumstances. (I like) "having a nice head of year, so if I have any problems they will take care of them straight away." Good relationships, particularly with specially trained staff including learning mentors ensure that students feel comfortable about asking for help and able to tell someone if they or their friends are being harassed or are unhappy. Child protection procedures are in place and well understood by all staff who work directly with students. The school provides imaginative support for those who need help to stay out of trouble, such as rigorous training as sports coaches to develop self-discipline and prove themselves mature.
33. Although the school looks after students' welfare attentively, it does not make best use of files full of data about students' academic performance to ensure that good advice pushes achievement higher. The building bricks of high attendance, readiness to learn and a sense of security are all in place but the thrust towards high standards of achievement is missing from the guidance students receive. Too often in focusing on the detail of what to do to reach a specific standard with one task or piece of work, teachers lose sight of broader goals, including helping students to develop independent study skills and a love of learning. Reports and individual targets do not set out clearly enough whether students are doing as well as they could, given their starting point, age and capabilities.
34. Since the school forged successful partnerships with feeder primary schools that allowed lively work with Year 6 staff and students, and younger children, particularly in physical education, transition to Year 7 has been smooth. This is because exchanges of information are easier and more effective

and new students know much more about the school they are joining. They enjoy having older students as 'buddies'.

35. The headteacher leads by example in a passionate determination to involve students fully in the life of the school and in understanding and valuing the contributions that everyone makes to a vibrant school community. As a result, the 'Student Voice' has been given a key role to play in suggesting and organising improvements such as healthier food, better toilets and a new summer uniform. Students are close to the point where they have enough experience to take the responsibility for this and use initiative to set the agenda independently. They regret that in the everyday life of the school, one or two staff are not as good at seeking and listening to their views within lessons and tutor time, which makes some feel that they do not all have an equal 'voice'. "Teachers in school need to start listening to students more often and treat them with a bit more respect." Students noted that in lively lessons in art, music and drama "the staff and students are more friendly and relaxed. They listen to my views when I try to express myself." Discussions within other groups shape school life well. Students have active roles such as 'peer mentors', and 'teachers' in activities led by the Diversity group to help younger students respect people's differences. Students value such opportunities greatly.

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

The school has a satisfactory working partnership with parents. Its links with the wider community, schools and colleges are good. The links with schools and community groups through its sports college networks are very good and underpin individual achievement very helpfully. This has been a significant improvement in the school's work, although, overall, partnership has improved at the rate expected.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Parents are unsure about how well their children are doing because information on progress is not clear enough
- Sports college status has enabled the school to build very good local partnerships which have given groups and individuals wider experiences and in some instances, a first taste of success
- The school uses links with other organisations well, particularly to enable students in difficulty and those with particular gifts and talents to broaden their horizons and try out new ways of working

### **Commentary**

36. Parents think that the school is doing a reasonably good job and are pleased with how well their children settle, the hard work expected and good teaching and progress. They are less sure that children behave well and one in five parents feels inadequately informed about progress. Inspectors agree broadly with parents' positive views and reservations but found that standards of behaviour are a little higher than parents think, as most students behave well, whereas teaching and progress, though satisfactory, are not quite as good as suggested.
37. Parents' reservations about information on progress are justified because the school does not spell out whether students are doing well enough for their age group or capabilities. A parent stated: "it is impossible to know what progress is being made due to the extremely minimal amount of information provided. While it may meet statutory guidelines, it is wholly inadequate for meaningful communication." The layout of reports makes behaviour seem much more important than learning. For students who find subjects difficult, the row of ticks to the right of the page indicating apparent failure to display specific knowledge, skills and understanding is dispiriting. Suggestions of how to do better and the goals that students should set themselves are rare, as is celebration of genuine effort.
38. Parents have mixed experience of communication with the school. "On the few occasions I have had to phone the school, they couldn't have been more helpful. My concerns were noted and a member of staff got back to me promptly and sorted the problem." Contact books are used well in some cases but not in others. One parent wrote: "No-one attempted to contact us or made any comment in the contact book. As far as we knew our child was progressing well." Another stated: "If

I could wish for one thing for the school it would be to improve communication with parents.” As a result, as the school recognises, it has scope to improve the ways it keeps parents informed.

39. The school is making very good use of the enhanced resources it has as a specialist sports college to forge dynamic links with feeder primary schools, local community organisations and neighbouring secondary schools, for example to provide extra coaching, staff training and sporting activities. Students take part in ‘junior sports leader award’ programmes, using new skills with enormous enthusiasm and proficiency to coach Year 4 children. Strong links with the local sixth form and FE colleges ensure that transition to the next stage of education is smooth.
40. Links with the local Baptist Church and the Greenhouse project are of huge benefit to students who might otherwise struggle to stay in school until Year 11. These offer active support with mentoring, homework club and youth work projects. Joint project work with the police, Bedford Prison, a local hospice and health education workers contribute strongly to work in citizenship and development of students’ personal and social qualities. The school is at the hub of much admired local musical events.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership of the headteacher is good. Governance, the leadership of key staff and overall management are satisfactory.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The headteacher is a good leader, has very high ambitions for the students and is passionate about ensuring they play an active role in the school’s development
- The leadership team has taken a strong and effective lead in developing teaching and learning and in assisting middle managers, but does not check up enough on inconsistencies within departments
- Managers do not rigorously check the schools’ performance against national benchmarks
- Leadership of school-wide initiatives underpin improving standards, the ethos of the school and the maintenance of very good levels of attendance
- Long-term goals and financial planning, as expressed in the school improvement plan, are vague so the monitoring of progress and expenditure is not rigorous enough

### **Commentary**

41. Governors are strongly committed and supportive of the school’s aims and goals. They demonstrate their support of the staff and the headteacher in many ways. Like parents, they are proud of students’ achievements and attend drama and musical performances and sporting and other social activities. Governors play a full part in shaping the school’s key priorities based on their own contact with the school and by listening to staff, students and parents. However governors have not ensured that the school meets its statutory obligations for collective worship and the teaching of religious education does not meet the requirements of the agreed syllabus.
42. The local knowledge that governors bring to the school is very valuable but their well intentioned support is not sharp, incisive and constructively critical enough. A local, rather than a national perspective has tended to dominate governors’ thinking and the wider perspective, of how the school is performing compared with similar schools nationally, has not received enough attention.
43. The school improvement plan clearly identifies the key priorities and issues, but exactly what the school wants to achieve is too vague and time deadlines and funding priorities are not recorded in sufficient detail. Governors know what tasks the school has undertaken to bring about improvement because these are well documented. They are less aware of the impact of these on students’ achievement, whether the annual targets and priorities are likely to be met and whether the financial commitments are proving sufficient value for money.
44. The headteacher is passionate in her vision of a school where students, parents and teachers take an active responsibility for its ethos. Being a specialist school has played a big part in realising this vision and management of this is excellent. Students are positive about sport and they, and their parents, are aware of the wider impact that specialist status has had on their schooling, like providing additional resources and facilities.

