

INSPECTION REPORT

Backwell School

Backwell, Bristol

LEA area: North Somerset

Unique reference number: 132005

Headteacher: Mr Roger Mason

Lead inspector: Liz Barthaud

Dates of inspection: 13th - 17th September 2004

Inspection number: 268742

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
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll;	1647
School address:	Station Road Backwell Bristol
Postcode:	BS48 3BX
Telephone number:	01275 463371
Fax number:	01275 463077
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Maggie Edwards
Date of previous inspection:	28 / 9 / 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Backwell School is a very large, popular, oversubscribed 11-18 mixed comprehensive school. The school was granted specialist visual and performing arts status in September 2004. The sports facilities on the school site are jointly used by the school and the local community. There are 1647 students on roll, making the school much larger than average. The majority of students who attend the school live outside of the immediate area of Backwell. High proportions come from the Yatton area and travel to and from school by coach. The school serves approximately 30 primary schools. Attainment of students on entry to the school, as measured by tests at the end of Year 6, is above the national average. Backwell School was designated as a Beacon School for its work on staff development and from that achieved Training School status in 2003. The school was also successful in gaining a gold Artsmark award (2002). Its status as a Healthy School has recently been renewed for a further three years and in July 2004 the school achieved Investors in People status. The number of students known to be eligible for free school meals at just under 4 per cent is low when compared with the national average and indicates the well above average socio-economic circumstances of families whose children attend the school. Around 6 per cent of students are from ethnic minority backgrounds none of whom have English as an additional language. The number of students with special educational needs, including those with Statements of Special Educational Need, is lower than the national average at 6 per cent. During the last school year 15 students joined the school and 13 left. In comparison with the national average, this figure is very low. At the end of Year 11 around 70 per cent of students continue with their studies at the school with the remainder going to further education colleges or other schools.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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32698	Steven Barker	Lay inspector	
32251	Peter Bratton	Team inspector	Mathematics
3266	Peter Baker	Team inspector	English
30433	Chris Corp	Team inspector	Science Biology Chemistry
19983	Haydn Webb	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Citizenship
2866	Bob Battey	Team inspector	Art and design Special educational needs
17156	Ted Graham	Team inspector	Design and technology
32147	Ann Wallis	Team inspector	Geography Sociology
4317	Ken Madrell	Team inspector	History
28899	Graham Sims	Team inspector	English as an additional language Modern foreign languages
34084	Mary Davis	Team inspector	Music
14446	Barry Simmons	Team inspector	Physical education
3162	Philip O'Neill	Team inspector	Religious education Theatre studies
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

Backwell School is a **very good** school. Standards are **well above average** because teaching and learning are **very good** overall with some excellent features. All students achieve very well building on their prior attainment levels as a result of the very good teaching and learning they receive.

Leadership of the school is **very good** and management is **good**. The school gives **very good** value for money. The greatest aids to achievement are the vision of the recently appointed headteacher, the very positive attitudes to learning displayed by the students and the dedication of the adults employed by the school, who provide very good role-models for students.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The achievement of all students is very good as a result of very good teaching.
- The clarity of vision, sense of purpose and aspirations of the headteacher ensure that the quality of what the school provides is very good.
- Standards are very good as a result of very good leadership at all levels throughout the school.
- Though procedures for assessing and tracking student performance are satisfactory, the use made of performance data to establish strategies for individual students to improve their performance is not sufficiently developed in all subjects.
- The school has developed very good links with parents, which contributes to the very good attitudes and behaviour of students within the school.
- The governing body provides a high level of both challenge and support to the school and is fully involved in shaping future developments.
- The school offers a very broad range of curriculum opportunities to meet the need of all students but provision for information and communication technology (ICT) in Years 7 and 8 is unsatisfactory.
- The strong commitment to the professional development of all staff to support the vision for the future development of the school.
- In some areas across the school there is a lack of rigor and consistency in the way in which managers implement agreed whole school policies and procedures.

Overall, progress since the previous report has been very good. A greater range of teaching strategies and styles is now used in lessons. Students in Years 10 and 11 are given more opportunities to take responsibility in the running of the school and to display initiative. The school has strengthened the contribution it makes to the overall cultural development of all students. Inconsistencies in the way in which teachers mark the work produced by students remain and the school continues to fail to meet the statutory requirements in relation to holding a daily act of collective worship for all students.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

When students join the school in Year 7 their attainment, based on the results at the end of Year 6, is good. Results at the end of Year 9 in the national tests in 2003 were well above the national average in English, mathematics and science. Performance within these areas has been well above average over the last three years. Results in the GCSE examinations in 2003 were also well above the national average. GCSE results have been improving faster than the national average in recent years and students' achievement is very good. The 2004 results at the end of Year 9 and Year 11, which are yet to be validated, indicate a rising trend. Overall, boys achieve as well as girls with some variations between subjects. In 2003, sixth form students gained above national average results in the AS and GCE A-Level courses. The unconfirmed results for 2004 indicate a return to the well above average standards achieved in 2002 and 2001. This represents well above average achievement as attainment on entry into the sixth form, based on average GCSE point scores, is about average.

Year 11 and 13 results

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

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

Students currently in Years 7 to 9 are working at above average standards and achieving very well. Older students build well on previous study, continue to work to an above average standard and continue to achieve very well. Sixth form students are achieving very well, although standards between subjects can vary. Throughout the school the achievement of students with special educational needs and those identified as gifted and talented is very good.

Backwell School is a very inclusive school and one where the personal and academic development of all students is of equal importance. As a result relationships between students and teachers are **very good** throughout the school. Students' personal development in Years 7 to 13 is **good** because the school actively seeks and acts upon their views through the year and house council system. Students throughout the school adopt **very good** attitudes to all aspects of school life and their behaviour is **very good**. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development throughout the school is **good**.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is **very good**. Teaching and learning are **good** in Years 7 to 9 and **very good** in Years 10 to 13. The highest proportion of excellent teaching was seen in Years 10 and 11 but there were examples in all year groups including the sixth form. The main reason for the difference in teaching and learning is the use made by teachers of performance data to devise individual learning strategies for students. Teaching and learning are very good because teachers use their very good subject knowledge to plan lessons, which successfully meet individual student needs. In most lessons students are involved in a variety of learning activities and use a wide range of different resources. As a result the achievement of all students is very good. On rare occasions when teaching in the main school is unsatisfactory, learning is slower in these lessons.

The curriculum offered is **good** in the main school and **very good** in the sixth form. Opportunities for students to be involved in a wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities are very good. Other aspects of the overall educational provision which are strengths within the school include the very good provision for students with special educational needs, the mixture of GCSE and vocational courses offered in Years 10 and 11 and the very good careers education and guidance provided to all students from Years 7 to 13. The current arrangements for ensuring all students in Years 7 and 8 receive their curriculum entitlement in information and communication technology (ICT) are unsatisfactory. This is having a negative impact on their achievement in this subject. A whole school curriculum review is currently taking place, which will address this issue. The arrangements for the care support and welfare of all students is good. The school has very good links with parents, other schools and colleges and the community.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership of the school is **very good**. A significant strength is the vision and clear sense of purpose demonstrated by the recently appointed headteacher. He has already introduced systems and procedures that will address the areas for improvement identified by this inspection. His very high aspirations, commitment and energy will ensure that standards remain high. The effectiveness of management throughout the school is **good** although there are inconsistencies in the way in which individual managers apply agreed whole school policies and procedures. Governors are actively involved in shaping the vision and direction of the school and provide good levels of support

and challenge to the management team. Financial management is satisfactory. Governance of the school is satisfactory overall with governors fulfilling their roles well, except that they do not ensure that all students take part in a daily act of collective worship, religious education is taught in the sixth form and ICT is delivered in accordance with statutory requirements in Years 7 and 8.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are very positive about the work of the school. They value what the school provides for their children, both academically and through the wide range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities offered. They strongly believe the school has high expectations of their children and that this is reflected in the high standards of behaviour and the reputation that the school has in the local community. Parents believe the pastoral care provided is a strength of the school and they as adults are comfortable approaching the school on any issue relating to their children. They are clear that the school does value their views.

Students hold very positive views about their school, with a high percentage enjoying school and believing that they are taught well.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Enhance the quality and consistency of the assessment procedures currently in place.
- Use the full range of performance data available to set all students precise strategies to raise standards even further.
- Improve monitoring arrangements to ensure all staff with management responsibilities consistently apply agreed whole school policies and procedures.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Provide a collective act of daily worship for all students.
- Ensure all students in Years 7 and 8 receive discrete ICT lessons.
- Provide religious education teaching in the sixth form.

