

INSPECTION REPORT

ALTRINCHAM GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR BOYS

Altrincham

LEA area: Trafford

Unique reference number: 106361

Headteacher: Mr T Gartside

Lead inspector: Mr I Thompson

Dates of inspection: 11th – 15th October 2004

Inspection number: 268735

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

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Terms used in this report

Pupils in Years 7 to 9 are at Key Stage 3, having transferred in most cases from their primary schools after Year 6. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are at Key Stage 4 of their education. Those pupils who remain at school after the compulsory period of education are in the sixth form, in Years 12 and 13. Pupils in Years 9 to 11 follow courses and Programmes of Study set out in the National Curriculum. A course of religious education is a requirement for pupils and students of all ages at school.

At the end of Year 9, pupils 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 pupils know, understand and can do at age 14. At the end of Year 11, pupils aged 16 may take examinations in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). Sixth form students may take further courses leading to the General Certificate of Education at Advanced level (A level). Students may take examinations leading to the Advanced Subsidiary award (AS), equivalent to half the difficulty of the full A level, which is gained by further study beyond AS standard. Some students may also take Advanced Extension Awards (AEA).

Inspectors judge the standards reached by pupils by comparing their attainments with national test and examination results, or by the levels of performance expected for pupils of the same age nationally. Pupils' 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 with similar standards at the start of the stage of learning in question.

Efforts have been made to minimise the use of abbreviations, though some have been used. Throughout the report, ICT refers to information and communication technology. Comparisons to national averages are based on data for the academic year 2002/2003.

Little reference is made to pupils for whom English is an additional language. At the time of the inspection, only one pupil was at a relatively early stage of English language acquisition.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar (selective)
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 – 18
Gender of pupils:	Male
Number on roll:	1058
School address:	Marlborough Road
	Bowdon
	Altrincham
	Cheshire
Postcode:	WA14 2RS
Telephone number:	0161 9280858
Fax number:	0161 9243888
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr C Barratt
Date of previous inspection:	17 th May 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Altrincham Grammar School for Boys is an average sized, selective school for boys aged 11 to 19. The school serves mainly Altrincham but draws pupils from a wide area. Overall, the social and economic backgrounds of pupils are relatively advantaged. More parents wish to send their children to the school than there are places available. The school offers places first to pupils who reside in the Altrincham area and who have attained a qualifying score. Boys' standards of attainment on entry to the school are above average, reflecting its selective nature. There are 1058 pupils on roll, 259 of whom are in the sixth form. Below average proportions of pupils join or leave the school at other than the usual times. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. The majority of pupils are white; some 20 per cent of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest groups being of Pakistani, Indian and Chinese origins. Although a higher than average proportion of pupils comes from homes where the first language is not English, only one pupil is at a relatively early stage of learning English and none at a very early stage. The proportion of pupils on the school's register of special educational needs, including one statement of special educational need, is well below average.

The school has been a specialist languages college since September 2003.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
12271	I Thompson	Lead inspector	
19369	C Wild	Lay inspector	
8341	W Wimshurst	Team inspector	Mathematics; post-16 mathematics
19229	S Morton	Team inspector	English; English as an additional language
19913	R Garrett	Team inspector	Post-16 English
17799	A Stoddart	Team inspector	Science; post-16 physics
22906	B Hodgson	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT); post-16 ICT
4689	M Christian	Team inspector	Design and technology; post-16 design and technology
22046	J Joliffe	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages; post-16 French
30749	H Boyle	Team inspector	Art and design
30427	F Shuffle-Botham	Team inspector	History; post-16 history
22590	B Castle	Team inspector	Citizenship; geography
4697	R Black	Team inspector	Music
30800	B Colley	Team inspector	Physical education; special educational needs
31135	R Hobson	Team inspector	Religious education; post-16 business education
2141	J Oxley	Team inspector	Post-16 physical education

The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The school provides a good standard of education. Very good leadership by the headteacher provides clear educational direction and the school has many strengths, particularly in the attitudes and personal development of its pupils. The school gained a School Achievement Award in 2003 in recognition of its high and improving standards.

Results in GCSE examinations in 2003 were very high and in the top five per cent of schools nationally. Results were average in comparison with grammar schools but above average for schools that had similar results at the end of Year 9. It should be noted that all comparisons include results for girls, which are generally higher than those of boys; no separate comparisons are available for boys' schools. Although above average overall, boys' standards on entry to the school span a wider range than most selective schools. Boys achieve well in relation to their capabilities as they move through the school. The language college initiative has had little impact in the year since its establishment although some good developments are emerging. **The school provides good value for money.**

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Boys achieve well. There are no significant differences in the achievements of different groups of pupils.
- Standards are high at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11.
- Social, moral, spiritual and cultural development are very good and a significant factor in boys' personal development.
- Relationships and attitudes are very good and play an important part in the effective learning atmosphere in the school. The school is a racially harmonious community.
- The school provides a wide range of enrichment activities to support learning beyond the curriculum. Support for learning beyond the school day is very good.
- The development of the learning opportunities provided by the language college need to be more closely monitored and co-ordinated.
- Assessment data is not used as well as it could be to support learning. Although there is some good practice, marking does not consistently tell pupils how to improve.
- Statutory requirements are not met in the provision of religious education in the sixth form and a race equality policy for the whole school. The requirements of the National Curriculum are not fully met for physical education in Years 7 to 9.
- Accommodation for physical education is poor and affects standards.

Progress since the previous inspection has been good. Results at the end of Years 9 and 11 are rising faster than the national trend. Teaching has improved. Most of the key issues have been addressed except that the school does not provide religious education for sixth form students, weaknesses remain in accommodation for physical education and the use of assessment requires a yet sharper focus on the use of data to support planning and learning.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*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.*

The achievement of all pupils, including the gifted and talented, those with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language, is good. Standards are well above average at the end of Year 9. This represents good achievement in relation to pupils'

standards when they joined the school. By the end of Year 11 standards are well above average, representing good achievement in Years 10 and 11 in relation to pupils' standards at the beginning of their courses and their capabilities. Sixth form standards are well above average and students' achievement is good.

Pupils' personal development is very good and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. Pupils have very good attitudes. Behaviour throughout the school is very good. Attendance is very good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides a good quality of education. Teaching and learning are good, leading to good achievement. Provision for extra-curricular activities, additional enrichment and support for learning outside the school day are very good. The school makes satisfactory arrangements for pupils' care and guidance but assessment data is not used well enough to support learning and marking does not consistently give pupils guidance as to how they can improve. The school has good links with other schools and good links with business to support learning in the sixth form that could be developed further to support the work of the whole school. Pupils and students are not consistently given opportunities to develop their independent learning skills.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership is good and management is effective overall in promoting achievement. The headteacher provides very clear educational direction for the school's improvement and the school runs smoothly from day to day. Governors provide good support for the work of the school and hold it appropriately to account but they do not meet all their statutory responsibilities. Financial management is very good. Although the quality of middle management is good overall, the use of assessment data at departmental level is not always sharply enough focused to check that pupils achieve as well as they could in relation to their capabilities.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents and pupils appreciate the school's distinctive character. They believe that the school provides good care and pastoral support. Parents appreciate the individual support that teachers provide and the very good relationships in the school, based on mutual respect. They also feel that reports are informative. Inspectors agree that relationships are very good and that teachers provide effective individual support. However, although reports contain very good comments on general progress and personal development, they do not provide precise enough information on what is needed for improvement. Parents are rightly concerned about the poor state of accommodation for physical education and sports facilities. Parents and pupils raised concerns about toilet provision. It is inadequate and unsatisfactory.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Make better use of assessment data to support learning and improve the effectiveness of the marking of pupils' work.*
- Co-ordinate, monitor and evaluate the development of the learning opportunities provided by the language college.*
- Improve accommodation for physical education.*

And to meet statutory requirements:

- Provide religious education in the sixth form.
- Implement and monitor the effectiveness of a race equality policy.

*These matters are part of the school's improvement plan.

THE SIXTH FORM AT ALTRINCHAM GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR BOYS

The sixth form at 259 students is larger than most sixth forms and has been growing steadily over recent years. It offers a large number (25) of GCE AS/A level courses. It attracts an increasing number of students from the Manchester area. A small proportion (about seven per cent) receives financial support. To enter the sixth form, students must have at least five A*-C grades with grade B in their chosen subjects. Attainment on entry is above average. The entrance policy excludes a substantial minority of its Year 11 pupils from the sixth form and the school makes no provision for these boys.

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good. It is cost-effective because students are achieving well, standards are well above average overall and its costs are less than might be expected. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good overall because high academic standards have been maintained, teaching quality has improved and there is better use of ICT. However, long-standing issues relating to provision for religious education and the physical environment remain unaddressed.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Leadership sets a clear goal of high academic standards and students understand that much is expected of them as a result.
- Teaching is good; students learn well as a result and their achievement is good.
- Students appreciate the support they receive, the quality of teaching and the adult relationships that are fostered between teachers and students.
- Students are frustrated by the limitations and restrictions of their social environment* and these affect their attitudes to the extent that they have mixed feelings about their overall experience of the sixth form.
- There is no provision for religious education and students' achievement is affected as a result.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

Judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses inspected in the sixth form are shown below.

They are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects in the sixth form were inspected.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	English literature – Satisfactory. Standards are above average. Achievement is satisfactory: some teachers, though enthusiastic and committed, do too much for their students so that students are not taking sufficient responsibility for their own learning. French – Good. Standards are above average. Achievement is good overall because teaching is good, and teachers' very good subject knowledge helps students learn well. Standards are above average.
Mathematics	Mathematics – Very good. Very good teaching leads to well above average standards. Very positive attitudes of students and very good leadership ensure that students' achievement is very good.
Science	Physics – Good. Results are high and the standard of students' work is well above average. Achievement is good. Teaching and learning are very good and ICT is used well by teachers and students. Leadership and management are good.
Information and communication technology	ICT – Very good. Very good teaching, leadership and management, and excellent relationships ensure that students learn and achieve very well. Standards are well above average.
Humanities	History – Good. Standards are above average. Students achieve well because of teachers' subject expertise and very good guidance.
Engineering, technology and	Design and technology – Very good. Excellent leadership, very good

manufacturing	teaching and students' very good attitudes ensure that students achieve very well to reach well above average standards.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Physical education – Good. Teaching and learning are good and students achieve well as a result, particularly as they move from Year 12 to Year 13. Standards are high.
Business	Business education – Very good. Teachers' very good subject knowledge particularly helps students learn and achieve well. Standards are well above average. There are limited opportunities for real-life case studies and 'hands on' learning.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Good. Careful monitoring, checking and tracking of progress take place: individual students are well known to the pastoral team and supported well. Parents are involved in the support process well when necessary.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Good overall. The pursuit of high academic standards provides clear direction for the sixth form and students understand the high expectations that leadership has for them. However, leadership has not dealt with aspects of provision that have been issues for a considerable time. Efficient management ensures that students are monitored closely and cared for as individuals.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Good overall. Students speak highly of the quality of teaching and support they receive, and value especially the good relationships that are established between teachers and students. They appreciate their treatment by teachers as young adults. On the other hand, students think that some of the boundaries set by the school are unnecessarily restrictive especially in comparison with their peers elsewhere. They have no forum of their own in which to express their views and are sceptical about whether expressing their views would have any effect. They also still have to use a dowdy and cramped social area. Inspectors endorse students' positive views but also understand their frustrations.

*The school is dealing with the accommodation issue in its building programme.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

In work seen during the inspection, standards are well above average throughout the school. Achievement is good in relation to boys' standards when they join the school and when they begin their courses in Years 10 and 12 and in relation to their capabilities.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well. Achievement in art and design, design and technology and music is particularly good.
- Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 and GCSE results are rising at a faster rate than nationally. A level results are well above average and improving.
- Standards in the sixth form subjects inspected in depth are well above average in mathematics, physics, art and design, business, design and technology and ICT.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs, gifted and talented pupils and those with English as an additional language enables them to make similarly good progress to other pupils.
- Achievement is hindered in physical education by poor accommodation.
- The specialist language college status has not yet had a positive effect on the rate of achievement in modern foreign languages or in other subjects.

Commentary

1. Boys enter the school with above average standards of attainment overall; this is confirmed by the results of national tests and tests by the school early in Year 7. Nevertheless, they have a considerable range of previous experience because they come from many primary schools spread over a wide area. The school's induction process quickly makes them aware of a tradition and expectation of hard work. Teachers are careful to identify pupils' earlier learning and build upon it. As a result of the school's positive, purposeful ethos and the support of parents, boys make rapid progress and achieve well throughout the school.
2. In national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003, results in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science put the school in the top five per cent of schools nationally. Results were above average in comparison with results for other grammar schools. Both comparisons include national results for girls and these are consistently higher than those of boys. The rate of improvement in the school's results for the last five years has been faster than found nationally and provisional results for 2004 indicate that this trend has been continued.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	42.8 (43.0)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	47.3 (46.5)	35.4 (34.7)
science	43.1 (41.5)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 155 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

3. Results in GCSE examinations in 2003 were very high and in the top five per cent of schools nationally. They were broadly average in comparison with other grammar schools but above average for schools that had a similar score in national tests in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9. The comparisons do not do full justice to an all boys school because the scores for comparison include results for girls. Work seen during the inspection

shows good overall achievement and standards to match the provisional results for 2004, which show further improvement.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	99 (99)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	53.1 (53.1)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 154 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

4. In work seen during the inspection in Years 7 to 9, standards are above average in citizenship, design and technology, geography, ICT and physical education. They are well above average in all other subjects. Overall, achievement is good in Years 7 to 9 in relation to boys' standards on entry to the school and their capabilities. Achievement is very good in art and design, design and technology and music, reflecting pupils' response to enthusiastic, challenging teaching and the high level of practical experience offered by the subjects. In an otherwise positive picture, only one subject produces achievement that is less than good. Although achievement in physical education is satisfactory in relation to pupils' standards when they join the school, it is adversely affected by the poor quality of accommodation. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are above average in citizenship and physical education. They are well above average in all other subjects. Achievement continues to be very good in art and design, design and technology and music; it is good in all other subjects except physical education where it is satisfactory. The specialist language college status has not yet had an effect on the rate of achievement in modern foreign languages or in other subjects, although some good initiatives such as primary school language classes and 'fast tracking' (to move more able pupils on more rapidly) have not yet had time to take effect.
5. There are no significant differences in the achievement of different groups of pupils. All boys who have English as an additional language are identified and at the time of the inspection none were at a very early stage of learning the language. The needs of boys new to the school are assessed and, where needed, the local education authority (LEA) provides a specialist teacher to support them in their lessons. This excellent programme allows them to integrate socially and academically. As a result, they make good progress. Gifted and talented pupils achieve well overall. In some subjects, high expectations and good opportunities are helping to raise their standards and achievement but progress is not monitored effectively enough. For example, in some subjects, pupils could be pushed harder to achieve A* grades at GCSE from A predictions. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well. Very good communication between teachers and the support systems ensures that pupils with special needs achieve as well as others.

