

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **ASTON COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL**

Swallownest, Sheffield

LEA area: Rotherham

Unique reference number: 106957

Headteacher: Mrs E Newton

Lead inspector: Mr D Pittman

Dates of inspection: 1<sup>st</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> November 2004

Inspection number: 268740

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

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## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Type of school: Comprehensive  
School category: Community  
Age range of students: 11 – 18 years  
Gender of students: Mixed  
Number on roll: 1872

School address: Aughton Road  
Swallownest  
Sheffield  
South Yorkshire  
Postcode: S26 4SF

Telephone number: 0114 2872171  
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Appropriate authority: Governing Body  
Name of chair of Mrs J Austen  
governors:

Date of previous February 1999  
inspection:

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

Aston is a much larger than average comprehensive school for students aged 11 to 18. The number on roll is 1872. The number of students in the sixth form is 277. The overall gender balance of the school is 908 boys, 964 girls. The socio-economic background of students is mixed, but average overall. Attainment of students on entry is broadly average. The proportion of students with special educational needs is average, as is the number of students with statements. There are very few students from minority ethnic groups; no students require support with their understanding of English. The school attained its specialist status in mathematics and computing in 2003, and has been awarded the Sportsmark. This development built upon the strong links the school has with local industry. Training school status has also provided a positive link with higher education.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

| Members of the inspection team |             |                | Subject responsibilities   |
|--------------------------------|-------------|----------------|--|
| 16976                          | D Pittman   | Lead inspector |  |
| 13786                          | S Walsh     | Lay inspector  | Citizenship  |
| 12499                          | M Durkin    | Team inspector | English (including sixth form), English as an additional language          |
| 1407                           | P Scott     | Team inspector | Mathematics (including sixth form)   |
| 21866                          | D Tracey    | Team inspector | Science, Physics (sixth form)  |
| 31129                          | J Pickering | Team inspector | Art and design (including sixth form)                                      |
| 23891                          | P Slape     | Team inspector | Design and technology (including sixth form), Work-related learning        |
| 29972                          | W Webster   | Team inspector | Geography  |
| 20497                          | V Williams  | Team inspector | History, Leisure and tourism (sixth form)                                  |
| 30690                          | G Allison   | Team inspector | Information and communication technology (including sixth form)            |
| 17404                          | J Tolley    | Team inspector | Modern foreign languages (including sixth form)                            |
| 22501                          | S Jones     | Team inspector | Music  |
| 7926                           | J Bowden    | Team inspector | Physical education, Special educational needs, Social studies (sixth form) |
| 10895                          | D Wasp      | Team inspector | Religious education, History (sixth form)                                  |
| 23926                          | D Howarth   | Team inspector | Health and social care (sixth form)  |

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the school is **satisfactory** but is improving rapidly. The new headteacher's commitment and vision have provided a clear direction for the school. The prevailing ethos is caring and supportive but also challenging in terms of higher expectations. The school is effectively led and well managed. Recent performance in GCSE examinations is good. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory; students generally achieve in line with their capabilities. Students are given satisfactory guidance and support; their progress is monitored well. A good range of enrichment activities enhances students' personal development. The school gives **satisfactory** value for money.

#### The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Standards in GCSE examinations are steadily improving; they are now above average.
- Behaviour management is improving; it is a major focus for the school in its drive to raise standards.
- The leadership and management of the headteacher are very good; a new vision and sense of purpose have been created.
- The provision in history, religious education and physical education is very good but the provision in music and citizenship is unsatisfactory.
- Support for students with special educational needs is very good.
- Standards in English are unsatisfactory; literacy in the curriculum does not have a high enough focus.
- Involvement and links with the community are good.
- Despite recent improvements, the overall accommodation provision is unsatisfactory.

The school has made satisfactory progress since its previous inspection. Standards in GCSE examinations have risen, but issues in relation to boys' achievement, particularly in literacy skills, remain. Performance in National Curriculum tests for Year 9, especially in English, is a continuing focus. The curriculum provision for Years 10 and 11 has been enhanced by a vocational dimension and benefits from links with other schools at sixth form level. Assessment procedures such as recording and reporting progress have improved. The achievement of specialist status in relation to mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) has helped to promote high standards in these areas. New facilities and the refurbishment of some areas of school have provided an improved learning environment, overall.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

| Performance in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11, compared with: | all schools |      |      | similar schools |
|---|-------------|------|------|-----------------|
|   | 2001        | 2002 | 2003 | 2003            |
|   | -           | B    | C    | D               |
| Performance in GCE AS and A-level examinations in Years 12 and 13           | C           | D    | C    |                 |

*Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average*

*Similar schools are those whose students attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

**Note** Comparative national figures for the GCSE examinations of 2004 were not available at the time of the inspection but reference is made about the results and trends.

Standards are broadly average on entry to the school, although there is the full spectrum of ability. Examination and test results over time show an improving trend which reflects the national picture. **Overall achievement is satisfactory.** Results in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 are average; performance in mathematics and science has improved. Overall, standards are now closer to those of similar schools. In 2004 the school achieved its best results to date for the grade category five or more A\*-C (58 per cent) – this is above the national average. The overall performance is also above average. Standards in mathematics and science are above average, but were below average in English. Standards seen in lessons in Years 7 to 11 are average, but also reflect the improving trend in attainment. Students with special educational needs and the most able make good progress. In the sixth form, standards are average and progress in lessons is satisfactory.

Personal development, including spiritual, moral and cultural development, is **satisfactory**. Attendance rates are **satisfactory** in the main school, but are unsatisfactory in the sixth form. Attitudes are generally **good**; standards of behaviour are **satisfactory**. Relationships between teachers and students are good.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The quality of education provided by the school is satisfactory.** The school is increasingly effective in identifying the individual needs of students. **The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory; it helps promote acceptable standards of achievement.** Teaching is satisfactory in Years 7 to 11 and good in the sixth form. Teaching in history, religious education and health and social care is of a very good standard. The school is creating an ethos for learning based upon increasingly high expectations and positive working relationships. Students are achieving satisfactorily because of effective teaching and the positive attitudes to learning of most students. Assessment procedures are good; the substantial amount of data collected is being increasingly used to monitor progress in an effective manner.

Overall, the school provides students with a satisfactory curriculum but it is unsatisfactory in the provision for music and citizenship. The gaining of specialist status has positively enhanced the curriculum. The caring and supportive ethos which is evident in the school helps students prepare for life after leaving. The provision for extra-curricular activities is good.

Procedures to ensure students' care, welfare, health and safety are **satisfactory**. Support, advice and guidance are **satisfactory**; careers guidance is good. The involvement of students in the school's work and development is **satisfactory**. The school is popular and is oversubscribed; it enjoys a good reputation in its community for being caring and supportive. The school has good links with parents.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

The school is effectively led and managed. The leadership of the new headteacher is very good. A strong team of senior and middle managers support her well; they provide good leadership in the school. Efficient and effective monitoring systems have been put in place. The overall governance of the school is good. Governors are fully involved in the strategic planning for the school. The financial management of the school is now good and more rigorous. Administrative staff are mostly effective and efficient.

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



The school works well with parents to support learning. They are satisfied with most aspects of its work. Parents are provided with a good range of information about the activities of the school. Students enjoy being at the school. They feel that they are taught well and they are helpfully supported in their academic and personal development.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- Review the curriculum provision in sixth form; improve the provision in music and citizenship.
  - Continue to focus on the implementation of behaviour management strategies to achieve consistency of practice.
  - Improve standards of achievement in English and the monitoring of literacy across the curriculum.
  - Continue with the improvement programme for accommodation.
- and meet statutory requirements for:

- Citizenship, the ICT provision in music and art and design, sixth form religious education and the daily act of collective worship

## **THE SIXTH FORM AT ASTON COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL**

### **OVERALL EVALUATION**

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory and it gives satisfactory value for money. Standards on entry are average and standards in examinations are average. Overall, teaching is good and achievement in lessons is good, but in examinations there is underachievement in some subjects. Although there is a wide range of courses to choose from, the curricular provision overall restricts choice and flexibility for the majority of students. Leadership and management are satisfactory.

### **The main strengths and weaknesses are**

- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Students' achievement in art, health and social care and history is very good.
- Students' attitudes are positive and they have good relationships with their teachers.
- The curriculum restricts the choices of a large proportion of students; it has a negative impact on overall standards and achievement for some students.
- Provision in the English language and literature course is unsatisfactory.

### **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      | <p>Provision in <b>English (language and literature course)</b> is <b>unsatisfactory</b>. Standards are below average and many students do not achieve satisfactorily, because teaching is not challenging. Leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory.</p> <p>Provision in <b>French</b> is <b>good</b>. Standards are well above average. Good teaching and positive attitudes enable students to achieve well. Leadership and management of the subject are good.</p>  |
| Mathematics                               | Provision in <b>mathematics</b> is <b>good</b> . Standards are above average and improving. Very good teaching and students' positive attitudes towards learning are enabling students to achieve well. The department is well led.  |
| Science                                   | Provision in <b>physics</b> is <b>good</b> . Standards are above average and students achieve well as the result of consistently good teaching. Students have very positive attitudes and this improves their motivation to succeed. Leadership and management of the subject are good.  |
| Information and communication technology  | Provision in <b>information and communication technology (ICT)</b> is <b>good</b> . Standards are average and students achieve well because of the good teaching they receive. Students are interested in the subject and as a result work hard. The subject is well managed with a distinct focus on helping students to improve.   |
| Humanities                                | Provision in <b>history</b> is <b>very good</b> . Standards are above average and students achieve very well in relation to their prior attainment. Teaching and learning are very good and students are very positive about their learning opportunities. The subject is very well led and managed.   |
| Engineering, technology and manufacturing | Provision in <b>design and technology, product design</b> is <b>satisfactory</b> . Standards are average and improving, due to good teaching and good leadership and management.   |
| Visual and performing arts and media      | Provision in <b>art and design</b> is <b>very good</b> . Standards are above average. Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching and excellent use of assessment.  |
| Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel   | <p>Provision in <b>leisure and recreation</b> is <b>satisfactory</b>. Standards are below average. Learning is satisfactory and students achieve as they should. Teaching is good, but progress is hampered by frequent absence and the low motivation of a minority of students. Leadership and management are satisfactory.</p> <p>Provision in <b>sports studies</b> is <b>good</b>. Good quality teaching involves students fully in their learning. Standards of work seen were average. Students achieve well in relation to their prior attainment.</p> |
| Health and social care                    | Provision in <b>health and social care</b> is <b>very good</b> . Results were well above average in 2004. Standards in Year 13 are above average and improving. Students achieve very well, because teaching and learning are very good. The use of assessment to raise standards is very effective.   |

*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'.*

Year 12 lessons were also sampled in biology, business studies, geography, music, religious education and general studies. In geography, business studies and biology, standards were average and students achieved well as a result of good teaching. In music and general studies standards were broadly average and teaching satisfactory. In Year 13, lessons were sampled in drama, Spanish, design and technology systems and control, psychology and general studies. In drama standards were well above average and teaching very good. In Spanish standards were above average and teaching was satisfactory. In psychology, standards were below average and teaching was satisfactory. In general studies standards were broadly average and teaching was satisfactory.

### **ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

Effective guidance and support promote good achievement. Good advice regarding university applications and employment helps students to achieve their goals. Students are treated in an adult manner and their views are respected. However, the monitoring and evaluation of students' progress are not rigorous enough in some subjects.

### **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM**

Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. The head of sixth form knows the students very well and has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses within Years 12 and 13. The procedures for monitoring and evaluating the work of the sixth form are satisfactory and adequate action is taken to raise standards as a result of analysis of data and effective liaison with subject co-ordinators. However, strategic planning in relation to the curriculum has not been effective in raising overall standards in examinations.

### **STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM**

Students have positive attitudes towards their learning. They appreciate the wide variety of courses and opportunities available to them in the sixth form. They value both the help and guidance given to them by their teachers and the way they are treated as young adults.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

#### Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Overall, standards at the end Years 9 and 11 and in sixth form are broadly average. Examination and test results over time show a steadily improving trend. The overall **achievement of students is satisfactory** and also improving. In most subjects there is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls, apart from English where a minority of boys underachieve. Most students continue to make satisfactory progress; students with special educational needs and the most able make good progress. Standards in mathematics are above average in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11, but in English they are below average in Years 7 to 9.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in GCSE examinations have shown an improving trend; they were above average in 2004.
- Standards in mathematics, science and ICT are above average by the end of Year 9.
- In comparison with similar schools, overall performance in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, is below average at the end of Year 9.
- Standards in English are below average at the end of Year 9, in GCSE examinations and at A-level.

#### Commentary

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

| Standards in: | School results | National results |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|
| English       | 32.4 (33)      | 33.4 (33.3)      |
| Mathematics   | 35.6 (34.9)    | 35.4 (34.7)      |
| Science       | 32.9 (33.4)    | 33.6 (33.3)      |

*There were 320 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*  
**Note** Comparative national figures for the National Curriculum tests of 2004 were not available at the time of the inspection but reference is made about the results and trends.

1. In the 2003 National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9, the combined results were average. In mathematics and science, results were in line with national figures, but were below average in English. In comparison to similar schools, results were low, although in mathematics students performed well at the higher levels. Results in mathematics and science have improved significantly in the 2004 tests; standards are now above average. The pattern of improvement was not reflected in English results. The overall standards are now closer to those of similar schools. At the end of Year 9, achievement in mathematics and science lessons reflects the improved test results; it is only satisfactory in English.

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

|   | School results | National results |
|---|----------------|------------------|
| Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades  | 50 (52)        | 52 (50)          |
| Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades  | 92 (91)        | 91 (91)          |
| Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades  | 99 (99)        | 96 (96)          |
| Average point score per student (best eight subjects) | 35.1 (35.9)    | 34.7 (34.8)      |

*There were 314 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

**Note:** *Comparative national figures for the GCSE examinations of 2004 were not available at the time of the inspection but reference is made about the results and trends.*

2. In 2003, overall performance in GCSE examinations was in line with the national average and the trend of improvement was also similar to the national picture. However, performance in comparison to similar schools was below average. In 2004, the school achieved its best results to date for the grade category five or more A\*-C (58 per cent); this is above the national average. The students' overall performance was also above average. Standards were above average in mathematics and science, but below average in English. Particularly good standards were achieved in art and design, drama, graphics, textiles, geography and history. The overall performance in GCSE examinations is comparable to that of similar schools.

### **Standards seen during the inspection**

3. In Years 7 to 9, standards are broadly average overall and are above average in mathematics, science and ICT. Achievement by the end of Year 9 is generally satisfactory but on many occasions it is good; this because of effective teaching. Teachers have high expectations, which are encouraging students to achieve better. However, standards seen in lessons and in samples of students' work reflect below average standards of performance in English and music. Achievement in the basic skills of numeracy is good, but it is unsatisfactory in literacy.
4. In Years 10 and 11, standards in general continue to be broadly average, but with areas of good achievement. The positive effect of the mathematics and ICT status, including well-managed departments and good teaching, can be clearly seen in the higher standards achieved. Standards in English are below average, because there is not enough good teaching and learning. Overall achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. This is partly a reflection of the unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour of a minority of boys, which have a detrimental effect on learning.
5. Overall, students with special educational needs achieve well, as a result of the very good provision for them. Local education authority data shows good achievement at the end of Year 9 in all three core subjects and particularly in mathematics. Analysis of provisional 2004 GCSE results shows that students with statements of special educational need all attained at least three A\*-G grade passes and that one attained five A\*-C grade passes. Most attained better grades than expected. Similarly, most of those at the School Action Plus stage of the Code of Practice attained better than expected in relation to their GCSE passes. They generally achieve well in relation to their targets set in their individual education plans and statements of special educational need. Across all years and in most subjects, students with special educational needs achieve well, particularly in Years 10 and 11. However, in modern foreign languages and music, in Years 7 to 9, students with special educational needs are not achieving as well as they could, because the provision for them is unsatisfactory.

6. Students identified as gifted and talented also achieve well. Analysis of provisional 2004 GCSE results shows that 50 per cent of the identified cohort attained between one and four A\* grade passes and that 99 per cent attained between one and six A-grade passes. School analysis shows that there is a continued upward trend in the attainment of higher levels at the end of Year 9 for the identified cohorts of gifted and talented students. Targets are being met and often exceeded.