SIXTH FORM SECTION OF THE SUMMARY REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The sixth form is very effective. It is cost effective and provides very good value for money. At the end of Year 11 students who wish to continue with their studies have the option of applying for places at other schools and local colleges. Attainment on entry to the sixth form based on GCSE point scores is satisfactory. Examination results for 2003 were above average when compared to all schools nationally. This represents very good achievement. Achievement is very good as a result of very good teaching. Leadership is very good and management is good.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Very good teaching resulting in very good learning and achievement.
- The very good attitudes and behaviour displayed by the students make them very good role models.
- Sixth form students receive very good support, guidance and advice
- Procedures for assessing and tracking student performance are good. However, the use made of performance data to establish strategies for individual students to improve their performance is not sufficiently developed in all subjects.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

Judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses inspected in the sixth-form are shown below. They are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects in the sixth-form were inspected.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	
English	Provision is very good . Results in A-Level Literature and Language were just below the national average in 2003 but rose sharply in 2004. Very good teaching contributes significantly to students' learning and achievement.
French	Provision is very good . Standards achieved by students are above average. Very good teaching by a team of highly skilled staff ensures very good achievement.
Mathematics	Provision is very good . Standards achieved by students are above average. Very good teaching by highly skilled teachers fosters excellent attitudes in students that enable them to make very good progress in their learning.
Science	
Biology	Provision is good . The department has a team of well-qualified and experienced teachers who work in a co-operative manner with their students. The teaching is good and leads to above average attainment at A-Level.
Chemistry	Provision is good . Well qualified and enthusiastic teachers share a very good relationship with their students. The teaching is good and leads to above average attainment at A-Level.
Physics	Provision is very good . AS and A-Level standards are well above the national average. Teaching is very good using a wide range of teaching and learning styles.
Information and communication technology	Provision is satisfactory . Standards are consistent with course requirements. Students realise their full potential through supportive teaching and modern equipment.

Humanities Geography	Provision is very good . Results are above average and rising. Students achieve very well because teachers are very knowledgeable, teaching resources are varied and interesting and lessons are challenging.
History	Provision is very good . AS and A-Level results are consistently well above average and they are better than would be expected from students' GCSE results. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and teaching is very good. Students display very good attitudes to their learning.
Sociology	Provision is very good . Results are above average and rising. Students achieve very well because teachers have high expectations and lessons are challenging. Students have very good attitudes to learning.
Visual and performing arts and media	
Art and design	Provision is very good . Students achieve very well. Supported by very good teaching they learn very well and achieve well above average standards. Students have very good attitudes to their learning. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. Space is inadequate and there is very limited space for storage and to display and celebrate students' work.
Theatre Studies	Provision is very good . Students reach very good standards and achieve very well. This results from the dynamic climate for learning created by very good teaching and the students desire to reach perfection in their work. Teachers know their subject very well and are very well led in their quest for excellence.
Business	Provision is good with very good features. Standards are above average. Students achieve very well with many gaining grades higher than expected because of the good teaching, high expectations and very positive student attitudes.

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 judgments in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. Excellent and very good are equivalent to the judgement 'outstanding' in further education and sixth form college reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to 'very weak'.

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

The provision of support, advice and guidance for sixth form students is **very good**. The very good personal support they receive makes a positive contribution to their achievement. Relationships with staff are very good and this results in very good behaviour and attitudes to work. The use of assessment data to assess learning is good. However, the use of assessment to devise specific learning strategies for students on an individual basis is at an early stage of development. Opportunities for students to express their views and contribute to school life are very good.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership of the sixth form is very good and management is good. There is a clear rationale for the range of courses offered in the sixth form and new courses are introduced in consultation with the students. A review of the curriculum is currently taking place to ensure that it remains broad enough to continue to meet the needs of all students. The sixth form is cost effective.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students are very enthusiastic about their school and enjoy life in the sixth form. They consider that teaching is challenging and demanding. Students strongly believe that they are encouraged to become independent learners and, by the time they reach Year 13, feel that they are given very good support and advice to enable them to make good future career choices. They appreciate the range of additional responsibilities they are offered and believe that the school does seek, value and act upon their views.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were well above the national average. The unconfirmed results for 2004 indicate a similar picture. Results in GCSE examinations in 2003 although above the national average, fell slightly on those achieved in previous years. The unconfirmed results for 2004 indicate that standards have returned to the higher levels gained in 2002. Overall standards and achievement are **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in the majority of subjects by the end of Year 11 are well above the national average.
- Students achieve very well in all year groups in the main school.
- Standards in ICT in the main school, though average, are not good enough.

Commentary

1. Over the last few years, the overall standards achieved in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 have been well above average. Recent results show that, compared to schools with similar intakes, students are making good progress overall and achieve very well in Years 7, 8 and 9. Results in GCSE examinations have been consistently above the national average over the last three years. The progress and achievement of students in Years 10 and 11 are very good.
2. The very good standards achieved in the national tests in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9, and at GCSE in nearly all subjects have been maintained by good and very good teaching and the imaginative leadership and management of departments. The school has made the improving of teaching and learning a priority for development and recent initiatives are having a clear impact on students' learning and achievement and rising standards.
3. Students continue to make very good progress in nearly all subjects, and the proportion of students gaining five grades A*-C is consistently well above average compared to schools in similar circumstances. The results in the GCSE examinations represent very good achievement by the end of Year 11. While nearly all standards in nearly all subjects are above average, standards at the end of Year 11 in English, mathematics, science, art and design, modern foreign languages, sociology, religious education and Latin are well above average. At the heart of these very good standards lie the commitment and dedication of the teachers and the students' eagerness to learn. Another key factor is the quality of support provided for students with special educational needs.
4. Standards of literacy are good across the school. Competence in mathematics across the school is very good. There is a consistent emphasis on the use of key words and the technical language of subjects. Students' skills in number are very well developed and good enough to support their studies in other subjects. However, standards in ICT across the school, although average, are not good enough. Students' knowledge and skills in ICT are not developed well enough in all subjects.
5. Achievement of students with special educational needs against their targets as stated in their Individual Education Plans is very good whether taught in class or when withdrawn for specialist help. The achievement of gifted and talented students is very good.

Key Stage 3

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	37.1 (34.4)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	39.1 (36.7)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	37.4 (35.2)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 252 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

Key Stage 4

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	66.0 (70.0)	52.0 (50)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	96.0 (96.0)	91.0 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99.0 (99.0)	96.0 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	41.3 (42.1)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 256 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

Sixth form

Results in the sixth form are **well above** average. Achievement in the sixth form is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in the sixth form are well above the national average.
- The achievement of students in the sixth form is very good because they receive very good teaching.
- Attitudes to work in the sixth form are very good.

Commentary

6. At the end of Year 11 students can apply for places at other schools and the further education college. Each year around 70 per cent of Backwell school students transfer from the main school into the sixth form. The school's entry policy for the sixth form is an inclusive one. This enables students to return to study at the school with a GCSE point score average lower than would be the case in other schools. Sixth form results in GCE A-Level examinations in 2003 were above average and for the previous two years well above. The unconfirmed results for 2004 indicate that results will be well above average. Results vary from subject to subject and from year to year. This reflects differences in attainment on entry to the individual courses rather than different rates of progress.
7. The work completed by students currently studying in the sixth form is above national expectations. Of the subjects inspected, standards in English, mathematics and modern foreign languages are above average, and in physics, art and design, geography, history, business education and sociology are well above average. Students are keen to learn and this coupled with the very good and sometimes excellent teaching they receive results in very good achievement for all.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students is **good**. The development of students' attitudes and behaviour is **very good** and the overall contribution made by the school to students' personal development is **good**. Attendance and punctuality are **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have very positive attitudes to all aspects of school life.
- Students behave very well and relate well to one another and to their teachers.
- The school actively promotes and rigorously monitors attendance.
- Opportunities are missed to improve students' appreciation of their own and others' cultural traditions.
- Registration sessions are not consistently used to promote academic and personal development.

Commentary

8. The school works hard to develop the positive attitudes that students bring from home to the school. Teachers have very high expectations of students and their behaviour in lessons and this is enforced by the vigilance of the pastoral care teams. The school's new behaviour policy is widely acknowledged by students as being fair. They understand the clear rules and the consequent rewards and sanctions, which are prominently displayed in all classrooms and detailed in each student's planner.
9. Student behaviour is very good in lessons, around the school and in the community. The excellent relationships in evidence around the school ensure that students with identified special needs develop very positive attitudes to their work. The school has received numerous letters commending students on their exemplary behaviour when on school trips. However, registration time is not consistently used to progress students' learning or personal development and where this does not happen, unsatisfactory behaviour may occur.
10. Attendance is very good as a result of the attitudes of students to their school and the positive messages from school to home that underlie the school's desire to promote a school culture where education is valued. Exclusions are very low as a consequence of the school's inclusive policies and procedures and the very good overall behaviour of students.
11. In most lessons seen, in assemblies and in enrichment and extra-curricular activities, care is taken to support students' spiritual, moral and social development. Although religious education makes a particularly significant contribution to students' overall personal development and art and design has a very good impact in supporting cultural development, in too many lessons seen, opportunities were missed to develop students' appreciation of the cultural diversity of the society in which they are living. Students' moral and social development is promoted throughout the daily life of the school and the result is the orderly and considerate way students interact with each other and with adults in the school.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of students

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1483	30	2
White – Irish	1		
White – any other White background	20		
Mixed – White and Black African	3		
Mixed – any other mixed background	23		
Asian or Asian British – Indian	4		
Black or Black British – Caribbean	2		
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1		
Chinese	2		
No ethnic group recorded	28		

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

12. The number of permanent exclusions is low and fixed term exclusions are below the national average. The school works hard to identify potentially disaffected students and works with their parents to support them in retaining their place at Backwell. In Years 10 and 11 there are alternative curriculum arrangements in place to help meet the needs of this specifically identified group of students. The school only uses permanent exclusion when there is no alternative.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data:	5.8	School data:	0.3
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.

13. Attendance is very good. Unauthorised absence is low. A high proportion of students are dependent on coaches to travel to and from school and therefore punctuality to school can be affected by local traffic conditions. Overall, punctuality to school and lesson is very good.