Sixth form

6. Standards in A level examinations in 2003, based on average points scores, were well above average overall and in the top five per cent nationally for male students. In most subjects, all students entered obtained at least a pass grade. In many subjects, more than half the students obtained A or B grades. Particularly successful subjects in 2003, with well above average results, were biology, business studies, chemistry, economics, English literature and history. Subjects with below average results were English language and literature, design and technology and German. Provisional results for 2004 indicate an improvement in overall performance. In most subjects, a majority of students obtained the highest A/B grades. All the

subjects for focus in this inspection sustained a high standard of performance, or improved on 2003, except history.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	93.8 (97.5)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	47.1(56.5)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per pupil	380.1 (413.5)	258.2 (263.3)

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

- For present students, standards are well above average overall. Students receive good advice about their choice of courses and good support so that few do not complete their studies. In subjects inspected in detail in this inspection, standards are well above average in business education, design and technology, ICT, mathematics, physical education and physics; standards are above average in English literature, French, and history. Students’ attainment is particularly noteworthy in design and technology, where much of the work is to a standard worthy of higher education courses.
- Achievement is good in relation to students’ above average prior attainment and their capabilities. Students achieve particularly well when building on the skills and knowledge obtained at an earlier stage as, for example, in ICT. They also achieve very well when they encounter very good teaching as they do in Year 12 French, design and technology, ICT, mathematics and physics. Students’ positive approach to learning and strong relationships between teachers and students are significant factors contributing to their very good achievement in these subjects. Occasionally, students do not achieve well when they rely too much on others or on their teachers, or are reluctant to commit themselves wholeheartedly to taking responsibility for their own learning.

Pupils’ attitudes, values and other personal qualities (ethos)

Overall, pupils’ attitudes to school are very good. The very good relationships between pupils and staff make a significant contribution to the very good behaviour and pupils’ success. Attendance is very good and is very high in comparison with other schools. Punctuality is very good; very few pupils do not arrive at school on time. Spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils respond well to a clear academic ethos and to the opportunities to take part in interesting activities.
- Pupils’ behaviour in and around the school is very good.
- The very good relationships between pupils and staff and with each other have a strong positive influence on the learning environment.
- Attendance is well above average and contributes to achievement.
- Pupils and students have few opportunities for developing skills in taking responsible roles.

Commentary

- The school has successfully maintained pupils’ very good attitudes to school identified at the previous inspection. When observing pupils in and around the school it is evident they are happy to be there; they are polite, chatter together good naturedly, say that they are proud to be associated with the school and as one Year 8 pupil commented “I am lucky to be at the school, as there are nice people here”. In lessons, the majority of pupils are attentive and apply themselves well, which assists their learning. In some lessons, such as music, pupils display a great deal of enthusiasm and attitudes to the subject are excellent. The school sets high expectations of achievement and teachers work hard to create a desire to learn in pupils, but in a few lessons attitudes and interest diminish due to less effective teaching. Further interest and enjoyment in the school are encouraged by the pupils’ involvement in a wide

range of activities and clubs. The only negative aspect of pupils' attitudes is the dropping of litter on the playground at break and particularly at lunchtime. A few pupils could be seen picking up their own litter, but the amount left on the ground does not reflect the usual sense of pride in the school.

10. The very good relationships between staff and pupils are a strong feature in contributing to the very good behaviour in lessons and around the school. Pupils want to behave well and, with very few exceptions, they do so. They value the commendations they receive. They have a high level of self-esteem and confidence. Pupils entrusted to conduct a survey of traffic outside school completed the exercise sensibly and diligently; their behaviour was impeccable. In response to the pupils' questionnaire, nearly half of the pupils disagree that there was no bullying in school, but on questioning pupils this was revealed as a very small amount that the staff deal with effectively. No evidence of bullying or of racial tension was found during the inspection week. The school is racially harmonious. Nearly all parents who replied to the pre-inspection questionnaire feel their child is happy at school and agree that their child is not bullied.

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	889	6	0
White – Irish	1	0	0
White – any other White background	8	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	5	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	32	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	38	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	2	0	0
Black or Black British – African	7	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	2	0	0
Chinese	27	0	0
Any other ethnic group	36	0	0
Parent/pupil preferred not to say	7	1	0

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

11. Provision for pupils' spiritual, social and cultural development is very good. Provision for their moral development is excellent. School performances help to develop their self-esteem and they are learning to appreciate the performing arts as well as the academic focus of the school, but there are not enough opportunities for the boys to develop leadership responsibilities in the school.
12. The very good opportunities for pupils to become involved in extra-curricular events and clubs enable them to broaden their experiences and develop their collaborative skills. In class, teachers provide good opportunities for boys to reflect on what they learn and to consider the moral implications of new developments. A very good example was a Year 11 history class considering the causes of war and the possibility of mankind being condemned never to achieve lasting peace. Pupils respect the standards of the school and the right of all to study

and are willing to listen to each other's opinions and beliefs with respect. This encourages their confidence and openness. The openness of the school's Islamic Society, for example, is indicative of the boys' willingness to share experiences and to encourage understanding. Pupils respect the authority of the prefects and they support the discipline of the school. The school council has been developed, but there are still too few opportunities for the boys to take responsibility in the school, other than for their own study. They have the confidence and maturity to do so but they are not required to do more than support the requests of the teachers. They are not challenged to develop their leadership skills or to take responsibility for others.

Attendance

13. Attendance at the school is very good; the rate of unauthorised absence at the school is well below the national average. Although the school communicates to parents the importance of regular attendance, the school is not rigorous enough in ensuring that parents contact the school on the first day of absence so that the school knows the whereabouts of its pupils. Very few pupils were observed arriving at school late; most of the late arrivals are due to the inadequacies of the local rail service.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	3.1
National data	7.2

Unauthorised absence	
School data	0.0
National data	1.1

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

Sixth form

14. Attendance and punctuality are very good. Attitudes and behaviour are very good, as in the main school. Students' personal development is good, but opportunities are missed to develop students' leadership qualities.
15. Students' attitudes to learning in the sixth form are very good and behaviour is often exemplary. In almost all lessons, students are absorbed in their work and fascinated by their chosen subjects. Students and staff have high expectations of the standards they will achieve and students say the school has never let them down. When speaking to students, they feel that relationships are very good with staff, that there is a family atmosphere in the school and a sense of camaraderie exists between year groups. Attendance in the sixth form is very good. The school expects students to attend all lessons; they respond well with very good attendance and use their study periods responsibly.
16. Provision for students' spiritual, social and cultural development is very good. Provision for their moral development is excellent. The very good opportunities presented to the boys to learn new skills, and to have new experiences in a safe and orderly environment, are enabling them to develop into well-mannered, rounded individuals. They clearly support the discipline of the school and make a useful contribution to the good order of the school through their roles as prefects. Various subjects encourage students to reflect on the wonder of what they study and they are encouraged to become thoughtful and to consider the impact of what they learn. They are not able to develop their understanding of the range of belief systems, however, as there is no religious education in the sixth form. The work of the Amnesty group and the availability of the Tradecraft stall demonstrate their concern for others and they respond well to requests for assistance from teachers. Prefects' support role in Year 7 classes at registration gives confidence to younger pupils in their early days at school. Other opportunities for students to develop their leadership skills are limited. There is no separate council for sixth formers, though they are represented on the school council. They do not

organise clubs, teams or music groups independently from teachers and there are many missed opportunities for them to become school leaders and make a significant contribution to the life of younger boys in the main school. Their contribution to the sixth form itself is responsive rather than active.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Pupils achieve well because of good teaching in a supportive and purposeful atmosphere for learning. The curriculum meets most pupils' needs although there are deficiencies in physical education in the main school and in religious education in the sixth form that make it unsatisfactory overall. Extra-curricular opportunities to enrich learning are very good. Satisfactory attention is given to the care and welfare of pupils. The school manages the inclusion of different groups of pupils very well.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good throughout the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers know their subjects very well, which enables them to plan challenging lessons.
- Teachers insist on high standards of behaviour so that time is used well.
- Pupils learn well because they are given work that captures and maintains their interest.
- Although the use of assessment is satisfactory overall, teachers are not consistently using data well enough to check pupils' progress.
- Marking does not consistently tell pupils how to improve.

Commentary

17. Teaching and learning are good overall in all years. A substantial proportion of teaching is very good and some is excellent. The small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching seen during the inspection was the result of teachers failing to plan lessons well enough to meet pupils' needs and to maintain the pace of learning. Teaching is very good in art and design, design and technology and music. With the exception of physical education, teaching is good overall in all other subjects.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 116 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
5 (4%)	39 (34%)	56 (48%)	13 (11%)	3 (3%)	0	0

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

18. The introduction of language college status has not yet had a noticeable effect on the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Nevertheless, teaching has improved since the previous inspection as a result of monitoring of classroom standards and support for improving practice by senior and middle managers. Teaching has many strengths and promotes good learning. The principal strength of teaching, from which all else flows, lies in teachers' very good command of their subjects. Teachers use their knowledge to plan lessons that challenge pupils and promote their learning by gaining their interest. When appropriate, teachers provide expert demonstrations and are able to provide clear explanations of difficult concepts so that pupils understand. Many lessons are characterised by teachers' enthusiasm for their subjects that pupils are encouraged to share. Very good relationships between teachers and pupils, together with pupils' very good attitudes, contribute much to the learning atmosphere in the school. In the great majority of lessons, pupils behave very well because they are interested

and the pace that teachers set carries them along so that little time is wasted. Classroom management is very good and pupils respond very well to the high standards that teachers set for their work and behaviour. The contrast when lessons are not well planned is stark. Pace, interest and motivation all suffer and, occasionally, behaviour deteriorates, with the result that learning and progress are unsatisfactory.

19. The school considers the learning needs of all pupils with special educational needs well. Pupils are monitored carefully and action is taken to give any necessary support. Strategies for effective teaching and learning are listed on information provided to teachers that links very well with the school's pastoral system. Appropriate individual plans are designed to target and monitor improvement for these pupils. Pupils, parents and teachers are involved in regular reviews of statements for improvement. Target setting is completed by subject departments so that monitoring and recording are effectively linked to standards and achievement.
20. Teachers are given much good advice about what they can do to help the learning in their subjects of boys for whom English is an additional language. However, they do not always pick up on these specific strategies. Boys sometimes struggle with specialist vocabulary and teachers do not always give them enough help in tackling a task such as participating in oral work.
21. Overall, the use teachers make of assessment to support learning is satisfactory. The school collects and collates relevant data about pupils' attainment on entry to the school. Year 6 national test results and other data are used to place pupils into groups from Year 7 and targets are set for them. The data is made available to teachers and progress towards targets is reviewed regularly. Most subjects have at least satisfactory arrangements in place to assess pupils' attainment but many are not using the information effectively to support pupils' learning so that they know what they have to do to improve. Teachers are not using the data well enough to plan for individual pupils' needs and check their progress. Although there is some good practice, marking of pupils' work is inconsistent and does not inform them well enough as to how they might improve.

Sixth form

Teaching is good overall and students learn well as a result. All teaching observed was at least satisfactory and a very high proportion was good or better. This is a better picture than that described in the previous inspection report. Teaching is very good in design and technology, ICT, mathematics and physics.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' very good subject knowledge, effective planning and good use of assessment help students learn and achieve well.
- Good relationships between teachers and students promote good, and often very good, attitudes, confidence and motivation.
- Learning in some subjects is hampered by students' over-reliance on the teacher or lack of variety in approach and method.

Commentary

22. A strong feature of the good teaching is teachers' very good knowledge and understanding of their subjects. They use these effectively to guide students' learning. In business education, for example, teachers use very good subject knowledge to explain business concepts and theories, drawing effectively on relevant examples. In mathematics, teachers are very skilful when introducing new and difficult concepts; these are very clearly explained. Teachers combine their good subject knowledge with well-planned lessons, pace and a variety of activities that effectively meet the needs of their students. In French, for example, the

challenge and pace of lessons are often very good and where interesting activities are planned, this leads to high performance. These attributes of good teaching are reinforced by good relationships between teachers and students and among students themselves. As a result most students have very good attitudes to their work and achieve well. Students are particularly keenly motivated in design and technology, ICT and mathematics. Teachers assess students well and provide much effective support for learning by the imaginative use of resources, including ICT. In design and technology, for example, students are given honest critical appraisal of their work, suggestions for improvement and a high level of practical assistance, all of which help them to sort out strategies for improvement and give them confidence to work. Students are tracked carefully at all stages of their courses and target setting is realistic. At times teachers do too much for students so that they become over-dependent on teachers for their learning. Teaching methods can lack variety. The use of ICT to support learning is limited in some subjects. On these occasions, teaching is not so effective.