### Sixth form

In work seen, standards were broadly average, showing that students' achievement is satisfactory.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average in French and above average in art, history, health and social care and physics.
- Achievement is very good in history and art.
- Standards are below average in English language and literature; students are underachieving.
- In A-level (A2) examinations there is underachievement in a few subjects.

### Commentary

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

|  | School results in 2003 | National results in 2003 |
|--|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades | 86.0 (95.1)            | 89.4 (92.6)              |
| Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades | 28.4 (21.9)            | 32.6 (35.3)              |
| Average point score per student          | 252.9 (207.0)          | 258.2 (263.3)            |

**Note** Comparative national figures for the GSE A/AS examinations of 2004 were not available at the time of the inspection but reference is made about the results and trends.

7. In 2003, standards in examinations were broadly average overall. Since students enter the sixth form with average attainment compared to other sixth forms, this represents satisfactory achievement. There was a marked difference in the overall performance of boys and girls in 2003; boys' performance was significantly better than that of girls in English language and general studies. Although there is an improving trend in AS and A-level results across most subjects, achievement is patchy and varies from year to year in individual subjects; for example in 2004 there was significant underachievement in mathematics, design and technology and physics.
8. Standards in examinations were broadly average in 2004. Standards were above average in history, geography, religious education, French, drama and health and social care. Students achieved well in economics, religious education, French and geography. Standards were below average in English language and literature, leisure and tourism, chemistry, biology, mathematics and product design. Students did not achieve as well as expected in science subjects, English language and literature and product design, and in 2004 there was significant underachievement in mathematics. In ICT and sports studies students begin their courses with lower than average attainment, because they do not have the foundation of full GCSE courses

in Years 10 and 11. Since they achieve average standards by the end of Year 13, this represents good achievement.

9. Retention rates in the sixth form are good when compared with similar schools nationally. Typically, one or two students in each subject do not complete the course. However, in the light of the curriculum arrangements in this school, where the majority of students take only three AS subjects or the equivalent in Year 12, the small proportion of students who drop out of courses and therefore do not continue in Year 13 is significant, since this means that these students only do two A-level courses or less. This affects their overall points score and in turn restricts the choices they have in the next stage of education. Destinations for students following A-level courses are limited in range and a small proportion of students do not achieve a grade in some AS or A-level courses.
10. A representative sample of subjects was inspected. Standards of work seen ranged from below average to well above average, compared to national standards. In physical education and ICT standards are below average but students' achievement is satisfactory in relation to prior attainment. In health and social care and history achievement is very good. In lessons, most students are achieving well in the majority of subjects. However, in English, combined language and literature students' achievement is unsatisfactory.

### **Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities**

Attendance rates are **satisfactory**. Attitudes are generally **good**; standards of behaviour are **satisfactory**. Personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students' attitudes are good and this supports satisfactory achievement.
- Relationships between teachers and students are good.
- The school does not provide a daily collective act of worship.
- There is insufficient work in lessons to challenge racism and promote race equality.

### **Commentary**

11. Attendance rates are satisfactory and are very similar to those seen during the previous inspection. Procedures to monitor attendance are satisfactory, in that early contact with parents keeps unauthorised absence rates to a reasonable level. However, they are higher than the national rates, and so the poorest attenders are identified and supported. However, the electronic registration system is not used effectively to analyse attendance. Attendance rates in June and July are unacceptably low in all year groups and far too many students, including those studying for GCSE examinations, miss substantial amounts of school time through holidays. There has been insufficient improvement in attendance rates since the previous inspection.
12. Students generally have good attitudes towards their work. Students in the top sets work particularly hard. Students respond well to exciting, enthusiastic teaching and high expectations, in particular in history lessons where attitudes are often excellent. Girls generally apply themselves better than boys. Boys are more likely to have

unfinished work, to come to lessons without equipment or to act in a silly, immature way. Occasionally, there is mild disruption to lessons through chatter and noise. Good relationships between students and teachers, including a relaxed manner and good use of humour, help students develop confidence and high self-esteem.

13. The overall standard of behaviour, as seen on the inspection, is satisfactory. Younger students move around the school in a sensible manner and there is a calm social atmosphere in the dining hall. Older students are more boisterous and a minority of older boys fool around in corridors and push and shove in dining hall queues. When staff are aware of bullying, usually name-calling, sensible steps are taken to address the issues. The school has a continuing priority on improving standards of behaviour. The procedures and support for behaviour management, which have recently been introduced, are beginning to have an impact on this important area of the school's life. The school is now more pro-active in the identification and prevention of more serious bullying; as with all schools, it remains a continuing focus. Exclusions have been high, an indicator of the school's intention to deal firmly with serious behavioural issues. Procedures to manage behaviour are rapidly improving under the influence of the new headteacher. A culture of positive reinforcement of personal success and good attitudes is being effectively promoted.
14. The school does not meet statutory requirements for a daily collective act of worship. Regular assemblies are of variable quality and often include a spiritual element, but opportunities to refer to a system of beliefs are sometimes missed. Tutor times are not used effectively to promote students' personal development. This situation has not improved since the previous inspection.
15. Opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are insufficiently planned; they happen by accident rather than by design. This results in a satisfactory provision. Subjects such as English and music make unusually limited contributions to students' personal development. Religious education makes a good contribution to student's personal development; there is a valuable topic on moral development. In history, opportunities are carefully planned and this makes for much better provision. For example, in Year 8 students are encouraged to think about topical moral, social and cultural issues while studying Native American Indians and stereotypical interpretations of history are addressed. The school's cricket tour in South Africa and the links with an African school have given a small number of students an extremely valuable personal experience of spiritual, moral, social and cultural dilemmas and have promoted race equality. These experiences are shared well with the rest of the school through assemblies and tutor periods. However, there is insufficient work in lessons to make students aware of cultural diversity and to challenge racism.
16. In normal lessons the attitudes and behaviour of students with special educational needs are generally no different from those of others. Where teaching assistants are present to support students with special educational needs, this is accepted well by all; other students often take advantage of their presence and seek extra help themselves. The attitudes and behaviour of students in the support for learning department are good; this results in a calm and purposeful learning atmosphere. Year 11 students with statements of special educational need are particularly appreciative of the help, support and guidance they have received from the support for learning department throughout their time in school.

## **Sixth form**



Attendance rates are **unsatisfactory**. Attitudes and behaviour are **good**. Personal development including spiritual, moral, and cultural development is good. Social development is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' behaviour is good; it supports a productive learning environment.
- Very good relationships between teachers and students promote good learning.
- Students' positive attitudes and hard work support satisfactory achievement.
- Very good opportunities for social development help students become mature and self-assured.
- Lax systems for monitoring attendance have resulted in unsatisfactory attendance.

### Commentary

17. Students have good attitudes to their work. They are willing and hard working. Students' behaviour is good and they apply themselves well to the task in hand. Very good relationships between teachers and staff give the students the confidence to ask challenging questions. For example, in a mathematics lesson absolute honesty between the teacher and students in presenting answers and asking questions was a key factor in helping students learn. However, a minority of students are a little passive, biddable rather than enthused. In an interesting general studies lesson about the difference between popular art and high art, students' response to questions was muted and learning was limited by the lack of high quality discussion.
18. Opportunities for personal development are better in the sixth form than in the rest of the school. The students' reticence and lack of confidence to speak out are recognised and students value the many opportunities to develop their social skills. They speak enthusiastically of their involvement in sailing tall ships and professional management courses designed to improve skills of collaboration and co-operation. Extensive residential visits, together with the mixing of Years 12 and 13 in tutor groups, result in a very close knit and vibrant community. Students describe their visits to a school in Africa as life changing; they learn to appreciate their own lives and to understand the limitations of material wealth. The sixth form council has extensive powers and students learn that with power comes responsibility.
19. School records indicate that attendance rates in the sixth form are below those seen in the rest of the school. However, during the inspection sixth form attendance was good. The school recognises that the monitoring of attendance has not been sharp and improvements are being sought.

#### *Ethnic background of students*

| Categories used in the Annual School Census |
|---|
| White – British                             |
| White – Irish                               |
| White – any other White background          |

#### *Exclusions in the last school year*

| No of students on roll | Number of fixed period exclusions | Number of permanent exclusions |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1698                   | 204                               | 3                              |
| 2                      | 0                                 | 0                              |
| 7                      | 0                                 | 0                              |

|                                    |     |   |   |
|------------------------------------|-----|---|---|
| Mixed – White and Black Caribbean  | 8   | 0 | 0 |
| Mixed – White and Black African    | 1   | 0 | 0 |
| Mixed – White and Asian            | 11  | 0 | 0 |
| Mixed – any other mixed background | 4   | 0 | 0 |
| Asian or Asian British – Indian    | 1   | 0 | 0 |
| Asian or Asian British – Pakistani | 1   | 0 | 0 |
| Black or Black British – African   | 4   | 0 | 0 |
| Chinese                            | 1   | 0 | 0 |
| Any other ethnic group             | 2   | 0 | 0 |
| No ethnic group recorded           | 132 | 0 | 0 |

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

### **Attendance in the latest complete reporting year 2003 (%)**

| Authorised absence |     | Unauthorised absence |     |
|--------------------|-----|----------------------|-----|
| School data        | 6.8 | School data          | 1.6 |
| National data      | 7.2 | National data        | 1.1 |

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

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**

The quality of education provided by the school is **satisfactory**. The curriculum and resources are satisfactory. There are unsatisfactory aspects of accommodation. Students are achieving satisfactorily because of effective teaching and the positive attitudes to learning of most students.

### **Teaching and learning**

Teaching and learning are **satisfactory**. Assessment procedures are **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers' effective planning and very secure subject knowledge help to promote and develop students' skills.
- The active encouragement of enthusiastic teachers helps motivate students and usually leads to a high level of productivity.
- A good variety of teaching approaches are used to stimulate students' learning.
- Work in a few lessons is insufficiently geared to the needs of individual students.

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 204 lessons

| Excellent | Very good | Good     | Satisfactory | Unsatisfactory | Poor | Very poor |
|-----------|-----------|----------|--------------|----------------|------|-----------|
| 6 (3%)    | 48 (24%)  | 83 (41%) | 54 (26%)     | 13 (6%)        | 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.*

### Commentary

20. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and expertise; many show an enjoyment of their subject that is often enthusiastically shared with students. In modern foreign language lessons, teachers have a good command of the languages they teach and in the majority of lessons use them effectively to conduct activities. Students therefore benefit from good role models, and listening skills are well developed as a result. In art, teachers use their very good subject knowledge and particular interests to improve students' practical skills and knowledge of other artists. Lessons are well explained and provide a clear view of the teachers' high expectations. In ICT lessons, the enthusiasm of teachers stimulates students to work hard. Tasks are challenging as teachers do not supply answers but encourage students to think problems through.
21. Teachers usually relate well to students and are usually able to motivate them effectively. There is often an atmosphere of achievement and mutual respect. Students have the confidence to question teachers and develop new ideas and increase their understanding. In history lessons relationships are excellent. There is a relaxed, yet purposeful, air in lessons that is conducive to high quality learning. Detailed planning together with good classroom organisation and a clear style of delivery often result in good learning. For example, in geography, schemes of work and lesson planning are a strength. Lessons are well resourced with plenty of variety which helps to engage students and hold their attention. However, there are times, for example in English and music, where the planning is inadequate. Occasionally in English the work is not closely matched to the students' needs and they are not challenged enough. In music lessons, planning does not take into account the different musical abilities of all students, including those with special educational needs and those who are more able musically. Many opportunities are missed to involve and engage students in learning through practical music activities and well-focused listening.
22. Many teachers are keen to use a variety of teaching approaches in their lessons. In drama there is an emphasis on varied activities; collaborative work enhances the enjoyment and motivation of the students. In design and technology teachers use a wide variety of techniques, such as product analysis, to help students' understanding of issues. They encourage prototyping with temporary and real materials to help students to improve products.
23. There are small pockets of unsatisfactory teaching. For example, in some personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons, which is delivered by many teachers, there can be inconsistencies in expectations. The teaching and learning are unsatisfactory, because the tasks students are asked to perform are at too low a level; this is a direct result of an unsatisfactory curriculum.

24. Occasionally, work is not well matched to students' capabilities. This results in higher attaining students not being appropriately challenged and lower attaining students not being able to fully grasp concepts. This can result in unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour, as students struggle and lose interest. There are occasions when a lack of rigour in behaviour management results in these students, and usually their classmates, not learning effectively.
25. Teachers are well aware of the requirements of students on the school's list of special educational needs. They have copies of students' individual education plans as well as very useful summary information provided by the support for learning department. This is also posted on the support for learning site on the school's intranet. Targets on individual education plans are discrete and sharp, thus helping teachers plan their work to meet the needs of these students.
26. Where observed, teacher assistants and support teachers provided effective support in lessons for students with special educational needs. In a science lesson, for example, support staff knew the strengths and weaknesses of the students well and worked very closely with the class teacher to offer good support and guidance. In a mathematics lesson, a teacher assistant was fully involved with all the students helping them with computers. Where there are no support staff in mathematics, the use of specialist college status finance enables groups to be small. Here, teachers are successful, because they understand the individual learning needs of students with special educational needs. In the support for learning department area, where older students were involved in preparing individual assignments for assessment, a very positive learning atmosphere and very good quality support and guidance from staff ensured that all were achieving very well. Younger students with specific learning difficulties benefited very well from the use of a nationally produced programme by a specialist teacher.
27. Assessment practice is good overall. Target setting is becoming increasingly effective. Some subjects having excellent procedures. In history, for example, essays are marked very thoroughly, with very good points made for improvement, clear targets are set and assessed work is sent to parents. In art and design, each student's coursework is individually designed and reviewed very effectively. ICT uses spreadsheets very well to check students' progress against their targets and for monitoring coursework. However, teachers do not consistently emphasise how students can gain higher levels by using the grade framework in the ICT National Curriculum. Very good assessment procedures are also found in health and social care and geography. Procedures followed in English courses are unsatisfactory, as assessments are not related to clear objectives, are too generous and do not challenge students to improve.

### **Sixth form**

28. The overall quality of teaching is good, and promotes good learning amongst students. Teaching is particularly effective and stimulating in mathematics, history and health and social care. In general, teachers have very good subject knowledge and use assessment well to guide students about how to improve. Students are encouraged to work independently, participate fully in debate and use their knowledge of the subject to solve problems. In a very good Year 13 statistics lesson, groups of students were asked to work collaboratively to solve problems related to modes, means and medians. The groups presented their solution to the class confidently and articulately, with accuracy and clarity. However, the quality of teaching in English is unsatisfactory; in some lessons there is insufficient challenge and this results in unsatisfactory learning. Low expectations create an easy-going atmosphere and a too limited intellectual response from the students.

29. Teachers provide interesting activities to contextualise theoretical ideas, to promote students' learning. For example, in physics, there is a very good emphasis on individual experimentation. This results in better progress, because this 'hands on' approach consolidates students' theoretical understanding well. History lessons are conducted with pace and rigour; questioning techniques are used very effectively to probe students' understanding to greater depth. In these lessons there is a sense of shared purpose and this encourages all students to engage in lively debate. In French, clear presentations enable students to assimilate ideas quickly and allow students to progress rapidly. Students have frequent opportunities to undertake in-depth research and report their findings to others. Their investigations and discussions in health and social care provide a very good basis for their other topics and underpin their learning very effectively
30. The overall quality of assessment procedures is good. For example, in art and design work is very thoroughly and helpfully assessed with clear guidance for improvement. However, the use of data is not fully developed in some subjects to set targets and monitor individual progress against expectations.

### **The curriculum**

Curricular provision is **satisfactory**. The extra-curricular provision is good and enhances students' personal development. The overall resource and accommodation provision is unsatisfactory.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The provision for students with special educational needs is very good.
- Opportunities for personal enrichment are good; learning outside the school day is well supported.
- The mix of academic and vocational courses available to Year 10 and 11 students is well planned.
- The PSHE programme is unsatisfactory, because it does not promote continuity and progression.
- The effectiveness of programmes designed to boost literacy is poorly monitored.