45. The school has been adversely affected by shortages of specialist teachers. The headteacher has been pro-active both in using the expertise of the staff already in post and in imaginatively seeking ways to recruit and retain staff in subjects where there are shortages nationally. Some good appointments have recently been made to areas where previously there had been considerable underachievement.
46. There are strengths in the way that the headteacher and senior leadership team have led a number of school-wide initiatives. Management of attendance is very effective and has been achieved through good teamwork and by working closely with parents. The curriculum is well led and plans to introduce more opportunities for vocational education will give increased flexibility and a better match to students' needs and aspirations. Year heads pay close attention and give good support to students' personal development but have yet to develop the same rigorous approach to academic monitoring.
47. Teaching and learning are at the heart of the school's thinking and the implementation of the National Strategy is providing teachers with the structure for improving learning and assessment. Members of the leadership team are themselves very good role models for less experienced staff. They have effectively led by example, helping middle managers identify areas of strength and weakness and then to become more effective in the ways they act on their findings. However, there is a lack of consistency; some subject leaders have been more successful than others, in managing to turn their intentions into reality so that actions have a positive outcome and impact on students' achievements. Staff readily acknowledge there is still much to do, and for improvements to be proven in national tests and public examinations, but there is general optimism and signs that standards are improving. A weakness that senior and middle managers have still to tackle, however, is the inconsistent use of performance data, to raise expectations and to ensure that the work teachers set for homework and in lessons takes full account of students' prior attainment and potential.
48. Leadership and management of special educational needs are good. There are good links with departments who are well informed about students' needs. There is a clear policy and a good and developing range of information for staff. Support staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. They are attached to departments and planning between teaching assistants and teaching staff is good. The deployment of teaching assistants is well organised. Procedures for the recording of the progress of individual students are effective.
49. Performance management and the continued development of staff are strong. The effectiveness of ideas and information being passed on from those attending courses to others in the school is variable. All newly qualified staff feel well supported both in the school and in their departments. A feature of the school is the training opportunities it offers for non-teaching staff to develop and, where appropriate, to improve qualifications.

**Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004**

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	3981516
Total expenditure	3787391
Expenditure per student	4081.24

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	189499
Balance carried forward to the next	383624

50. Systems for financial control are satisfactory. A refreshingly brief finance manual crisply lays down processes, limits, and accountability. A major weakness is in strategic financial planning on the broadest scale. Budgets are prepared based on what has happened in the school previously, rather than on a rigorous comparison with national patterns of spending. On paper, the school has a large carry-forward budget. Whilst some of this is apparently earmarked for building improvements and refurbishment, governors were unclear about the amount. Lack of costings and detail in the school improvement plan has not helped in this confusion. Overall, the school provides satisfactory value for money.

## **OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES**

### **Work-related learning (WRL)**

Provision for work-related learning is satisfactory.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The programme is well coordinated and documented, with clear vision for its development
- Planning for work-related learning has not permeated the work of all departments although in some subject areas work is good
- The school is developing a broad business partnership, which it will launch formally this year
- Planned curriculum developments in Years 10 and 11 will further enhance opportunities for work-related learning

### **Commentary**

51. Effective coordination has raised staff awareness through auditing and has produced a clear strategy for development. Existing initiatives such as the well-established work experience programme in Year 10, activities week, the PSHE and careers education programmes and links with local colleges provide a good base for improvement. The nine strands of the statutory guidance for work-related learning are being addressed, thus meeting requirements.
52. Overall, progress across subjects is satisfactory, with good initiatives under way in a number of departments. The sports studies course offers students opportunities to develop accredited coaching and leadership skills, units on tourism in geography focus on the world of work and topics such as labour relations are discussed in English. The non-GCSE ASDAN course provides well for the needs of less academic students. From Year 9, the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship initiative is under way, with good outcomes already evident. Vocational courses in art and design and ICT are proving successful, with good teaching and learning observed during the inspection. In some subjects, however, notably religious education, explicit work-related elements have not been incorporated.
53. During the inspection, a range of WRL courses, including PSHE sessions, was seen. The overall quality of teaching and learning was good and, as a result, students made good progress and achieved well. The planned introduction of more work-related courses, such as construction, hairdressing and catering, in Years 10 and 11, will improve the balance of the curriculum and increase its breadth and relevance to all students. It will also enhance the quality of existing links with colleges. Although WRL is at a relatively early stage of development, the programme has many positive features and shows clear potential for improvement.

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

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

#### ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

##### English

Provision in English is satisfactory.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Average	Average
Achievement	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Satisfactory

##### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students, especially boys and higher attainers, do not do well enough at GCSE
- Lessons are well managed and organised; good relationships help learning
- Questioning to probe and delve is too rare; some teachers over-direct ideas
- Teachers vary methods well so that pace is brisk and written work lengthy
- Assessment is good: most marking is frequent, accurate and very helpful

##### Commentary

##### Examination results

54. Results in the 2004 national tests, taken at the end of Year 9, matched the national average and those in similar schools. Girls achieved well, particularly at the higher grades. Students' results in English mirrored those in mathematics and were much better than those in science. At GCSE, results were just at the national average. Students' progress was not as good in English as it tended to be in other subjects. Achievement was satisfactory, however, as the school entered a higher proportion of students for both language and literature than many similar schools. Features of the language examination were the low proportion of A\*/A grades, and that boys did less well.

##### Standards and achievement

55. Students join the school with average standards in English. They soon become organised, sensible, and interested. A good feature is the way they are taught to work in pairs and small groups. In class, students show good listening skills, but their ability to use these to think around topics and then express opinions or conclusions in detail is more variable. Knowledge is better than understanding. By the end of Year 9, the vast majority of students are comfortable and willing when asked to write at length. They can work quickly, and show a good understanding of how to structure writing. This is not matched by accuracy of spelling, grammar and punctuation, very few students showing good habits of checking and correcting work. By the end of Year 11, students show good skills in narrative and personal writing. Tasks which require opinion, argument or analysis are less confidently tackled. Some students resort to tedious introductions, over-lengthy explanation of the obvious, and plot summary of set texts. Vocabulary is often better than its spelling. These features impact on the achievement of some average-attaining boys, and a few higher-attaining students. In contrast lower-attaining students achieve well, those with special needs being helped by sensitive teaching, good information about their needs, and very good support from classroom assistants.