23. Overall, assessment is good. Students' performance in GCSE examinations in Year 11 is used well to set targets for GCE A level examinations. Teachers assess students' work thoroughly using examination criteria effectively to ensure that students know how well they are doing in relation to their targets. Teachers use the information well to support students' achievement and to plan for the needs of individuals and groups of students. Progress is checked regularly and targets reviewed; students are well informed about what they need to do to improve.

The curriculum

Although having a number of strengths, the curriculum is unsatisfactory because it does not comply fully with statutory requirements. Nevertheless, there is a good range of courses for pupils of all ages. Careers education is good. Very good extra-curricular provision ensures very good support for learning beyond the school day and additional enrichment of the curriculum. The school provides good equality of opportunity and access to the curriculum for all pupils. Accommodation is unsatisfactory, although improvements are being made and planned. Resources for learning are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school does not comply fully with statutory requirements to teach physical education in Years 7 to 9. Religious education is not provided for sixth form students.
- Extra-curricular provision is very good and supports learning very well.
- Provision for personal, social, health and careers education is good.
- The curriculum is regularly reviewed and evaluated and there are some good innovative developments. The language college initiative is beginning to provide increased learning opportunities, particularly in languages.
- The curriculum offers few alternative pathways for older pupils.

Commentary

24. Although the curriculum has strengths, it is unsatisfactory because of two principal deficiencies. Religious education is not provided for sixth form students as required by law. At the time of the previous inspection, not enough teaching of religious education was provided for sixth form students. Now there is none. The full requirements of the National Curriculum programme of study for physical education are not met for Years 7 to 9. This is mainly because of difficulties created by inadequate accommodation for the subject. The school has for some time had plans to remedy the situation but has been unable to make progress because of circumstances largely outside its control. Apart from these important weaknesses, the school meets the needs of the majority of pupils by offering a good range of courses that is enriched by very good extra-curricular provision. The curriculum provides a very good range of

opportunities in art and design, design and technology and modern foreign languages. A particularly good example of curriculum development is provided by modern foreign languages where learning is very well supported by extra-curricular activities and links across the curriculum with other subjects. A weakness in the school's curriculum offering is in the provision of alternative business and work-related courses for older pupils. Work-related learning (WRL) is at an early stage of development. The school clearly states its purpose as developing boys' capabilities to the fullest and preparing them to follow a university degree course. However, a substantial minority of pupils do not go into the sixth form and a similar proportion does not go on to university. The curriculum is not meeting the needs and aspirations of the significant minority of pupils who do not, or cannot, go into the sixth form well enough. Business and community links are not well enough developed for the school to be able to offer alternative curricular pathways. The potential benefits to these boys and others of adding breadth to the curriculum can be seen in the high quality, industry-standard work that has resulted from the Nuffield Bursary scheme. The work done by a student funded by this scheme, in conjunction with a university, shows excellent learning of processes and presentation.

25. Support for learning beyond the school day is a strength of the school and reflects the enthusiasm that teachers bring to working with pupils and students in addition to their contractual commitments. The varied activities broaden horizons and extend learning very well. An annual 'activities week' allows additional time for activities not normally available during the rest of the year.
26. Good provision for pupils' personal, social and health and education (PSHE) is an important factor in pupils' personal development. There are clear links between the overall ethos of the school, pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour and the curricular provision made – through directly focused PSHE lessons, tutorial sessions and as part of subject teaching – to promote personal development. In a similar context, good overall provision is made for careers education so that pupils are aware of the possibilities for the next stage of their education and life beyond school.
27. The curriculum is reviewed regularly and provision evaluated. The process leads to innovation when needs are identified. For example, a 'fast track' class has been introduced for a group of higher attaining pupils to take GCSE early. The school successfully gained specialist language college status in September 2003. Curriculum development associated with language college status has provided the means to extend the range of languages offered, including Arabic, Russian and Mandarin, as well as a very good range of extra-curricular opportunities to study modern foreign languages. Contacts have recently been established with towns and schools in France so that departments in the school can build subject links and pupils can take advantage of exchanges. Students have taken part in the European Youth Parliament which contributed to their awareness of citizenship. Whilst a few departments such as geography, mathematics and art and design are beginning to develop opportunities, others have not begun to develop this dimension in their subjects.
28. Provision for boys for whom English is an additional language is good. Boys are also given the opportunity to take examinations in their home language and some attend classes in these languages as part of the language college provision. Because of these measures, they are given the same opportunity to succeed as all others and their achievement is good.
29. Access to lessons is ensured for all pupils and students with special educational needs and occasionally timetabled groups are adjusted to allow these pupils and students to follow their lessons. Support assistants are employed to help some pupils who have individual education plans (IEPs) to support their education. There is good communication to assist achievement and teachers and assistants are well aware of pupils' needs.
30. Overall, accommodation is unsatisfactory because facilities for teaching indoor physical education are poor and adversely affect learning. The gymnasium is too small for its purpose

and the changing rooms are overcrowded. Outdoor facilities are waterlogged in poor weather and there are now no tennis courts. Accommodation for teaching mathematics is unsatisfactory because there are insufficient rooms so all rooms are shared by teachers and a proportion of lessons take place in unsatisfactory temporary classrooms. Several departments use these rooms, which are a poor environment in which to learn. Facilities in the newly refurbished areas for design and technology are excellent and the new areas for art and design are very good, though there is no exhibition space. Boys respect the buildings, which show few signs of damage despite their age. Maintenance and cleaning staff work hard to present the school well.

31. Resources for learning are satisfactory overall. There are good stocks of books in most subjects and a satisfactory number of computers overall. At the time of the inspection, there were only two interactive whiteboards in use in the school but these are enhancing opportunities for learning. The science laboratories are well worn. The sports and physical education facilities are adversely affecting achievement. There are good resources in music and in art and design there is a rich diversity of resources. The library is small with a limited range of books and display. Pupils and sixth form students make very good use of the computers located in the library for independent learning and research. A spacious room adjoined to the library is used well for careers information.

Sixth form

32. The sixth form curriculum provides a good range of academic courses for students but is unsatisfactory because the requirement to provide religious education for sixth form students is not met. Overall, however, the courses offered suit most students' needs and aspirations well. All students in Year 13 follow a course in general studies so that their horizons are broadened and they can encounter a wider range of subjects and issues. A PSHE course in Year 12 prepares students for a general studies module at AS level. The key skills of communication, application of number and ICT are provided through subjects.
33. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory overall. Students have their own common room but this is dilapidated and dowdy. Other rooms including the library are available for private study and students have ready access to ICT facilities. In physical education, the lack of a specialist teaching room is not conducive to stimulating methods of teaching and learning is affected as a result. Teaching staff are very well matched to the needs of the subject curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

The trust and high regard pupils have for staff create very good relationships that are a strength of the school. The school takes care to ensure that pupils' views are valued. Overall, guidance for pupils through the monitoring of their work and the setting of appropriate targets is satisfactory; support for pupils' personal development is good. Procedures to ensure pupils' health and safety are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The form tutors and the recently established structure of heads of year provide good support for pupils' personal development.
- The school council, form tutorials and individual mentoring are beginning to enable pupils to have a voice in the school.
- There are satisfactory arrangements for the induction of pupils new to the school and the arrangements for the transfer of students to the sixth form are good.
- The school has not adopted a race equality policy.
- Whole-school child protection training is not up to date.

Commentary

34. The very good relationships that pupils have with staff ensure that pupils are secure and trusting in their care. Pupils value the accessibility of the staff. They feel that there is not just one person in whom they could trust, but that they could approach any teacher with concerns and be confident that they would be listened to and appropriate action taken to solve their problems. The recent introduction of heads of year and the form tutors provides good monitoring of attendance, behaviour and general progress. Guidance through the monitoring of academic achievement is satisfactory; pupils know and understand how to improve their personal targets, such as completing coursework, but specific subject guidance on how to meet targets and improve their work is inconsistent. Although the school is racially harmonious and some procedures are in place informally, governors have not adopted a race equality policy or formal procedures to assess the operation and impact of all its policies on pupils, prospective pupils and staff, publishing the results of monitoring each year, as required by law.
35. The process of seeking pupils' views throughout the school is in its early stages of development. The school council has recently re-formed and is now very active in seeking out pupils' views. The success of being instrumental in the recent re-surfacing of the playground has increased the confidence of the council and of their peers in their ability to have a strong voice in the democratic process of the school. Daily discussion and debate of the 'Thought for the Week' in form tutorials encourage pupils to voice their opinions on a wide range of diverse topics, such as the return of heritage objects, and drugs in sport.
36. Although all staff are provided with copies of the child protection procedures, not all are aware of the recent change in the designated person. The designated person is due to undergo training in the very near future and a full review will take place to identify staff training needs. Appropriate policies and procedures for health and safety are in place.
37. The school has endeavoured to improve the induction of pupils into school. At the pre-inspection parents' meeting, a few parents thought that the induction process should include pre-visiting. The school offers local primary school pupils opportunities to visit before starting their secondary education, but because of the selective nature of the school, some of the primary schools are reluctant to avail themselves of the opportunity. The school ensures that pupils are cared for on entry to school; allocation of prefects to care for the younger pupils results in very good relationships that endure with both age groups.

Sixth form

38. Overall, students receive good guidance in the sixth form and appreciate the efforts teachers make on their behalf. Comments during the inspection by students such as "teachers are fantastic" and "the school has never let me down" indicate the value students place on their relationships with staff. The quality of support, through monitoring students' progress and guidance on how to improve and raise their levels of achievement, is good. Although careers staff encourage individual research on students' choice of careers, students feel that earlier assessment of their future course or career needs and aspirations would help to ensure that they follow appropriate sixth form courses. Students believe that the school has rigid views on how it educates them and that it is pointless to express views of their own. This perception is at odds with the otherwise positive view they have about relationships with the school. Where possible, careers teachers try to fulfil students' requests for work experience in their chosen fields. They provide useful support for students in preparing their applications for higher education.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has good links with its parents. Good links have been established with associate primary schools and colleges. The school has good links with the community.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are happy with the school's provision for their sons.
- Links with the community enrich the provision in sport and the curriculum.
- The school supports learning in the local primary and secondary schools.
- Parents receive well-produced, good quality information booklets.
- Information in pupils' annual progress reports is not sufficiently focused on what pupils need to do to improve.

Commentary

39. Parents are supportive of the school and are happy with the provision their children receive. Many of the parents have long-standing family connections with the school. The school is part of their shared lives and results in a close connection with very good support for events, clubs and out-of-school activities. The parents' association is very active and successful in providing support, organising social events and consequently raising considerable funds for the school. The school makes use of parental expertise in sports. For example, in hockey the link with a parent has resulted in the school being successful in competition. The strong association with the school establishes high expectations of personal development and academic achievement from parents and the community, which the school satisfies.
40. Overall, information to parents is of a satisfactory quality. Termly bulletins give a good range of information on the daily life of the school. Useful information is provided on how to help children at home by informing parents about what is being taught; for example how the school is teaching study skills this term. The prospectus and the governors' annual report to parents have detailed information on the work of the school that meets requirements. Pupils' annual progress reports give good general progress information and indicate the areas for improvement in personal development, but are less successful at focusing directly on achievement in subjects and what pupils need to do to improve. The school has recently introduced a survey of parents' views of the school. Detailed analysis is not yet available but consideration has been given to parents' views on the organisation of parents' evenings and changes are being implemented to take their views into account.
41. Pupils in the partner primary schools are benefiting from the support provided by the specialist languages college. A partnership approach to developing practice is emerging. A very good range of lunchtime and evening classes is offered as part of the community programme and these classes are free to pupils in the school. However, the provision of these classes has not been planned in the context of other local provision and there is no sense of whether this duplicates existing provision or makes best use of funding for the benefit of the local community. One of the school's business partners is interested in further developing its connection with the languages college. Wider links with businesses in the area have not yet been exploited or developed.

Sixth form

42. Links with the community and other colleges are good.
43. Teachers make good use of links with businesses, colleges and visiting speakers to broaden students' experiences. Students are encouraged to take part in community services such as assisting local primary schools or helping in local hospitals. Industry days and Challenge of Enterprise Conferences, directed at improving students' team working and communication skills, link students with businesses. The school encourages students to make use of a range of activities to expand their knowledge and widen their outlook. A range of stimulating opportunities is provided, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and World Challenge expeditions to Vietnam, which students welcome and value. Links with colleges and

institutions for higher education are satisfactory and used appropriately to help students to make an informed choice of their next educational destination.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership, management and governance are good. Financial management is very good. Not all statutory requirements are met and monitoring and evaluation of the school's specialist language college are not rigorous enough.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good financial management enables the school to achieve its educational aims.
- The school is led and managed well overall. The headteacher provides very clear direction based on close analysis of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Other key staff support the school's vision and implement policies well.
- Governance of the school is good. The chair and his team provide strong support, professional expertise and constructive challenge to take the school forward.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the school's specialist status are not sufficiently rigorous.
- Statutory requirements are not fully met.