### **Commentary**

31. Teaching time has been increased to the recommended minimum of 25 hours, although the school continues to fail to provide a daily act of collective worship for all students. Tutor time is still often poorly used. The curriculum now reflects the assets of specialist status in mathematics and computing, the Sportsmark award and a good work-related programme for post-14 students. The provision of vocational courses and alternative curricular options in Years 10 and 11 has developed significantly. Two students are educated off site and receive education in basic skills. A small number of students choose not to attend and some students do not do the full complement of core subjects because of ability levels. The students' entitlement to citizenship is not fully met.
32. The curriculum provided in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory and meets statutory requirements, except in citizenship and in art and music where the ICT elements are missing. It is broad and balanced and builds appropriately on the work of primary

schools, because of the effectiveness of curricular links with feeder schools. Arrangements in modern foreign languages offer a somewhat random allocation to either French or Spanish which limits access to a second language when GCSEs are being chosen.

33. The curriculum provided for Years 10 and 11 is good. An extensive range of GCSE courses together with short courses in physical education and religious education is enhanced by five vocational courses and four applied GCSEs. The curriculum has been widening and changing to respond to the varied needs of students. The process is being consolidated. Half the current Year 11 students pursue some vocational element, whereas in Year 10 the percentage has fallen to 30 per cent. One class of higher attaining students has the opportunity to take AS-level general studies but, if they do, it prevents them from taking a second language. The blocking of physical education with religious education leads to inadequate time overall for physical education and single periods which are too short to be effective. The curriculum in history is particularly imaginative and full of innovation. Unsatisfactory provision for PSHE detracts from what is otherwise a strong provision.
34. Overall, curricular provision for students with special educational needs is very good. These students have full and equal access to the curriculum and are fully involved in the life of the school. Alongside the traditional range of GCSE courses on offer, the school has recently offered some vocational courses to meet the full ability range of students in Years 10 and 11. As yet, there is no embedded provision for students in the sixth form. Close links with special schools are also of benefit for students with complex needs. Formal extra-curricular provision run by teaching assistants means students with special educational needs have the opportunity to ask for and receive extra subject and specific support and guidance during the week. Students improve their literacy and numeracy skills through attendance at the support for learning department ICT suite, where they work on a commercially produced program.
35. Departments are kept fully informed of special educational needs, as a result of regular liaison with the subject link group and with the support for learning department. As a result, the quality of provision for students with special educational needs across subjects is mostly very good; in religious studies it is very good. However, in Years 7 to 9 in modern foreign languages and music, provision is unsatisfactory.
36. The intervention, extension and booster programmes for students with poor literacy and numeracy skills have some strengths, but there are weaknesses in how they are applied. Their effectiveness is poorly monitored. The Pathways process provides a framework and guidance for students in Years 10 to 13. Work-related learning for all, together with extended placement opportunities and college link provision, and a strong re-engagement programme including ASDAN bronze and silver, all mean that students are well prepared for later stages of education and employment. The equality of opportunity and access to curricular provision is good.
37. Parents recognise the value and extent of the extra-curricular programme. The large majority thought that the provision was at least good. They mentioned dance, school trips and the links with the Makunduchi School in Zanzibar. The programme of curricular enrichment and extra-curricular activities is especially strong in sport and art. Most subject departments also have formal or informal out-of-hours clubs which support learning. Sixth formers and younger students benefit mutually from the 'Toe by Toe' reading scheme. There are many stimulating trips and visits, some residential, in many subject areas.

38. There is a good match between the number and quality of teachers and the needs of the curriculum. Subjects are taught by specialists. Difficulties in filling a vacancy are currently affecting standards in art and design. The school has a good range of support staff. The support for learning department is well staffed. Along with an experienced special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) there are four specialist learning support teachers and sufficient teaching assistants to support those students with statements of special educational need, as well as other students on the school's list of special educational needs. Teaching assistants are enthusiastic and committed to working with students with special educational needs and their effective deployment ensures the curricular needs of these students are met.
39. The resource provision is satisfactory overall, although a wide variation exists between subjects. Resources are good in mathematics, design and technology, history, religious education and ICT and for special educational needs. Resources are unsatisfactory in English, where there is too much sharing of detailed texts, and also in music, where there are insufficient instrumental resources to meet the needs of the curriculum. In mathematics, ICT facilities recently acquired along with specialist college status are excellent, and also in design and technology, which is well equipped due largely to internal funding. The school's student to computer ratio of 3.5:1 is good, with students having a computer each in most ICT lessons. However, ICT across the curriculum is often curtailed due to difficulties of access to ICT facilities. There is increasing use of modern technology, such as interactive whiteboards, in teaching and this has a positive impact on learning in many subjects. The resources in the library are adequate overall. While the new cyber-café facility is well used by the school and the community, both parties make insufficient use of the library resources.
40. The accommodation remains unsatisfactory. The school is making strenuous efforts to improve the accommodation but almost 1900 students spend their days in a building originally designed for 600. The fabric of the building is in poor repair with crumbling brickwork, rotten windows and corroded drainpipes, all causing an impact on the school's finances. Corridors and stairways are narrow and movement between lessons is difficult. The dining facilities are inadequate for such a large number of students. Dedicated accommodation for the learning support department is accessible by parents or students with mobility needs. There are very good ICT resources in the learning support department. These are used very effectively to support the learning of students with special educational needs.
41. The local education authority has prioritised the school for rebuilding or major refurbishment within the 'Building Schools for the Future' programme. Only four of the original 25 mobile classrooms remain on site, one being the student support base and another housing graphics technology. The design and technology department enjoys a new suite for computer aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) and refurbished textiles room but the rooms for food technology are not yet satisfactory. The ICT department being housed in small rooms counters considerable investment in new hardware and software. A new wing provides very good accommodation for the history and religious education departments while two state-of-the-art specialist ICT suites are in contrast to the original building. The unsatisfactory indoor physical education facilities make it difficult to raise standards of achievement in badminton, basketball and volleyball, while the showers do not provide the privacy students expect, limiting the normal development of personal hygiene. The on-site swimming pool shared with the local community is soon to be replaced with a new sports complex.
42. Learning in English is less effective because the rooms are dispersed around the building, causing poor punctuality and difficulty moving resources from one place to another. Science provision has been improved because two rooms have been refurbished and a good quality ICT suite has been added. The art department is no longer dispersed around the site but the accommodation remains unsatisfactory because one room is too small and two others suffer from inadequate drains. One of the rooms in modern foreign languages suffers from noise from

the nearby music rooms and another is so small that there are insufficient seats for a full class. The accommodation for music is also unsatisfactory because there are insufficient practice rooms and one has inadequate soundproofing.

43. There is no outdoor seating where students might socialise at break or lunchtimes. The sixth form study area with its 12 computer workstations is the only area in the school to allow students an independent working space, and opens off from the large, unwelcoming space that is the sixth form common room. The library, a joint venture between the school and the local community, has undergone major refurbishment and forms part of Webgate, an impressive ICT facility. The students' toilets are in poor repair and suffer from vandalism. One block of toilets is closed because the ceiling has fallen in. The interior of the building is maintained in good order by the caretaking and cleaning staff and there is very little graffiti, although litter and plastic bottles reduce the quality of the learning environment. The infrared alarm system has been upgraded. The security fence at the rear of the school is in good order and two caretakers live on site but the school still suffers from intruders and theft.

### **Sixth form**

44. Overall, the curriculum in the sixth form is satisfactory. An appropriate range of AS, A-level and vocational courses is offered. Other options are available through the school's curricular links with two local secondary schools. The school places much emphasis on its enrichment programme, recognising the relevance it has to its student body, but this restricts some students to a choice of only three subjects in Year 12. This limitation of choice can fundamentally affect continuity into Year 13. Some students, therefore, have no escape route from courses that prove inappropriate. This runs against the purpose of Curriculum 2000 in broadening students' choice and pathways. There is some unnecessary duplication in key skills courses. The statutory requirement for religious education is not being met. Students who have taken GCSE subjects early speak of difficulties in picking up the subject again in Year 12.

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

Procedures to ensure students' care, welfare, health and safety are **satisfactory**. Support, advice and guidance are **satisfactory**. The involvement of students in the school's work and development is **satisfactory**.



## Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are good procedures to secure students' health and safety.
- Careers education is good and helps students make well-informed decisions about their futures.
- There are good relationships between form tutors and students.
- The Student Support Base works well to support vulnerable students.

## Commentary

45. Health and safety procedures have improved substantially since the previous inspection and are now good. Action is taken to minimise hazards whenever possible. Some areas of the school are dilapidated and students and staff are sometimes forced to work in unsavoury conditions. There are some weaknesses in child protection procedures - it cannot be assured that policy and procedures fully meet locally agreed procedures and lines of referral are not clear enough.
46. The pastoral system is very well established and the system of retaining year heads and form tutors through Years 7 to 11 results in very good relationships being formed, especially between students and form tutors. However, procedures to monitor attendance and behaviour, although adequate, have not been particularly rigorous. Tutor time is rarely used effectively. There has been improvement in the monitoring of achievement since the previous inspection, including the establishing of monitoring days where targets are set.
47. Induction procedures are satisfactory. There are good relationships between primary schools and the receiving secondary school. Many of the children have the opportunity to take part in lessons at the secondary school while they are in Years 5 and 6. Although very approachable staff from the secondary school visit primary schools early in Year 6, students do not have the opportunity to meet the head of Year 7 until induction day, which is held in July. Induction days involve individual primary schools and students do not meet their secondary classmates or their form tutor until the first day of secondary school. There is an intake evening, when form tutors are available, but parents are invited rather than students. Year 7 students understandably report that they were apprehensive about their first day of school. Sixth form mentors attached to Year 7 classes provide students with valuable support.
48. Careers education is of good quality. There is a good taught programme, which helps students identify their strengths and weaknesses, and learn about career pathways and post-16 opportunities. There is an accessible careers library and ICT is used well by students to investigate careers. Connexions support focuses on the highest achieving students and those who are at risk of underachieving, so the majority of students have limited access to a routine careers interview. Conversation with Year 11 students revealed that, although many had good ideas about their futures, their ideas about the qualifications needed to reach these aspirations needed refining.
49. The school has very effective relationships with outside specialist agencies; this enhances further the quality of support and guidance for those students with special educational needs. Annual reviews are effective and support students with statements of special educational need as they move through the school. Parents and students'

views are taken into account, because they are involved in the setting and reviewing of targets at annual reviews. The school meets fully the curricular requirements as outlined in students' statements.

50. Leadership draws on a wide range of assessment data to help guide the appropriate placement of students on the school's list of students with special educational needs. Whole-school data enables leadership and management to track the progress these students make. The analysis of this data is well developed to show, for example, how well students with special educational needs are progressing year on year. Analysis of SATs data is undertaken by the local education authority and fed back to the school to enable local comparisons to be made. Leadership and management analysis of GCSE data highlights how well students with special educational needs achieve.
51. Extra support from the student support base is helping vulnerable students to reach their potential. Last year a significant number of students at risk of underachievement met or exceeded their examination targets. Many students spontaneously talked about the very good support they had received from learning mentors.
52. There is a school council that gives students a chance to air their views. Students report that in the past it brought about good improvements such as the availability of water, but that recently it has been less effective.

## **Sixth form**

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There is a lack of a formal induction process.
- There is good advice to support applications to university.
- The sixth form committee gives students a powerful voice.
- Students are well supported by subject teachers and pastoral staff.

### **Commentary**

53. There is no formal induction into the sixth form. All students are interviewed and support focuses on those students where there is an imbalance between the prediction of GCSE examination results and the student's aspirations. Students do not have the opportunity to sample lessons and the main source of guidance is usually the subject teacher. As the majority of students are only studying three AS subjects they cannot afford to make mistakes about subject choices, as they will have to carry on with a problematic subject to A-level or only have two A-level subjects to offer to universities. Students need a more rigorous induction programme to ensure they fully understand the demands of individual subjects and A-level examinations.
54. Assessment is regular and supportive. Well-established systems monitor students' progress and identify underachievement. Students report that they get very good academic support from individual subject teachers. Very good relationships between teachers and students result in students developing the confidence to ask for help when it is needed.

55. There is a good quality tutorial system in the sixth form that is supplemented by an interesting life skills programme. Students receive effective personal support from tutors and senior sixth form staff. Students receive good guidance about university applications. Students have a good understanding of the UCAS system, including point scores, and generally make well-informed choices about their futures. However, because of the system of studying only three subjects at AS-level and a concentration on level 2 key skills some students are restricted in their choice of universities. The life skills programme provides students with some very handy information, such as simple plumbing and how to change a plug. Personal development is enhanced by health education days, when students can learn about physical, mental and sexual health from experts who work in the local community.
  
56. Students feel that their views are heard and well respected. The sixth form committee is unusually powerful and successfully manages the common room and study areas, in addition to organising social events. The sixth form committee is able to make direct representations to senior management if there are problems within subject areas.

## Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Links with parents, the local community and other schools and colleges are **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is good information for parents.
- The specialist school status has enhanced community links.
- There are good links with primary schools.

### Commentary

57. Good communication with parents keeps students well informed about school and their children's progress. A small number of parents were concerned about the quality of information they receive about their children's progress. Reports are generally of good quality. Most written comments clearly communicate what children know, understand and can do and propose strategies for improvement. A minority reports on attitudes, rather than achievement. Reports do not include National Curriculum levels and the school uses its own system of grades to report whether children are reaching their targets. At present, parents are not invited to monitoring days, but they have the opportunity to attend subject-based parent evenings. The majority of parents are supportive of the school and of their children's education. There is an active parents' association. Opportunities to seek parents' views have been informal. Complaints are responded to efficiently.
58. Community links have developed well since the previous inspection. The specialist college status has given the school the opportunity to enhance its links with the local community, other providers of community education and local primary schools. There is a good and expanding range of courses for adults, which is available either in school or out in the local community. Courses focus on improving skills in ICT and mathematics. Other local groups use the school's ICT facilities.
59. There are effective links between the support for learning department and the parents and carers of students with special educational needs. They are invited to and attend annual reviews of students with statements of special educational need. Their views are recorded; hence they are fully involved and informed as to their child's progress towards the targets set out as part of the review process. Procedures for involving parents and students in the setting and review of targets on individual education plans are well developed. Special evening meetings have also been held for parents. The support for learning department has close links with primary schools and, as a result, provision for incoming students is effectively planned in advance.
60. There are strong curriculum links with local primary schools. There is a well-established science initiative, involving pupils from Years 5 and 6 and mathematics classes, designed to stretch able Year 6 pupils. The school has worked effectively with other local secondary schools; this includes a joint physical education initiative. The school has very strong links with a local university that enhance initial teacher training and staff development.

### Sixth form

Parents' views of the school are **satisfactory** and students' views are **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students appreciate the good quality support that helps them achieve satisfactorily.
- Students enthuse about the opportunities for enrichment which improve their confidence and social skills.

### **Commentary**

61. Parents are satisfied with sixth form provision. Students are very pleased with their sixth form experience; they feel that they are doing well. They appreciate the good support they get from teaching and pastoral staff including effective support for university applications. Students are very enthusiastic about enriching experiences such as involvement in the 'tall ships' activity, management training and exchange visits to a school in Makunduchi, Zanzibar. Their sincere commitment to the school is reflected in extensive involvement as peer mentors to Year 7 classes and supporting a catch-up reading scheme.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

The school is effectively led and managed. The leadership of the new headteacher is **very good**. A strong team of senior and middle managers support her well; they provide good leadership in the school. There is **good** management of the school; efficient and effective monitoring systems have been put in place. The overall governance of the school is **good**. Governors are effectively involved in the strategic planning for the school. The financial management of the school is now good and more rigorous.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The headteacher's vision has provided a new sense of purpose and direction for the school.
- Governors make a good contribution to the effective leadership of the school, but some statutory requirements are not met, particularly in relation to citizenship and spiritual development.
- The leadership and management of special educational needs, history, religious education and physical education are very good.
- The management and co-ordination of citizenship, PSHE and music are unsatisfactory.
- Financial management has improved significantly; it now supports effective decision making.
- Senior and middle managers carry out their delegated roles well.