##### Teaching and learning

56. Learning is helped by taking place in classrooms which are invariably welcoming and well organised. Teachers work hard. They almost always manage classes effectively, setting up a calm, purposeful atmosphere. Relationships between students and with teachers are a strength. The result is good student attitudes and behaviour in almost all lessons. Students come to expect

teaching of a certain standard and where this is not met, they show disappointment. Some teaching is very good, but this occurs less often than is usually the case. A weakness lies in oral work, which is frequently rather than well used. At its best it generates thought, understanding and new ideas, as seen in a Year 10 lesson where students were able to explain with feeling and at length their reactions to unfairness and mistreatment in 'Kes'. But in a number of lessons, students were only expected to give brief factual responses to very basic questions so that they could only show superficial knowledge. When this happens the teacher's voice and views are too predominant. Teachers use a good range of methods so that learning is brisk and interesting, but there are occasions when the benefits of a particular approach are insufficiently thought out by teachers, and not clear enough to students. Students learn to write at speed, but not always neatly or accurately. Assessment is good, and most marking goes to great lengths to explain to students what they have achieved and where to make improvement. The frequency of grading, correction, and setting precise targets remains rather inconsistent.

### Leadership and management

57. The department benefits from energetic and principled leadership, which sets a very good example of how things can and should be done. There is a vision and an ambition for improvement. Performance is checked regularly and thoroughly, and firm yet thoughtful action taken where change is needed. Resources and accommodation are good. The curriculum caters well for mainstream English whilst integrating drama, and relevant aspects of information and communication technology and citizenship.

### Language and literacy across the curriculum

58. Students join the school with average literacy skills and make satisfactory progress in them. In no subject is students' achievement held back by literacy problems, but despite considerable attention and training, teachers' awareness of the importance and value of teaching literacy within other subjects remains inconsistent. In science, geography and physical education literacy skills are well taught and used. The school is well aware that spelling and oral work remain priorities, the latter because challenging question and answer sessions are too rare. Most teachers still use questioning merely to check attention or as a prelude to writing tasks. Key words and phrases are usually displayed in classrooms but they are too rarely referred to. In some subjects, such as art and history, the writing of some older boys and higher-attaining students is limited by language skills which show greater limitation and more frequent error than normal.

### Modern foreign languages

In addition to the focus subject, two lessons of Spanish were sampled. The standards observed in these lessons, were above average. Teaching and learning were very good. Students had very positive attitudes to their studies because of the interesting and stimulating teaching they received.

French is the main foreign language and is taught from Years 7 to 11. Spanish is taught to a group of students in Years 10 and 11 who have opted to study Spanish instead of French. The focus of the inspection was on French.

### French

Provision in French is satisfactory.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Average	Average
Achievement	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- French results at GCSE show steady improvement
- Pair work is good: its regular inclusion in lessons has fostered good collaboration between students
- Planning to meet the range of students' needs lacks rigour therefore students are not always appropriately challenged in lessons
- The teachers' skilful use of computers strengthens students' positive attitudes to the subject

## **Commentary**

### **Examination results**

59. Results at the end of Year 9 dropped well below average in 2004, with girls doing slightly better than boys. GCSE results were average. Students did better in French than in their other subjects, boys significantly so.

### **Standards and achievement**

60. By Year 9, higher-attaining students produce descriptive written accounts in French using past, present and future tenses. However, in other students' books there is little evidence of independent writing or of the use of more than the present tense. The work of lower-attaining students is limited to consolidation of class oral tasks. The standard expected of middle and lower-attaining students tends to be set too low. By Year 11, most of the higher-attaining students write at length, using a range of tenses confidently, express their opinions and give reasons using more complex sentences. The standard of average and lower-attaining students in French is average. However, in lessons where activities are less well matched to their interests and needs, students do not achieve as well as they should.

### **Teaching and learning**

61. Teachers show a good command of the language and most speak French regularly when teaching. Students' listening skills are well developed in these classes. In a minority of classes, however, English is inappropriately used for teaching. In these classes, the teaching also limits opportunities for students to recall prior learning or solve problems for themselves or speak French.
62. Teachers usually outline what is to be done, which is helpful. In the best lessons, a very good pace and level of challenge is maintained and students' interest is stimulated by, for example the skilful use of language games designed to reinforce learning of vocabulary and structures. But in some lessons, too many new phrases are introduced at once and students have difficulty in remembering them, whilst not enough oral practice prior to encountering the written form of new language badly affects pronunciation. Relationships in lessons are good and most students want to do well, settle quickly, listen attentively and concentrate on tasks. They work well in pairs and small groups, because teachers encourage this in most lessons.
63. In the best examples seen, written work is marked regularly, but the quality is inconsistent, with only some teachers making significantly detailed comments to enable students to understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to get better.

### **Leadership and management**

64. Leadership is competent and committed, has a clear vision for the department and provides a good role model. Management has implemented several improvements and there are examples of effective teamwork among the staff and evidence of common approaches to teaching. Many of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection have been resolved.

## MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is satisfactory.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Average	Average
Achievement	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

  

Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since previous inspection	Satisfactory

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve expected GCSE results because of effective teaching and examination preparation
- Teaching benefits from good organisation and an experienced team who work well together
- New initiatives provide good opportunities for various groups of students and for parents
- Results in GCSE statistics are good, especially as it is taught alongside mathematics
- Teaching methods lack the variety and flair for the subject to be really interesting and challenging

### Commentary

#### Examination results

65. GCSE results, in 2004, were average compared with all and similar schools nationally. Such results have been maintained since the last inspection, and are better than English and science. Increasing numbers of higher grades A\* and A have been achieved. Over a quarter of Year 11 also gained A\* to C grades in GCSE Statistics. However, Year 9 mathematics results dipped in 2004 to be below average compared with all and similar schools nationally, although the results met the school's targets. There is little significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls.