Commentary

44. The governance of the school is good overall. Governors are very supportive of the school, proud of its performance and proud of the fact that, though selective, it gives priority to local applicants for places. They are very well informed and have a very clear view of strategic priorities. They contribute fully to the school improvement plan. They are very ready to question and challenge constructively the school's approach. The chair of governors brings much professional expertise to the work of the governing body and a very thoughtful, analytical and strategic approach to longer-term developments. Governors understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school very well, and though there are no direct links with particular subjects (apart from the special educational needs governor) they do invite reviews from particular areas on specific matters, for example the provision of an ICT suite. However, the governing body has not ensured by all reasonable means that the school fulfils its statutory requirements in respect of the provision of religious education in the sixth form, of a policy for race equality that includes monitoring and evaluating its effectiveness, and of sufficient time for physical education in Years 7 to 9. These breaches have an impact on pupils' or students' learning, achievement and welfare.
45. Leadership is good overall. The leadership of the headteacher is very good. He conveys a very clear sense of direction and purpose through his vision of a school that has a strong academic ethos, high standards of teaching, learning and behaviour, and that is continually improving facilities and keeping up to date. While being prepared to challenge assumptions and take difficult decisions, he has also built up confidence about teaching quality and given the school a way of working together through departmental contributions to the school improvement plan. The headteacher is supported well by senior staff who share the school's vision and are active in implementing it. They recognise the importance of sharing good practice, and teachers themselves are now making contributions to the teaching and learning handbook and the 'Teachers' Toolkit'. They are beginning to look outside the school for ideas and support by, for example, membership of a forum for deputy headteachers. Other key staff have substantially accepted the necessity for change and provide further impetus for it. As a result, there is a strong sense of moving forward in the school while maintaining traditional standards. However, leadership has neglected or not fully implemented some of the school's statutory obligations, as indicated above. One case, the lack of provision for religious education in the sixth form, has been ignored since before the previous inspection. The

omissions place a question mark over the school's otherwise inclusive nature and the effect on pupils' and students' achievement.

46. Management is good overall. Effective systems deriving directly from school policy are in place to manage performance, staff development, and the monitoring and review of departments' work. These are contributing well to school improvement. The sixth form is managed well and makes a good contribution to the life of the school as a result. The school's very good contribution to initial teacher training benefits teaching practice across the school. Monitoring and support for teaching have improved teaching quality. On the other hand, monitoring and evaluation of the progress and impact of the specialist language college on the school are not rigorous enough. Whilst a presentation has been made to the governing body, this has provided an overview of developments rather than a detailed report of progress against the action plan contained in the successful bid for funding. The leadership and strategic management of the specialist language college have not focused sufficiently on the school and its pupils, although some initiatives are benefiting the linked primary schools and the local community.
47. Financial management is very good. As a result of the close working partnership between the headteacher, the finance officer and the chair of the governors' finance committee, the school has succeeded in making improvements to facilities and funding future projects, for example for a new sixth form centre, in line with its educational priorities. Principles of best value are very well applied to all expenditure, a good example being taking up the opportunity when it arose to appoint two members of staff instead of the intended one because of the additional benefit this would bring to pupils' education.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	3,603,192
Total expenditure	3,555,958
Expenditure per pupil	3,402

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	79,421
Balance carried forward to the next year 2004-2005	126,655

Sixth form

Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Governors are supportive. Financial management is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The sixth form has doubled in size over the last ten years, and attracts not just a high proportion of Altrincham Grammar School's boys but also an increasing number of pupils from the Manchester area.
- Students are treated as individuals and their progress is checked regularly.
- Subjects are led and managed well.
- There is no provision for religious education, and social accommodation is inadequate.

Commentary

48. As in the main school, governors know about and support the work of the sixth form well. Finances are managed well so that the needs of the sixth form can be met. The sixth form leader and his deputy have a unity of purpose that they convey effectively to the students. They have done much to extend the popularity of the sixth form. Management is good. Effective day-to-day management ensures that the sixth form operates efficiently. Students

and their work are regularly reviewed and benefit from the care with which this is done, particularly in relation to the involvement of parents and the maintenance of careful records on individuals. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds are also carefully tracked. Subjects are led and managed well. However, leadership has still not fully dealt with aspects of provision that have been issues for a considerable time, though accommodation is being dealt with through the school's building programme.

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

Work-related learning (WRL)

Provision in WRL is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A senior member of staff from the careers department has taken charge of WRL to promote development.
- Business links have been established and visiting speakers give insight into the world of work.
- Heads of departments have been requested to identify WRL links within their subjects, but as yet there has been no audit.
- Some departments pay good attention to WRL in lessons, but many do not.

Commentary

49. Provision for WRL is developing satisfactorily in the school. Meetings have been held wherein teachers were asked to identify links with WRL and to include aspects of work and simulated working conditions in the classroom. During the inspection, it was possible to see some lessons where teachers had planned to include aspects of WRL to enhance the learning. For example, in design and technology, some workshop practices included production line techniques; pupils learned about batch, one-off and multiple production methods; they worked with sophisticated equipment and gave formal presentations to others in the group to advertise their products. Presentations were strong in history when pupils were learning about economic awareness and the concepts of supply and demand, costs and wages, and in science where they used commercial standards of presentation on aspects of industrial science. In ICT the job of a systems analyst was examined; in religious education pupils used a well-known problem-solving technique to discuss ethical issues. Pupils have visited farms and factories and others have experienced work shadowing, but owing to the Health and Safety Risk Assessment legislation, such visits are now difficult to arrange. Pupils studying French appreciated the opportunity to do work shadowing during visits to France in previous years.
50. All pupils in Year 10 have a week of work experience in the summer term and the range of placements is wide, in shops, offices, schools, care homes, factories and private businesses. Most pupils enjoy their experiences and make efforts to find their own placements. On return to school they have to make a presentation in English lessons which, again, demands skills in speaking to an audience. In Year 12, as part of the key/life skill programme, students have to involve themselves with public speaking, team building and lateral thinking activities.
51. Leadership and management are satisfactory. A senior member of staff from the careers department has taken charge of WRL, has met with fellow heads of department to request that they identify WRL links within subject departments and is planning to collate responses. WRL is at an early stage of development and its impact on learning is limited, but the school has made a satisfactory start in implementing the statutory requirement that all young people experience some WRL in Years 10 and 11.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good leadership and management provide clear goals for the department to work towards. Priorities for development have been carefully identified.
- Teachers use a wide range of challenging assignments that are highly motivating. As a result, the boys work very hard and persevere to achieve their best standards.
- Extra-curricular activities offer rich opportunities for the boys to extend their interest in the subject. They also make a very good contribution to their personal development.
- Boys learn well because of good teaching and their achievement is good as a result.

Commentary

52. Results in the 2003 national tests for boys in Year 9 were very high in relation to all schools and well above average for grammar schools. This was also the case in the provisional results for 2004. GCSE results were also very high for both English and English literature in comparison with all schools and well above average for grammar schools. These same standards were reflected in the provisional 2004 results with a continuing increase in the very high numbers of boys gaining the top grades.
53. Boys enter the school with standards that are above average. Teachers' careful planning of challenging tasks enables boys to make good progress and to reach standards that are well above average by the end of Year 9. This represents good achievement in relation to their earlier learning and their capabilities. Boys for whom English is an additional language are either able to work independently as everyone else, or are well supported by a rigorous programme to meet their language needs. The solid foundation for learning developed in Years 7 to 9 is consolidated in Years 10 and 11. The majority of boys are enabled to maintain standards that are well above average and achievement is good. The boys match their teachers' high expectations with their own high aspirations and they work hard to produce extended pieces of coursework. In literature, they support their views with well-chosen references to the texts and in oral work they collaborate very well; they have the confidence to challenge each other and to assert their own views. Careful marking and monitoring of work are a very good feature of assessment for this age group. Because of the thoughtful deployment of support staff, pupils with special educational needs are able to participate in and complete all tasks. These boys are given the same chance to succeed as all others. In work seen during the inspection it was clear that the skills to obtain very high grades by the end of the year in national tests and examinations were being developed for Years 9 and 11.
54. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall across Years 7 to 11. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject and they use this to provide a wide range of tasks that gives the boys the chance to write in a variety of styles and for different audiences. The literature texts have been chosen with great care to appeal to more able boys and they are also used to explore a range of social and moral issues such as racism and capital punishment. Careful planning is often a feature of lessons for Years 7 to 9 so that lessons have a brisk pace and time is used productively. The quality of pupils' work is also helped by the care with which it is marked, particularly in Years 10 and 11. The boys' own work is often used as examples or for practice in applying the examination criteria. Because of this, the boys are clear on what they

have to do and, in general, they know how to improve. In all years boys show a willingness to persevere and they also work very well together. As a result, boys make good gains in their learning; they have genuine intellectual curiosity and they relish challenge. The boys' experience of English is extended in the very good programme of extra-curricular activities. The debating societies and the Book Week activities, for example, provide opportunities to broaden their interests and the drama club and theatre visits contribute well to their cultural development.

55. Leadership and management are good. There is a clear vision and a common sense of purpose. All staff contribute to the schemes of work so that expertise is shared and everyone's contribution is valued. There is also a commitment to improvement which involves closer support for staff and more careful monitoring of teaching and learning.
56. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Improved results in national tests and examinations mean that more boys attain the highest levels and grades. This has resulted in improved achievement. The clearer sense of direction, underpinned by more strategic planning, is aiming to secure the highest quality of experience for all boys.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

57. Standards are above average. Subjects make a satisfactory contribution overall to the development of pupils' skills. For example, some good work is being done in design and technology to develop pupils' reading, writing and speaking skills through the use of 'key words' for the subject, different kinds of note-making techniques, questioning and discussion in class. Marking does not deal specifically with mistakes in language and expression, however. Geography and religious education have good vocabulary displays, opportunities for extended writing, and 'writing frames' (often quite sophisticated) to support pupils' writing. Again, what is lacking is correction of mistakes in pupils' work. Science laboratories have good displays supporting literacy and there are examples of good word-processed work by pupils after initial research. No specific help is given to improve writing, however, and though word lists are displayed they are not referred to. This mixed picture of the effectiveness of the literacy programme is borne out by the literacy co-ordinator's own check on progress. All departments have received advice, guidance and training in implementing the whole-school policy. Her programme is in its second year of operation and has moved on from a focus on spelling and marking to developing writing skills. Given that departments are receptive, there is a good case for consolidation before moving to the next stage.

Latin

58. One lesson in Latin was sampled in which teaching and learning were very good. Teaching is very knowledgeable and promotes thinking skills and general knowledge as well as the pursuit of Latin. The high standards seen reflect the results in the 2003 examinations. Pupils are very keen and enjoy the challenge of translation and gaining greater insight into the structure of language. They are reflective and mature. The room is very small and limits the activities as well as movement.

Modern foreign languages (French, German, Spanish)

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average.
- Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject.
- The curriculum, including extra-curricular opportunities, is very well designed to promote learning.
- Foreign language assistants provide very good opportunities for speaking.

- Most pupils have very positive attitudes, but in a few classes the management of behaviour is not firm enough.
- Data is not yet used consistently enough to bring about improvement.

Commentary

59. The proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades in French, German or Spanish in 2003, was well above the national average, particularly in Spanish and significantly above the national averages for boys. Provisional results improved in 2004. Whilst these results may not appear to be as strong as other subjects' results, they compare extremely favourably against other schools nationally. These high standards are reflected in the high quality of pupils' work seen during the inspection.
60. The great majority of pupils achieve well overall, and they achieve very well in the second language they follow from Year 8. This is due to their very mature attitude to work and teachers' very good knowledge of their subject. In a few classes in Years 8 and 9, pupils' achievement is only satisfactory. Their progress is limited by inattentiveness and low level silly behaviour which is not dealt with firmly enough. When teachers use ICT with confidence, pupils' interest, irrespective of their capability in languages, is increased and standards of work are higher. This was demonstrated in a German lesson when pupils produced excellent presentations of work they had researched using websites.
61. Most pupils are developing their skills well in all areas of language learning. Year 7 pupils who have already studied a language in their primary schools are placed in a group where the teacher builds on their prior learning to ensure progression. This is a development of the specialist language college, linked to the provision of language classes in partner primary schools. The great majority of Year 9 pupils are able to answer oral and written questions with confidence, conduct a simple discussion in the foreign language and use the past tense accurately and have a very good range of vocabulary. Higher attaining pupils in Year 8 have achieved a high degree of accuracy in their written work. These pupils are 'fast tracked' so that they will be able to take GCSE earlier than usual. In Year 11, higher attaining pupils use the foreign language with confidence. Their listening, comprehension and speaking skills are particularly strong and they are able to produce largely accurate extended pieces of independent writing, such as descriptions and letters, using a variety of tenses and complex phrases. The speaking skills of all pupils are improving well in French, German and Spanish as a result of the very good support from the foreign language assistants and good opportunities for speaking provided by teachers.
62. Teaching is good overall and promotes good learning, but ranges from satisfactory to excellent. Teachers use their very good knowledge of their subject to prepare materials for learning very thoroughly to provide good challenge for pupils. In the best lessons, the pace is very brisk; pupils are keen and concentrate well. When teaching is excellent, the teacher promotes high achievement through enjoyable but very challenging questioning and tasks. Relationships with pupils are mostly very good, although in some classes expectations are not made clear enough. Planning is satisfactory but does not always help to structure lessons. Learning objectives are not precise enough or consistently shared with pupils, or reviewed at the end of the lesson. Marking is mostly detailed and helpful, although some teachers' marking is too brief. Good assessment data is available but is not yet used enough to bring about still further improvement. Teachers make very good use of homework to extend learning.
63. The modern languages curriculum is very good. Pupils are offered French, German and Spanish as well as a very good range of other languages as part of the extra-curricular provision resulting from the school's specialist language college status. Although it is still early days, the language college is not yet having a clear impact on standards in modern foreign

languages, although pupils are benefiting from the increase in provision of foreign language assistants' time.