Sixth form

The development of students' attitudes and behaviour is **very good** and the overall contribution made by the school to students' personal development in the sixth form is **good**. Attendance and punctuality are **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students relate very well with each other, their teachers and form tutors and this helps create a positive ethos for teaching and learning.
- Students demonstrate maturity and conduct themselves well in school.
- There are good opportunities for students to become fully involved in the life of the school.

Commentary

14. Strong relationships exist between students in the sixth form and their teachers and form tutors, which are built on trust and mutual respect, creating a culture of successful teaching and learning. The school attracts a number of students from other schools into its sixth form and they settle quickly and are made to feel very welcome by fellow students and staff alike. The very positive attitude of all students is a major strength of the sixth form. Students demonstrate increasing maturity in the sixth form and conduct themselves responsibly around the school, demonstrating very successfully to younger students their suitability as role models.
15. The school routinely offers sixth form students the opportunity to involve themselves in the life of the main school through a variety of pastoral care roles. For example, sixth form students mentor younger students with special educational needs, working with them in registration periods and at break and lunchtimes. This and other opportunities assume a high degree of responsibility and make a major contribution to students' personal development.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided in the main school is **very good**. Teaching and learning are **very good**. The curriculum offered is **good** and enrichment activities and opportunities are **very good**.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning in the main school are **very good**. Teaching and learning are **good** in Years 7 to 9, and **very good** in Years 10 and 11. The assessment of students' work and the use made of assessment information to set progress targets are **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching ensures a very good working atmosphere in most lessons.
- Teachers' detailed subject knowledge supported through a wide range of teaching styles has a very positive effect on learning.
- Students' very good behaviour and concentration make learning very good.
- In some subjects, teachers' marking does not give enough information about how students can improve their work further.
- The use made of assessment data to devise strategies to improve learning varies between departments.

Commentary

16. Teaching and learning are very good overall and have improved since the previous inspection. There is some excellent teaching in art and design, drama, geography, mathematics and physical education. A small amount of unsatisfactory teaching occurs when teaching fails to challenge students' thinking. Details of the teaching observed during the inspection are given in the table below.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 140 lessons observed.

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
9 (6%)	48 (35%)	63 (45%)	17 (12%)	3 (2%)	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.

17. Learning is more effective in Years 10 and 11 because the proportion of excellent and very good teaching is greater than in Years 7 to 9. Students respond positively to the consistently very good teaching they receive and attain very high standards.

18. Teachers have very good subject knowledge together with a very clear understanding of the requirements of the various examination syllabuses. They appreciate how students' understanding, skills and knowledge can be developed and use an effective and varied range of teaching strategies. As a result lessons are well planned to ensure all students progress their learning. Teachers discuss lesson objectives and set challenging tasks, which extend students intellectually and creatively. In some of the satisfactory and unsatisfactory lessons, teachers do not explain tasks thoroughly enough to allow students to complete them without seeking further advice. The high level of teachers' expectations is matched by the students' own expectations and those of their parents.
19. Students are determined to achieve the best they can and teachers use these positive attitudes to challenge their thinking. Effective question and answer activities confirm students' understanding of the topics being covered.
20. Teachers make constructive use of a range of resources including ICT and detailed worksheets, which focus the students' thinking on the classroom activities. Very good use of ICT in modern foreign languages helps students extend their listening and speaking skills. The care shown for students is reflected by their positive behaviour and attitude in lessons. Teachers engender a happy and productive atmosphere, which results in students keeping well to task. They also cater for the higher attaining students and all students including those with special educational needs achieve above national levels. In a number of subjects excellent teaching inspires the students to a very high level of enjoyment and achievement.
21. The teaching of basic numeracy skills is very good, and the general teaching of literacy is good. Whilst students' competence in ICT is satisfactory this does hinder the progress they are making in this area in other areas of the curriculum.
22. The teaching and learning of students with special educational needs are very good. They receive excellent levels of focussed, relevant support from their teachers and support staff. The assessment of their needs is very good and the findings are very well used to provide very good teaching programmes to meet their individual needs.

Assessment

23. Overall the use made of assessment data to monitor the progress students make is satisfactory. Targets are set for all students and are agreed between the teacher, student and parents. However, the effectiveness of this strategy varies in practice between subjects. Assessment is unsatisfactory in music and ICT. The school is aware of these issues and has recently appointed a co-ordinator to develop with all staff a consistent approach to assessment. The role is in the early stages of development but initial training is already having a positive impact in some subjects. Assessment is very good in art and design and Latin and good in religious education and physical education. The use of assessment and monitoring procedures is better in Years 10 and 11 where the majority of teachers mark and assess the work produced by students in line with the examination requirements. The use of data to devise teaching strategies which have a clear focus on improving learning, is at an early development stage.

The curriculum

The school curriculum includes careers guidance and work-related learning. These specific aspects of the curriculum are reported later in this report.

The quality of the curriculum is **good**. The opportunities for enrichment are **very good**. The quality of accommodation and resources are **good**.

Main strengths and weakness

- Provision for extra-curricular activities is very good.
- The provision for students with special educational needs is very good and supports their very good achievement.
- The range of courses that students can choose to study from Year 10 onwards is very good
- Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) in Years 7 and 8 is unsatisfactory.
- The match of teachers and support staff to the curriculum is very good.

Commentary

24. Overall, the curriculum successfully meets the needs and aspirations of the students. Students with special educational needs are given full access to the curriculum and as a result they achieve very well. The curriculum is very good in the range and quality of provision in English, mathematics, science, physical education, art and design, music and Latin. Provision for ICT in Years 7 and 8 is unsatisfactory. Insufficient time is made available to all students to enable them to gain the range of skills necessary to support their learning and students who have been identified as gifted and talented are not being sufficiently challenged.
25. After his first full year in post, the headteacher has commissioned a review of the school curriculum. This has led to the formation of a group of staff who are currently reviewing the current curriculum in the light of new central government and local initiatives. The school has a keen interest in innovation across the curriculum particularly for those students aged 14 to 19 years. The results of this review will be built into the curriculum model for the academic year starting in September 2005.
26. Courses leading to vocational qualifications and employment have been incorporated into the curriculum since the time of the previous inspection (1998). The school has also improved its management of the curriculum so that students have a wider range of course combinations in Years 10 and 11. There is now satisfactory provision for religious education in Years 7 to 11. The school does not meet its statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship, as was noted at the previous inspection.
27. There are very good opportunities for enrichment. There is a wide variety of experiences on offer both inside and outside of the school day. These include many sporting, music and drama activities, along with residential opportunities. Enrichment opportunities are less well developed in history, ICT, design and technology, and Latin. Despite such large numbers of students relying on coaches to bring them to and from school their participation rates in all the opportunities provided by the school are very good.
28. The accommodation is satisfactory overall. It is very good in English and physical education. It is unsatisfactory in art and design. The accommodation is very spread out, variable in quality and size and built over a number of different decades in the last century. In the area of modern foreign languages the size of the rooms has an impact on the range of teaching strategies that the teachers can use. The same situation arises in the business studies area. The school has done very well in creating full access for students with a physical disability to enable them to gain access to each building on the school site. The resources for the curriculum are good and are well chosen to support learning.

29. The school benefits from a very well qualified staff who are well matched to the delivery of the curriculum. All teachers are qualified to teach the subject they are time-tabled to teach. There is well-targeted support by teaching assistants in lessons and flexible arrangements for the withdrawal of students for specialist help.

Sixth form

The overall quality of education in the sixth form is **very good**. Teaching and learning are **very good**. The curriculum offered is **very good**.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning in the sixth form are **very good**. The assessment of students' work is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

Very good teaching significantly raises standards.

Learning is very good in the majority of lessons.

Students are very keen to do well. They have a positive attitude to their learning.

Students respond very well to the high expectations their teachers have of them.

The use made of data across departments is inconsistent

Commentary

30. Teaching and learning are very good and have improved since the previous inspection. The consistently very good teaching enables all students to achieve very well. The excellent teaching in drama and geography inspires students to extend and enjoy their learning. No unsatisfactory teaching was identified in the sixth form and only a small percentage judged to be satisfactory. Details of the teaching observed during the inspection are given in the table below.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 65 lessons observed.

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2 (3%)	34 (52%)	25 (39%)	4 (6%)	0	0	0

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

31. Students' standards on entry to the sixth form are about average. The high quality of teaching has a very positive effect on learning and has raised standards to above the national average by the end of Year 13 in 2003 and well above in the two years previously.
32. Teachers know their subject very well and have a good knowledge of course requirements. They meticulously guide students through the requirements at both AS and GCE A-Levels. Teachers plan and structure lessons well, making them productive experiences for students. Lessons are stimulating and the dynamic atmosphere in many classrooms supports active learning.
33. Most teachers have high expectations of their students and most students have high expectations of themselves. High level demands and innovative styles of work develop very good independent learning. As a result students are rewarded with high levels of achievement. The very best teaching encourages students to be active in lessons, especially through their contributions to discussions. Effective question and answer activities confirm students' understanding of tasks. Lessons have good pace and challenges appropriate to the needs of the students. Teachers have a genuine concern to bring out the best in every student. Teachers cater well for higher attainers. All students including those with special educational needs achieve above national levels.

34. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are good. Students receive regular and valuable feedback on how well they are doing and how to improve. Most teachers know their students well and involve them in reviewing their progress. However, not all departments make effective use of data on students' previous performance to develop strategies for individual students to make further improvement and more rapid progress.