#### Standards and achievement

66. When they start in Year 7, students' standards in mathematics are average, and satisfactory progress is made through to Year 11. Students of all abilities achieve satisfactorily across the range of mathematics topics. They are strongest at reproducing the standard methods they have been taught. For example, they know and apply techniques in solving algebraic equations and using trigonometry with triangles. The numerical skills of students are satisfactory and are usefully consolidated when practised in lessons. In one lesson, higher-attaining Year 9 students showed a good knowledge about statistical averages and how to calculate them. Students generally present work well and in particular they draw graphs and charts carefully. The students are less strong at thinking for themselves, exploring or explaining ideas. Too often they are told rules to follow, without opportunity to explore and fully understand them. Although sometimes they lose interest in text-book exercises, students usually concentrate well in lessons.

#### Teaching and learning

67. Teaching is by specialists who work hard in supporting students. The planned coverage of mathematics is good, with topics that are regularly assessed. Classroom management is effective and characterised by good relations between teachers and students. Good use is made of time. Lessons start with a short activity, which is best when involving all the students, and time at the end is used productively to check and review what has been learnt. Homework is regularly set. Students get helpful feedback through constructive comments in exercise books. Assessment is strongest in Years 7 and 8 where students are involved in checking their own progress. In one good lesson, lower-attaining students carried out practical measuring then completed calculations using their results. However, a general weakness is the lack of variety in learning activities. Work is mainly based on textbook exercises that some students said they found boring. Students do not discuss ideas enough or explain their methods at the board, so limiting their understanding and confidence.

Higher attainers too often finish and have to wait rather than explore tasks that would challenge them and extend their learning. Although ICT is yet to fully support the teaching and learning of mathematics, this has improved since the last inspection. Students all use the computers for statistical work and many use graph-plotting software well.

### Leadership and management

68. Leadership is keen for success and this is reflected in staff efforts to support students. A strength is the range of initiatives beyond lessons. Masterclasses and the national mathematics contest enhance provision for higher-attaining students and those identified as particularly gifted and talented. Careful tracking identifies students who then benefit from extra classes after school. An imaginative PE and mathematics day, links with primary schools and a summer school, and mathematics evenings for parents are particularly good features. Evaluation of subject provision is accurate and useful. Meetings, records and resources are well organised. The department has tackled most issues identified in the last inspection and standards have been maintained. However, enriching the learning of mathematics in lessons is recognised as an important area for further improvement.

### Mathematics across the curriculum

69. Students make satisfactory use of mathematics in other subjects, with many teachers aware of how to develop skills further. For example, accurate calculation, handling of data and manipulating equations in science are an outcome of the subject's detailed numeracy policy. In geography, the analysis of data from surveys on a field trip was well planned and executed. Very good practical examples in GCSE PE included the measuring of heart rate during exercise and recovery, followed by the graphing and interpreting of data.

### SCIENCE

Provision in science is satisfactory.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Below average	Below average
Achievement	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

Leadership	Good
Management	Unsatisfactory
Progress since last inspection	Unsatisfactory

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' achievements and standards are improving as a result of the quality of leadership of the department and teaching that is becoming more effective
- Management over time has been unsatisfactory leading to poor results in past GCSE examinations and Year 9 national tests and significant underachievement
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and know their students well

### Commentary

#### Examination results

70. In 2004, results in science at the end of Year 9 in national assessments were well below the national average. GCSE results fell significantly in 2004 to well below the national average. Girls significantly under performed and all students did much worse in science than they did in their other subjects. These results and those of earlier years indicate that students' achievement in science up to July 2004 was poor. Students have been coming into the school with broadly average standards and leaving with well below average results.

## **Standards and achievement**

71. Students' achievement currently, in their work in lessons, is satisfactory, resulting from improved teaching. Work in the past has been poor and students are building upon a weak foundation of knowledge, understanding and skills, and so their achievement over time is unsatisfactory. Teacher assessments, Year 9 trial examinations and inspection evidence show that standards are improving, although attainment remains below average in Years 9 and 11. The Year 10 module examinations taken show that these students are now attaining improved standards in GCSE examinations. Students work well in groups and are learning to apply their knowledge to tackle problems. Numeracy skills are developing, for example some students are able to demonstrate confidence in balancing equations and working on calculation of mass. They use ICT competently for relevant research, presentation and data analysis. Students demonstrate sound listening and oral skills, although the quality of their written work is below average.

## **Teaching and learning**

72. The quality of students' work over time and their achievements indicate that teaching has been ineffective. During the inspection, teachers showed good subject knowledge and lessons were well planned. Teachers have appropriate relationships with students who behave well. Several lessons seen had a good pace with a variety of activities, which matched the needs of most students, although this was not always the case. Group work is well established with all students being involved in practical tasks. In less successful lessons, the pace was slower allowing students to be off task and time was not then used efficiently. During group work some students were not challenged enough and so their work was unsatisfactory. Although starter activities and lesson summaries are in place, these are not always effective and relevant. Written work is marked consistently across the department. Year 10 and 11 students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to achieve their target GCSE grades, although not all students are motivated to do so. Extra-curricular activities are available and these are well attended and include science competitions, clubs and booster classes.

## **Leadership and management**

73. The current management structure in the department is proving helpful in raising students' standards and achievements, however the previous arrangements led to a failing department and there are still areas of weakness to tackle. National teaching and learning strategies for science are now being used, although not fully embedded in all teaching. Underachieving students have been identified and are usually supported. Although student assessment sheets and progress charts are used to monitor how well they are getting on, targets identified by students as areas for improvement are not always specific and measurable, making them less effective. Good practice is encouraged throughout the department with the use of a 'critical friend' to evaluate lesson plans and teaching. Although new members of staff and trainee teachers are well supported, there has been some recent instability in the staffing and it is taking time to develop a consistent approach throughout the department. Members of senior and middle management who teach science are good role models.
74. Recent leadership has resulted in a cohesive science team and this includes non-teaching staff who are involved in planning of lessons. Although there has been improvement in assessment, the use of ICT and the development of study skills since 1999, students are not doing as well as at the time of the last inspection and so improvement since that time has been unsatisfactory, overall.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

Information and communication technology (ICT) is taught as a specific subject in Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11 examination courses are offered in GCSE ICT. Around half of students in Years 10 and 11 take this option. Students not following an examination course rely on their other subjects to cover the National Curriculum requirements and this is satisfactory, overall.

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is satisfactory.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Average	Average
Achievement	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

Leadership	Good
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since previous inspection	Good

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Leadership has been effective in dealing with the previously unsatisfactory provision and achievement
- Teaching does not always enthuse students
- Older students have a good choice of GCSE courses, which are growing in popularity
- Students get lots of opportunities to use computers in most subjects
- Monitoring and assessment procedures are not yet fully effective

### **Commentary**

#### **Examination results**

75. The school provides a choice between a standard and applied GCSE. In these examinations, results were average in 2004.