64. Leadership and management of French, German and Spanish are good. Overall there has been good improvement since the previous inspection due to the careful management and reflective leadership of the department.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in external tests and examinations are very high.
- Good teaching and pupils' very positive attitudes result in good learning.
- Very good leadership provides a clear vision for ensuring that pupils achieve well.
- Marking is inconsistent; it does not inform pupils well enough about what they need to do to improve.
- Less than adequate accommodation results in difficulties in monitoring the work of the department.
- The contribution to developing pupils' numeracy made by subjects across the curriculum is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

65. Results in the 2003 Year 9 national tests and GCSE examinations were very high. Results were well above average when compared with other grammar schools. In both, the proportion of pupils gaining the highest levels was very high. Provisional 2004 results were similar.
66. In Year 9, pupils' attainment is well above average at this stage of their learning. In relation to their capabilities this represents good achievement as they entered the school with above average skills in mathematics. Pupils recall their tables confidently in doing calculations in their heads. In Year 9, pupils' algebraic skills are being developed well. The highest attaining pupils understand well the different methods for solving simultaneous equations. In Year 11, standards are well above average and pupils' achievement is good in relation to their earlier learning. The highest attaining pupils have a good understanding of circle theorems and the lowest attaining pupils can use trigonometry effectively.
67. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11 is good. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge well to ensure that new skills and concepts are clearly explained. Teachers' questioning involves pupils well and provides opportunities for pupils to share ideas and strategies with each other. As a result, pupils make good progress in lessons in their understanding of new skills. Teachers plan well for the needs of all pupils; tasks are suitably challenging and, consequently, pupils who are gifted and talented achieve as well as other pupils. Some of the most effective teaching is where the mathematics strand of the government's national initiative in Years 7 to 9 (Key Stage 3 Strategy) is being implemented well. Pupils' attainment is assessed regularly and teachers intervene in pupils' learning in lessons to check their progress well. Marking, however, does not always provide sufficient information for pupils about what they need to do to improve their work. Teachers manage and organise pupils well. As a result, pupils' attitudes to learning are very good; they behave very well, work productively on their tasks and co-operate very well with each other when asked to work together. This is encouraged by the very good relationships with teachers and with each other.
68. Leadership and management are very good. Very clear vision and direction are provided in the department's planning. Pupils' performance is analysed and evaluated well. Teachers are

working together to move the subject forward. The available accommodation is less than adequate. Teachers share rooms frequently, often with other subjects, which makes it difficult to display and monitor the work of the department. Improvements since the previous inspection have been good; better use is now made of ICT to support pupils' learning and pupils' progress is tracked more effectively.

Mathematics across the curriculum

69. Pupils' competence in mathematics is well above average and numeracy skills are developed well in mathematics lessons. The contribution made by other subjects across the school varies widely and is unsatisfactory overall. The school's policy is not yet clearly defined and few subjects are planning well enough to support these skills in lessons. As a result, opportunities are being missed to reinforce and extend pupils' numeracy skills. The responsibility for checking and supporting teachers' planning is not clearly defined.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching promotes good learning and good achievement.
- Very good attitudes help pupils to learn well.
- Teachers' expert knowledge makes learning effective.
- Assessment is not sufficiently analytical and pupils are not consistently involved in setting targets for improvement.

Commentary

70. Results in national tests for Year 9 pupils in 2003 were very high compared to the national average, above average for similar schools and grammar schools and well above the average for pupils with similar prior attainment. The trend in results has been upward for the last few years at a rate similar to the improvement nationally. Provisional results for 2004 are similar to those for 2003. Results in the GCSE separate sciences, biology, chemistry and physics, were above average for grades A*-C in 2003 and the proportion of the highest grades A*/A was well above. Results in the dual award science examination in 2003 were above average and the proportion of pupils gaining the highest grades A*/A was more than one in two, compared to about one in ten nationally. Results in 2004 were similar.
71. In work seen during the inspection, standards are well above average by the end of Year 9 and by the end of Year 11. Pupils enter the school with above average standards and reach standards well above average by the end of Years 9 and 11. Achievement is good. There are no significant differences in the performance of different groups of pupils.
72. Teaching is good and as a result pupils learn well. Teachers are experts in their subjects and lessons well planned. The best lessons include a variety of activities that maintain pupils' interest and make learning effective, especially when theory is followed up by practical work. Teachers give clear instructions so pupils work safely and carefully in experimental sessions. Because behaviour and relationships are very good, teachers waste little time maintaining discipline and lessons are productive as a result. In an otherwise positive picture, marking does not give pupils clear enough information as to how to improve their standards and pupils are not consistently involved in setting their own targets for improvement.
73. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. The previously high standards have been improved and accommodation is better, although a proportion of lessons still take place in unsatisfactory temporary classrooms. Pupils and teachers now make good use of ICT skills

and apparatus. Pupils are still given little guidance on how they can improve their standards. The recently gained language college status has had little impact in the science faculty and opportunities for development are being missed.

74. Leadership and management are good. There is a clear aim to help all pupils to achieve their potential although the analysis of data to identify strengths or weaknesses needs to be extended. The scheme of work has been adapted to make it more suited to the needs of grammar school pupils. Day-to-day organisation is good and teachers and laboratory technicians are deployed well to make best use of their expertise.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very high in GCSE.
- Pupils have very good attitudes and are interested in the subject.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good.
- Teaching and learning are good overall, leading to good achievement by pupils, but a few lessons are not planned well enough.
- There is insufficient use of National Curriculum levels in teaching in Years 7 to 9 to help pupils understand how to improve their standards.
- There is insufficient regular monitoring of teaching to ensure that there is consistently good teaching.
- There is insufficient technician support for the subject.

Commentary

75. Standards in GCSE courses in 2003 were very high with 81 per cent A*-C grades, well above the national average. Provisional results improved in 2004.
76. In work seen during the inspection, standards in Year 9 are above average. Pupils make good use of desktop publishing software to create professional-looking brochures. They can insert formulae in spreadsheets and are beginning to understand the concept of modelling, in managing the finances of a sports club. They are achieving well in the subject as they build on their earlier learning. Standards in Year 11 are very high, and reflect the very good achievement made by pupils. They have completed their first major project where they make use of a wide range of skills they have learned in previous years. Pupils have very good understanding of data bases and can use queries and create reports. Very good use is made of word-processing skills to present their work.
77. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers have a very good understanding of their subject, and are able to give pupils clear explanations about the use of software, leading to pupils making good progress. However, in a few less successful lessons, planning and time management are unsatisfactory and there is insufficient challenge. Objectives are not made clear at the start of lessons and plenary sessions at the end are rushed so that learning is not reinforced sufficiently. In Years 7 to 9, National Curriculum levels are not used to inform pupils how well they are doing or of how to improve their standards. In Years 10 and 11, pupils taking GCSE courses make very good progress. This is because their teachers have a very good understanding of examination requirements and plan lessons accordingly. Pupils have very good attitudes in lessons, and their work rates and high level of interest contribute to the good progress they make.
78. Leadership of the subject is good and management is satisfactory. Curricular innovation in Years 10 and 11 is good and ensures that pupils who do not take a GCSE course complete

ICT work in other subjects to meet statutory requirements. Although there is some monitoring of teaching, this is not done regularly enough to ensure all lessons are well taught. There has been good progress since the previous inspection; high standards have been maintained and the accommodation and resources improved.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

79. The use of ICT across the curriculum is satisfactory overall. Pupils have good levels of knowledge and understanding of ICT software programs and can use their skills in many subjects when they have the opportunity to do so. The majority of departments have planned use of ICT in their schemes of work. There is good use of ICT in science, music, geography, design and technology and art and design but it is unsatisfactory in physical education. Pupils use word processing extensively in many subjects, particularly to complete coursework projects. They create slide show presentations and use desktop publishing well. In some subjects, pupils use specific software effectively in their work. In design and technology, pupils use computer-assisted design (CAD) and computer-assisted manufacturing (CAM); in art and design digital images are manipulated using photo-editing programs. There has been good progress since the previous inspection in the use of ICT across the curriculum. The newly created third ICT room has gone some way to meeting the demand by departments but lack of access to computers is still an issue and prevents pupils making full use of their ICT skills. The number of computers and interactive white boards available is less than that seen in most schools of this size.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good leadership and teamwork are promoting very good standards.
- Teaching is good and pupils achieve well.
- Teachers have good knowledge, high expectations and enthusiasm for the subject.
- Pupils' work is monitored well, which ensures high standards.
- The department has no significant weaknesses.

Commentary

80. Results in the 2003 GCSE examination were well above average. Pupils do significantly better in geography than they do in their other subjects. In 2004, provisional examination results were very marginally lower. From Years 7 to 11 achievement is good, showing that the department adds good value to pupils' attainments.
81. Pupils join the school with a wide range of previous experiences and standards that are broadly average. By the end of Year 9, standards are above average, representing good achievement in relation to pupils' starting points and their capabilities. By the end of Year 9, pupils have above average knowledge and understanding of a wide range of topics. They successfully use a good range of geographical terms such as those associated with migration. Many Year 9 pupils are starting to understand the concept of sustainability. Pupils make good use of a variety of graphs to represent data. Pupils achieve very well in Years 10 and 11 so that by the end of Year 11 their standards are well above average. They build very successfully on knowledge and skills learned in Years 7 to 9. Year 11 pupils successfully compare photographs of river valleys and give their reasons for the differences. Standards of classroom work are reinforced well by good fieldwork, as seen in the very recent Year 11 fieldwork from the Macclesfield area. Standards in current GCSE coursework are well above

average with pupils showing very good development of their research and analytical skills using graphs and charts. Pupils are being challenged and are achieving their potential. Pupils with special educational needs and pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve as well as their peers.

82. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall from Year 7 to 11; in Years 10 and 11 it is very good. The reason for better teaching in Years 10 and 11 is that the more experienced teachers are chosen to teach the examination course. They make greater demands on pupils, which results in extending them fully. Overall, teachers show good geographical knowledge and apply it well in their teaching. They have high expectations. Challenging questions make pupils evaluate and analyse data effectively, as seen in a Year 11 lesson where pupils sought appropriate fieldwork information to support their hypotheses. Pupils respond well to the support and encouragement that teachers give them and the quality of work is consequently good. Planning is good and teachers ensure that the aims of lessons are made clear. A consequence of the good marking and assessment is that pupils know what they need to do in order to improve. Attitudes to geography are very good and this helps to underpin learning. Pupils produce high quality work and assignments by using computers in presenting their work. Pupils with special educational needs receive good support from teachers and their peers.
83. Leadership and management are good. The department has a clear sense of direction. The department works well together as a team and has a commitment to improving standards. The head of department has a clear vision for the development of the subject. The language school dimension has enabled links with two French schools to undertake comparative geography. 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. Good improvements have been made since the previous inspection, particularly raising examination standards, monitoring and assessment procedures and the use of both fieldwork and computers.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The attitudes and motivation of the boys support good learning.
- Boys achieve well as a result of good teaching.
- Teachers emphasise the need to use supporting evidence so that judgements are more considered.
- There is too little use of assessment in Years 7 to 9 to monitor individual progress throughout the year.
- The limited monitoring of teaching results in some inconsistency in quality.

Commentary

84. GCSE results in 2003 were well above the national average. Provisional results in 2004 were higher and almost three quarters of the boys achieved A* or A.
85. Standards at the end of Year 9 are well above average. This represents good achievement in relation to pupils' standards on entry to the school. Achievement is good because of good teaching and the interest and enthusiasm of the boys. Good literacy skills enable them to focus on the material they investigate and to gain a clear understanding of its meaning. They use sources confidently and most evaluate the reliability of the source. They have a secure overview of the periods studied and their understanding of historical concepts is good. Their essays are generally well planned and higher attaining pupils are selecting the most relevant

evidence to support their opinions. When they have the opportunity they research well and present their work attractively and in an orderly way.

86. Standards in Year 11 are well above average. Achievement is good because pupils are interested in the topics and well motivated to succeed. They have a wide vocabulary and are willing to become involved in discussion in a mature fashion. They have a good grasp of the international tensions before and after the World Wars and can identify the concerns that motivated the actions of the major powers. At times these views can become polarised or stereotypical; however, higher attaining pupils recognise the need to maintain a balance and understand the views of different ideologies. In debate, the boys' oral presentations confidently display understanding of the different sides and present reasoned arguments.
87. Although the quality of teaching and learning is good overall, enabling pupils to achieve well, there is some inconsistency. This is because there is a large number of teachers in the department so that opportunities for monitoring classroom standards and providing guidance for improvement are inevitably restricted by the time available. The best teaching challenges pupils to explain and justify the statements they make. Tasks ensure that pupils use the knowledge they gain to analyse what they know, stimulating higher thinking skills. The boys' motivation is supported because they are involved in active tasks and group work. Teaching is less successful where teachers do not assess the performance of pupils in lessons, so that the activity becomes more significant than the quality of the learning that results from it. Homework encourages pupils to reflect on what they have learned, although marking does not help them to identify areas for development.
88. The quality of leadership and management is good. The department has worked successfully to raise standards in the GCSE examination, and the emphasis on developing pupils' thinking skills has permeated the department. Assessment is not a strong feature and provides only limited opportunity to monitor and assess pupils' progress. The department makes a good contribution to pupils' awareness of citizenship, and a very good contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Since the previous inspection, there has been an increased use of ICT and some key assessments have been put in place. Improvement has been satisfactory.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well as a result of good teaching.
- The subject makes an excellent contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development.
- Teachers do not consistently mark and assess work to inform pupils of how they can improve.

Commentary

89. All pupils in Year 11 are entered for either the full GCSE or short course in religious education. The majority take the full course. In 2003, all pupils gained an A*-C grade, with 93 per cent attaining A* or A grades, a much higher than average proportion. In 2004, provisional results show that 98 per cent were awarded an A*-C grade, with 82 per cent gaining an A* or A grade.
90. By the end of Year 9, pupils are attaining well above average standards. The highest attainers are already approaching the top GCSE grades in their essays. They use difficult theological vocabulary confidently and can explain abstract concepts well, both orally and in their writing. Lower attaining pupils still have good levels of understanding, but they express themselves in a more straightforward fashion and make more technical mistakes in their writing. Pupils are introduced to difficult theological concepts, such as the Christian idea of the Trinity, or Muslim and Hindu concepts of God. By the end of Year 11, pupils are on target to attain high GCSE

grades, and standards are well above average. The majority will be entered for the full GCSE course in Year 11. They address ethical issues confidently and sensitively in both discussion and their writing.