The curriculum

Overall, curriculum provision in the sixth form is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum provides well for students to progress from GCSE to AS and A-Level courses in a wide range of subjects.
- There are good opportunities for students' personal development.
- The provision for students with special educational needs is very good.
- The provision for teaching religious education is unsatisfactory.
- Sport opportunities for all students are not built into the sixth form curriculum.

Commentary

35. The school provides a good range of academic courses in order to serve the needs of the students who wish to continue their education at the school. It is inclusive in the flexibility it exercises over entry requirements which allows students to benefit from further study before entering employment. There are opportunities to study vocationally based courses in business studies in both Years 12 and 13. The school does review the range of subjects offered on an annual basis, an example of which was the introduction of a critical thinking course into Year 13 in September 2003.
36. There are very good opportunities for students to play an active part in the main school. Sixth form students act as mentors to younger students and they take an active part in the school house system.
37. The curriculum provision for students with special educational needs is very good. They receive very good and sometimes excellent levels of support. The very good short-term targets in their Individual Education Plans are known and evaluated by all staff and parents. The students are very well involved in setting their own targets and sharing these with staff to improve their standards and to further enhance their learning.
38. There is no programme for the teaching of religious education in the sixth form and as a result the school is failing to meet one of its statutory duties. The school does not make provision for all students to participate in some form of sports activity during the time-tabled week and relies on students using the sports centre on site on an "ad hoc" basis in their own time.
39. Accommodation is satisfactory and students have access to their own sixth form block. They have access to quiet areas for independent study as well as common areas for social interaction. Staffing is very well matched to the curriculum and resources are good in most subject areas.

Care, guidance and support

The school's provision of support, advice and guidance for students is **good** as are its procedures to ensure students' care, welfare and safety. The steps taken to involve students in the work and development of the school are **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school has very effective pastoral care structures and procedures in place.
- The school knows all students well and has their care as its main concern.
- Learning mentors provide very good care and support for the most vulnerable members of the school community.
- Students are consulted on whole school issues and can see their views reflected in school policy.
- A lack of rigour in health and safety procedures in some areas could expose the school to risk.

Commentary

40. The pastoral care structure and system are strong features of the school. Close monitoring of students' welfare and academic performance in Years 7 and 8 ensures that all students quickly settle into school and become known to the pastoral care teams. The very good relationships between form tutors, heads of year, heads of house, and students ensure that those who may need help and support are quickly identified and action taken. The good quality and quantity of information available to the pastoral care teams in year groups and houses for the upper school ensure that students' academic and personal development is closely monitored. However, although the information is effectively used by pastoral care teams, it is not routinely utilised with subjects to guide and support students' learning.
41. Learning mentors provide very good care and support for a significant number of students who need academic support or who could be at risk of exclusion through disaffection with school. Learning mentors have forged strong links with many external agencies that, through their intervention and counselling, enable students to overcome significant barriers to learning and personal development. The special needs co-ordinator and learning support staff make very good contact with primary schools and the available supportive agencies to ascertain students' needs and attainment.
42. The school does not yet have in place a whole school council but plans do exist for this to happen. Through year councils and unit councils for each house in the upper school students are enabled and encouraged to express their views and see them acted upon. The school's new policy for the management of behaviour was developed in consultation with student councils, and students recognise and appreciate their input to the process and take greater ownership as a consequence. Councils met during the inspection week and feedback was timetabled for form representatives, in registration sessions throughout the school, to let all students know that their views are being acted upon.
43. Health and safety procedures are generally rigorous. In some areas practices are not as secure as they could be and this represents a potential risk to the school. One example being the arrangements for students arriving late to school. Students are required to sign the late book, but not everyone follows this system. Recognising this, and to avoid alarming parents with early phone calls to chase up apparently absent students, the school does not record students as absent until after the lunchtime registration. In the event of an emergency the school would have to rely on individual subject teachers' registers to know with certainty which students are in school at that time. This represents an unacceptable risk. The school does not currently log ad-hoc health and safety incidents with the consequence that full records are not available.

Sixth form

The provision of support, advice and guidance for sixth form students is **very good**. The involvement of sixth form students in the work and development of the school is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school provides very good pastoral support for students.

- Sixth form students receive good advice and guidance before taking the next steps in their lives.
- Students are routinely consulted and can clearly see their views being acted upon.

Commentary

44. The pastoral care of students in the sixth form is uppermost in the minds of the sixth form team. Sixth form tutors and the role they fulfil are highly valued by students. There is an extensive programme of advice, information and guidance provided for students in the sixth form. Tutorials and outside speakers provide information about higher and further education, careers and gap year opportunities. This makes a strong contribution to students' personal development and enables them to make informed choices about their lives once they leave Backwell School.
45. The school takes great care to ensure that students and their families are made fully aware of all options that exist and of the processes involved in accessing them. The school goes to considerable lengths to support, guide and encourage students to recognise the advantages of continued education as well as providing extensive information to them and their families.
46. Students in the sixth form are regularly asked for their views on a variety of issues, both formally and informally enabling them to contribute to the work and development of their school. The new arrangements for sharing information with students on predicted and required grades at one to one tutorial session arose as a direct consequence of feedback from the most recent Year 13 exit questionnaire. These processes clearly demonstrate to students that they have a voice that is being heard in their school.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

There is a **very good** partnership with parents who hold the school in high regard. The **very good** community links and partnerships with other schools and colleges enrich the curriculum and have a positive impact on students' learning and personal development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school has developed an extensive information and consultative framework to strengthen links with parents.
- Very strong links with feeder schools ensure smooth transition into the school.
- Extensive links strengthen the school's position and popularity with the local community.
- Effective links with further education colleges, universities and local employers ensure that students in the sixth form have good opportunities to explore the options available to them when leaving school.
- Reports to parents do not consistently provide them or students with high quality information on the steps they need to take to progress their learning.

Commentary

47. The school goes to great lengths to communicate with parents and ensure that they have access to information about their children and the opportunity to discuss it. Regular newsletters, reports, the school website and invitations to visit the school provide parents with many opportunities to work in partnership with the school to support their children's learning and personal development. The school sends personalised letters to parents if their children have been particularly successful or diligent as well as to those parents whose children need additional support. Following a trip to Glastonbury Cathedral, the school received a letter from the Dean commending the students' exemplary behaviour. The school wrote to the parents of all students who were on the trip making them aware of the positive feedback that had been received.

48. Links with parents of students with special educational needs are very strong particularly at the time of transition into the school from Year 6 to Year 7. Year 7 pastoral care staff have very good links with the major feeder schools which ensure a smooth and seamless transition from primary school for all students. The school is developing stronger curriculum links with primary schools, which will build on the good links that already exist for some subjects.
49. Parents are generally very supportive of the school's work and all that it provides for their children. Reports to parents vary both between departments and between year groups. Some reports give parents and students good information concerning the steps that they must take next in order to improve their learning and make progress, but this is not happening consistently throughout the school.
50. Extensive links with the local community through a wide variety of visitors, visits, enrichment week, exhibitions, performances and lettings give the school a high profile and increase its popularity with the local community.
51. Sixth form staff have established an impressive network of links with universities, colleges and employers. These links are instrumental in encouraging students to consider and take up places in higher education. Students are provided with every opportunity to explore all of the options open to them when they complete their studies at school and move on.
52. Parents of children with special educational needs are supplied with copies of their Individual Education Plans and are kept very well informed about their needs.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership of the school by the headteacher is **very good**. The overall quality of leadership of key staff is **very good**. The effectiveness of management is **good** throughout the school. Governance of the school is **satisfactory**.

Main strength and weaknesses

- The clarity of vision, sense of purpose and aspirations of the headteacher ensure that the quality of what the school provides is very good.
- Standards are very good as a result of very good leadership at all levels throughout the school.
- Performance management and induction procedures for new teachers and in-service training for all staff are very well organized and effective.
- Governors are effective in helping to shape the future direction of the school but do not meet all their statutory duties.
- The school improvement plan is not costed and as such has limited value as a management tool.

Commentary

53. The headteacher is providing strong, focused and pro-active leadership. Since his arrival in September 2003 he has developed and articulated clear priorities for the next stage in the development of the school. He has quickly established himself with students, staff and parents, and is already having a significant impact on the life of the school. He was instrumental in ensuring the school gained Visual and Performing Arts status from September 2004. The yet to be confirmed 2004 examination results show a further rise on those achieved in 2003 both in the main school and the sixth form. The school achieved Investors in People status in July 2004. The headteacher is a visible presence around the school and is very approachable to all members of the school community. He has a clear and realistic vision of what the school seeks to achieve. He is very well supported by a dedicated and hard working senior leadership team, who between them offer a wide range of complementary skills and experiences which are used for the benefit of the students. This team was expanded in number in September 2004, and the roles of its members have

been adjusted. This has resulted in improvements in the day-to-day management of the school and an increase in the number of initiatives being introduced which is helping to raise the attainment of students.