#### **Standards and achievement**

76. Students enter the school with average computing skills and maintain this in all years. By Year 9 almost all competently use software when for example working with spreadsheets to calculate costs and ticket receipts for a school disco. For many students however, more technical work and understanding of difficult concepts is not always fully established. This is shown for example when they opt to use the calculator rather than harnessing the power of the spreadsheet program to store dynamic formulae.
77. In Year 11, students are able to analyse the needs of a particular business by implementing and testing systems to evaluate its operations and finances. However, for many low attainers, written and spoken explanations and evaluations lack the detail necessary to secure the highest grades.

#### **Teaching and learning**

78. Teachers explain tasks clearly and demonstrate techniques thoroughly, so that students know what they have to achieve. In most lessons, teachers provide appropriate monitoring and guidance to support the achievement of students as they work at the computer. In some however, there is not enough supervision to ensure that all maintain concentration and effort. In many lessons, teaching is sound, but not greatly exciting. The result is that, while students are generally co-operative, they do not often show real enthusiasm and some need constant supervision to maintain their focus and work rate. Students evaluate their own learning and are involved in marking the work of others. This is beginning to prove effective in showing students how they can improve.

#### **Leadership and management**

79. At the time of the last inspection, ICT was unsatisfactory and some elements were poor. In reaching a situation in which the subject is now satisfactory and continuing to improve, significant progress has been made. There is now a clear vision for ICT that has had a strong impact upon provision and standards in both the examination courses and the use of computers in other subjects. Computer numbers remain at an average level, having only kept pace with national increases, but machines are now mainly of a good quality and enhanced by other resources such as interactive whiteboards. The monitoring of teaching is appropriate, but not yet leading to all teachers using a variety of teaching styles to get the best out of students. Assessment procedures have been improved, well-organised systems for securing accurate and consistent levels for Year 9 students are in place, but records of their achievement are not yet compiled in the most consistent and practical form.

## Information and communication technology across the curriculum

80. Opportunities to use computers in other subjects have been strongly developed since the last inspection and are now satisfactory. They are good in physical education, music and geography. The curriculum now covers all parts of the ICT programme of study. These improvements mean that statutory requirements are now met and achievement is now satisfactory, with standards meeting expectations in all aspects of ICT. A coherent plan shows what is provided in Years 10 and 11 and similar mapping is under way in Years 7 to 9. To complement the improvement of the curriculum, a thoughtful programme of replacement and upgrading computers is ensuring that resources are sufficient in quantity and quality to meet the demand. However, overall ICT resource levels have only kept pace with national developments and a few subject departments report having difficulties in using computers whenever they need to. Monitoring the quality of ICT teaching in other subjects is inconsistent and assessing how well students use computers in other subjects is currently ineffective.

## HUMANITIES

### Geography

Provision in geography is good.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since previous inspection	Good

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most lessons are well planned and organised to ensure that all students achieve well
- In a few lessons, activities do not work as well as intended and students become restless
- Students generally work hard and achieve well, a small number are occasionally less involved in their learning
- Teachers work well together and are committed to keeping students interested in geography

### Commentary

#### Examination results

81. 2004 GCSE results were average. As in recent years, all students gained at least a G grade. Results were higher than at the time of the last inspection. Boys and girls achieved similarly.

#### Standards and achievement

82. Most students enter the school with average standards in geography. By Year 9, the great majority have a good knowledge and understanding of geographical processes, demonstrated by explaining how volcanoes are caused and how they affect people in places such as Montserrat. In Years 10 and 11, most students can make comparisons between different places, when for example comparing economic patterns in the UK and Kenya. They know how these have changed and understand the reasons.

#### Teaching and learning

83. Most lessons start briskly and are well organised, so that learning develops coherently and students work at a good pace. However, pace is occasionally a little too fast for students to reflect and for teachers to check that all are keeping up with learning before moving on. Good, testing, questioning ensures that all students are regularly involved in discussions. Students often discuss the topics studied in pairs and small groups, which works well in improving speaking and listening skills, as well as geographical understanding. Occasionally, teachers do not monitor the work of some

groups effectively, in these situations students do not fully participate and concentration wanders. Teachers show high expectations for attention, behaviour and effort, but in a relaxed way that is effective in promoting good relationships and student attitudes. Work is usually planned to provide well for different needs, so that students with all levels of attainment, including those with special needs, achieve as well as each other. In many lessons, good guidance is given to students on how to improve, often in activities in which they evaluate each other's work. Teachers enjoy geography, seek to make it interesting for students and are willing to try new ideas. Although these do not always succeed fully, they usually provide activities that interest and motivate students. Occasionally lessons are extremely imaginative and stimulating, which succeeds in generating a high level of response from students and excellent learning.

### Leadership and management

84. The effective organisation of the department and good teamwork has ensured that a period during which key staff have been absent due to illness has not resulted in major disruption to students' learning. It has also secured good improvement since the last inspection in GCSE results, achievement in Years 10 and 11 and target setting for individual students. At the same time, existing strengths in achievement in Years 7 to 9, teaching and fieldwork have been maintained. There are not enough up-to-date geography books in the library.

### History

Provision in history is satisfactory.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Average	Average
Achievement	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Leadership	Good	
Management	Good	
Progress since previous inspection	Good	

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about history
- Students have generally good factual knowledge but less good analytical skills
- GCSE results have improved significantly in recent years
- The use of ICT has improved, but it is still not used widely enough

### Commentary

#### Examination results

85. In 2004, teacher assessments in Year 9 were well above the average, but teachers know that these were too generous and have worked together to improve their accuracy. In 2004, GCSE results were close to the national average and have improved considerably in recent years. Boys did slightly better than girls, which is the reverse of the national picture.

#### Standards and achievement

86. Students in Years 7 to 9 have generally good knowledge of key events and people. Most students are good orally, but their written work tends not to include enough analysis of evidence and has weaknesses in literacy, particularly in spelling. Higher-attainers write more detailed explanations and are producing more sophisticated conclusions. In Years 10 and 11, students also show good knowledge and the GCSE course work on the Suffragette Movement showed higher-attainers applying their knowledge successfully when analysing evidence and evaluating the reliability of different sources. Other students still tend to be too descriptive and their conclusions are more superficial. Students in all year groups clearly enjoy history.