91. All pupils throughout the school achieve well, considering their capabilities and prior attainment. This good achievement is the result of good teaching and learning. Teachers have good knowledge of their subject and they plan an interesting range of activities to interest and challenge pupils well. They are particularly good at introducing complex, abstract ethical issues, such as the question of suffering and the sanctity of life. Pupils make excellent gains in their understanding of such issues. In some lessons, learning could be even better if the timings of some activities were crisper, allowing more time for summing up at the end. Not all teachers make it clear in their marking how pupils could improve their work. They also sometimes fail to pick up spelling and grammar mistakes. There are limited opportunities for visits out of school and few visiting speakers. More such occasions would enable pupils to relate what they learn to 'real life' more deeply.
92. The department is effectively led and managed. The head of department has successfully raised the status of the subject. He also led curriculum changes, largely to raise standards at GCSE, and these have been very successful. As a result, there has been very good improvement since the previous inspection.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are excellent and the department's targets for developing the curriculum and improving the subject have been exceeded.
- The quality of teaching is very good; it motivates pupils and brings about very good learning.
- Achievement across the school is very good in relation to pupils' starting points and to their abilities. Pupils set themselves high challenges and are determined to succeed.
- Standards of work over the five years in school rise from above average to well above average by the end of Year 11.
- There are no significant weaknesses in the department's provision.

Commentary

93. In the 2003 GCSE examinations, the proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades was nearly double the national average. In 2004, results were even better. Over half the pupils in the group gained A* grades. Results are usually highest in the electronics option.
94. By the end of Year 9, standards are above average. This demonstrates very good achievement as pupils enter school with little knowledge of the subject, although their practical skills on simple projects are sound and they can draw what they have made. In work seen during the inspection, pupils make good gains in designing skills as they understand how to analyse a problem and draw and explain their individually innovative ideas. They build up a good knowledge of materials and tools in the early years in school and use this when making, fixing and testing models. Appraisal skills are above average as pupils evaluate their results honestly. Finishing skills are above average as pupils spot errors and work out how to improve upon what they have produced. In graphics, when using a computer program to draw objects to scale, pupils' attainment is very high, as they have to be aware of measurement and fine detail and become accustomed to using a very sophisticated drawing package.

95. By the end of Year 11, standards are well above average and this represents very good achievement as GCSE is more demanding and pupils have to be self-reliant when deciding upon their own projects and setting deadlines. Designing is well above average. Pupils devise worthwhile tasks showing ingenuity and skill, often using more than one material and incorporating electronics. In work seen during the inspection, pupils attain very highly in all the material areas, but especially in electronics. On this aspect, pupils who are gifted and talented set themselves extremely complex tasks to demonstrate advanced thinking and planning skills. In resistant materials, pupils show good manufacturing skills and they often produce prototypes before embarking upon full-scale items. These are seen to be useful as they show the pupils where work needs refining and how grades may be raised. In all areas, pupils are skilled in appraisal, often to the point of being too self-critical, but their comments show that they understand how to assess their products against original specifications and users' needs.
96. Throughout the school, there are no significant differences in the achievement of different groups of pupils.
97. Teaching is very good overall and secures very good learning. There are no significant weaknesses in teaching. Teachers are very well skilled in both theory and practical aspects and successfully pass on information and skills to their pupils. Planning is very good and teachers create challenging tasks to motivate the pupils. They use resources effectively and set high standards by selecting high quality examples. Lessons include attention to literacy and numeracy and pupils are always encouraged to use ICT for research and recording. Teachers know their pupils well and assessment is particularly strong in Years 10 and 11 where pupils have constant feedback about work, effort and time planning. This dialogue is particularly valuable to the less confident pupils and to those who have special educational needs as it helps them overcome their difficulties. At best, marking of coursework and homework is diagnostic and clearly informs pupils about how they can improve. This is not always matched in reports where comments often dwell too much on pupils' attitudes and effort. Teachers obviously enjoy teaching and the pupils react well to their humour. Relationships are very good and behaviour is excellent, so teachers do not have to waste valuable lesson time in gaining order and discipline.
98. Leadership and management are both excellent. The teachers work well as a team and are ably supported by a highly efficient technician. There has been very good improvement since the previous inspection. The development plan was mainly concerned with raising standards overall; revising the scheme of work, particularly for pupils in Years 7 to 9; increasing the use of ICT and improving the assessment process. In all aspects, the targets have been exceeded as the improved work and GCSE results prove. There is a good link with the local university and the department is frequently used for initial teacher training, indicating a centre of very good practice. The accommodation has been refitted, which has had a beneficial effect on morale and in promoting the work of the department. Lesson time has been increased, so pupils now have sufficient time to produce the quality and quantity of work befitting their abilities. In order to enhance the learning and facilitate home to school communication, the department is planning to exploit the use of the school website.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are high.
- Pupils achieve very well across all years because of very good teaching.

- Standards of behaviour and personal relationships are excellent and have a very positive effect on learning.
- Business and community links are not yet strong enough to inform pupils of career pathways or offer alternative ways of learning.

Commentary

99. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2004 show standards to be well above average, matching work seen during the inspection. GCSE results were well above the national average in 2003. Provisional results for 2004 are similar. This indicates an upward trend since the previous inspection.
100. In work seen during the inspection, standards are well above average by the end of Year 9. Standards have improved as a result of very good teaching that focuses on technical skills and the understanding and knowledge of colour theory and composition. Pupils' understanding of art and prominent artists is very good. The broad and varied curriculum gives them many opportunities to learn from different cultures. As a result of this, their skills of research and design are very well developed. All pupils achieve very well in relation to their prior attainment. This includes pupils with special educational needs and pupils for whom English is an additional language. This very good progress is a result of high levels of individual support and encouragement that are provided by teachers both in and out of lesson time. Higher attaining pupils, including the gifted and talented, make very good progress through extended homework, through additional projects and through the refinement of their work.
101. Pupils continue to make very good progress in Years 10 and 11. This is due to the very good teaching which promotes independent research and the consolidation of technical skills. Pupils show effective planning in their sketchbooks and journals and they are very confident in using a range of materials and media to illustrate their work. Their understanding of the effects of colour is particularly well developed. They are able to demonstrate the effects of light, surface and mood in their paintings by using a range of appropriate techniques. By the end of Year 11, pupils' practical skills are of a very high order and standards are well above average. Their critical and observational skills, in particular, allow them to analyse successfully both their own work and the work of others.
102. Teaching is consistently very good and sometimes excellent across all years. This is due to the excellent relationships forged on mutual trust and respect and an atmosphere of hard work and co-operation. Teachers' knowledge of their specialist subject areas is very good. This enables them to explain techniques and concepts clearly and simply, and, as a result, pupils learn quickly. An excellent range of activities and skills captures the interests and imagination of all pupils, who enjoy their lessons. Teachers provide very good demonstrations and produce examples of work that are of the highest quality. Pupils clearly know the high standard of work expected of them and how to achieve it.
103. Pupils following the GCSE course are particularly well motivated and very mature in their approach to coursework. Pupils have many opportunities for wider research and reading. They use their ICT skills with confidence to produce contemporary images and designs. They receive a great deal of individual support and guidance and are encouraged to explore new ideas and methods in their planning and preparation for GCSE. A good range of cultural visits supports coursework and examination requirements very well. There are, however, few opportunities for community projects or WRL beyond the classroom.
104. Leadership is good. The head of department provides clear vision and is committed to raising standards through improving the quality of teaching and learning and by using assessment to inform curriculum planning. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good.

Music

The provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Because teaching is consistently very good, pupils achieve very well in relation to their capabilities and standards overall are well above average.
- Opportunities for enrichment through taking part in the various ensembles are excellent.
- The department is very inclusive and a large number of boys participate enthusiastically in musical activities.
- Assessment needs to be developed so that pupils know better what they have to do to improve.

Commentary

105. Standards at all stages, both in examination results and in work seen and heard, are well above the national average in comparison to other selective schools. The 2004 GCSE results at the highest grades were outstanding, albeit for a somewhat small group. There is no noticeable difference in achievement between the different groups of pupils but it is significant that achievement is very good for so many pupils. Many boys have well-developed keyboard skills and a surprisingly good knowledge of chords, which they can use most effectively in making their well-structured compositions.
106. Pupils' very high standards are the result of consistently very good teaching and learning. Teachers' expectations are very high and pupils are challenged by well-planned tasks, which frequently extend their thinking. A strong characteristic of this very good teaching is the teachers' enthusiasm and the presentation of material in a stimulating way. Whole-class activities, using percussion or singing, are well structured and purposeful in developing skills. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good and the pupils' general attitudes are excellent. There is a bubbling enthusiasm and the boys often show a total absorption in what they are doing. Particularly in group work, but also generally, they show an excellent ability to organise themselves effectively and listen well to each other. In Year 11, pupils can talk well about the music they have heard, showing that they have the appropriate musical vocabulary, and their contributions often show a high level of interest and understanding.
107. Opportunities for the boys to enrich their experiences of music away from the formal lessons are extensive. They are able to take advantage of the skills of a large team of visiting instrumental teachers and many more boys than might be expected have reached the highest grades of national instrumental examinations. The numerous school ensembles perform to a very high standard and attract a large and enthusiastic number of boys. Particularly outstanding are the excellent swing band and the impressive barbershop choir, which are led by the department staff, whose considerable expertise in these fields is responsible for the success of these ensembles.
108. Excellent leadership and very good management have moved the department on well since the previous inspection. The new and excellent resources are a significant support for teaching and learning and facilities for ICT now provide very good support to pupils' composition activities. Pupils respond enthusiastically in Years 7 to 9 to the new curriculum that is bringing an experience of practical music making to all pupils. Much has been done in a short time and standards are well above average but the present assessment arrangements do not effectively inform the pupils what they need to do to reach a higher level still. The department works in accommodation that is barely adequate; there are plans to extend but until then the conditions for the day-to-day running of the department are difficult.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Accommodation is poor and this constrains what can be taught, affects the teaching of the National Curriculum and impedes learning, achievement and standards.
- Pupils' very good attitudes assist learning.
- Very good extra-curricular provision supports the curriculum and gives good opportunities to enhance talented pupils' practical achievements.
- Assessment through evaluation, analysis and guidance on targets, National Curriculum levels and grades is inconsistent and misses opportunities to boost standards and achievement.
- The quality of learning is affected by the deployment of teachers who are not qualified in physical education.

Commentary

109. GCSE results in 2003 were well above average. Pupils did less well in physical education than in their other subjects but pupils did as expected against their predicted grades. In 2004, school data suggests that results were still well above average and better than in 2003. No pupils gained the highest A* grade in 2003 or 2004.
110. Pupils are already showing above average skills in rugby at an early stage in Year 7. They have a growing understanding of positioning the body for tackles and safety in the ruck. In gymnastics pupils do less well as they are very early on the course because of the two-week timetable. Pupils' standards are above average in Year 9 and they are achieving satisfactorily in most activities but development of anatomy at an early stage would help standards at GCSE. For example, pupils in Years 9 are not confidently aware of muscles used in exercise. By the end of Year 11, standards in the core curriculum and for those following the examination course are still above average with pupils achieving satisfactorily because they have good attitudes and listen well. Talented pupils are encouraged to participate in extra-curricular activities and have opportunities of representation at local and regional level. Non-participants usually achieve as well as they should in lessons when they are well enough involved in teaching and learning but this is not consistent.
111. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. In good lessons, teachers help all pupils by questioning effectively to draw out pupils' learning and understanding; demonstrations assist all pupils' understanding. Teachers encourage pupils to view one another's work and encourage pupils to observe and analyse each other's performance for improvement. Teachers do not share objectives consistently or review lessons thoroughly enough to guide improvement in practical performance. Marking in the GCSE course does indicate areas for improvement but grades are not related well enough to possible examination performance to focus achievement. Teachers have tried to be inventive with large numbers in a small area on teaching programmes which do not fully meet pupils' needs. For example, volley ball and badminton are taught on undersized courts in Year 11 as teachers try to prepare pupils well for future leisure and fitness activities but giving them little experience of a true game in these activities because of poor facilities. Year games lessons, as seen in Year 8 and Year 10, led by non-specialist teachers, are unsatisfactory as the expected structure of lessons is not followed and skills are not developed well enough for pupils to achieve as well as they should.
112. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory because of unsatisfactory improvement after the previous inspection. Little action has been taken to provide adequate facilities and the department has had further loss of tennis courts to provide a car park. The playing fields are badly drained and unsatisfactory maintenance means that grass is long and pitches are not

marked clearly; this constrains teaching and affects the flow of the ball especially in football. The lack of indoor facilities results in a failure to meet fully the requirements of the National Curriculum, as teachers do not have the space or the time to ensure that compulsory elements are taught. This has an adverse impact on achievement as pupils progress through the school. The poor accommodation affects what might be achieved and taught. Very good guidance for teachers is provided in a departmental handbook but consistent implementation of this in the construction of lessons and to include literacy, numeracy and citizenship would help pupils' standards and improve their learning and understanding. There is now a specific theory teaching room to meet the increasing needs of the theory course and this would give easy access to link theory and practical aspects if the indoor facility was available. There is no school sports co-ordinator programme to encourage links with schools in the area.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

The long-term planning and lesson planning for personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship are good so that statutory requirements are met. In PSHE lessons sampled, good teaching promoted good learning. Citizenship is taught through the PSHE programme with a contribution from all subjects. PSHE and citizenship are taught as discrete subjects with one lesson each fortnight for Years 7 to 10. Year 11 pupils have half this time allocation.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The carefully planned enrichment activities are a strength; they successfully involve pupils in the wider and practical aspects of citizenship.
- The newly appointed co-ordinator has made a very recent evaluation of citizenship across all subjects.
- There is no effective monitoring or evaluation of the citizenship programme.
- Assessment procedures do not sufficiently inform the progress that pupils are making in developing citizenship skills.
- Citizenship, within subjects, is not given a high enough profile and is not made sufficiently explicit.