54. The headteacher is still in the process of deciding how to prioritise new initiatives. He is very aware of the importance of an efficient and comprehensive self-evaluation system, and has recently appointed an extra senior member of staff to implement a whole school assessment for learning programme. More work needs to be done to ensure that there is a consistent approach to the collection and use of performance data of the students, and that national initiatives for literacy and numeracy are implemented and monitored. He recognises that there is much to do but has the ability, the tenacity and the resolve to lead the school to even greater success.
55. Departments are generally well led and managed. There are a few departments, which have been identified by the school, where further training is required to improve the overall effectiveness of the curriculum area. Training for middle managers is currently being provided. The reviews of the performance of all departments, held twice a year, have enabled the leadership team to have a clear and accurate idea of the quality of learning and teaching in all the subjects. These reviews have identified the need to monitor teaching further in order to spread the very good and sometimes excellent practice that exists. Departmental objectives are broadly linked to school priorities but most plans do not include arrangements for monitoring progress or detailed criteria against which success can be quantified or measured. While there is much informal exchange of information between departments, in order that whole school policies are consistently applied there is now a need for this exchange of information to be formalised.
56. The school has taken a positive approach to performance management. Good procedures are fully implemented and are having a positive impact on raising the quality of teaching and learning. There are very good and effective procedures in place for supporting the professional development of teachers. Priority is given to the training needs associated with the school improvement plan, departmental plans and those needs identified as a result of performance management reviews. The induction of staff new to the school is good. All new staff are invited to a wide ranging programme of meetings on relevant whole school topics. In addition, newly qualified staff receive good mentoring, support and guidance within departments from senior managers. The school is also a very good provider of initial teacher training.
57. The school is fortunate in having a very capable and committed governing body that is very well led. Many governors have specialist knowledge that they are prepared to use for the benefit of the school. Many have close involvement with the school through their committees and subject link roles with specific departments. They are strongly committed and their work is well informed, providing a strategy and policy frame-work for the operation of the school. There is a very strong partnership between governors and headteacher, firmly rooted in a commitment to providing high quality education for all students. Improvements since the previous inspection have been very good. Recognising that the opportunities for all students in Years 7 to 9 to follow a course in ICT were unsatisfactory, changes to the curriculum have been put into place for current Year 9 students, which will filter down into Years 7 and 8 next year. The governors have investigated a variety of ways in which the requirement for a collective act of daily worship for all students could be fulfilled but the lack of space and the layout of the site present major barriers. The lack of the teaching of religious education in the sixth form will be reviewed as part of the whole school curriculum review process. Despite these examples of non-compliance with statutory requirements governors are a real strength of the school.
58. The management and leadership of special educational needs are excellent. There is an excellent level of teamwork amongst all staff. The governor for special educational needs has made very good links with the school. The governors are at present involved in relevant discussions with the local education authority regarding the way it funds its special

education provision. Within its present levels of funds the school finds it difficult to provide sufficient resources to meet the stated objective for all its students with statements and for students who have not yet been provided with a statement but have a recognised special education need. The school manages its existing resources very well and employs a good number of highly experienced and qualified support staff and teachers. Students with special educational needs are very well included in all aspects of the day-to-day life of the school. The leadership and management for students who are gifted and talented are good. The co-ordinator effectively supports all staff to identify all gifted and talented students across the school.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	5,577,100	Balance from previous year	154,356
Total expenditure	5,564,804	Balance carried forward to the next	166,652
Expenditure per pupil	3,406		

59. Financial management is satisfactory. The school and governing body have effective systems in place for regular monitoring of income and expenditure. Close scrutiny by the bursar and the governor's finance and premises committee ensure that the school has avoided a deficit. Best value principles are rigorously applied and ensure that value for money is achieved on all purchases. The school does not fully cost the priorities for improvement in the school improvement plan, which coupled with the absence of accurate costing of the curriculum, deprives senior leaders and governors of a valuable planning tool.

Value for money

Taking into account:

- the amount of money spent per student in Years 7 to 11 and the sixth-form
- the very good achievement of students throughout the school
- the very good behaviour and attitudes of students
- the effectiveness of management, which is good
- the very good leadership throughout the school
- the overall very good quality of teaching leading to very good learning
- the good curriculum with a very good range of extra-curricular opportunities

the school provides very good value for money and the sixth-form is cost effective.

Sixth form

Leadership of the sixth form is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are well organised systems to monitor individual student performance.
- The head of the sixth form is very well supported by his sixth form tutors and he has created an effective team to support the students.
- All staff promote high standards in the sixth form.
- The sixth form is cost effective.

Commentary

60. The very good leadership of the sixth form has generated a very purposeful ethos in which the school's aims and values are embedded in its work. The head of the sixth form has created a very effective team of tutors who have developed a good system for monitoring all aspects of the students' contribution to life in the school. This has a positive impact in raising the quality of students' work and improving individual levels of confidence. There is a very good and productive relationship between staff and students and students are very positive about the level of support they receive.
61. The high standards achieved by students in the sixth form result from the very good relationship that exists between the sixth form and the rest of the school. Subjects are generally well led in supporting the persistent drive for excellence. The school's commitment to inclusion of all students to the full extent of their competence shows itself in the range of courses on offer.
62. Over 70 per cent of students transfer from Year 11 into the sixth form to continue their studies. In addition to this, the school recruits students from other schools. Retention rates from the end of Year 12 to Year 13 are very good.

Work-related learning

The effectiveness of the school's provision for work-related learning (WRL) is **satisfactory** and it meets statutory requirements.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Careers education and guidance are well taught and effective.
- An audit across all curriculum areas has identified the positive contributions all subjects can and do make to the work-related learning programme.
- Departments have yet to update their schemes of work to identify where they will contribute to the work-related learning programme.
- A very successful work experience programme is in place for all students in Year 10.
- The school offers a limited range of vocational opportunities to students in Years 10 and 11.
- Plans to assess the impact of work-related learning are yet to be considered.

Commentary

63. The school's programme for careers education and guidance is very good and with effect from September 2004 the programme has been extended so that all students in Years 7 to 13 are fully involved. Students receive very good careers guidance, including individual interviews from Year 9 with the Connexions service. Students interviewed in Year 11 and the sixth form said they were happy with the support they were receiving and that they were guided well both about progression post-16 and about future careers.
64. During the summer term 2004, the recently appointed work-related learning co-ordinator completed an audit across all curriculum areas to identify which subjects could make a positive contribution to this area of learning. WRL is part of the careers, citizenship, personal, health and social education programme but in addition to this, the business studies courses in Years 10 and 11 and the World of Work GCSE course currently contribute to the overall programme. Other subjects have yet to identify activities to develop understanding of business or work, or to use work as a context for learning, but this has been identified as an area for development.
65. Work experience is provided for all students in Year 10. Students are well prepared for this programme by the joint heads of careers who prepare teaching materials for form tutors to use. Most placements are fully compatible with the requirements specified by the students and the majority of evaluations completed by students at the end of the placement indicate high levels of satisfaction. However, most subject areas in the main school do not build into

curriculum plans opportunities for students to use this work within the wider curriculum. As a result, students do not have the opportunity to apply knowledge gained from their work placements to extend subject knowledge within lessons. Plans to assess the impact of WRL opportunities on student achievement are at an early stage of discussion.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- In 2003, the performance of students in end of Year 9 tests was well above the national average.
- The attainment of all students is very good.
- GCSE results in English Language in 2003 were well above the national average and, in English Literature were above the national average.
- The leadership of the department is very good and its management is good.
- Students' participation in lessons is very good.
- Relationships between teachers and students are excellent.
- Marking and assessment in Years 7 to 9 are inconsistent.

Commentary

66. There has been continuous improvement in standards in Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11 since 2001. In 2003, boys outperformed girls at the end of Year 9. In 2003, the performance of girls in GCSE English Language and Literature exceeded the performance of boys as it does nationally. Overall, students' achievement in lessons in Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11 is good. Standards in English have been maintained since the previous inspection and the quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9 has improved significantly.
67. Students make good progress in lessons, are attentive, listen carefully to each other, respond well, focus on their work and are very well behaved. Their oral work is very confident. They are very willing to volunteer answers and ask questions. They work very productively in pairs and groups. Students read widely, benefiting from the school's excellent library provision, and have a very high level of understanding of texts. They write well in a whole variety of styles and there are some excellent examples of extended writing often using ICT. Teachers' assessment of written work is good in Years 10 and 11 but inconsistent in Years 7 to 9.
68. Very good levels of achievement are directly attributable to good teaching, some of which is very good. Teachers have a high level of specialist knowledge. Lessons are well planned, well structured and well managed. Effective questioning enables teachers to build on students' answers in order to develop their ideas and reinforce learning. Students are able to evaluate their own work and the work of others. Students with special educational needs benefit from expert support in the classroom. The excellent relationships between teachers and students provide a very positive climate for learning.
69. Students achieve very well because of the very good leadership and good management of the department. The department is actively involved in a regular process of self-review and actively participates in the school's Assessment for Learning initiative. The department is also a lead department within the local education authority. Plans are in place to use data more rigorously to ensure all students know what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve. The improvement of assessment procedures in Years 7 to 9 is addressed in the department plan.

70. Progress since the previous report has been very good. All students now make good progress in lessons and the quality of teaching has improved from satisfactory overall to good.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

71. Overall, literacy across the curriculum is good. In science, there are good examples of research and report writing and the department gives literacy support to low attainers. In mathematics, the department ensures that all students understand mathematical language and there was an effective use of literature to illustrate an example of probability. The use of key words is common in many subject areas, as are good opportunities for students to develop writing and oral skills. However, the lack of a literacy policy and monitoring of the range of literacy opportunities within subjects has led to an inconsistency of approach to literacy across the curriculum.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching and well-motivated students result in very good learning and standards which are well above average by the end of Year 11.
- The department makes very good use of its excellent computer suite.
- Students' written work is not marked frequently or rigorously enough.
- The department is led very well, and there is very good teamwork amongst the well-qualified and capable staff.