### **Commentary**

62. The headteacher provides very good leadership; there is now a clear sense of direction for the school. A particular strength has been her ability to bring about a change in the culture of the school in such a short period of time. She is beginning to instil an ethos which builds upon the principles of respect for the individual and high expectations, so as to sustain and improve standards. A strong emphasis has been placed on achieving consistency in the management of behaviour and improving the effectiveness of

learning in lessons through supportive self-review. The school is managed with thoroughness and a clear purpose to consolidate strengths and promote consistency of practice.

63. An effective senior leadership team ably support the headteacher. The team are establishing a new identity; they work well together showing a strong commitment to the objectives of the school. Re-defined responsibilities have provided a new set of priorities for the management team. The quality assurance procedures that operate within the school are effective. A systematic review of performance for each subject leads to targets being drawn up for both the whole school and individual subjects. Each target has clear criteria, so that its success or otherwise can be measured and the level of planning for meeting these targets is appropriately detailed. Consequently, the standards achieved by the school, particularly in GCSE examinations, have continued to improve. The school improvement plan is too detailed and insufficiently focused on major priorities.
64. The overall quality of middle management in the school is good, with particular strengths being shown in history and religious education. In religious education there is a clear and detailed development plan. Assessment outcomes are used very well to guide learning programmes and there is a strong emphasis on raising standards of literacy. In a similar vein the strategic and curriculum planning in history are of a very high quality. There are some weaknesses, however; the leadership and management of music and citizenship are unsatisfactory. In music and citizenship, planning is inadequate; it does not provide continuity and coherence in teaching and learning in these areas.
65. The overall governance of the school is good. The governors show a strong commitment to the school and are knowledgeable about all aspects of the school's work. The background information compiled for governors' meetings is detailed and informative. They are pro-active in their intentions for the school. For example, they have been particularly active in promoting improvements to the school's buildings and its environment and in acquiring specialist school status. There are some statutory issues which need to be addressed in relation to citizenship, ICT requirements in music and art and design, religious education in the sixth form and a daily act of collective worship. The governing body is an effective team and working relationships with the staff are good. Governors produced an informed and detailed development plan for their own team. Annual meetings with parents are carefully recorded; these minutes show the care governors take to explain the school's work to parents. Helpful information on the required areas is given in the annual report. The prospectus is an attractive and informative document, which reflects well the school's values and work.
66. The school's staff performance management process is well structured and is helping to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers and teaching assistants are supported by a programme of professional development, taking account of individual, department and whole-school priorities.
67. The school pays due regard to the Code of Practice for special educational needs and statutory requirements are fully met.
68. Very effective leadership and management have resulted in a very good whole-school ethos for the inclusion and support of students with special educational needs. Leadership has

ensured the ethos of provision and support for students with special educational needs has a high profile and that staff are fully involved in the overall provision for them. There is a clear vision for future provision and development planning is well linked to whole-school areas for improvement. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively to provide the required support for students with statements of special educational need and those at the school action stage of the Code of Practice for special needs. This provides the breadth and level of support required for these students. The monitoring and evaluation of the work of the support staff are well embedded as a result of the appraisal system they are part of. Analysis and evaluation of data with regard to students with special educational needs are well embedded. The monitoring and provision for these students across subject departments are helped by the work of the link group. The support for learning department benefits well from dedicated administrative support.

69. The quality of financial control and management is now good; it has improved significantly. A recently appointed business manager is ably supporting the headteacher in rectifying a lack of strategic planning in the introduction of initiatives. A recovery plan has been agreed with the local education authority to bring the budget back into balance. The measures which have already been put into effect have produced significant savings. It is anticipated that the budget will be balanced in the next financial year. Administrative staff are effective and efficient.

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

| Income and expenditure (£) |           | Balances (£)                        |          |
|----------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------|----------|
| Total income               | 5,692,988 | Balance from previous year          | -204,528 |
| Total expenditure          | 5,601,890 | Balance carried forward to the next | -113,430 |
| Expenditure per student    | 3,028     |                                     |          |

## Sixth form

Leadership and management of the sixth form are **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' progress is tracked effectively.
- There is effective liaison with subject co-ordinators.
- Data is analysed thoroughly.
- The analysis of data is not used effectively for strategic planning.

### Commentary

70. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. Governance of the sixth form is satisfactory. Governors are informed about the sixth form provision, its cost and the results students achieve. Assessment data is used well to evaluate performance in the sixth form both in terms of analysing examination results and ensuring that students' progress is tracked efficiently against their targets.
71. The head of sixth form knows the students very well and has effective systems in place to ensure that students' progress is tracked and that they are given appropriate support and guidance. There is a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses within the sixth form, through thorough analysis of available data. The procedures for monitoring and evaluating the work of the sixth form are satisfactory. There is effective liaison between the head of sixth form and subject co-ordinators, whose aim is to raise standards. This is concentrated mainly upon the development of appropriate teaching and learning strategies and in supporting students in developing study skills. In this area, work done has been effective and there has been satisfactory improvement since the last report. However, data is not being used effectively enough to evaluate how well the curriculum provided meets the needs of the students in order to enable them to achieve well.
72. Examination results in 2003 and 2004 indicate that in some subject areas there is underachievement despite good teaching and positive student attitudes. A significant proportion of students fail to achieve grades expected at AS and A-level. The school analyses examination results rigorously but the action taken to adapt the provision to improve overall standards and achievement for all students has not been effective.



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

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

#### **ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

##### **English**

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

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

- Gradually improving standards by the end of Year 9 because of more stable staffing.
- Teaching and learning are effective and occasionally good, leading to nationally expected achievement.
- Students are not aware of how to improve due to inadequate marking.
- Work is not always matched to students' needs and therefore a minority of students, particularly boys, is not challenged enough.

##### **Commentary**

73. Results and current standards reflect gradual improvement. Students' achievement is satisfactory, taking into account the 2003 and 2004 GCSE results, as well as work seen. The relatively new heads of department are developing a shared vision for the improvement of teaching and learning.
74. In work seen, students' attainment by the end of Years 9 and 11 was below average. This represents satisfactory achievement because when the students joined the school, their standards were below average mainly because of their writing standards. Girls do better than boys and the department has produced new schemes of work as well as developing more rigorous targeting, to prioritise the achievement of boys. Standards in literacy, especially at Level 5, improved slightly in 2004. In 2003, GCSE results in English were below average, but standards improved in the results for 2004.
75. Most students have a basic knowledge and understanding of literacy skills by the time they have been in the school for three years. Their oral skills are good in classroom discussion but falter in formal situations. Writing standards are below average; some students have not grasped key skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar, although their work is generally well presented. Writing is creative and students enjoy creating imaginative and descriptive stories. The standards of all students are benefiting from a wider choice in the variety of writing assignments. Planning for adapting work in lessons is not enough to match the needs of all students. The use of ICT to develop students' writing standards is inconsistent, because of limited access. Students with special educational needs make good achievement because of the support they receive.
76. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, and there are examples of good teaching and learning. Occasionally, the work is not closely matched to the students' needs and they are not challenged enough. In the good lessons, there is a brisk pace, students are clearly motivated and a large amount of work is completed.

Students enjoy exchanging ideas with each other and their teacher in an atmosphere of achievement and respect. In a Year 9 lesson on *Dracula*, the students thoroughly enjoyed exchanging ideas in an atmosphere of high expectations. Consequently, they presented their findings in a deeply felt and expressive manner, because the teacher sensitively drew out their ideas and encouraged their thinking.

77. The leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. The relatively new heads of department have been supported by a full complement of English specialists, who provide stability and consistency after a period of fluctuation. Staffing is much more stable. Heads of department have instituted new systems and procedures to target and improve standards. Newly qualified teachers are given clear guidelines and support to achieve effective teaching and learning. Procedures for assessment are confusing and analysis of the standards and potential of individual groups of students is at an early stage. Some students are not aware of their standards or targets and therefore are not sure how to improve. Accommodation and resources are unsatisfactory because some classrooms are too far away and mean that students and teachers waste lesson time. Sharing texts disturbs concentration. Progress since the last inspection is satisfactory. Students' standards have been maintained and literacy teaching has been used effectively to target further improvements in English language for students.

### **Language and literacy across the curriculum**

78. The co-ordination of literacy is unsatisfactory. Management at a senior level is not yet effective in raising literacy standards. Standards in literacy are a barrier to learning, particularly for boys. Writing is a weaker area, when students come into school. Boys in particular find it a barrier to learning. In departments such as English, history and religious education, where rigorous attempts have been made to improve students' basic skills, advances are noted. In other departments, such as music, students are not making appropriate progress.

### **Modern foreign languages**

Provision in modern languages is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Attainment is above average in French; students' attitudes are positive.
- Assessment procedures are good and assessment is used effectively in lessons to raise standards.
- The needs of students with special educational needs are not always adequately addressed, so that their progress is hampered.
- Opportunities for students to use the language themselves are insufficient.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory and makes speaking and listening activities difficult.
- The curriculum arrangements for the second language are inadequate.

### **Commentary**

79. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Standards attained in GCSE results have improved in line with the national trend. Assessment procedures have improved, as has the use of ICT to support and extend learning.
80. In GCSE results in 2003 and 2004, the proportion of candidates achieving A\*-C grades was below average in Spanish and above average in French. The proportion of students attaining an A\*-G grade was broadly average. However, a much higher proportion of students was entered for examination than is the case nationally, so that comparisons with national figures are unreliable. In relation to their prior attainment, this represents satisfactory achievement in both languages.
81. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are average in Spanish and in French; students achieve satisfactorily. In work seen, there was no significant difference between boys' and girls' achievement. By Year 9 students can describe events in the past, present and future and express simple opinions. However, they cannot operate easily in French or Spanish without reference to notes and prepared dialogues. This hinders them in responding spontaneously and sometimes has an adverse effect upon pronunciation and therefore their confidence. Students whose standards of literacy are below average do not achieve as well as they should when the emphasis in lessons is predominantly on reading and writing. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are broadly average; students achieve satisfactorily. In French, standards are above average and in Spanish they are below; this represents satisfactory achievement. By Year 11, students can write at length and in detail. Students have a good understanding of grammar, and a good range of vocabulary and structures, and in French they link ideas together effectively in writing. In Spanish, writing is more reliant on models and the range of language used is more limited. Listening skills are well developed in both languages; students respond appropriately and promptly to instructions and questions in the target languages.
82. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers have a good command of the languages they teach and in the majority of lessons use them effectively to conduct activities. Students therefore benefit from good role models and listening skills are well developed as a result. Opportunities to practise informally in pairs increase students' confidence but are often limited to rehearsal rather than for real purposes. Presentations are clear, using visual aids and the whiteboard and students rapidly understand or identify and apply patterns themselves as a result. Teachers monitor students' progress closely in writing activities and students make good progress but some average and lower attaining students have difficulty with listening and reading activities, because they are not always given the means to succeed. The emphasis in some lessons is on reading and writing to the detriment of speaking and listening; this encourages students' dependence on written notes and, in turn, inhibits their confidence in speaking and responding. However, in a minority of Year 8 lessons, although presentations are clear and students are given the opportunity to practise informally, the pace is slowed because organisation is poor or tasks are too difficult because planning does not take adequate account of students' capabilities. For example, where students with literacy difficulties are expected to spend a whole lesson on reading, writing and grammar; this hampers rather than facilitates their progress and confidence because they do not experience success. In the majority of lessons students are well behaved, listen attentively and are concerned to do well, but they lose concentration and become restless when not directly involved in activities or their

needs are not taken sufficiently into account. In Year 10, students achieved well in describing their daily routine because the lesson was well planned with short, manageable steps in learning and conducted at a brisk pace. Students developed speaking skills effectively through pair work activities and were confident in correcting a text for accuracy as a whole class by the end of the lesson. Reading techniques were very clearly demonstrated and developed using the overhead projector, which enabled both students and their teacher to highlight key words and make explanations clear. Assessment procedures are good, and marking is regular and gives clear advice about how to improve but assessment data is not always used effectively to address the needs of groups of differing ability within lessons to enable all students to experience success.

83. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Teaching and learning are monitored and evaluated and ideas are shared on a regular basis. However, action taken is not sufficiently well structured or focused upon teaching and learning strategies to raise standards significantly, except in reading and writing, especially amongst lower attaining students. Average and higher attaining students make good progress, but the department's provision for students with special educational needs in Years 7 to 9 is inadequate and hinders rather than helps students' learning. The department has close links with centres in France and Spain and provides students with the opportunity to participate in trips abroad. The use of ICT is severely limited because access to facilities is difficult. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. Some rooms are small and this restricts the range and variety of activities which can be provided, but more importantly, noise from classes above severely affects learning and makes listening and speaking activities extremely difficult. Although it is possible for students to take two languages in Years 10 and 11, they are not able to make an informed choice because they do not experience the second language in Years 7 to 9. At present no students take two languages and this disadvantages able linguists in the next stage of education.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards and achievement are improving.
- The quality of teaching is good and leads to effective learning by most students.
- ICT is used effectively to help students' learning, especially those with special educational needs.
- Leadership and management are good.
- The monitoring of some aspects of teaching and learning is insufficiently rigorous.

### **Commentary**

84. Achievement is good across all years. By the end of Year 9, higher and most lower attaining students are achieving particularly well and making very good strides in their learning. This is because they have well-defined and understood targets for improvement, receive extra teaching outside the classroom or, in the case of those with special educational needs, effective individual support. Most students in Years 10

and 11 make good progress and achieve well; however, a minority of lower attaining students underachieve in Years 10 and 11, because they have unsatisfactory attitudes towards learning, present challenging behaviour and have low thresholds of concentration and application. There is no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls.

85. Attainment on entry is similar to the national average. In recent years, standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 have been close to the national average. In 2004, unconfirmed results show a marked improvement in standards, particularly those of the higher attaining students. When compared with similar schools, standards in 2003 were well below the national average, but evidence from the 2004 results and the inspection shows that the picture is improving and a level which is closer to the national average is being reached. Students' attainment in mathematics at the end of Year 9 is higher than that in English and science. At the end of Year 11, standards have risen steadily since the previous inspection. In 2004 GCSE examinations, both A\*-C grade and A\*-G grade results are above the national averages. The implementation of requirements for the specialist mathematics college status makes a positive impact on the improving standards and achievement of most students. The close matching of well-qualified teachers to students' learning needs and the use of the very good provision of new technologies for teaching and learning, are also contributing to this improvement.
86. The highest attaining students in Year 10 are very competent in a wide range of mathematical operations that demand well above expected levels of problem-solving and decision-making in unfamiliar contexts. Their secure grasp of mathematical ideas means that they will take GCSE examinations one year early and move on to more advanced work in Year 11. Average attaining students in Years 9 to 11 have a satisfactory grasp of basic numerical techniques but the lowest attaining students in Year 7 and 8 are insecure in their application of basic arithmetic. For example, in a lesson to learn the equivalence of decimals, fractions and percentages, lower attaining Year 8 students were prevented from making satisfactory progress because they were not confident enough in using division and multiplication of simple numbers, which they had previously learned. Students use computers competently to develop further their mathematical skills.
87. The quality of teaching is good. The most significant strength is the teachers' command of the subject content, which they use very effectively to challenge students' thinking and to extend their knowledge and understanding. There are inconsistencies between teachers in applying guidelines within the National Numeracy Strategy. The displaying of lesson objectives and key words for each lesson, the quality and range of introductory activities and end of lesson consolidation of learning varies widely between teachers. These variations have implications for the more rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning and the improved sharing of professional skills and ideas between teachers. A significant number of lower attaining students in Years 10 and 11 have weak recall and retention skills and they find difficulty with algebraic and other mathematical operations, which require solutions involving a number of logical steps. When introducing new ideas in mathematics to lower attaining students, teachers have to move forward cautiously, using repetitive revision, because many of these students are slow to transfer previously learned ideas to new situations. Regular assessment is used well by teachers to respond to the learning

needs of individual students and, from Year 9 onwards, students have a good understanding of how they can improve their learning, achievement and standards.