Commentary

113. There is no examination course in citizenship.

114. Pupils join the school with a very wide range of experiences in citizenship and social studies. By the end of Years 9 and 11 pupils have above average skills of enquiry and knowledge about becoming informed citizens. Citizenship lessons are supplemented by planned cross-curricular citizenship and so achievement is good. There are good contributions from English, physical education, science, art and design, history and geography but they are not always made explicit. Enhanced activities, like the elections for the school council, are starting to provide a good forum for all pupils to be involved in a democratic process. Pupils choose, support and elect representatives, so experiencing the electoral system. At times, an alternative timetable allows planned activities, such as the Year 10 day for personal, financial and consumer rights. These activities contribute to pupils' learning and achievement. The extra-curricular activities also enable pupils to be involved in regular debates, for example getting the vote at 16. Such enrichment activities give additional depth to the citizenship programme.

115. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11 is good. Citizenship and PSHE are only taught fortnightly. This acts as a constraint to the development of citizenship skills.

However, the good achievement made by pupils is the consequence of citizenship being taught in subjects, a timetable for specific events and the enrichment programme enabling practical citizenship. Some elements of citizenship are taught well through subjects; for example, in a Year 11 English lesson based on *To Kill a Mockingbird*, pupils discussed ways to resolve racism and conflict. The carefully planned assemblies programme covers moral and ethical issues. Form tutors follow up themes; for example, in a Year 10 registration group, pupils debated the issues about removing the Elgin Marbles from Greece. Although there is limited tutorial time, pupils fairly and quickly debate the issues. Lesson planning is good. This ensures consistency of teaching by form tutors. Pupils, from starting at school, show good listening and discussion skills, as exemplified in a Year 7 PSHE lesson about friendship. In discussion and debate many pupils support their views with good reasons, which was well demonstrated in a Year 9 lesson about the Industrial Revolution and a Year 11 lesson about the Cold War. In such lessons, teachers successfully encourage pupils to share opinions with others and develop their own ideas. However, in the majority of subjects citizenship is not made sufficiently explicit.

116. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The very recently appointed citizenship co-ordinator has already identified how to move the subject forward. Progress is being made with the analysis of citizenship across the school. She has, in a very short period of time, given the subject momentum. However, the limited time allocation constrains development. Citizenship, within subjects, is not given a high enough profile and is not made sufficiently explicit. Monitoring, evaluation and assessment procedures are being developed; as yet, they do not sufficiently inform the progress that pupils are making in the three strands of citizenship. Citizenship was not a curriculum subject at the time of the previous inspection and therefore no judgement can be given for improvement.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2003 (comparisons are with national results for all students).

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	4	75.0	80.1	25.0	23.7	35.0	29.9
Biology	2	50.0	65.2	0.0	11.1	20.0	20.6
Business studies	2	100.0	76.4	50.0	16.3	45.0	26.2
Chemistry	16	81.3	72.7	25.0	13.9	30.6	24.1
Classical studies	1	100.0	87.4	0.0	34.3	40.0	35.2
Economics	4	75.0	73.6	25.0	20.1	30.0	26.4
English/English language	2	100.0	82.9	0.0	17.5	20.0	28.7
English literature	3	100.0	85.9	0.0	19.1	30.0	30.2
French	10	100.0	78.2	30.0	18.9	40.0	27.6
Design and technology	3	100.0	74.9	33.3	15.1	40.0	25.3
Geography	6	100.0	74.3	50.0	19.8	50.0	26.5
German	6	83.3	81.5	0.0	19.3	26.7	28.9
History	4	50.0	80.7	0.0	19.5	15.0	28.6
Information technology	4	100.0	67.0	100.0	10.9	52.5	21.4
Mathematics	22	54.5	61.9	13.6	17.1	19.1	22.1
Other sciences	4	100.0	71.4	50.0	15.8	37.5	24.3
Other social studies	5	100.0	69.7	60.0	16.7	42.0	24.1
Physics	15	80.0	68.6	20.0	14.4	28.7	22.7
Spanish	3	100.0	78.5	0.0	17.7	33.3	27.3
Sports/PE studies	1	0.0	73.2	0.0	11.4	0.0	23.1

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	4	100.0	98.6	50.0	50.2	85.0	87.5
Biology	23	100.0	96.4	65.2	39.2	96.5	78.6
Business studies	30	100.0	98.7	66.7	36.8	94.7	80.1
Chemistry	37	97.3	97.6	75.7	49.0	97.8	84.9
Classical studies	5	100.0	99.5	80.0	55.9	100.0	90.9
Economics	8	100.0	98.9	75.0	52.0	102.5	88.3
English/English language	6	83.3	99.4	50.0	36.3	73.3	80.9
English literature	18	100.0	99.5	55.6	46.5	93.3	86.5
French	10	100.0	98.8	40.0	51.5	90.0	87.6
Design and technology	21	90.5	97.8	19.0	35.0	62.9	77.9
General studies	122	92.6	94.7	35.2	31.0	74.6	73.1
Geography	34	100.0	98.7	50.0	44.5	88.8	84.0
German	5	80.0	98.4	40.0	47.9	72.0	84.8
History	25	100.0	99.0	68.0	44.6	96.0	84.6
Information technology	18	100.0	95.6	22.2	24.6	73.3	69.5
Mathematics	53	100.0	96.7	62.3	55.6	94.3	88.8
Music	1	100.0	98.8	100.0	38.9	120.0	81.1
Other languages	1	100.0	98.8	100.0	64.9	120.0	93.8
Other sciences	13	100.0	97.3	84.6	41.5	106.2	80.3
Other social studies	18	100.0	97.4	66.7	42.7	98.9	81.8
Physics	39	97.4	96.7	48.7	44.6	84.1	81.7
Spanish	1	100.0	98.3	100.0	50.2	120.0	86.9
Sports/PE studies	4	100.0	98.0	75.0	30.9	105.0	75.2

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus in this inspection was on English literature and French.

English

The department also provides a course in English language and literature. Students' performance in that course has fluctuated over the last three years depending on the strength of the cohort, but overall has been above average, representing satisfactory achievement given students' well above average standards on entry. Current Year 13 students achieved well to reach well above average standards in provisional results for AS examinations in 2004.

English literature

Provision in English literature is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching, though satisfactory overall, has good or very good features and is enthusiastic and committed.
- Some teachers do too much for their students so that students are not taking sufficient responsibility for their own learning. Attitudes to learning are mixed as a result.
- Inconsistencies in marking, in reviewing and recording of learning, and in homework, do not promote students' achievement equally well in all lessons.

Commentary

117. Results at A level in 2003 were above average; provisional results for 2004 indicate well above average performance. Given students' well above average attainment on entry to the course, achievement has been good overall. In past years, all students have consistently obtained at least a pass grade, and performance at the higher (A/B) grades has been consistently at least above average.
118. Standards in the current Year 13 are above average. This judgement reflects students' provisional above average results in AS examinations in 2004 and teachers' assessment of the group's overall attainment as less strong than that of A level candidates in 2004. Their above average standards are evident in writing about Shakespeare's *Othello*, for example, where some students recognise Shakespeare's dramatic style and show good understanding of character, relationships and themes. However, in one lesson it was clear that some students' knowledge of the same set text was sketchy and they had not put in sufficient work to correct this.
119. Achievement, despite students' well above average prior attainment at GCSE and taking account of the recognised difficulties of making the transition to AS and A levels, is satisfactory. Students are supported well by helpful background material and extracts from critical writing about their set texts. However, marking is inconsistent and does not always give students a clear idea of what they need to do to improve, and some students rely too much on others or on their teacher, or are reluctant to commit themselves wholeheartedly to taking responsibility for their own learning. As a result, they are not yet achieving their full potential. Students in Year 12 began their AS course with very high GCSE performance; this is a stronger year group working at above average standards and, at this early stage of the course, achieving satisfactorily also.
120. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Very good teaching does occur, characterised by command of the subject, probing questioning, challenging activities such as group work on speaking Shakespeare's text using the appropriate tone of voice in a 'comic' scene from *The*

Tempest and by very good reviews of learning at the start and end of a lesson. As a result, students are actively involved in their learning and obliged to be precise about their answers and the evidence for them. More often, however, despite an enthusiastic and committed approach, teachers tend to over-explain or answer their own questions and do not allow sufficient time for students to explore or question independently. Though this arises from a well-meaning desire to ensure students have sufficient information or to cover the ground, the result is that teachers are doing more work than most students; a few confident volunteers can be, and are, relied on to provide contributions. As a result, learning is slowed, attitudes to learning range from keen to fairly reluctant or passive (reliant on others) among the same group and achievement is not better than satisfactory overall. On occasion, homework tasks are not sufficiently focused or challenging. For example, leaving students to read and mark 'what interested them' in a substantial amount of background material placed no specific obligation on individual students to produce an outcome for the next session. Sometimes also there is insufficient recording and review of learning in lessons.

121. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The newly appointed head of department is a very good role model for other teachers but inevitably at present has to concentrate his attention on promoting developments in the main school. On balance, improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

122. Students' language and literacy skills are above average and sufficiently strong for them to cope successfully with the demands of their chosen subjects and courses. Teachers support the practice and development of these skills well overall and particularly so in French and design and technology.

French

Provision in French is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and prepare very good materials for lessons.
- There are very good opportunities to develop comprehension and speaking skills.
- Not enough use is made of ICT to develop language skills.

Commentary

123. AS examination results in 2003 were well above the national average and A level results were similar to the national average, although from a very small entry.
124. Standards of work seen during the inspection match the examination results in Year 12 but are above average in Year 13. Whilst achievement is good overall in Years 12 and 13, students in Year 12 are achieving very well as a result of very good teaching and their own positive approach to learning. They are developing as confident speakers and their comprehension and writing skills indicate growing accuracy and use of independent French. The range of vocabulary and phrases and the degree of sophistication in the use of language by the higher attaining students are remarkable. Students are keen to deal with interesting and challenging tasks set by teachers. They enjoy lessons and approach their group assignments with confidence and maturity. The learning materials in French are extremely well prepared, stimulating thinking and comprehension skills as well as promoting general knowledge and an appreciation of other cultures.
125. Fewer students choose to follow French in Year 13 and groups are very small. This limits opportunities for group interaction and for some of the interesting language activities enjoyed

by Year 12 students. They are very studious and focus well, but translations and other tasks lack inspiration. The French *assistante* provides excellent support for the development of speaking skills by using careful but probing questioning. Limited use is made of ICT to engage the interest of students and to promote independent language skills.

126. Teaching is good overall. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. The challenge and pace of lessons are often very good and when interesting activities are planned, this leads to high performance. Homework offers a good challenge and this is often very well researched and completed by students.
127. Leadership and management are good because the curriculum is good overall and students have access to a very good range of extra classes in other languages, offered through the language college. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good as there are indications of rising standards, but a very good opportunity for work experience abroad which was organised in the past has not been continued. Capacity for further improvement is good if good practice and experiences in the development of the language college are built upon for the benefit of students.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' very good knowledge and understanding of mathematics are passed on effectively so that students learn and achieve very well.
- Very good leadership and management ensure that teachers' expertise is used well.
- Assessment of students' work is good; students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further.
- Very good relationships result in very good attitudes to learning that help students achieve very well.
- Questioning of students does not always involve all students sufficiently.

Commentary

128. In 2003, GCE A level examination results were well above average. This represents very good achievement in relation to students' attainment at the start of the course. Provisional results in 2004 were better.
129. Overall, standards of work seen in Year 13 are well above average. This represents very good achievement and reflects the very good progress students have made in relation to predictions based on their GCSE results at the start of the course. Students understand well the use of trigonometric functions and how to use calculus methods when dealing with a variety of curves. Students studying further mathematics have a good understanding of using algorithms to solve problems.
130. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers are very skilful when introducing new and difficult concepts; these are very clearly explained. Lessons are very well planned to develop students' learning and tasks provide suitable challenge with the result that students' achievement is very good. Good day-to-day assessment of students' work supports their learning well, ensuring that they know how well they are doing in relation to examination criteria. Relationships are very good and, as a result, students show very positive attitudes to their work; they make considerable efforts to understand the work they are doing and teachers provide good support and guidance so that students overcome their difficulties and achieve very well. Teachers usually question students well so that good links are made with previous learning but sometimes students are not involved sufficiently in discussions in lessons.

131. Leadership and management are very good. There is a clear vision to get the very best from students. Teachers are deployed very effectively to ensure that their specialist knowledge is used well, and they work very well together to ensure that students' progress is checked and supported well. Good arrangements have been made to incorporate recent developments in the subject. Students' performance is analysed well and appropriate steps taken to improve their standards. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Mathematics across the curriculum

132. Students' use of mathematics and their level of numeracy skills are above average overall so that they are able to tackle the demands of their different subjects and courses successfully. In physics and design and technology students apply their mathematical skills particularly well.

SCIENCE

The focus in this inspection was on physics. Lessons in chemistry, biology and geology were also sampled. In a very good chemistry lesson, students were carrying out calculations and graphing results to determine the order of a reaction. In a very good biology lesson, students studied samples of materials associated with different ways of improving the agricultural yield from soil and drew conclusions about which was ecologically the most sound. In a very good geology lesson, students were studying the effect of weathering and followed the process through a series of samples showing the effect on granite. The teacher had planned the work carefully so that the lesson was not hindered because it was in an unattractive and unsatisfactory temporary classroom.