Commentary

72. Students' achievement in modern foreign languages is very good. They make good progress in Years 7 to 9 and very good progress in Years 10 and 11. By the end of Year 9, standards in French are above average. The great majority of students take French at GCSE, and by the end of Year 11, standards are well above average. The school's GCSE results compare favourably with schools where only the more able students are entered for GCSE. Standards in German are well above average by the end of Year 11. Students are most secure in their reading and listening skills, although good emphasis is given to the development of speaking skills in class, and students are prepared well for their oral examinations in Year 11. Students' writing skills develop well in Years 10 and 11, but not enough attention is given to the accuracy of their written work in Years 7 to 9.
73. The quality of the teaching and students' learning is very good overall. It is slightly better in Years 10 and 11, although it is rarely less than good in Years 7 to 9. All of the teachers are fluent linguists, with very good command of their respective foreign languages. The teachers are good at ensuring that lessons are conducted as far as is practicably possible in the foreign language. As a result, students have very good models from which to learn their skills. Teachers use a very good variety of teaching methods and activities to interest the students and, in most lessons, they maintain a fast pace, making the best use of the limited amount of time available. The relationships and interaction between staff and students are very good and are key factors in motivating the students to learn. Even in the lowest sets, students still have good attitudes towards their work in French. The department has excellent resources for information and communication technology, and teachers make very good use of the computer suite, where an increasing range of interactive programs is helping to motivate the students and improve their language skills.
74. Students' work is not marked frequently, consistently or rigorously enough, particularly in Years 7 to 9. As a result, students are not always aware of where they have made mistakes or how they can improve their written work. There are few other weaknesses in the teaching, although some teachers are not always rigorous enough in demanding

accurate answers from the students. In some classes, teachers do not pay enough attention to the way students are seated in order to ensure that group or paired work is as productive as possible.

75. The department is led very well and the quality of the provision in modern foreign languages has improved since the previous inspection. The head of department has a very good understanding of the department's strengths and areas for development and has created a very effective team of well-motivated staff. Part-time staff are integrated well. The good teamwork results in a positive learning atmosphere and a willingness to share and encourage good practice. Foreign exchanges and trips abroad during the school's activities week provide further stimulus for learning. The department is managed well. The curriculum is well planned, and the recent acquisition of new books and course materials is having a positive impact on students' learning. The implementation of more comprehensive assessment procedures and more regular monitoring of the quality of teaching and students' written work are acknowledged areas for development. The department's teaching rooms are well presented with attractive displays of students' work, but the small size of some rooms imposes restrictions on the teaching methods used with the largest teaching groups.

Latin

Provision in Latin is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching consistently engages students to ensure high standards.
- Students display very positive attitudes which produce very good results.
- Very good resources support students' learning.

Commentary

76. GCSE results in 2003 were very good and the provisional results for 2004 are even better. This represents excellent achievement for the students, who only begin to study the subject in Year 10 and are entered for the examination in Year 12.
77. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. The teacher's very good subject knowledge leads to sound planning. Very good relationships between the teacher and students develop attitudes in students which are very conducive to learning. Constructive and very helpful worksheets ensure that students extend their knowledge of the grammar and syntax of the language. They consolidate understanding of sentence structure by conversing with each other in Latin. Students read and translate sentences into good quality English very soon after starting the course. The teacher is very concerned to ensure all teaching is set in context to give students a broad understanding of the lives of the Romans and their language. Students enjoy taking this course and actively participate in lessons.
78. Good leadership has maintained the quality of this course and a high level of results. The course is well managed and good resources give students every opportunity to succeed. The numbers taking the course in Years 10 and 11 are good, but the demands of the Year 12 curriculum mean that not all students who start the course complete the examination. The course is a positive contribution to the curriculum offered to students from Year 10.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership creates a committed and enthusiastic team of teachers.
- Very good teaching based on high expectations results in successful achievement by students.
- Assessment and marking procedures are inconsistent and do not fully support students' progress.
- Insufficient use is made of data to set targets for students to inform them of their potential.
- Students' very good attitudes have a positive impact on their learning.

Commentary

79. Standards attained by Year 9 students in the 2003 national tests were well above average for all schools and for similar schools. This represents very good achievement by these students. The results were a significant improvement on those of the previous year. Unvalidated results for 2004 have maintained this improvement.
80. The proportion of students achieving the higher grades of A*, A and B in 2003 was in line with that for schools with similar intakes and well above that for all schools nationally. The overall standard achieved by boys was higher than that of girls.
81. The proportion of students gaining the higher grades in the 2003 GCSE examinations was well above the national average. The unvalidated results for 2004 continued the improving trend with an increased proportion being awarded the higher grades. The standard of work seen of students in Years 10 and 11 was well above average. Students' achievement, including those with special educational needs, is very good.
82. The quality of teaching and learning across all year groups is very good. Teachers' strong command of the subject is evident in their teaching and students respond well to the high expectations placed upon them. Very good relationships between teachers and students create a strong work ethic in all lessons. Students display impressive attitudes towards their work and collaborate successfully with each other when solving problems. The most successful teaching seen was characterised by effective planning, challenge and a stimulating pace. These features were all present in a lesson with a group of Year 11 students of average ability. These students produced some impressive graphical work as a result of excellent teaching. Teaching was less effective when it lacked a clear structure and when learning objectives were not made clear to students.
83. Leadership is very good and management is good. An experienced and highly skilled teacher ably supports the head of department and together they lead a large team of well-qualified and enthusiastic teachers. Although the department is committed to improvement there is no explicit development plan. Procedures for assessment and the marking of work are in place but are inconsistent and not developed enough to fully inform students of their progress. As a result some students are unaware of how they can improve. Although considerable data is available to teachers it is not used to set targets with individual students to inform them of their potential.
84. The curriculum offers a challenging learning experience for students and the grouping of students for teaching takes good account of their abilities. ICT is used to support the learning of mathematics in all year groups. Teachers have worked hard to create an attractive teaching and learning environment. All classrooms have relevant displays that include students' work and key words used in mathematics.

Mathematics across the curriculum

85. Students' numeracy skills are above average and effectively support their learning in other subjects. Although there is no whole-school numeracy policy in place all teachers have received training in this area of learning. Students successfully apply their skills in art and design, geography and history. In science they show high-level skills when performing calculations, handling data and in graphical work. In business education specific numeracy skills are applied effectively by students when handling data. Mathematics coursework activities with ICT require Year 10 students to use these skills when working with spreadsheets.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE are well above the national level.
- Students achieve very well in science.
- The team of teachers is very enthusiastic with very good subject knowledge.
- The attitudes and behaviour of students are very good.
- Lessons are well planned following agreed set procedures.
- Student attainment data is not used fully to monitor the effectiveness of the teaching and learning.

Commentary

86. The attainment of students in national tests in 2003 at the end of Year 9 was well above the national average and even higher in 2004. The trend has been upwards since the previous inspection. In GCSE examinations the number of students gaining grades A-C were also well above the national average and again higher in 2004. The trend has been upwards over the past few years.
87. Inspection findings from lesson observations and students' work are that standards are well above national expectations in Year 9 and in Year 11. The students enter the school above the national average in science and achievement is very good throughout Years 7 to 11. Students' good achievement is the result of many factors including the teachers' high expectations, challenging lessons and the commitment of the students. Students with special educational needs are very well supported by both teachers and teaching assistants and achieve very well. Higher attaining students achieve very well and gain the highest grades possible at GCSE.
88. Teaching and learning are very good. Lessons are very well planned with teachers employing methods that ensure the lessons have good pace and a wide range of teaching activities. In the most successful lessons the effective planning ensures that the students are fully engaged and challenged by setting suitable activities. In the few less successful lessons, students were not fully engaged in the activities. The students' attitude to science is very good and they tackle all the tasks set with interest and enthusiasm. Very good relationships between teachers and students lead to a pleasant co-operative atmosphere where the teachers can concentrate on teaching. The teachers use a wide range of teaching and learning styles including many practicals. There is the opportunity for whole class use of computers for activities such as research and this is incorporated into a range of lessons. The teachers are very well qualified and have very good subject knowledge. This enables them to teach with confidence and to explain concepts with clarity.
89. The leadership of the department is very good and there is a clear vision of what can be improved further within the departmental evaluation process. The team of teachers work in a co-operative manner and follow the agreed procedures well. The teachers are well supported by an efficient group of technicians who ensure all the required resources are

available in lessons. The management of the department is good. The department has successfully introduced relevant and suitable courses throughout Years 7 to 11. The newly introduced GCSE applied science is relevant to the lower attaining students and directly addresses their identified needs in science. The department is very well placed to enhance their assessment procedures to enable teachers to review and compare the effectiveness of their teaching. Within the department are many examples of good practice. The monitoring of lessons is not sufficiently organised to identify and share this good practice. The accommodation for science is satisfactory. Some laboratories are suitable but the huts are very shabby.