## Teaching and learning

87. Teachers are knowledgeable and keen to share their enthusiasm for history. They structure lessons to take students through a topic in manageable steps. For example, in a good lesson on World War II this approach helped students to understand why the government publicised a particular view of people's response to the Blitz. Teachers questioned students regularly to check understanding, though sometimes opportunities to extend this were missed. In several lessons boys were allowed to dominate. During the lessons seen students had few opportunities for discussion, but the evidence from the work in books and on display shows interesting examples of debate. ICT is being used in some lessons, but this is not extensive. The regular assessments provide teachers with good information about students' progress. The best marking is accurate, rigorous and gives students good guidance on how to improve their work, but this is not always the case. History makes a very strong contribution to the teaching of citizenship.

## Leadership and management

88. The department is clearly determined to build on the improved GCSE results and raise achievement further. The action being taken is proving effective. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and the analysis of performance data are more systematic and helpful. Staff recognised that in Years 7 to 9, assessment was unreliable. The changes made mean that it is now linked more closely to National Curriculum requirements and is more accurate. Schemes of work have been sensibly updated and staff know there is further work to do on improving lesson planning to incorporate greater use of ICT. Much has improved since the previous inspection.

## Religious education

Provision in religious education is unsatisfactory.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Average	Below average
Achievement	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Leadership	Satisfactory	
Management	Unsatisfactory	
Progress since previous inspection	Unsatisfactory	

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students do not make adequate progress in Years 10 and 11 because they have insufficient time to study the subject
- Students have a positive attitude towards learning and this is helped by the good relationship teachers have with their classes
- Assessment for learning is not developed and students do not fully understand what they are currently achieving or what they need to do to improve
- Students achieve well in lessons where they are actively encouraged to participate in the learning, for example through discussion activities

## Commentary

### Examination results

89. Results for students who took the 2004 GCSE short course were slightly below the national average.

### Standards and achievement

90. By Year 9, students are familiar with a range of religious beliefs and practices. They are able to recall key religious accounts accurately, as seen in beliefs about religious founders. Students achieve well where they are asked to make links with their own lives and experiences, and also in lessons where they are actively involved in the learning, reflecting on and considering important beliefs and ideas. Higher-attaining students and those with special needs do not achieve as well as

they could because work is not always targeted at their needs. By Year 11, students do not make the expected progress because they do not have enough learning time.

### Teaching and learning

91. Students learn well where lessons provide them with opportunities to discuss and consider different points of view. They are keen to contribute their own ideas on moral and religious issues, for example on ideas about life after death and the treatment of animals. Where teaching encourages them to make links between the topic and their own experiences, they also progress well.
92. Marking does not provide adequate guidance on what needs to be done to improve and this hinders the rate at which students learn. In some lessons, learning is only satisfactory because the teaching activities focus only on learning about religious beliefs and practices and do not allow students enough opportunities to learn from the topics and relate them to their own lives. In some cases, students do not learn as much as they could because they are not challenged enough and the pace is slow. Teaching does not provide enough links with the local community, for example through the use of external speakers and visits to local places of worship.

### Leadership and management

93. Good support is given so that teachers are well prepared to cover the material. However, teaching and learning are not systematically monitored within the department. Despite findings from the previous inspection, the school still does not provide sufficient lesson time for Years 10 and 11.

## TECHNOLOGY

### Design and technology

Provision for design and technology is satisfactory.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Average	Average
Achievement	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Leadership	Satisfactory	
Management	Satisfactory	
Progress since previous inspection	Satisfactory	

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good assessment procedures enable teachers to know how well students are doing
- Disruption to staffing and interpretation of new examination requirements has resulted in a decline in results for graphics and resistant materials
- Very good accommodation and resources enhance students' learning
- Students in food technology consistently achieve well above the national average at GCSE
- Not all projects are challenging enough to raise students' achievement

### Commentary

#### Examination results

94. Results in the 2004 GCSE examinations were average. They were above average in food and textiles, but well below in resistant materials and graphics. Graphics have had an unsettled period due to several changes of staff which resulted in non-specialist teachers being used who were not experienced in examination techniques. Resistant materials were affected by interpretation of changes in the examination board requirements which affected the choice of projects in an adverse way and subsequently students did not gain the higher grades expected as in previous years.

### **Standards and achievement**

95. By Year 9 students are of average standard, they understand the design process and can design and make products in a range of materials using the correct tools and machinery.
96. By Year 11, students remain at an average standard, which is satisfactory achievement. Students produce coursework which shows their ability to design and develop products for a designated target market and to work to industrial criteria but in some areas do not show enough depth of understanding to gain the higher grades. Boys are achieving well below girls in the school and also against national averages.

### **Teaching and learning**

97. Teaching and learning over time are satisfactory which is confirmed by work seen. However, during the inspection week teaching seen was good over all areas of the subject which indicates recent good improvement. Lessons are well planned and some have good pace with a variety of activities which keep students engaged in their work. Teachers make good use of starter activities and most teachers use questioning to find out what students know, but in some cases do not probe deeply enough to improve students' critical thinking skills. Good behaviour management ensures students are able to learn in a calm and receptive atmosphere. Teachers give students group and individual tuition during lessons so that they are able to produce original and well-designed products. Students are able to plan their work using flow charts, use sewing machines confidently, understand about healthy diets and evaluate and develop their work. They are able to use the correct vocabulary for the subject.

### **Leadership and management**

98. There is a clear determination for the department to raise standards and there is evidence of the work being done to make this happen. The department works together as a team and the members support each other well. The new leadership and management is hampered by other school responsibilities which affects the time available to oversee the whole department and to find the key to raising achievement in all areas of the subject.
99. Although schemes of work cover all National Curriculum requirements, planning for students with special educational needs, including gifted and talented students, is not rigorous enough. Students' work is marked regularly with useful comments recorded to help students improve their work. National Curriculum levels are recorded after each module in Years 7, 8 and 9 to show the students' progress across these years and this enables teachers and parents to follow their progress. Managers have recognised that projects need to be more challenging for some students.
100. The new construction course will offer experiences to students who are looking for a vocational subject. The accommodation is spacious and well resourced, with the exception of provision of enough computers and sewing machines for whole-class work. The technicians in the department support teachers and students well and are a valuable asset.
101. Standards have stayed at about the same level since the last inspection, apart from 2004 where there was a drop in GCSE results which is in line with the rest of the school. However, work seen indicates achievement is rising across the department.

### **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

The inspection focused on GCSE art and design, vocational art and design and music. In addition, a Year 11 drama lesson was sampled. Enthusiastic teaching and very good relationships resulted in students making good progress in rehearsing and staging group performances. Achievement was good, and standards above those found nationally.