Physics

Provision in physics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' very good subject knowledge helps students to learn well.
- Students' excellent attitudes make lessons productive.
- An above average proportion gains the highest grades at AS and A level.
- Some students fail to gain a grade at AS level.

Commentary

133. Results in the GCE Advanced level examinations in physics for the last few years have been relatively stable. In 2003, results were above average and they are likely to be so in 2004, though national averages are not yet available for comparison. They were well above average in 2002. In all years, the proportions of the highest grades A or B were above the national average. At AS level, results are well above average, including the highest grades. However, each year a small but significant number of students fail to gain a grade. The department should ensure that all students are successful.

134. Overall, the standard of students' work seen during the inspection is well above average. Students in the upper sixth use a wide range of formulae competently. They obtain practical data with a minimum of direction by their teachers. They have very good mathematical skills and manipulate equations, substitute numerical values and calculate accurately. Graphs are drawn to a very high standard. Students in the lower sixth form already show excellent attitudes. They work well, use ICT competently and explain practical results in terms of physical theory. Students enter the sixth form with above average standards and their achievement is good because of the high proportion of the highest grades at AS and A level.

135. Overall teaching is very good. Lessons are brisk and well planned. Where available, the use of digital projectors or interactive boards adds interest and presents information clearly and quickly. Teachers show expert knowledge of their subject and answer questions competently, using their answers to extend their students' knowledge and understanding of a topic. They use questions well to help students recall previous knowledge, apply it to new situations and develop logical conclusions. Students learn very well. Their excellent attitudes and very good relationships with their teachers play a significant part in making lessons effective. Students have opportunities to take part in out-of-school activities, which broaden their understanding of their subject and the Nuffield Bursary Scheme gives some a useful experience of WRL.
136. Leadership and management are good. The work of teachers in the department is organised effectively. Teachers know students well and play an active part in assessing areas of strength or weakness. As a result, students understand what they need to do to improve their performances. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Advanced and AS level examination results over the last few years have been consistently above average for the highest grades and ICT is well used by both teachers and students.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in A level courses are well above average.
- There are excellent relationships between teachers and students.
- Leadership and management of the subject are very good.
- Teaching and learning are consistently very good so that students are achieving very well.
- Students are very interested in the subject and value it as a career pathway.
- The range of courses available is limited.

Commentary

137. In 2003, AS and A level results were above average. In 2004 provisional results improved with 83 per cent of students in AS and 56 per cent in A level achieving A/B grades.
138. Standards in Years 12 and 13 are well above average. Students taking the AS course have very good understanding of graphical interfaces and know the key aspects of windows, icons, menus and pointers (WIMPs). Making use of a commercial web page, students can effectively evaluate the way data can be entered into spreadsheets. They have higher level skills in their use of spreadsheets as they complete practical tasks to calculate paving costs in a garden. Very good use is made of conditional formatting and more advanced formulae. In Year 13, students have very good knowledge about databases and the advantages or disadvantages of using either a database or a spreadsheet. They have made a good start to their coursework where they create databases for real situations, such as currency exchange and the organisation of the school's annual activity week. Students are achieving very well, building on skills and knowledge gained in GCSE to reach well above average standards.
139. Teaching and learning are consistently very good. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge, which is most effectively used in explaining technical use of software and examination requirements to students. Lessons are very well planned, and students are intellectually challenged through tasks set and use of well-selected video material. Students have excellent relationships with each other and with teachers. The working atmosphere in all lessons contributes to the very good progress students make. The department-prepared coursework guide for the A level course is excellent, and provides students with a valuable resource.

140. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. Since the previous inspection there has been very good progress. Although only introduced three years ago, the standards in both AS and A level have shown significant improvement and very high standards are being achieved. The number of students taking advanced courses is increasing and many intend to use the subject as a route through higher education towards a career in ICT. However, the range of courses available is limited at present to advanced level and this may not meet the needs of all students.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

141. Sixth form students make good use of ICT skills in many subjects. Students make extensive use of the Internet for research purposes and where they are required to complete projects they make effective use of word processing and presentation skills, for example in design and technology. Students are very competent users of the technology and make effective use of the email facility provided by the school to transfer work between home and school. French and physical education make only limited use of ICT, but the overall situation has improved well since the previous inspection.

HUMANITIES

The focus in this inspection was on history. Lessons in geography, government and politics, and philosophy were also sampled. In the two geography lessons, standards were well above average. Learning and achievement were good because of teachers' good knowledge and challenging work. A very good government and politics lesson had brisk pace and provided very good examination practice. Students achieved very well. In a philosophy lesson students were engaged and interested in the theories of the philosopher Descartes because the teacher explained the concepts well and challenged them to think hard. He showed them extracts from a well-chosen video that helped to bring the very abstract concepts to life well.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very good subject expertise of teachers enables them to give very good guidance to their students.
- The best teaching challenges students to justify their statements so that they give considered judgements.
- Teachers do not always ensure that students are taking a full part in lessons.
- Although methods of assessment have been introduced, they are not yet being used consistently.

Commentary

142. Results in the A level examination in 2003 were well above average and achievement was good. All students achieved a pass grade. Provisional results in 2004 were lower, but are still likely to be above average.
143. Standards are above average. Achievement is good given students' attainment on entry to the course and in relation to their capabilities. Students make confident use of information and they develop good analytical skills because teachers emphasise the importance of supporting evidence. Notes are clear and orderly and provide a useful basis for essay work. Essays are fluent, well balanced and to the point. Most students give responses based on logic and understand the need to justify their opinions with valid evidence. Lower attaining students

include generalisations rather than precise detail and example. Students nevertheless achieve well because they are well motivated and their attitudes to learning are very good.

144. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject and students trust their advice and very good guidance. On occasion, teaching is excellent: in one lesson a high level of questioning ensured that students considered their judgements carefully, and they were challenged to explain their judgements. Teachers do not always ensure that students are taking a full part in lessons. When students support each other through paired work or peer assessment they become fully involved, and active partners in their learning.
145. The quality of leadership and management is good. There is a clear vision for the department and a commitment to raising standards. Methods of assessment have been introduced, although these are not yet secure across the department. Some useful links have been made with local universities, but these have not yet been fully developed. The AS level examination has been successfully introduced and improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

The department offers AS level and A level courses in product design (resistant materials) with one of two options, design and technology in society, or mechanisms, energy and electronics. The focus in this inspection was on design and technology.

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are excellent, ensuring students are given every opportunity to succeed.
- The quality of teaching is very good and brings about very good learning.
- Standards are well above national averages in both theory and practical work.
- The sixth form students appreciate help and act upon advice, thus raising the standards of their work.
- Students have excellent attitudes to their work and have made very good progress in the subject since starting sixth form courses.
- The courses offered suit students' needs and aspirations.
- The sixth form students do not have their own workshop.

Commentary

146. Ninety per cent of students gained an A level in technology in 2003, but the results were not as good as those in the previous year, when there was a 100 per cent pass rate. Provisional results for 2004 show an improvement. Usually nearly 40 per cent of students gain either A or B grades, which is above the national average. There is a rising trend in entries and most students who take the course complete it.
147. Standards are well above average and students' achievement overall in relation to their standards when they began their courses and to their abilities is very good. In Year 13, students use their understanding and skills in practical and theory work and add on the necessary critical, organisational and analytical skills on sophisticated projects which allow them to show their advanced thinking skills. In work seen during the inspection, students' work on individual projects answer real-life problems in the hospital and medical field, solve potential dangers in the home and develop children's learning. Much of the work is to a

standard worthy of higher education courses. Theory work and files are very good quality. Portfolios are very well presented and annotated and students more often than not use ICT to enhance their work. As part of evaluation, and in order to maintain high literacy standards, students assess their own work against existing products, defend their decisions and explain their intentions clearly to others. Students' skills in explaining their thinking are better developed in Year 13 than in Year 12 as the older ones are more aware of the social and moral implications of persuasive advertising and they have clearer opinions about marketing.

148. Teaching is very good and leads to very good learning. The teachers are extremely well skilled, know the subject and the requirements of the examining boards thoroughly and motivate the students. Lesson planning is very good. Teachers ensure that students have interesting projects, see high quality exemplars and are given correct information and sufficient time for developing their practical work. Relationships are very good and there is mutual trust and respect between students and adults. The quality of one-to-one help is high. There is purposeful dialogue between teachers and students and thorough questioning which helps students to organise their ideas and extend them. They are given honest critical appraisal of their work, suggestions for improvement and a high level of practical assistance, all of which help them to sort out strategies for improvement, and confidence to work. Students are tracked carefully at all stages of their courses and target setting is realistic. Teachers expect students to do their best and give them appropriate support and guidance so they can fulfil their potential. Students appreciate the help and advice given. At the end of lessons, the time for evaluation is well used as it ensures students develop questioning ability and confidence in judgement. The sixth form students do not have their own workshop, but this is not affecting standards as students may access any workshop at any time.
149. Leadership is excellent. The teachers in the department work together as a mutually supporting team and there is a shared commitment to succeed. The teachers teach to their strengths and have clear roles and responsibilities for different parts of the course. They meet regularly to plan and discuss work. The monitoring of teaching and sharing good practice are well developed. The department has made very good progress since the last inspection. New courses have been offered, results in AS and A level show an upward trend and are now well above the national average, most students stay on their courses and the take-up rate is rising.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Subjects in this curriculum area were not a focus for this inspection. However, a lesson in art and design was sampled, revealing that standards are high due to very good teaching which focuses on high quality support and guidance and strong assessment. Students' technical skills are well developed and their research skills are well above average. This allows them to reach the higher levels of attainment and contributes strongly to examination success.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus for this inspection was on physical education.

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are increasing numbers of students opting for the course.
- The students have a very positive attitude towards the course which contributes to learning.
- Standards are high particularly in the A level classes.
- There is insufficient use of ICT, and lessons, although well taught, lack visual stimuli.

- The accommodation is drab and uninviting for advanced level studies and limits students' choices.

Commentary

150. Only four students were entered for A level physical education in 2003 so no significant comparisons can be made with national averages. Three of the students attained A/B grades and the fourth a D grade. The AS results for 2003 were above the national average for boys and 40 per cent (seven students) gained A/B grades. The remaining 11 students gained C/D grades. The provisional results for 2004 show high standards for A level students with 75 per cent of boys gaining grades A-C, but results were unexpectedly low for the AS students. However, these students have now made very good progress in their A level year. All students over time have made good to very good progress from the AS year to the A level year.
151. Standards are well above average and students achieve well, particularly from the first year to the second year of the course. The students' written work is generally good but a few need to re-order their files so that they can better understand their notes and handouts. Oral work shows a very good understanding and knowledge of the coursework. The students' answers to questions are articulate, accurate and confident. Their attitude to the subject is very positive and contributes greatly to their learning, despite their drab surroundings. Years 12 and 13 are offered an afternoon of physical education and many choose to participate off site in local sports centres. Others choose to stay on the school site where they have to play their games on badly drained fields. The limited facilities indoors make the accommodation for physical education unsatisfactory because they affect choices for the students.
152. Teaching and learning are good overall. The method of conveying information in theory lessons shows flexibility and variety. In one lesson, for example, a practical input helped students participate in medieval sports and gain more insight into the organisation of such events. Use of discussion, overhead projection and handout information compensated in part for the lack of ICT presentations. Students are encouraged to use ICT in their homework but more use of *PowerPoint*, DVD and video in teaching would more fully explain some of the technicalities in sporting activities. The absence of a specialist room is not conducive to stimulating methods of delivery, and learning is affected as a result. The planning of lessons is thorough and much work has been done to provide the students with sufficient examination information. Relevant homework is set and marked and students know their targets.
153. Leadership is good because the course has been well prepared and thoroughly thought out. Management of the course is also good because there is consistency between the teachers of the course and the students have different teachers for different topics. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. Standards have risen, more teachers are involved in post-16 examinations and more students are taking up the option.

BUSINESS

The focus for this inspection was business education. A Year 13 economics lesson was also sampled. Students learnt well about the causes of inflation because the teacher explained and challenged students effectively. His very good subject knowledge underpinned the examples he gave, and students listened and responded well. The teacher also made helpful links to examination requirements, thus helping students to understand how to maximise available marks.

Business education

Provision in business education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- High standards and good achievement have been maintained since the previous inspection.
- Teachers' very good subject knowledge is used to good effect to explain concepts and challenge students so that they learn and achieve well.
- There are insufficient opportunities for real-life case studies and 'hands on' learning.

Commentary

154. In 2003, 30 students took the A level examination in business studies. They all passed, with 67 per cent attaining an A or B grade. These results were well above the national average, and the students achieved well when compared with their attainment at the start of the course. The provisional 2004 results were a little higher, and there has been a rising trend over the last three years. The retention rate on the A Level course is high.
155. By the end of the A level course, standards overall are well above average. The highest attaining students are on target for A grades. Students have a good knowledge and understanding of corporate objectives, how firms grow and the business cycle. They are able to use business terminology and apply it to case studies. They are also able to calculate profit and loss accounts using different methods and use spreadsheets to analyse marketing and accounting data. They discuss issues confidently and fluently and carry out research from both textbooks and the Internet effectively. All students achieve well on the course.
156. Learning in lessons is good because the quality of teaching is good. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to explain business concepts and theories, drawing effectively on relevant examples. They are particularly skilled in preparing students for examinations. In some lessons, learning could be even better if a greater range of learning methods were used to bring the subject to life. Teachers know their students well. They assess what they can do effectively, and set development targets carefully and realistically.
157. The department is led and managed well. The head of department has identified appropriate development priorities and teachers maintain high standards and good achievement. Since the previous inspection, improvement has been satisfactory because although there is an annual visit arranged to the Jaguar car plant, there are insufficient links with local businesses and students would like more opportunities to relate theory with real-life case studies. The department is not yet capitalising on the school's language college status to make links with international businesses.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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