88. Leadership and management are good. There is a clear direction, sense of purpose and commitment to improving achievement amongst a large and cohesive team of teachers. The well-organised department is managed reflectively and efficiently. Bold, well-considered and corporate decisions are taken and put into practice, where it is felt students' learning and achievement will benefit. Evaluation of the work of the department is a strong feature. However, the monitoring of aspects such as teaching, planning and marking is not sufficiently rigorous. Accommodation is very good and provides for effective learning in a suitable environment.
89. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection. Curriculum time has been increased for Year 10 and 11 students. There are now no significant differences in the performance of boys and girls and there is an improving trend in standards and results.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

90. With the exception of lower attaining students in Years 7 and 8, students' competence in the use and operation of number is sufficiently well developed to allow them to make good progress in other subjects. In Years 9 to 11, most students' mathematical skills have improved to allow them to make good progress in transferring them to help develop new ideas in other subjects. There is a school policy which includes the use of recommendations from the National Numeracy Strategy. However, there is inconsistent response from most subject departments. In geography, science, design and technology there is good planning and use of mathematics, particularly in graphing skills to represent data. This is contributing to the raising of standards in these subjects.

## **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is good and students learn well as a result.
- GCSE and National Curriculum tests have improved.
- Students of all ages make good progress.
- Staffing of the department is good and is leading to improving standards.
- Day-to-day marking of students' work is not sufficiently detailed.

### **Commentary**

91. In 2003, results in National Curriculum tests in Year 9 in 2003 were average, and well below average in terms of what might have been expected, given students' prior attainment. However, results in 2004 improved significantly, confirming good achievement in this age range. In Year 11 students can take a range of GCSE science examinations. Results in 2003 in double award science were well above average whilst

in single award science they were above average. Overall, results were broadly average in 2003, but above average in 2004.

92. Standards in Year 9 are currently above average and more consistent with the most recent test results. Students enter the school with attainment which is broadly average for their age. As the result of predominantly good teaching they make good progress and achieve well, so that by the time they are in Year 9, their knowledge and understanding are above what might be expected for their age. For example, a higher attaining Year 9 class made better progress than might have been expected and achieved well in a lesson where they investigated the displacement reactions of metals using micro-chemical techniques. They were able to write word equations, for the reactions they observed, with a good degree of success. Standards of work in Year 11 are also above average. Students' knowledge and understanding of biology, chemistry and physics continue to improve at a good rate. These students have maintained the good progress seen with younger students and their achievement is also good. For example, in physics they have a good understanding of the life cycle of a star and in biology can relate the process of photosynthesis to the development of ecosystems. Students with special educational needs make good progress and achieve as well as other students, because they receive good support from teachers and learning assistants in their lessons.
93. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers have a good command of their subject areas and as a consequence scientific theories and concepts are clearly explained, which improves students' learning. There are effective strategies in place which improve the quality of teaching and learning. For example, most lessons focus clearly on keywords and the criteria by which students' work will be assessed. This results in students having a much clearer picture of what is expected of them and improves the standard of their work. Lessons are well planned. For example, most lessons are divided into three sections, with a starter activity and plenary session. This uses time effectively; ensuring students maintain interest and learn well. Expectations of students are high and they generally respond positively to new and more exacting work. There are good relationships between students and teachers and this is an important factor in promoting a better learning environment. Although pupils' day-to-day work is regularly marked, it does not at present give them an accurate picture of the absolute standard of their work and how they can progress from one level to another. A few lessons are taught outside laboratories and this limits the development of enquiry science skills for those students involved.
94. Leadership and management are good. There is a good sense of vision for the future. There is an effective system of monitoring teaching and learning that is leading to common approaches to improving achievement. Teachers and support staff work well together, ensuring the department functions efficiently on a day-to-day basis. Since the previous inspection improvement has been good. Test and examination results are improving. The department is in a good position to move forward.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well because of the good teaching they receive.
- Students learn well in Years 7 to 9, because they have good attitudes towards the subject.
- Computer college status has helped students to become competent users of ICT.
- The use of ICT to enhance students' learning in other subjects is inadequate.

## Commentary

95. In 2003, examinations were taken only by a small number of students, of low prior attainment. Their results were poor, when compared to national averages. Since then, there has been marked improvement. The unverified 2004 results indicate attainment just below average.
96. Standards in Year 9 are above average. This indicates good achievement on the part of students as they enter the school with average ICT skills. Most students improve their ICT capability, and know how to use a wide range of software, because of good teaching and access to good resources. Most students used spreadsheets well to set up a booking system for a concert. They used appropriate formulae and explain their purpose well. However, many students are less successful in explaining more abstract terms such as inputs and processes. Higher attaining students incorporate material from different sources into their projects very well to make them suitable for a particular task. Lower attaining students' presentations about a travel club were simplistic and did not show a clear understanding of the needs of a particular audience. Students with special educational needs make good progress. Their ICT skills are often well in excess of those in literacy and numeracy. Students are well motivated. These good attitudes greatly assist the good learning that takes place. There is no significant difference in the standards and achievement of girls and boys. Students make more progress in Year 9, as they are taught largely by specialist teachers.
97. All students now take examination courses in Years 10 and 11 and the standards seen during the inspection are average. This indicates good achievement, as these students did not have access to the current good resources and consistent specialist teaching in previous years. Most students' ICT skills develop well. For example, lower attaining students use databases well to provide an ICT solution to a particular problem. Higher attaining students write succinct, yet thorough, analyses of their project work. However, many students, especially boys, have below average writing skills, which inhibits their ability to describe, analyse and evaluate their work. In Year 11, some of the courses are not suited to the needs of some students. As a result some students are less well motivated and find success difficult. The school has acted to improve this position. The Year 10 courses are more suitable and students are making greater progress.
98. The quality of teaching, both in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11, is good. Teachers are enthusiastic, which stimulates students to work hard. Tasks are challenging, as teachers do not supply answers but encourage students to think the problem through. Lessons are well planned and clearly presented using projectors, so that students are clear about what they need to do. The best lessons set the learning



objectives clearly and return to reinforce these at the end. However, this pattern is not consistently used throughout the department. Students help each other willingly and so learn effectively from each other. Teachers and teaching assistants give good support to students; this enables those with special educational needs to achieve well. Behaviour is good in most lessons. However, in Year 11, where the courses are inappropriate for some students, low-level misbehaviour inhibits learning. Marking is good and teachers record assessments thoroughly, so that they are able to advise individuals on the steps they need to take to improve. However, teachers do not consistently emphasise how students can gain higher levels by using the grade framework in the National Curriculum. Homework is set regularly and teachers ensure that all students can complete this, even if they do not have computers at home.

99. Leadership and management are good. The department works effectively as a team and there is a desire to improve results still further. Ample opportunities are provided for students to use ICT outside lesson time and they grasp these enthusiastically. The monitoring of progress made by students throughout the department is good. However, support and training for the non-specialist teachers, especially in Years 7 and 8, are not thorough enough, which results in lower achievement in these classes. The technical support team is skilled and effective. However, technicians are too few in number, either to maintain the increasing number of computers or to develop projects such as the school web site and intranet.

### **Information and communication technology across the curriculum**

100. Provision for ICT across the curriculum is satisfactory overall. There is a very good vision for the future development of ICT as a medium for improving teaching and learning. Computing college status has been well planned and implemented and the additional funds, together with those provided from school resources, have helped students become competent users of ICT. They are particularly proficient in using the Internet for research and for communicating and presenting information. However, the use of ICT in subjects is variable. Those that have relatively easy access to computers use ICT well. Mathematics, for example, has two computer rooms; ICT is built into the schemes of work and it is used very effectively to teach the four rules of number. The support for learning department is well resourced and ICT is central to teaching and learning. Similarly, in history, ICT is used very well as a matter of course in most lessons. Science uses its suite of computers well for modelling outcomes. Lack of access to the computer resources, however, makes it difficult for other subjects to fully use ICT. Students taking music and art and design in Years 7 to 9 are unable to meet the National Curriculum requirements, because of the insufficient use of ICT. The use of computers in English is also unsatisfactory, because of limited access to facilities.

101. There has been good improvement in ICT since the previous inspection. All of the issues have been resolved, with the exception of the limited development of cross-curricular ICT.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **Geography**

Provision in geography is **good**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Measured against prior attainment, most students achieve well.
- Lessons are well planned. Students find them interesting.
- Students know how well they are doing due to thorough assessment.
- Fieldwork is well integrated into the curriculum.
- The acting head of department is a good leader and manages the department well.
- There is insufficient attention given to the learning needs of the most able students in mixed ability classes.

## Commentary

102. Standards are improving. Most students enter the school in Year 7 with limited prior knowledge of geography. Aided by a well-structured scheme of work, they make good progress, gaining broad geographical knowledge of contrasting human environments and some understanding of physical processes. By the end of Year 9, standards are broadly in line with national averages, as they were at the time of the previous report. Students are beginning to know where places are. Most understand basic terminology. They can explain, for example, why a much higher percentage of India's working population is engaged in farming than in Britain.
103. GCSE results in 2002 and 2003 were slightly below national averages and had declined. Students tended to do less well than in their other subjects. The most recent results in 2004 were significantly better, matching standards of work seen in the current Year 11. When compared to prior attainment, this represents good achievement. The performance of boys in particular was much improved. The special needs of less able students are understood and well met by adapted resources and focused support. Setting by ability helps teachers stretch the most able, but the quality of provision for such students in mixed ability classes, whilst improving, varies.
104. Students enjoy geography and are generally well behaved but a few wander off task when insufficiently challenged or the pace of the lesson falters. Most teachers enjoy a relaxed and productive relationship with their students who repay them with commitment. Less able students struggle to describe in depth and are often poor spellers. The department is committed to its role in helping to strengthen literacy. Schemes of work include opportunities for extended writing, for listening and for discussion. Students contribute willingly to questions and answer sessions. They collaborate well in group situations. They know how well they are doing, how well they should be doing and how to improve, due to effective assessment.
105. Teaching and learning are good. This is a large department and the quality of teaching and learning does vary. Schemes of work and lesson planning are strong. Lessons are well resourced with plenty of variety, which helps to engage students and hold their attention. They learn best where the structure of the lesson gives pace and momentum and when students have the opportunity to work on their own. Year 9 students reflected as they listened to a description by Vikram Seth of a street scene in India. They could visualise the throng of people and the informal workers – the subject of the lesson. Clock-driven pace hurried groups through

exercises using photographs, the pace quickening as they got the hang of it. What drove learning was the teacher's expectation that all would work hard, quickly and accurately. Extension material for some and simplified worksheets for others ensured that the whole class achieved very well.

106. The performance of the department is regularly reviewed and its teaching monitored. The acting head of department is fully aware of what needs to be done to raise standards. She is strongly supported by a team which shares responsibility for curricular development. Together, they are continuing to extend the provision for gifted and for less talented students. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory.

## History

Provision in history is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership and excellent management are effective in improving standards.
- Very good teaching, particularly in Years 9 to 11, helps students to learn very well.
- Students achieve very well, due to very good teaching and their positive attitudes to learning.
- Lesson aims sometimes lack precision.

## Commentary

107. Attainment in GCSE examinations in 2004 is well above average. The recent trend is one of improvement. Most students perform very well against expectations based on prior attainment and better than in all other GCSE subjects. There is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls.

108. Students enter in Year 7 with below average history skills. By the end of Year 9, students' standards are broadly average. This indicates good achievement over Years 7 to 9. This is the result of good teaching and students who work conscientiously and well. By the end of Year 9, students have a good grounding in historical skills. Most have a good understanding of the main events and people of the periods studied. Knowledge of chronology is very good. Most students demonstrate an ability to identify the nature and significance of source material well, although it is rather limited in Years 7 and 8. Gifted and talented students are not sufficiently stretched in Year 7. Students with special educational needs make very good progress when provided with high quality specialist support.

109. By the end of Year 11, standards are well above average, with achievement over Years 10 and 11 very good. This is due to very high quality teaching and students, especially boys, who show an unusually strong commitment and interest in their studies. By Year 11, students have further developed their skills impressively in using source material and are confident in undertaking historical enquiry. Best independent coursework is of excellent standard. Great emphasis is placed on regular revision and the practice of examination skills, to very good effect.

110. Teaching and learning are very good overall. They range from satisfactory to excellent. Well-structured imaginative lessons, together with teachers' very good knowledge of topics taught and strong classroom management, account for the very good teaching. Relationships are excellent. There is a relaxed, yet purposeful, air in lessons that is conducive to high quality learning. Best teaching is inspiring and stimulating and has very high expectations. In a small minority of lessons, students rely too much on their teacher and there is limited use of visual aids, little group work and insufficient opportunity to develop written work. Lesson aims are insufficiently detailed; they need to be more focused on the knowledge, understanding and skills of what is taught and how they are to be tested.
111. The subject is very competently led and excellently managed. Competent staff work very well together as a team. Strategic planning is excellent and curriculum planning and assessment for learning are of a very high quality. A very good coherent programme of ICT application exists, but skills development is impeded by lack of access to computers. A wide variety of enrichment activities, such as the 'Horrible History' and 'Top Gear' lunchtime clubs and extra-curricular visits, are provided. However, there is insufficient use made of the local history in Years 7 to 9.
112. The effective use of resources, particularly modern technology in teaching, enhances learning opportunities. Progress since the previous inspection has been very good.

### **Religious education**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The quality of teaching is very good and enhances students' learning.
- The subject is led and managed very well.
- Students acquire subject skills rapidly from Year 7 onwards.
- Higher attaining students lack sufficient challenge in their written work during Years 7 to 9.
- The subject makes a very important contribution to the personal development of all students.
- There are insufficient opportunities to visit sites of religious interest.

### **Commentary**

113. Results in the short course GCSE examination have been above average in recent years and students entered have achieved well in terms of their prior attainment. In lessons seen and work analysed during the current inspection, standards by the end of Year 9 are in line with those expected by the locally agreed syllabus. This represents good achievement, as many students enter the school with low levels of subject knowledge. From Year 7 onwards, all students acquire a very good understanding of Christian beliefs and of other world religions such as Sikhism. In Year 9, students also become familiar with moral values in society and, in this context, some very detailed and well-argued essays were seen on moral dilemmas. At this stage, however, higher attaining students lack sufficient challenge in their written work. In Years 10 and 11, students develop a very mature understanding of

spiritual and moral issues, such as world poverty. Standards at this stage are above expectations and all students achieve very well, including those with special educational needs.

114. The quality of teaching is very good, especially in Years 10 and 11. Specialist teachers use their subject skills very well to promote very good learning and use very strong classroom management techniques to ensure that all students have the confidence to participate in lively classroom debates. This has addressed an issue arising from the previous report about the reticence of some students to take part in discussions. There is a wide variety of classroom activities to enthuse students and group work is used very imaginatively to promote students' personal development. As a result, they show very positive attitudes to their work and listen to each other's views with respect.
115. The department is led and managed very well, with a clear and detailed development plan. Assessment for learning is used very well and there is a commendable emphasis on raising standards of literacy. The subject makes a very strong contribution to the personal development of all students, especially in the area of multicultural understanding. ICT is used well as a departmental resource and there are excellent displays in every classroom to enhance learning. Students would benefit, however, from more opportunities to visit sites of religious interest.
116. Overall, the department has built well on the previous report. This is a very strong department with a dedicated teaching team. The key issue now is to build on the very good progress already made, especially in terms of providing a wider range of examination courses.

## TECHNOLOGY

### Design and technology

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The management of the department is too fragmented; it does not promote consistency of practice.
- Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 11 and result in improving standards and students' good achievement.
- Assessment is not sufficiently secure or matched to National Curriculum levels in Years 7 to 9 to enable students to progress sufficiently.
- Improvements in ICT and CAD/CAM facilities are having a positive impact upon standards of work.

### Commentary

117. Teachers' assessments indicate that standards are above average in Year 9. Currently, standards of work show that attainment is average by Year 9. This represents good achievement for all students compared with their below average levels of attainment on entry in Year 7. In Years 7 to 9, students experience a broad range of materials and processes, but not computer control. In Years 8 and 9 students experience a curriculum material area for half a year and this means that they succeed in developing process skills and produce finished products of good quality. They do not consistently show how their design ideas are developed in each material area.