90. The improvement since the previous inspection is good. Standards have been raised and the marking of work is better and lessons more challenging.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in ICT is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is insufficient curriculum time to enable students to reach their full potential.
- National requirements are not met for students in Years 7 and 8.
- Where control technology is taught, teachers set high expectations for learning and good standards are achieved.
- There is good teaching and learning in the use of spreadsheets for forecasting and problem solving.
- Students show interest and complete their work conscientiously.
- Students with special educational needs achieve well through the use of ICT, but the highest attaining students are not sufficiently challenged.
- The assessment of students' work is unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

91. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 indicate that standards are well above the national average. Due to a lack of curriculum time specifically allocated to the teaching of ICT in Years 7 and 8 the full curriculum is not covered to sufficient depth to make these assessments reliable. In GCSE examinations, for the short course in ICT, all students gained a pass grade. However, fewer achieved the highest grades than the national average. The evidence from the inspection is that students attain standards that are below national expectations at the end of Year 9 and near to the national average at the end of Year 11.
92. Many students join the school in Year 7 with sound skills and knowledge of ICT. By the end of Year 9 the progress they make is satisfactory. Progress is maintained as students work towards GCSE qualifications, for example, in mathematics when they use a spreadsheet to forecast the profitability of pizzas when considering contents and presentation. Gifted and talented students achieve soundly but the very limited time in which they have to experience this subject in lessons timetabled as ICT and taught by a subject specialist limits what they might otherwise achieve. All students are included in the learning process and there is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls.
93. Overall the quality of teaching is good. Specialist teachers know their subject well. When ICT is taught in other subjects it is well integrated and students make satisfactory progress. A good range of teaching resources are used effectively to support learning. The students work to the best of their ability and they clearly enjoy their studies. Learning is good when they have their discrete lessons in ICT.
94. A specialist teacher leads the subject to a satisfactory level and there is a large cross-curricular element to the teaching. The management of this teaching is good. It attempts to make the most of the very little amount of time that the students have to learn this subject.

The facilities are good and organised so there is free access to the computers out of formal lesson times. A network manager and two technicians provide good support for learning through their effective maintenance of the computer system.

95. The procedures for assessing the standards students reach against National Curriculum levels are currently unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9. Only a sample of the students' work is assessed against National Curriculum levels. The limited amount of time dedicated to teaching this subject results in students covering fewer aspects to the required depth for full assessment against national requirements to be made. Infrequent assessment has led to inconsistency in learning between classes in each year group and a lack of continuity as the students progress from year to year. The work of older students is marked regularly but the teachers' comments do not help students to identify their mistakes clearly or learn what will help them progress.
96. Overall progress since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. The facilities for the subject and the management of the subject have improved. However, there has been no improvement in the provision for the highest attaining students. Standards achieved at the end of Year 11 have fallen. At the time of the previous inspection, more students passed the short course at the higher grade levels.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

97. Throughout the school there are examples of good practice. ICT is used well in design and technology, particularly where students use the computer to aid the machining of materials and to design artifacts. Students' skills are developed as they use computers in the majority of their subjects to research and record information. In mathematics they log and process numerical data and use this to solve problems to a good standard. In science computers are used to monitor and record readings from sensors. In art and design, students use advanced applications to edit and enhance digital images. Very good practice also exists in the school library where all the resources are on the network's database to enable the students to find all the books and other resources that might help them in their individual studies. Similar very good practice can be found in the careers department where the students can explore a range of career paths based on their personal interests and aptitudes. The school's Internet site also enhances communication and learning for all in the school's community.

HUMANITIES

Geography, history and religious education were inspected in full. In Years 10 and 11 a social science course is available as an optional subject and this was sampled as part of the evidence base.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results in 2003 were above average and improved further in 2004.
- The joint leadership and management of the department are very good and teachers work well collaboratively.
- Students have mature attitudes to learning and respond well to the good teaching they receive.
- National Curriculum criteria are not applied accurately in the assessment of students' levels at the end of Year 9.

Commentary

98. Standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are above average and all students achieve well. GCSE examination results were above the national average in 2003. School data for 2004 indicates that results improved further this year with an increased percentage of students gaining the higher grades. Teachers' assessments undertaken at the end of Year 9 in 2003 and 2004 indicate that standards are high. However, because National Curriculum criteria are not always applied accurately, the levels given are over-generous so students are not always sure how well they are actually doing or how to improve their work. Standards seen in the work produced by students in Year 9 during the inspection were above average.
99. Students achieve well because teaching and learning are good. In some lessons teaching is very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which they use well to extend students' understanding of geography. They create and use a wide range of attractive resources, including ICT, which engage students' interest. Students have very good attitudes to learning and respond well to guidance. For example, the personal coursework tutorials help them to achieve good grades at GCSE.
100. The department benefits from the complementary strengths of its joint leaders whose leadership and management are very good. The department work very well as a team, sharing subject expertise and resources. There is a clear vision for future improvement and the department continually evaluates its work. Students' progress is carefully tracked using individual record cards.
101. Improvement since the previous inspection is good as results continue to rise. The department has the capacity and commitment to improve further.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results show a rising trend and in most years are well above average.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge.
- High quality explanations and questioning enable students to learn well.
- The marking of students' work is good but they do not know how well they are doing against national expectations.
- There is insufficient use of performance data to monitor students' progress.

Commentary

102. Standards of all students at the end of Years 9 and 11 are above average. In 2003, GCSE results were well above average. In recent years GCSE results have shown a rising trend.
103. Standards in the current Year 9 are above average. This represents good achievement for students in relation to when they started at the school in Year 7, including those students with special educational needs. Students of all abilities demonstrate increasingly good factual knowledge and understanding of history. They acquire a good range of skills in the analysis and interpretation of sources. The content of the written work of most students is good but some have weaknesses with their presentation and with their spelling and grammar.
104. Standards in the current Year 11 are above average. This represents good achievement by students who opt for history. They have a good knowledge and understanding of topics such as the Cold War and Vietnam. Students' written work is well organised, it shows a good understanding of the subject matter and evidence is used well to substantiate their views. Their skills with the interpretation and evaluation of sources are very good. In

lessons oral responses are good, students are articulate and speak with confidence demonstrating a good knowledge and understanding of the issues.

105. The quality of teaching and learning in history is good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. They are enthusiastic and committed and use a range of effective approaches in the classroom. High quality explanations and skilful questioning enable students to learn well. In some lessons good use is made of introductory activities to engage students and lessons are concluded effectively to consolidate learning. Students' work is well marked. They have a clear understanding of their strengths and weaknesses but have insufficient information about their performance against National Curriculum levels. There are insufficient opportunities for teachers to formally assess student progress in lessons and for involving students in the assessment of their own learning. As a result, students are not clear about the progress they are making. Relationships in the classroom are good and students display positive attitudes to their work.
106. The leadership of history is good and management is satisfactory. The department operates well as a team with staff having lead responsibilities for major areas of the curriculum. Schemes of work have been revised and provide good guidance but there are no planned educational visits for students in Years 7 to 11. Teaching staff are very well qualified. Accommodation and learning resources are of good quality and meet the needs of the curriculum well. However, the use of performance data to monitor progress is unsatisfactory as is the quality of strategic planning .
107. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.

Religious education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The students exceed the level expected by the locally agreed syllabus at the end of Years 9 and Year 11. They achieve very well.
- Results at GCSE have been consistently well above average for those taking the full GCSE course and students exceed the expectations of the agreed syllabus in the standards reached in the short course taken in Years 10 and 11.
- Teaching is very good overall. The teachers are very effective in stimulating the students' interest in the subject and use assessment well to help them improve their work.
- Group work is not always used to best effect to raise standards of discussion and debate.
- The department is very well led.

Commentary

108. Students build well on the average standards they bring to Year 7 and exceed the expectations of the agreed syllabus by the end of Year 9. This represents very good achievement. Those students taking the full GCSE course reached well above average standards over recent years. In the short course, standards are above average overall. These very good standards are reflected in the students' work. Year 11 students understand the distinctive features of Christianity and other world religions. They recognise the experiences and questions they share with faiths other than their own. Both higher and lower attaining students achieve very well in relation to their earlier learning. Boys and girls reach comparable standards. Students who experience difficulties in learning are very well supported in achieving to the level of their capabilities as are the students who are particularly able.
109. Very good teaching is underpinned by the emphasis on key words used to explain and compare different religions. What is most striking, however, is the extent to which teachers relate the issues they discuss to the lives and sensibilities of the students. The teachers know the students well and make good use of assessment to help them extend their

knowledge and skill, with the consequence that the students know how they are achieving and how to do better. Though group work is mainly used to good effect, there are occasions when students do not get enough opportunity to organise ideas logically and test them in structured debate.

110. The department is very well led. The head of department, with the support of her colleagues, has done much to raise the profile of religious education in the school. It is now a subject that attracts an increasing number of students to the examination courses. Since the previous inspection standards have improved considerably and the requirements of the agreed syllabus are met in Years 7 to 11. The department, in its desire to cater for students who wish to extend their studies, teaches the full GCSE course during the lunch hour. This has been a very successful initiative.

Social Science

111. Social science is a popular subject with two groups in each of Years 10 and 11. Standards in social science are well above average. In 2003, GCSE examination results were well above average. High standards in the subject are a product of good teaching and the students' good attitudes to their work. In the one lesson observed teaching was good. The teacher demonstrated good subject knowledge through the quality of explanations and questioning. Students were well supported by a good range of resources. A very good feature of the lesson was their enthusiasm for the new subject and their enjoyment of the topic on government.

TECHNOLOGY

The focus for the inspection was on design and technology but the work in child development was sampled.