## Art and design

Provision in art and design and vocational art and design is satisfactory.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Average	Above average
Achievement	Satisfactory	Good
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory	Good

Leadership	Good
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since previous inspection	Satisfactory

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Curriculum developments in Years 10 and 11 are meeting students' differing aspirations and preferences
- The good leadership, shared goals and team-work are helping to raise standards
- Not enough use is made of teachers' on-going assessments and school data to plan work and lessons that match students' potential
- Students' attitudes, their interest and motivation in the subject are high
- Independent decision-making and use of digital media is inadequate

### Commentary

#### Examination results

102. In 2004 teacher assessments, at the end of Year 9, show standards to be well above those reported nationally. These results were over generous. In 2004, the numbers taking a GCSE in art and design increased with the introduction of the vocational qualification. Overall, standards were average, although in both courses the percentage of students attaining the highest grades was below average. Fewer boys than girls took the subject, as is the case nationally.

#### Standards and achievement

103. Attainment on entry is lower than for the core subjects and in Years 7 and 8 students make good progress. Sketchbooks are lively and show a suitable balance between drawing and colour work alongside written notes and annotations. In the past, many students in Years 7 to 9 have been taught by non-specialist teachers and this has limited year-on-year progress and the development of subject-specific skills and knowledge and understanding. However, staffing is now stable and lessons are taught by specialists. This is having a positive effect on standards and on students' attitudes. Those students choosing to take art in Years 10 and 11 could in time be better prepared for examination courses than in the recent past.
104. Standards of work in the vocational and fine art GCSE courses are higher than last year. Placing greater emphasis on the research elements, for example through visits to national galleries has proved effective. Students can recall, and discuss with understanding, the work they have seen at first hand. However, too many students still rely on found images, taken from secondary sources, or the class teacher to prompt their decision-making. They lack the confidence to make decisions for themselves - choose references, take photographs and modify their work. Their understanding, of what is successful and less effective and what they can do to change it, is underdeveloped. The additional time given to the vocational course helps students overcome some of these uncertainties. By Year 11, they are more confident and better able to base their decision-making on what they have tried out and tested. There are innovative plans to widen the vocational element of the subject and current provision has some good features. However, the use of digital media is underdeveloped.

105. In both courses, students are disadvantaged by not having the experience and practice of working under examination conditions as part of the school-wide programme of 'mock' examinations. Taking a 10-hour examination without having worked for longer than 1 hour is not in the best interests of the students.

### Teaching and learning

106. Teachers enthuse and motivate students very well. Students learn well, from their demonstrations, exemplar materials and displays and because behaviour is effectively managed. Question and answer are used effectively, particularly at the beginning and end of lessons, to consolidate learning and encourage students to use a specialist vocabulary when describing their own and others' work. Students receive good individual support through written and oral comments. Teachers have access to a range of information about students' past performance and potential achievement. Overall, they do not make best use of this, particularly in younger classes, to track progress and to plan and set class work and homework that has an appropriate level of challenge for higher-attaining students.

### Leadership and management

107. Good leadership is characterised by very good teamwork, ambitious plans for the future curriculum and improvements in students' achievements. The department is an exciting place to be and students enjoy being there. Leaders recognise that the challenge for the future is to ensure that the areas identified for improvement and the plans to turn them into a reality, are borne out by improved standards.

### Music

Provision in music is very good.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Good	Very good

Leadership	Excellent
Management	Very good
Progress since previous inspection	Very good

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very good relationships contribute much to students' motivation and learning
- The department monitors and develops its provision meticulously
- Very good demonstrations and explanations enable students to gain precise technical knowledge
- The quality of extra-curricular music is very high and ensembles are expertly directed
- Parents and students readily acknowledge the pleasure gained from the school's music
- In a small number of lessons in Years 7 to 9, the consolidation and review of what had been learned was not thorough enough

### Commentary

#### Examination results

108. GCSE results in 2004 were above average. All students passed and boys and girls achieved similar standards.

#### Standards and achievement

109. By Year 9, students compose and perform confidently. They gain a firm understanding of musical theory from interesting practical assignments. Whole classes use guitars and keyboards, and individual students use their orchestral instruments. Students achieve so well because they receive expertly-targeted help. In Year 11, most students are musical enthusiasts who experiment and learn with assurance, which enhances their achievement. Performance standards are high. Students

compose fluently, and have a thorough understanding of a good range of musical styles. They use accurate terminology when analysing examples, which significantly benefits their literacy skills. Students were particularly articulate in their descriptions of minimalist music.

### Teaching and learning

110. Teachers' careful preparation and individual help for students significantly benefit students' learning over the full range of ability. Students' learning is enhanced by clear lesson objectives and deadlines that encourage a brisk pace of learning. Teachers use their wide-ranging practical skills very well for demonstration, including the use of music technology. Students learn key words and ideas accurately because teachers' explanations are lucid and always exemplified through practical activities. Relationships are friendly, which adds to students' motivation; humour is a regular and beneficial additive to lessons. The element of enjoyment is particularly strong in the GCSE groups, where students' obvious respect for the teachers ensures very productive learning. Occasionally, teachers did not check students' views and reactions enough through question-and-answer, and the consolidation of learning at the end of some lessons in Years 7 to 9 was skimpy.

### Leadership and management

111. The leadership provides a model of good practice in teaching and organisation. The department is self-critical and reflective and has worthwhile plans for development following the searching 2004 review. The department is very well organised on a day-to-day basis. Worksheets and other materials, which are mostly created in-house, are of high quality. Information from assessment is very well used to guide planning and teaching.
112. Over 200 students learn instruments at school. Visiting tutors are very well organised. A wide range of ensembles of high quality rehearses and perform regularly. Of these, the wind band was heard during the inspection playing with outstanding precision and panache. Ensembles make tours and visits, including abroad. These activities provide very good opportunities for students' social and cultural development. Amongst the heavy responsibilities of the department is the training of junior music staff. Their development is very closely monitored and supported. None of the criticisms from the last report remain. Music is justly regarded as a strength of the school, and parents and students readily acknowledge the quality of what is provided and the pleasure it brings.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is very good.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Well above average
Achievement	Good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Good	Very good
Leadership	Very good	
Management	Very good	
Progress since previous inspection	Excellent	

*The judgements apply to physical education as a core subject and as a GCSE examination subject.*

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good examination results and high standards as a result of high-quality teaching
- Very effective leadership and management of the department and the positive influence of the specialist sports college status have resulted in impressive improvement in all areas
- A very good range of activities outside the school day enrich work done in lessons
- Very good relationships between students and with members of staff make a significant contribution to the very good learning in most lessons
- Analysis and evaluation of performance in lessons are not used consistently

## **Commentary**

### **Examination results**

113. GCSE results in 2004 were well above the national average with a significantly higher entry rate than the national average. Students achieved better results in physical education than in their other subjects. Boys' results were better than girls'.