118. In 2003, GCSE results were well below average overall, and students did significantly less well than they did in their other subjects. Provisional results in 2004 show notable improvement and GCSE standards are now broadly average. Students now do as well as they do in their other subjects. There are differences in subject performance, but overall students do a little better than expected from their prior attainment.

119. Results in electronics and particularly in textiles are well above average. Girls do a little better than boys. Standards of current Year 11 work are average. Not all students opt for design and technology subjects and this represents overall good achievement for those who do. Students develop very good design development skills in resistant materials, and use prototyping techniques widely across the department. Making skills are good, notably in resistant materials, and in textiles, where students' coursework is most complete. In some areas, there is too little match of evaluation to the original specification. The application of ICT to coursework, although improving rapidly, is variable and generally underdeveloped. Students of all abilities make equally good progress.

120. Teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11 are good overall. Where students' workbooks are developed in Years 7 to 9, this usually allows students to concentrate upon their designing and making. There are some differences in expectation of open-ended design by the end of Year 9, resulting in some challenges being largely cosmetic, while others result in widely differing products. In Years 10 and 11, teachers use a wide variety of techniques such as product analysis to help students' understanding of

issues. They encourage prototyping with temporary and real materials to help students to improve products. Teachers show students how to apply good graphic design or computer-aided design (CAD) techniques in some subjects, but not in others.

121. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Individuals manage different areas of the curriculum efficiently, and standards are rising, but this has also resulted in inconsistencies of approach across the department. There is a lack of sharing of good practice between subjects. In Years 7 to 9, assessment is not matched closely to National Curriculum levels and is consequently insecure. There are some differences in expectations and the use of terminology. Department priorities are clear, but teachers do not yet carry out a detailed baseline assessment of students on entry or liaise sufficiently with feeder schools. ICT opportunities and application are improving rapidly. New computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) facilities are good, but students' coursework is not yet universally rich in ICT applications.
122. Since the last inspection improvements have been satisfactory. Standards, although rising, again present a similar picture. Students' achievement is better. There is better curriculum coverage and understanding in systems and control. Boys' and girls' attainment is now more even. There are still management issues to address in developing consistency across the subject. Teaching rooms are still widely separated across the school. There have been some improvements in accommodation and resources, particularly in CAD/CAM facilities.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

### **Art and design**

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

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

- Standards are above average by the end of Year 11.
- Teaching and learning are good and lead to good achievement.
- The department is well led and managed.
- Students do not use ICT to generate or manipulate imagery.
- The assessment of students' work is very good in Years 10 and 11.
- The accommodation is unsatisfactory.

#### **Commentary**

123. Standards meet expectations in Year 9 and show good achievement from the students' well below average standards when they enter school. GCSE results in 2003 were well below average with the boys in particular underperforming. The 2004 results were above the 2003 national average, with both boys and girls being equally successful.
124. The work in school is good and improving. Students can record their observations through drawing, although they occasionally draw what they think they see, rather than what they do see. Research is central to their work and includes investigations into human emotions, resulting in good quality ceramic heads with exaggerated features. The development of composition features strongly in their work. There is some over-reliance on magazine photographs, although the use of landscape

photography helps to improve painting skills. Students do not use computers to create artwork. The work in Year 11 is above expectations and improving, continuing students' good achievement. Their preparatory work and planning are impressive, allowing them to learn for themselves and from each other. They draw and use digital photography to record information and develop ideas, linking their work to that of famous artists. Teachers know their students well and design work to ensure that those with special educational needs and those who are most able achieve as well as others.

125. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge and particular interests to improve students' practical skills and knowledge of other artists. Lessons are well explained and provide a clear view of the teachers' high expectations. Good relationships centre on mutual respect and students are keen to do well. Year 10 students made excellent progress when planning a low relief based on their observations of fruit and vegetables, recorded in very good quality paintings. The teacher's good-humoured prompting added considerably to their learning. Learning was unsatisfactory in two lessons, when a teacher failed to challenge a minority of Year 8 students who interfered with their classmates' learning, and when a smaller group of Year 10 boys were intentionally disruptive. The assessment of students' work is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11; it enables students to know how well they are doing and how to improve. Students' written evaluations within each project often contain spelling errors.

126. Students' good achievement and rising standards make it clear that the department is well led and managed. The curriculum leader is ambitious for her students, staff and the development of their subject. Skilful teachers and strong teamwork are central to the department's success. The department's progress is monitored carefully and there is a capacity to improve yet further. Planning lacks sufficient detail of the time, staffing and cost needed to implement the plans. Inadequate access to computers makes full delivery of the National Curriculum impossible. Working with artists-in-residence, visits to museums and the Yorkshire Sculpture Park enrich the curriculum. The accommodation is unsatisfactory: one room is too small for larger groups by the end of Year 9, while there are problems with the drains in two other rooms. The department has been unable to recruit staff in recent years, interfering with learning in Years 7 to 9. The technician provides very good support for students and teachers. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have risen, all students achieve well and the students' behaviour has improved.

## **Drama**

Drama was not inspected in detail but some lessons were seen.

127. The teaching of drama is an asset to the curriculum. The teaching of drama not only broadens the curriculum, but also improves standards because students are able to transfer the skills they have learned into other subject areas. Teaching and learning emphasise decision-making skills, and provide opportunities for students to think for themselves. Students learn well overall, because the lessons are well prepared and they enjoy the subject. Emphasis on varied activities, personal development and collaborative work enhances the enjoyment and motivation of the students. In a Year 7 lesson on physical theatre, work was carefully planned and executed, and skilful.



This was because of the high expectations of the teacher and carefully targeted lesson planning. In an otherwise satisfactory Year 11 lesson the students were less active and dramatically involved. A wide range of extra-curricular activities contributes to the positive ethos of the school.

## Music

Provision in music is **unsatisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students do not achieve as well as they should in Years 7 to 9.
- The leadership and management of the department are unsatisfactory.
- Statutory requirements for the use of ICT in Years 7 to 9 are not met because of the lack of music technology resources.
- The school provides a good range of instrumental tuition.

### Commentary

128. Standards in music by the end of Year 9 are below national expectations and students do not achieve as well as they should, given their average attainment on entry to the school in Year 7. This is because of weaknesses in teaching, planning and assessment, instabilities in staffing during the last three years, the lack of instrumental and music technology resources, and the unsatisfactory accommodation which restricts teaching methods and group work.

129. By the end of Year 11, standards of work seen were in line with expectations and students' achievement was satisfactory. This is because teaching and learning are satisfactory and most students receive instrumental tuition. Students' performing skills are good but their musical knowledge and understanding, required for the listening and appraising paper, are less well developed. GCSE results for 2003 were just above the national average and results for 2004 are likely to be similar, but numbers are small.

130. The quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory overall. It is unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. In Years 7 to 9, students make satisfactory progress in individual lessons, but achievement over time is unsatisfactory, mainly because of inconsistencies in teaching and planning across the department. Teachers plan clear learning objectives and include progressive activities to help students to learn. However, lesson planning does not take into account the different musical abilities of all students including those with special educational needs and those who are more able musically. Many opportunities are missed to involve and engage students in learning through practical music activities and well-focused listening. Consequently, students do not always develop their musical skills, knowledge and understanding well enough. Students' attitudes vary in response to the quality of teaching, but overall their attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory. Students learn more effectively in Years 10 and 11, because teachers take more account of individual students' musical skills, knowledge and understanding. Overall there has been a decline in the quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection.

131. The leadership and management are unsatisfactory. At the time of the inspection the head of department was absent and the department was being ably managed by the head of drama.

During the last three years there have been several changes of staff and this has affected continuity of learning. However, the monitoring and development of teaching and learning are not effective in achieving consistency and improving achievement. Planning is inadequate and does not provide continuity, progression or coherence in teaching and learning. This is because of the lack of schemes of work which clearly identify the key knowledge, musical skills and understanding that students are expected to learn. Arrangements for assessing students' attainment and progress and for ensuring consistency between teachers are not fully in place in Years 7 to 9.

132. A good range of instrumental tuition is provided and there are opportunities for musically talented students to perform in musical events both in and outside school. However, there are insufficient extra-curricular music activities to cater well enough for the interests and abilities of all students, including those who already play instruments and the musically talented, or to develop students' musical learning and personal development. The wind band achieves a good standard because of effective teaching and direction by the woodwind teacher.
133. The recent improvement to the music accommodation has brought the whole department together in a suite of rooms. However, teaching and learning are restricted by the lack of small spaces for group work in which to develop students' performing and composing skills. Also there are not enough music resources to support teaching and learning when several classes are taught simultaneously. The department is unable to meet statutory requirements for the use of ICT in music lessons in Years 7 to 9 or to enhance students' composing skills in Years 10 and 11 because of the lack of music technology resources. Improvement since the previous inspection is unsatisfactory.

## **HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL**

### **Physical education**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students achieve well by the end of Year 9 and very well by the end of Year 11, as a result of very good teaching.
- Very good leadership and management provide a purposeful focus, ethos and direction for the subject.
- The very good attitudes and behaviour of students result in a very positive atmosphere in lessons and extra-curricular activities.
- Very good extra-curricular provision throughout the year extends students' learning experiences and personal development.

## Commentary

134. Standards by the end of Year 9 are average; students achieve well in relation to their below average standards on entry to the school. By Year 9 all groups of students have acquired a good range of individual skills and are able to apply these in a wide range of activities. In netball, for example, most girls have secure individual skills and are able to apply these successfully when developing their tactical skills in small-sided games. In swimming, boys are able to adapt their front crawl style to that required for water polo. In volleyball, both boys and girls are developing their individual skills well.
135. In Years 10 and 11 all students are entered for the GCSE short course. The trend in the proportion of students attaining A\*-C grades has been continually rising over the past three years. In 2004, 81 per cent attained A\*-C grades. There has also been a rising trend in the proportion of students attaining A\*/A grades, this having doubled to 41 per cent since 2002. There are no national comparisons for the short course. Standards of work seen in the short course are above average and most students are achieving very well. They have continued to build on and develop the skills and techniques learned in Years 7 to 9. Students are now able to opt for the GCSE full course with the present Year 11 group taking the examination in 2005. Standards of work seen were above average and most students are achieving very well, with no significant gender differences. In volleyball, for example, students apply the dig, volley and block well in games and their teamwork skills are developing very well. In badminton, all are developing a good range of shots and applying these tactically.
136. Across all years, students have a good knowledge and understanding of the principles and procedures for warm-up, the quality of work in Years 10 and 11 being particularly good. All students also have a good grasp of assessment and evaluation of their own strengths and weaknesses, as well as those of their peers.
137. Teaching and learning are very good, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Learning objectives are made clear at the start of lessons, so students know what is expected of them. Though there is also a very good emphasis on the use of correct terminology, the visual representation of this could be better. Teachers have a very good command of the activities being taught. They have consistently high expectations as regards behaviour and discipline and in the ability of students to work to their best. Attitudes and behaviour are very good; students clearly respect the ethos within which the subject is taught, which enhances the quality of learning and promotes a very good atmosphere in lessons. Lessons are well structured and purposeful and provide for progression and challenge. In a very good quality Year 11 volleyball lesson, for example, students had planned their own skills warm-up and team tactics, as well as being involved in the evaluation of both their own and their peers' strengths and weaknesses. Effective use of questioning, for example in a very good Year 7 gymnastics lesson, enhanced students' speaking and listening skills. This also enabled the teacher to gauge the level of students' understanding. However, in another lesson the teacher was over-generous as regards the skills students were demonstrating. Students are involved in pair and small group work, as well as structured observation of others' work. This deepens their understanding further and helps them modify and develop their own practice. There are, though, missed opportunities to use ICT to support students' learning. Teachers circulate well, and their effective use of praise and constructive criticism makes students aware of their capabilities and what they need to do to improve. Effective plenary discussion at the end of lessons enables students to consolidate what they have learned.
138. Very good leadership and management provide a very purposeful focus and direction for the subject, in order to improve standards further. There is a strong team ethos and a shared

commitment to improve provision. Development planning is very effective, linked closely to whole-school planning. Some excellent work is being undertaken on assessment for learning, with clear evidence of this in practical lessons. However, moderation of levels at the end of Year 9 is not effective enough. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Positive aspects mentioned in the previous report have been maintained and the GCSE full course has been introduced. Timetable issues in Years 10 and 11 remain unresolved. The department has very good capacity for further improvement.

139. Very good extra-curricular provision throughout the year, including both recreational and competitive fixtures, broadens students' learning opportunities, enhances their personal development and extends the learning opportunities for the more physically capable. During the previous school year, 20 per cent of students regularly attended extra-curricular activities. As a result of the commitment of teachers, including support from non-specialists, a number of teams have recently been successful in district competitions. Thirteen individuals have attained county representative honours in a range of sports and seven students have attained national representative honours, including sports not taught at the school.

### ***Comment on general sporting provision in the school***

140. The timetable structure of the school means that unless students take part in extra-curricular activities, it is difficult for them to experience two hours of quality physical education per week. This is particularly the case in Years 10 and 11. At post-16 there is no formal timetabled provision for recreational physical education. However, students can attend extra-curricular activities and there are accredited courses for them to follow. The physical education department is part of the local schools sports co-ordinator (SCCo) scheme and as a result has developed very close links with local primary schools. The department has also become involved in the wider Physical Education School Sport and Club Links Strategy (PESSCL). As a result, there are established links with local community sporting organisations that are of direct benefit to students.

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

### **Personal, social and health education (PSHE)**

Provision in personal, social and health education is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Many individual teachers work very hard to ensure that their form groups receive good quality PSHE lessons.
- Unsatisfactory leadership has resulted in an incoherent programme that is not effectively managed.

### **Commentary**

141. Standards are average but are below average in those classes where students are not challenged to think about current issues. Achievement is satisfactory overall. Where teaching is demanding and students are stretched and made to think hard, achievement can be very good, but achievement is unsatisfactory in some lessons. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory. There is a good proportion of very good and good teaching because many individual tutors are enthusiastic about PSHE, are determined to have good knowledge and understanding of the subject, and plan lessons that interest and challenge students. These individuals, together with some year heads, take it upon themselves to ensure that their tutees have access to good quality provision. Teaching in a minority of lessons is unsatisfactory. When teaching

and learning are unsatisfactory it is because the tasks students are asked to perform are at too low a level, as a direct result of an unsatisfactory curriculum. Occasionally, behaviour management is ineffective.

142. There is a history of unsatisfactory leadership and management. The introduction of many initiatives, a lack of direction and inadequate monitoring of the curriculum have led to a fragmented programme where progression and continuity cannot be assured. There is no clear picture of what is taught, to whom, at what time and why. The programme has not been designed to meet the students' specific needs but has evolved and grown in a haphazard fashion. Students in Year 10 and 11 have specialist PSHE, careers and citizenship lessons plus a tutorial period. This generous time allocation now adversely affects provision in other subjects. Parts of the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 such as child development are of questionable relevance and have not been carefully designed to build on other linked parts of the curriculum. Neither the curriculum nor quality of teaching has been monitored. Although there appears to be adequate sex and drug education, unsatisfactory management means that the school cannot guarantee that all students receive their legal entitlement to these important aspects of learning. There has been unsatisfactory improvement since the previous inspection. The recent appointment of a subject co-ordinator has not yet brought about the visionary changes that are needed to bring about the necessary improvements in provision.

## **Citizenship**

Provision in citizenship is **unsatisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- A planned programme of work has not been fully implemented.
- Leadership and management are unsatisfactory.
- Procedures for assessing and recording students' work are inconsistently followed.
- The school council makes a positive contribution to citizenship.
- English, geography and history departments identify clear opportunities for students to learn about citizenship in their schemes of work.

## **Commentary**

143. During the inspection there was insufficient evidence to make a judgement about the standards students achieve by the end of Year 9. Standards seen in Years 10 and 11 were satisfactory.

144. Citizenship was only being taught in Years 10 and 11 at the time of the inspection. The quality of teaching and learning was satisfactory overall, but inconsistent. Lesson planning was consistently good and effectively linked the three strands of citizenship. Key features of the very good teaching were the teacher's very good subject knowledge, high expectations and methods which fully engaged students in their learning and challenged them well. As a result students made very good progress in their understanding of bias in the media.