### **Standards and achievement**

114. By Year 9, students have above average striking and fielding skills which they are able to apply to a controlled game situation, such as rounders. On the GCSE course in both Years 10 and 11 they have well above average knowledge and understanding of many aspects of the course, including physiology and anatomy. The use, development and understanding of mathematical skills on this course is also well above average. Students in a Year 11 GCSE dance lesson showed good choreographic skills and applied well above average performance skills in their dance. The ability of students to observe and analyse performance is variable, but in lessons where it was used it had a significant impact on achievement. Students have many opportunities to take responsibility in lessons and to develop planning skills. This is particularly notable in the sports studies course in Year 10, where students plan and organise the coaching of primary school students very successfully for their Junior Sports Leaders Award.

### **Teaching and learning**

115. Teaching of all GCSE courses is very good. A secure knowledge of the subject is regularly conveyed to students through perceptive observation of performance, appropriate intervention and good teacher directed question and answer sessions. Thorough planning, incorporating varied teaching strategies and an appropriate sequence of activities, involving both individual and collaborative learning, is also a feature of lessons. Relationships between staff and students are generally very good and students respond with enthusiasm to most lessons. Assessment of performance by teachers in the best lessons is used to enhance learning although, in some lessons, students were not set appropriate targets for improvement and higher-achieving students particularly were not challenged. The recording of assessment for students is developing and is beginning to involve them in setting their own targets for improvement. All students on the GCSE course are aware of their target grades and have a very good understanding of what is required for improvement. Information technology is used well by many students in their GCSE course work, but is still developing in other aspects of the course.

### **Leadership and management**

116. There is a tangible and effective emphasis on improvement through developing teaching and learning. A clear vision is understood and supported by all members of the department. Communication and co-operation between members of the department is good; all are very good role models for the students. The day-to-day organisation of the department is very good and the department is very well led. Curriculum organisation and development ensures that students make appropriate progress. All students participate in accredited courses. Improvement since the previous inspection has been much better than expected. There has been a significant improvement in GCSE results and in the development of the curriculum. Accommodation has also improved.
117. The school has been a specialist sports college for nearly three years now and progress has been very good because of excellent leadership and management. Students take pride in being part of a specialist sports college and embrace the specific values of the college. A very good range of activities after school exists for students of all abilities to support and enrich work done in lessons. The school competes very successfully with other schools in a range of sports and many students achieve representative honours. Community partnerships have developed very well to the benefit of both the school and the local community. Partnerships with primary schools are excellent and staff and students in primary schools are benefiting from the expertise of specialist physical education staff from Stopsley. The impact on the rest of the school has been particularly significant, as the focus on developing leadership skills in students has encouraged students to take more responsibility for their learning. Management has developed very impressive partnerships between

local communities and the school and careful and often inspired planning and organisation have been critical factors in the excellent progress made.

## **BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES**

The main focus for the inspection was the vocational art and design course taken by students in Years 10 and 11. This course is reported on in the art and design subject section.

## **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP**

The focus subject was citizenship. A small number of personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons were observed and statutory requirements are met. The quality of teaching is inconsistent and depends on how interested in PSHE the particular teacher is. In a Year 9 lesson on the dangers of smoking, teaching was good and students made good progress in understanding the problems of smoking in society and the connected health risks. Links with citizenship were effective and the contribution of the visiting speaker was a particular strength. In another Year 9 lesson, students were bored because the teacher spent more time checking on where students were than actually teaching them anything. Achievement and learning were poor as a result of the inadequate teaching.

### **Citizenship**

Provision in citizenship is satisfactory.

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Average	Average
Achievement	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Insufficient evidence	Insufficient evidence
Leadership	Good	
Management	Good	
Progress since previous inspection	Not applicable	

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students have good opportunities for active citizenship
- Students understand what being a good citizen means in different contexts
- Some subjects are not identifying citizenship clearly enough to students

### **Commentary**

#### **Standards and achievement**

118. Discussion with students showed that they understand what it means to be a good citizen. They know why it is important to take responsibility for their own actions and other people's well-being and why they should work together. They understand that citizenship includes national and local government and how the legal system works. PSHE, history, physical education and religious education make a particularly strong contribution to citizenship. For example, in history students learn about parliament and the meaning of important constitutional developments such as Magna Carta. Physical education strongly develops students' team working skills and their ability to take responsibility. In PSHE and religious education, students sensibly discuss moral, social and ethical issues which affect society and people's attitudes. Students have extensive opportunities for active citizenship and many visitors also contribute to the programme. The visit to Bedford Prison by a group of Year 11 students is particularly imaginative. This arose from a discussion with a visiting police officer gave the group an unusual insight into the criminal justice system which they then shared with the rest of their year group. A mock election was being planned for PSHE lessons in the week of the general election.

#### **Teaching and learning**

119. Citizenship is taught through other subjects. Relatively little direct teaching was seen, so it is not possible to make a secure judgement of teaching and learning, though in most subjects activities were developing good collaborative working and teachers were encouraging respect for the views of

others. In some subjects, teachers dealt well with many issues relating to citizenship, as for example work on the environment. However, the contribution of these to citizenship was not explicit enough and students did not appreciate the significance. Work is assessed but in some subjects this needs to be more specifically related to the criteria for citizenship.

### **Leadership and management**

120. A very thorough audit has given teachers a very clear picture of where citizenship is taught and where the particular strengths are. Careful monitoring and the action planning show good awareness of the quality of work and how to improve it. Teachers have access to a good range of specialist resources and the school works closely with others in the area to share ideas and resources. The citizenship log in contact books gives students a clear idea of what they have covered, though these are not always kept up to date. Students keep their written work with other work in the subject where the topic is taught. The absence of a citizenship portfolio makes it harder for students to relate the record of topics to the actual work. However, attractive displays in prominent areas in the school make the extent of the work very clear to students and underline the importance the school attaches to citizenship. Citizenship was not taught at the time of the last inspection and therefore progress cannot be judged.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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