145. The co-ordination and management of citizenship are unsatisfactory. A planned programme of work is not fully in place, to show when and how citizenship is to be covered, with sufficient time allocation and depth of coverage, and linking the three strands. Citizenship is taught through various areas of the curriculum and, because of this, the programme is fragmented and lacks overall coherence. A large number of teachers are involved, making it difficult to keep track of what is taught and learned and to monitor students' progress. As a result, teaching, learning and assessment have not been regularly or adequately monitored and evaluated. Although procedures for assessing and recording students' work are in place, they are not consistently followed. English, geography and history departments identify clear opportunities for students to learn about citizenship in their schemes of work but there is a lack of consistency across subjects. The school council makes a contribution to citizenship because it involves all students in some key decisions

### **WORK-RELATED LEARNING**

Provision in work-related learning (WRL) is **satisfactory**.

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

- All students undertake work experience which is well monitored and reviewed.
- Some departments contribute well to students' WRL, but practice is still very varied.
- The school has not yet appointed a WRL co-ordinator.

## Commentary

146. Standards of provision and effectiveness vary but are developing and broadly match expectations overall. All students learn through work on a three-week work placement co-ordinated through the Trident scheme, although a few returned to school. The school and students undertake a thorough review of all placements to establish the quality of the experience. Judgements are formed about what economic and industrial understanding has been established, and attitudes and skills developed. This is followed up by students in a unit of work contributing to their English language examination, in which they write about their experiences and lessons learnt. The school has developed good links with industry during its preparation for specialist status, but these have yet to be fully exploited with respect to aspects of WRL.
147. Although the structure of leadership has not been formalised, the management and development of WRL are satisfactory. A thorough audit of WRL across the Years 10 and 11 curriculum and beyond has been undertaken. Activities and planning in subject areas have been reviewed and mapped against requirements enabling the school to identify weaknesses. Some good practice exists, for instance including a wide range of related activities in business studies. In ICT GCSE, students design an ICT solution to a business problem by using either spreadsheets or databases. Effective business links exist in some subjects. In textiles students experience simulations of production line activity, and commercial mini-enterprise in conjunction with real business links. In systems and control, students contribute to a school sign-making company which has led to considerable income generation largely ploughed back into CAD/CAM teaching resources. Staff from a local software company visit the school to help a group of ICT students create web pages after school. The school is aware that some subjects contribute little or no contribution to WRL; lessons learnt in the review have yet to be acted upon. Careers education is embedded within the PSHE programme and is good. Twenty students have been involved in an 'army life' appreciation programme and where possible students undertake industrial and work-place visits in a number of courses. In Year 11, about half of the students take a GNVQ or vocational course. Where an alternative curriculum is more appropriate, some students follow suitable curriculum routes in conjunction with WRL and college courses leading typically to NVQ qualifications.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 11 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 tables below show entry and performance information for courses completed in 2003. (The validated results for 2004 were not published at the time of the inspection)

### **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 | 8              | 100.0                | 98.6    | 50.0                 | 50.2    | 90.0                | 87.5    |

|                            |     |       |      |      |      |       |      |
|----------------------------|-----|-------|------|------|------|-------|------|
| Biology                    | 9   | 100.0 | 96.4 | 22.2 | 39.2 | 71.1  | 78.6 |
| Business studies           | 11  | 100.0 | 98.7 | 36.4 | 36.8 | 81.8  | 80.1 |
| Chemistry                  | 4   | 75.0  | 97.6 | 25.0 | 49.0 | 60.0  | 82.1 |
| Drama                      | 7   | 100.0 | 99.5 | 42.9 | 40.1 | 91.4  | 83.6 |
| Economics                  | 6   | 100.0 | 98.9 | 33.3 | 52.0 | 76.7  | 88.3 |
| English/English language   | 17  | 0.0   | 99.4 | 0.0  | 36.3 | 0.0   | 80.9 |
| English literature         | 8   | 100.0 | 99.5 | 12.5 | 46.5 | 75.0  | 86.5 |
| French                     | 3   | 100.0 | 98.8 | 66.7 | 51.5 | 93.3  | 87.6 |
| Design and technology      | 7   | 100.0 | 97.8 | 42.9 | 35.0 | 85.7  | 77.9 |
| General studies            | 46  | 100.0 | 94.7 | 39.1 | 31.0 | 79.6  | 73.1 |
| Geography                  | 33  | 100.0 | 98.7 | 54.5 | 44.5 | 88.5  | 84.0 |
| History                    | 14  | 100.0 | 99.0 | 71.4 | 44.6 | 98.6  | 84.6 |
| Information technology     | 23  | 100.0 | 95.6 | 21.7 | 24.6 | 67.0  | 69.5 |
| Mathematics                | 16  | 100.0 | 96.7 | 75.0 | 55.6 | 100.0 | 88.8 |
| Music                      | 2   | 100.0 | 98.8 | 0.0  | 38.9 | 70.0  | 81.1 |
| Other Social studies       | 13  | 100.0 | 97.4 | 53.8 | 42.7 | 86.2  | 81.8 |
| Physics                    | 8   | 87.5  | 96.7 | 62.5 | 44.6 | 85.0  | 81.7 |
| Religious studies          | 7   | 100.0 | 98.8 | 28.6 | 46.7 | 71.4  | 85.6 |
| Spanish                    | 3   | 100.0 | 98.3 | 33.3 | 50.2 | 73.3  | 86.9 |
| Sports/PE studies          | 8   | 87.5  | 98.0 | 0.0  | 30.9 | 52.5  | 75.2 |
| Total                      | 253 | 92.1  | 97.7 | 39.5 | 42.1 | 76.1  | 81.9 |
| Business VCE               | 127 | 74.0  | 65.0 | 7.1  | 14.6 | 44.3  | 60.1 |
| Health and social care VCE | 20  | 90.0  | 67.7 | 5.0  | 14.5 | 59.0  | 63.5 |
| Science VCE                | 14  | 100.0 | 44.8 | 0.0  | 3.7  | 52.9  | 58.5 |
| Leisure and recreation VCE | 10  | 80.0  | 62.9 | 0.0  | 10.2 | 42.0  | 57.9 |
| Total                      | 171 | 78.4  | N/A  | 5.8  | N/A  | 46.5  | 85.5 |

### **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           | 13             | 100.0                | 80.1    | 53.8                 | 23.7    | 43.8                | 29.9    |
| Biology                  | 28             | 64.3                 | 65.2    | 3.6                  | 11.1    | 21.1                | 20.6    |
| Business studies         | 13             | 100.0                | 76.4    | 23.1                 | 16.3    | 37.7                | 26.2    |
| Chemistry                | 20             | 65.0                 | 72.7    | 10.0                 | 13.9    | 21.5                | 24.1    |
| Drama                    | 16             | 100.0                | 86.5    | 62.5                 | 19.6    | 45.6                | 30.6    |
| Economics                | 13             | 84.6                 | 73.6    | 46.2                 | 20.1    | 36.2                | 26.4    |
| English/English language | 24             | 87.5                 | 82.9    | 16.7                 | 17.5    | 30.0                | 28.7    |
| English literature       | 7              | 100.0                | 85.9    | 0.0                  | 19.1    | 37.1                | 30.2    |



|                        |     |       |      |      |      |      |      |
|------------------------|-----|-------|------|------|------|------|------|
| French                 | 3   | 100.0 | 78.2 | 33.3 | 18.9 | 43.3 | 27.6 |
| Design and technology  | 12  | 100.0 | 74.9 | 16.7 | 15.1 | 33.3 | 25.3 |
| General studies        | 100 | 85.0  | 73.9 | 18.0 | 17.8 | 30.3 | 25.7 |
| Geography              | 39  | 94.9  | 74.3 | 56.4 | 19.8 | 43.8 | 26.5 |
| History                | 17  | 82.4  | 80.7 | 47.1 | 19.5 | 34.7 | 28.6 |
| Information technology | 19  | 100.0 | 67.0 | 42.1 | 10.9 | 40.0 | 21.4 |
| Mathematics            | 28  | 60.7  | 61.9 | 7.1  | 17.1 | 19.3 | 22.1 |
| Other Social studies   | 13  | 84.6  | 69.7 | 30.8 | 16.7 | 33.8 | 24.1 |
| Physics                | 15  | 86.7  | 68.6 | 33.3 | 14.4 | 34.7 | 22.7 |
| Religious studies      | 6   | 100.0 | 80.2 | 50.0 | 22.6 | 43.3 | 29.8 |
| Spanish                | 5   | 80.0  | 78.5 | 0.0  | 17.7 | 20.0 | 27.3 |
| Sports/PE studies      | 11  | 100.0 | 73.2 | 18.2 | 11.4 | 32.7 | 23.1 |
| Total                  | 402 | 85.6  | 73.9 | 26.9 | 17.4 | 32.5 | 25.7 |

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was on the English language and literature combined course and French. One lesson was also seen in Spanish. In this lesson Year 12 students achieved as expected as a result of satisfactory teaching.

### English language and literature

Overall, the quality of provision in English (language and literature combined course) is **unsatisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory, because students are not challenged sufficiently.
- Standards are below average and there is insufficient emphasis on writing for examinations.
- Students are not given enough opportunity to be responsible for their learning.

### Commentary

148. English language and literature combined is offered at AS and A-level. The retention rate is average.

149. Results in the 2003 GCE A-level and AS level examinations were broadly in line with the national average. Results in 2004 indicate lower standards. In the work seen students' attainment was below average in Year 13 and broadly in line with the national average in Year 12. Overall, this represents an unsatisfactory level of achievement because their attainment was average when they joined the sixth form. All students have basic knowledge and understanding of their work and most enjoy the subject. Their oral skills are good in classroom discussion and only falter when the teacher takes over the discussion and there is insufficient time for reflection. Students make valid and cogent observations and some use sophisticated technical vocabulary

in their writing. They are not clear about how to prepare for examinations and work lacks rigour and relevance, particularly in Year 13. Spelling is a problem in many students' work. Students make some inferences from texts, although they do not sustain detailed textual analysis. Some students make good use of ICT to aid the presentation of their work. Facilities are limited, however, and therefore cannot be used consistently.

150. The quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory. In the best lessons there is a brisk pace, students are clearly motivated and a large amount of work is completed. In a good Year 12 lesson, studying language and power, students spoke confidently and accurately and developed their thinking to examine the texts. In contrast, teaching that lacks challenge and is not demanding results in unsatisfactory teaching and learning. Low expectations created an easy-going atmosphere and a limited intellectual response from the students. In an otherwise satisfactory lesson students learnt less because they were not so involved in the lesson and there was not as much variety. The department does not make good use of assessment data for curriculum planning. Some work is marked inaccurately and students believe their standards are higher than is evident. Students are too dependent on their teacher and produce lacklustre work as a consequence.

151. The leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory, because they do not provide a clear vision for improvement. There is insufficient monitoring of standards, teaching, learning and assessment. Accommodation and resources are unsatisfactory, because lessons are in a variety of rooms, causing teachers and students to be late and unable to be adequately equipped.

152. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

## **French**

Provision in French is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are well above average; students display high levels of fluency and independence.
- The quality of teaching is good and enables students to achieve well.
- Students' attitudes are very positive; they enhance their learning.
- There are insufficient opportunities for students to take the lead in discussions and work independently of the teacher.

### **Commentary**

153. French is offered at AS and A-level. The retention rate is good.

154. Results in the 2003 GCEA-level and AS level examinations were well above the national average, with the majority of candidates achieving A or B grades at A2. Results in 2004 indicate similar high standards. In the work seen, students' attainment is well above average in Year 13 and above average in Year 12. Overall, this represents good achievement in relation to their prior attainment. All students have a very good understanding of grammar and apply rules effectively and successfully in

their work. They have a wide range of vocabulary and structures in their repertoire and by the end of Year 12 and during Year 13 they display a high level of fluency and independence in manipulating the language to express their ideas, both in writing and in speech. Listening skills are very well developed and they cope very ably in lessons where French is the main means of communication. Students make good use of ICT to increase their knowledge of French culture and current affairs.

155. The quality of teaching and learning is good. In the best lessons there is a brisk pace and a high level of challenge. In a very good Year 12 lesson studying grammar, students were able to work out the rules governing the sequence of tenses from an example, then went on to use the structure successfully in the discussion which followed. In all lessons, high expectations create a challenging atmosphere. Clear presentations of new language are combined with activities and resources, enabling students to assimilate it quickly. This allows them to progress rapidly to using it effectively in discussion and debate. Activities which fully involve students in using French to complete tasks are effective in increasing their confidence and competence in manipulating the language. As a result, they rapidly increase in independence during their course. In some lessons, however, opportunities for students to work independently of their teacher, take the lead in discussions or use the language creatively or imaginatively are missed. Work is marked rigorously and students are given very full and constructive advice as to how to improve.

156. The leadership and management of the subject are good. Very good knowledge of the subject, good planning and good liaison between teachers involved lead to a high level of consistency in approach and expectations and enable students to build effectively on previous learning. Because teachers work closely together students' achievement is monitored closely and appropriate action is taken to raise standards and ensure that students achieve well. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. Noise from classes above regularly disrupts learning and makes listening and speaking activities very difficult.

157. Students have very positive attitudes towards their learning. They appreciate the help and guidance they are given and the good relationships they have with their teachers. Some students were concerned that the gap in learning caused by taking GCSE French in Year 10 and picking it up again in Year 12 created difficulties for them in reaching the required standard for advanced level work.

158. Progress since the last inspection has been good.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Achievement and standards are improving, following recent poor performances at AS and A2.
- The close match of teachers' excellent knowledge and skills with their encouragement and challenge are helping students to learn very effectively.
- Students' attitudes are very positive and these assist teaching and learning.
- Curriculum leadership is very good.

## Commentary

159. Achievement is very good. Students' work and inspection observation show that students on AS and A2 courses in pure mathematics, further mathematics, statistics, mechanics and decision mathematics are making very good progress. This is because an effective team of teachers, with appropriate expertise, is well matched to the courses they teach to students, who have very good attitudes towards learning. Standards in 2002 were close to the national average. Results in AS examinations declined the following year to well below average.
160. Recently there has been a marked improvement in achievement in all groups following AS and A2 courses. However, AS results for 2004 still show pockets of underachievement amongst a minority of boys. More higher attaining students with GCSE grade B or better are continuing to follow mathematics courses in Years 12. A growing number of female students is taking the subject. Retention rates are good. Higher attaining students in Year 10 are to take GCSE in mathematics early and continue in Year 11 with AS units in preparation for taking A2 level in Year 12 and further advanced courses in mathematics in Year 13.
161. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. A significant strength of the teaching is the teachers' expertise in, and enthusiasm for, the subject. The team of six teachers encourages the students to give their best and students respond very well. Relationships are friendly and harmonious, yet high expectations and challenge predominate. Generally, students work hard and most are taking increased responsibility for their own learning. Careful attention is paid to developing students' understanding of underlying principles and students are required to develop oral skills by presenting solutions to problems to the class. In a Year 13 class in statistics, groups of students were asked to work collaboratively to solve problems related to modes, means and medians. The groups presented their solution to the class confidently and articulately with accuracy and clarity. Assessment is used effectively to inform students of the progress they are making and to set high but achievable targets. Arrangements for assessment currently provide for identifying underachievement early; such students are counselled and parents are informed.
162. Leadership and management are good. Close teamwork by a group of teachers committed to improving standards and raising achievement is providing students with consistency in learning. Courses are well managed and organised and students are supported effectively in their studies outside of lessons. New initiatives and resources arising from the introduction of the specialist college status are having a positive impact on the quality of education. For example, ICT equipment and associated software are being used well to improve teaching and facilitate learning. The time allocated for teaching mathematics in the sixth form has been increased to meet a recommendation from the previous inspection.

## SCIENCE

The main focus was on physics but one lesson of biology was also observed. In the Year 12 biology lesson seen, students were developing a wide range of techniques for testing biochemicals. This was the result of good teaching which focused well on their practical and experimental skills.



## Physics

Provision in physics is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- It is an increasingly popular subject at AS level although comparatively few females take up the subject.
- Students' good achievement is underpinned by their positive attitudes towards the subject.
- Teaching is consistently good and students learn well as a result.
- Some students underachieved in their 2004 A2 examinations.

### Commentary

163. GCE A-level results in 2003 were well above the national average, with many students gaining the higher A/B grades. However, results in 2004 fell, with some students achieving less than was expected of them. GCE AS results in both 2003 and 2004 were above average and indicate good achievement. Retention rates are good, with most students going on to complete their study of physics. Current standards are average in Year 12 and above average in Year 13 and reflect the most recent examination results. However, both Year 12 and Year 13 students are achieving well and better than might be expected in relation to their GCSE results. Students in Year 12 build effectively on their GCSE course and cope well with the demands of AS level. For example, in a good Year 12 lesson, students made good gains in their knowledge and understanding of the transformation of potential to elastic energy, by investigating the practical aspects of bungee jumping. There is a particular emphasis on the development of both mathematical and ICT skills and this contributes significantly to the students' good achievement. Students grasp and learn concepts in physics well. For example, Year 13 students were able to use their understanding of mathematical functions to investigate how the flux density of the sun varies with different planets. As a result, they made good progress in this topic. As the result of consistently good teaching, students make good progress in lessons and their achievement is good.

164. Teaching and learning are good and this was confirmed by scrutiny of students' work. Lessons are well planned and focus well on what students are to learn. Teachers make very effective use of their strong subject knowledge to ensure that concepts are clearly explained and this improves learning. There is a very good emphasis on the teaching of experimental physics through individual experimentation. This results in better progress because this 'hands on' approach consolidates students' theoretical understanding well. Expectations of students are high and students respond well. They work hard and show considerable interest in the subject. Their attitudes to physics are very positive and they show a mature outlook, as evidenced by the good quality of their work. Students' views of the subject are very positive. They feel they are doing well and this increases their motivation to succeed. As a result, students' learning is good across both age ranges.

165. Leadership and management of the subject are good. Staffing of the subject is very good and there is a strong commitment to build upon what has already been

achieved. Improvement since the previous inspection is good and is reflected in above average standards.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students are achieving well, because of the good teaching they receive.
- Students have very good attitudes towards their work, which enhances their learning.
- Students develop well as independent learners, because of the very good access they have to ICT resources.

### **Commentary**

166. In 2003 A-level results were average and the unverified 2004 results indicate a similar pattern. Results in previous years have been higher than this. AS level results in 2003 were high.

167. Year 13 students following the A-level ICT course are achieving well, because of good teaching and their very good attitudes towards the subject. Students speak highly of the progress they have made and of the very good access they have to ICT resources. Their progress has been particularly good, as many of these students had not followed ICT courses before entering the sixth form. For example, many had not encountered databases but they now have a good understanding of how these can be applied, via their project work, to specific situations. They analyse the advantages and disadvantages of software well. Their databases are well designed, using a wide range of functions. Lower attaining students are less secure when evaluating their work. Teachers provide a good structure for students to maintain their notes. As a result, most students' work is well organised and useful for revision. All students in Year 13 benefit from the small groups in which they are taught as teachers are able to give individualised support very effectively. Teachers use very good ICT-based assessment systems to track students' progress and to monitor coursework. Year 12 students show a good understanding of how spreadsheets are used to analyse and manipulate data. Higher attaining students' essays are clear and well structured when, for example, discussing the advantages and disadvantages to industry of the use of ICT and robotics.

168. Teaching and learning are good. Marking of students' work is very thorough and helpful to the students. Teachers' questions are challenging and based upon a very good knowledge of the subject. Therefore students are made to think and respond. Relationships are very good. Teachers treat students like adults. There is a good working atmosphere in lessons, with appropriate light touches of humour. Teachers instigate good discussion by stimulating presentations. Courses are well planned, which provides a good framework for the students yet gives ample opportunity for them to work independently. Most students complete their ICT courses and many intend to continue with them in higher education.

169. Leadership and management are good. Teachers work well together and learn from each other. Good vision is shown by the development of other vocational courses that

give students the opportunity to gain industry standard qualifications. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

## **HUMANITIES**

The focus during the inspection was on history, but lessons in geography and religious education were also seen. In geography, standards were above average and students achieved well as a result of good teaching. In religious education standards were also well above average and students achieved very well, as a result of very good teaching.

### **History**

Provision in history is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are well above average in Years 12 and 13.
- The quality of teaching is very good and promotes effective learning.
- Students have very positive attitudes towards their courses.
- The subject is led and managed very well.
- There are excellent opportunities for students to attend conferences and residential courses.
- The school library has insufficient resources to help students develop their independent learning skills.



## Commentary

170. In recent years, results at both AS and A2-level have been above, and sometimes well above, national averages, particularly in terms of those students achieving the highest grades. The standards reached by students in the current inspection are above the national average in both years. On the AS course in Year 12, students are beginning to use a wide range of evidence to produce structured arguments and their skills of source interpretation are being developed well. In this context, some very detailed extended essays were seen from Year 12 students on life in seventeenth century England. In Year 13, students hone their historical skills further and display a very good command of higher order skills through their note-taking and extended writing, for example in examining the loss of power by the Crown throughout the seventeenth century. In both years, students are very articulate and can discuss historical issues in depth. As a result, they achieve very well in terms of their prior attainment.
171. Teachers use their considerable subject expertise to promote very good learning. Lessons are conducted with pace and rigour and are enlivened by the use of stimulating and enjoyable tasks that engage students' interest. Questioning techniques are used to excellent effect, in order to probe students' understanding to greater depth. Above all, there is a sense of shared purpose in lessons and this encourages all students to engage in lively debate. As a result, students are very positive about their work and thoroughly enjoy the pursuit of knowledge. They respond very well to the high expectations of their teachers.
172. The subject is led and managed very well, with very strong support from an experienced teaching team. The progress of students is monitored thoroughly and they know precisely how to achieve higher grades in their work. There is a very wide range of resources to support students within the department, but library resources are not sufficient to help students develop their independent learning and research skills. ICT is used well in presentations but needs further development as a teaching and learning tool. Students have excellent opportunities to attend historical conferences and residential courses.
173. Overall, this is an increasingly popular and highly successful area of sixth form provision within the school. It has a very experienced and dedicated teaching team with the undoubted ability to build on its current success.

## ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

The focus was on the AS/A2 courses in product design. Work was sampled in the systems and control course. In the two lessons observed, standards were average, but represented good achievement at this stage of the course. The teaching and learning observed were good. Students make good progress with their coursework project and their understanding of subject theory.

### Product design

Provision in product design is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and learning have resulted in students' highly developed ability to sketch and model design ideas rapidly and with great clarity. .
- Standards in recent years have been below average, and students have underachieved.
- The new technology ICT suite and application of CAD/CAM to students' work are raising standards significantly.

## Commentary

174. In 2003 students underachieved significantly at AS level, but A2 results were broadly average. Provisional results in 2004 indicate that standards are below average at A2 and that this represents unsatisfactory achievement in comparison with their prior attainment. This underachievement appears to be largely related to performance in theory examinations.
175. Currently, students' work is on course to achieve broadly average attainment in AS and A2 examinations, and achievement is satisfactory in comparison with students' prior attainment.
176. Students in Year 12 have learnt how to present and develop their ideas on paper effectively, using rapid design and rendering techniques. Their investigation and research are detailed and thorough. By Year 13, students have become effective independent learners, although progress of individuals' coursework varies. They use product analysis of existing products and modelling techniques competently to help develop their designs. Designing skills are above average, and students use sophisticated computer-aided design very effectively.
177. Teaching and learning are good overall. Students feel that they are now making better progress. The process of using 'post-its' to communicate monitoring targets is effective, but students would like teachers to set clear unit completion targets and insist on deadlines being met. Teachers help students to understand design processes closer to industrial practice than they experienced in their GCSE course. This has resulted in students' notable and highly developed ability to rapidly fill a page of effective design ideas with clarity, and show how these develop. Teachers use a variety of teaching methods, but students would like these to be wider still, for instance to include more video material, visits, speakers etc. and less note taking. Industrial links are underdeveloped.
178. Leadership and management are good. The course makes good use of the new CAD/CAM suite. The application of ICT to students' work, and the application of CAD/CAM in particular, is starting to impact positively upon standards. The course has delivered good results in previous years. Subject leaders have identified issues relating to recent underachievement and put appropriate strategies in place to improve matters. All students now experience regular weekly theory lessons. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

## VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

### Art and design

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

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are above average and rising.
- Teaching and learning are very good; students' achievement is very good.
- The department is very well led and managed.
- The assessment of students' work is excellent.
- Students lack a dedicated studio space.

## **Commentary**

179. The GCE AS examination results in 2003 were above average. Every candidate was awarded a grade A or B in 2004. The A2 results in 2003 were above the national average and the 2004 results were higher again. Every student who started a course in 2003 sat the terminal examination.

180. Standards of work are above expectations and improving. A wide range of art and artists from the Italian Renaissance, American abstract expressionists and modern European sculptors influences students, who draw to collect particular information or develop compositions. Life drawing classes add to the students' drawing skills, although simple errors such as ellipses with corners surprisingly occur. Students are increasingly original and investigative, resulting in high quality compositions and very good achievement overall. The majority use thorough preparation to develop an idea in a number of directions, regarding each stage as another starting point, whereas a small number are more comfortable changing the scale or colour, or adding texture to an image. Occasionally paint is used crudely and discordant colours overpower more subtle detail. A small number of students prefer using mixed media, clay, card and metal to arrive at innovative sculptures and mobiles inspired by Degas or Calder.

181. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to allow students to gain from their personal interests and specialisms, promoting very good attitudes and relationships. Learning is centred on experimentation and investigation and the way artists develop their work. The assessment of students' work is excellent. Individual students design their own courses, reviewing progress at regular intervals, reflecting the head of department's innovative leadership. Regular discussion of each other's work provides a fascinating insight into the creative process.

182. The department is very well led and managed. The head of department recognises that strong teamwork between students and teachers is central to the subject's success. The department's progress is monitored carefully and there is a desire and the capacity to improve yet further. There are good opportunities for students to visit galleries and museums and to work with artists-in-residence. The accommodation is unsatisfactory and lacks studio space for independent working. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have risen and students achieve very well.

## **HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL**

### **Leisure and recreation**

Provision in leisure and recreation is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good assessment and helpful academic guidance promote satisfactory independent learning.
- Students' achievement is satisfactory in relation to prior attainment, due to good teaching.
- Students do not prepare well enough for lessons and few participate fully in discussions.

### **Commentary**

183. The AVCE double award course in leisure and recreation was inspected. Recent results have been well below the national average overall. Male students perform better than female students. In most years, except 2004, most students achieve results in line with, or above, the predicted grades based on prior attainment. The retention rate on the course is average. The low number of students on the course means that direct comparisons with national data are unreliable.

184. Standards attained by students on the current course are below average in Years 12 and 13. As standards at entry in Year 12 were below or well below average, this indicated at least satisfactory achievement. This is due to teachers' helpful academic guidance, good detailed assessment of assignments and a generally high level of commitment by students to their coursework. Students commence the course with often very limited background knowledge and understanding of the topics studied. They work with increasing confidence, collect information from a variety of sources and form sound judgements. The best work balances theory with appropriate case study application. However, lower attainers have weak literacy skills and this restricts their ability to express themselves well. Students use ICT skills competently to support their coursework assignments. However, few question the accuracy and reliability of data downloaded.

185. Teaching is generally good, but learning only satisfactory. Very good relationships exist between students and teachers that form the basis of productive learning. Emphasis in lessons is properly placed on independent learning. Work assignments are thoroughly and helpfully marked so that students, by redrafting, can improve the quality of their presentations. At times, lessons are too teacher-led and do not use video and other visual material sufficiently to support teaching. Students rarely contribute meaningfully to discussions, often because they do not prepare themselves well enough for lessons. Also, the frequent absence of students, often those with low motivation, hinders the progress of others and reduces the pace and productivity of lessons. The result is that learning is satisfactory rather than good.

186. Day-to-day management is sound and the course runs efficiently. However, there is no subject specialist who has overall responsibility for the monitoring and academic development of the subject and this is a limitation. Leadership of the course is, thus, only satisfactory. Students benefit greatly from visits to leisure and recreation activities and centres, but need to read around the subject, including articles in magazines.

## **BUSINESS STUDIES**

In this group of subjects, the school runs courses in A-level business studies and economics. There is an AVCE course in business and a full GNVQ intermediate course in business.

187. In 2004, the results in A-level business studies were well above average and those in economics above average. At AS level the results in business studies were below average and those in economics were above average. The results in AVCE business improved slightly, but were below average. In GNVQ, both students gained the certificate – one with a merit and the other with a pass.

188. None of these subjects were inspected in depth but one lesson of AVCE business was observed. Good teaching enabled the students to learn quickly and effectively about the promotion of products through the power of advertising.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

The curriculum includes a General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) full intermediate course and an advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) course. Both courses provide very good continuity and progression into higher education and the caring professions. The focus of the inspection was on the advanced work and the GNVQ course was sampled.

### **GNVQ**

189. In 2004, the results were above average. All students gained the qualification: two with distinctions, three with merits and two passed. Given their very modest GCSE attainment, these results represent very good achievement. In the lesson seen, good teaching challenged the students to produce a leaflet for parents and carers on how to encourage and foster the intellectual development of young children.

### **AVCE**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Results are well above average and reflect students' very good achievement.
- Standards of work are above average and improving.
- Teachers have high expectations, and teaching and learning are very good.
- The use of assessment is highly effective in raising standards and achievement.
- Work placements of high quality bring relevance to students' learning.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Students are mature and highly motivated and have very positive attitudes.

### **Commentary**

190. Standards of work overall are above average and improving. Given that most students who begin the course have below average GCSE results, these standards represent

very good achievement. Teachers' very good knowledge of the subject and syllabus enables them to explain units very clearly to develop students' understanding of the work. Higher attainers produce very detailed work and reach well above average standards in case studies about the health of different members of a family. In order to attain the highest grades, they need to improve the analysis of their research and be more critical in their conclusions. Students benefit enormously from a variety of very effective and successful work placements. They use these opportunities to put theory into practice and to collect data to support their studies. For example, they apply and evaluate their communication skills in a local special school, and with a Sure Start group they presented information very clearly about nutrition and diets for young children. This successful vocational learning greatly increases students' confidence, especially that of lower attainers. These students produce portfolios of an average standard, but need to develop their examination technique in external tests to improve their results.

191. In 2004, the results in the double A-level award were well above average. All students passed, and over half the grades were at the higher A and B level. In the single A-level award at the end of Year 12, the results were average. These results reflect a rising trend and demonstrate very good achievement. As a consequence, the subject is increasingly popular and retention rates are high.
192. Students feel that the subject is very rewarding, very well taught and highly relevant to their future. They are especially pleased with the variety of work, the structure of the course and the opportunities they have to develop their teamwork skills alongside those of independent research. They are mature and highly motivated and their very positive attitudes support and promote their very good achievement.
193. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. The best teaching is very well planned, and uses a wide variety of learning methods and very good resources that are carefully matched to students' needs. It is focused on increasing their knowledge, understanding and skills at an appropriate pace. A variety of assessment techniques are used skilfully to ensure learning and raise standards. For example, in a very effective lesson, students were taught to mark specimen answers and, following discussion, to identify high quality work. For homework they were challenged to replicate such quality in their answers to a past question, thereby sharpening their examination technique. In another very good lesson they designed exercise programmes for clients and in role-play situations had fun persuading each other to adopt their strict regimes. Where teaching was less effective there was too much teacher input and too little student activity, so that the pace of learning slackened. However, in the lessons observed teaching was never less than good.
194. A dedicated team with high aspirations and expectations of their students has been created and is led by a very competent co-ordinator. Leadership and management are very good. Good organisation overcomes some unsuitable accommodation and lack of computers in the subject, so that these inadequacies do not have a negative impact on standards and results. Planning, though it does not include subject targets, is focused on raising achievement through improving teaching and learning. Every opportunity is taken to share good practice and to develop teachers' considerable expertise further.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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