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good and sometimes very good because of good lesson planning and preparation.
- Students achieve good standards at the end of Years 9 and 11.
- The leadership of the department is good with a clear ethos of high expectations in work and behaviour.
- Assessment across Years 7 to 9 is not collated or used effectively to monitor student attainment and progress.
- The management of the department does not ensure a common approach in planning schemes of work for Years 7 to 9 to ensure continuity and progression.
- There is no formal development plan for the department.

Commentary

112. The standards achieved by students at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were well above the national averages for design and technology based on unverified teacher assessments. In lessons seen during the inspection week, standards were above average and achievement good. Students gain a good breadth of experience using a wide range of practical skills and materials in all the design areas. There is a good focus on producing good quality products together with increasing use of computer-aided design and computer manufacturing techniques to extend students' experience of technology.
113. GCSE results overall in 2003 were well above the national averages with very good results in graphics and textiles. In lessons, overall standards are above average and achievement is good. Folios are good and graphically well presented with many students making good

use of ICT. However, students do not have a wide experience of existing products to extend their design thinking skills. Computer-aided design and manufacture are not well embedded in coursework to gain higher grades.

114. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good and sometimes very good. Where lessons are good or better they are planned well, expectations are high and lesson objectives are shared with students. Teachers have a good working relationship with students that contribute to their good motivation and progress in lessons. Students with learning difficulties are supported well and also make good progress. Gifted and talented students are identified but there is no planned strategy to address their needs.
115. The leadership of the department is good with a clear ethos of high expectations in work and behaviour. There is good teamwork but because the management of the department is shared, there are differences in planning schemes of work in Years 7 to 9 to cover the programme of study. This makes it difficult to prevent duplication in learning and to ensure continuity and progression. Planning does not identify cross-curricular themes, for example, literacy, citizenship and the use of ICT. Assessment practice is consistent across Years 7 to 9 but data is not collated to monitor students' attainment and progress to ensure support is provided when required. In Years 10 and 11, assessment is thorough and provides constructive information to students including actions for improvement. A departmental annual review identifies key issues together with expenditure requests. This contributes to whole school planning but has not led to a formal development plan for the department. Overall, management is satisfactory.
116. The accommodation for design and technology is good, teaching rooms are well maintained and well organised. The resources for teaching and learning are good but there are insufficient facilities for computer-aided manufacture. Display is of a good standard and effectively used as a resource for teaching using examples of work produced by students to show high expectations of quality, content and presentation.
117. There were no specific issues to be addressed from the previous inspection. The department has maintained standards.

Child development

118. GCSE results in 2003 were above the national averages. The evidence from inspection is that the standards seen are above average and achievement is good. Case studies are good and graphically well presented with many students making good use of ICT.
119. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. There is a good working relationship with students and this contributes to their good motivation and progress in lessons.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design, drama and music were inspected in full.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards by the end of Year 9 are above average. By the end of Year 11 they are well above average.
- Students achieve well by the end of Year 9 and very well by the end of Year 11.
- Leadership and management are very good and are innovative.
- Very good planning and assessment support the very good teaching and learning.
- The accommodation is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

120. On entry to the school students' standards in art and design are average. They quickly make progress and they achieve well and by the end of Year 9 attain above average standards. By Year 11 their achievement is very good and they attain well above average standards. Over many years GCSE examination results have been at least above average and are now well above average. Overall, standards have remained the same since the previous inspection and the subject remains one of the highest performing subjects in the school. Work in progress is enhanced by the wide analytical range of knowledge students have of other artists. Very good attention is given to cultural aspects. The inclusion of all students is very good.
121. The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the previous inspection and is now very good overall. Teachers have very high expectations and the students are supported very well to give of their best. Very good schemes of work are interpreted very well into lesson planning. Students display very good attitudes to the subject.
122. Assessment is very good and is enhanced by the detailed suggestions the students receive which help them to improve their standards further. Relevant homework is frequently set and its completion is very well tracked.
123. The very good innovative leadership and management by the subject leader have enabled her to build a highly committed team of well-qualified teachers. Daily meetings are held to discuss the students' progress and how to further the work of the department. All teachers show a very high commitment to their work and there is excellent teamwork and collaboration between the various and wide specialisms they represent. These include fine art, graphics and photography. These specialisms impact very well on the range of the students' work supported by the very good range of extra-curricular activities.
124. Overall the accommodation is unsatisfactory. It is too small and cramped and there is insufficient storage and display space. In a separate building the accommodation for photography is good. Overall, resources are good and the department has very good facilities for ICT. The students use these very effectively to enhance their work. There are very good links with artists and visits into the community. These give the students good opportunities to examine work-related opportunities. The students' literacy and numeracy skills are suitably used.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results at GCSE are above the national average.
- There is a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities.
- Assessment does not sufficiently inform students how well they are doing or how they can improve.
- Schemes of work do not include enough listening experience.
- Younger students do not have enough access to ICT in lessons.
- Students are able to use the accommodation and resources outside of lesson time to develop their independent learning skills.

Commentary

125. In Years 7 to 9 standards are above average. Students display particular strengths in performing and composing. Listening skills are less well developed. Achievement is good because tasks set are sufficiently challenging to engage and motivate all students. By the end of Year 11, standards achieved in the GCSE examination are above average. The 2004 results indicate that all students gained a grade within the A to C range.

126. Teaching and learning are good. Tasks are explained clearly and resources are well prepared. There is good encouragement for students who benefit from individual help according to their needs. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge. In some lessons in Years 7 to 9 however, tasks are not matched sufficiently to the ability of the students. Opportunities are sometimes missed to set the music in context and to engage students in the music itself, and performing tasks are treated as mechanical exercises. Students work well together and support each other in their learning and they develop skills in appraising by assessing each other's work. Relationships between students and teachers are generally good and the atmosphere is calm and students well behaved. Schemes of work fail to meet National Curriculum requirements to develop skills in listening as well as in performing, composing and appraising. The use of technical musical language is not sufficiently established in Years 7, 8 and 9, and opportunities are missed to encourage independent learning by the setting of homework.
127. The department does not assess the musical skills the students bring with them when they join the school in Year 7. As a result, there is not a formal baseline on which to judge progress from Years 7 to 9. National Curriculum teacher assessment levels recorded at the end of Year 9 do not match the evidence seen, and there are no formal baseline assessment procedures in place to provide evidence upon which to base these assessments. Students are not familiar with National Curriculum levels and do not know how well they are doing against national expectations. Assessment at GCSE level is satisfactory.
128. Overall leadership is satisfactory. However, there are issues regarding the professional development and support of colleagues, and establishing common practices of assessment. Management is satisfactory because results achieved at the end of Years 11 and 13 are above average, but opportunities are being missed to use the strengths within the department to bring schemes of work up to date and share good practice and expertise in using ICT.
129. Students value the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities, including the provision of tuition provided by expert teachers in a wide range of instruments. Singing tuition is also offered to all students. The music department is well resourced and the accommodation includes a range of practice rooms available to students during their breaks and after school resulting in opportunities for developing independent learning. Provision for using ICT in lessons is improving for older students but is still not being used enough for students in Years 7 to 9.
130. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. There remain issues still to be addressed in relation to access in lessons to ICT for Years 7 to 9 and in the development of understanding of the musical elements and the use of technical language.

Drama

Provision in drama is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very high at the end of Year 11.
- Very good teaching contributes significantly to the very good learning and achievement.
- The leadership and management of the department have a significant impact on raising standards.

Commentary

131. Drama is taught as a separate subject throughout Years 7 to 9 and is a popular option at GCSE. GCSE results in drama in 2003 were very high and improved further in 2004. Overall, achievement in lessons is very good. Since the previous inspection, there has been an improvement in standards and a significant improvement in the quality of teaching.

132. Overall, in lessons teaching and learning are very good. One excellent lesson was observed in which Year 11 students' worked on the performance of scenes from *Romeo and Juliet* and this was of a very high order. Teaching is very well structured and challenging and students are very well managed. Teachers use a whole range of expert strategies to develop drama skills. Improvisation skills, student self-evaluation and peer group appraisal are particularly effective.
133. In Years 7 to 9, the syllabus has been devised by the department to build drama skills to an increasing level of sophistication over three years. The emphasis on confidence, co-operation and concentration also enhances these skills across the curriculum. GCSE portfolios of work are excellent.
134. Drama is very well led and managed and has three specialist members of staff. The department puts on highly successful school productions and runs many theatre trips and other visits for its students.
135. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is excellent leadership and management of the department.
- Consistently good teaching promotes very good learning.
- Students of all ages achieve very well.
- The behaviour and attitudes of the students are very good.

Commentary

136. Students join the school in Year 7 with a wide range of physical education skills and experiences with some below those expected of 11 year olds. They settle into the school quickly and by the end of Year 9 the overall level of attainment is at least in line with national expectations, with a significant number doing even better. This represents very good achievement. By the end of Year 11 standards for all students are above the national average. Good levels of skill are clearly evident. Students have a good understanding of tactics and apply the skills they have practised when they are playing in competitive games. The standard of swimming is very high. By the end of Year 8 the number of non-swimmers is minimal, and students swim with much confidence and style in a wide range of strokes.
137. Students with special educational needs are well integrated into lessons. They are given much support by teachers and other students and are reaching levels of attainment that are commendable for them. Talented students are encouraged to extend their skills both in school and with outside clubs. Many students take part in many inter-school activities, and gain much success. A large number of students have represented North Somerset and some have gone on to gain international honours.
138. Overall teaching and learning are very good and are major strengths of the department. All teachers have a very secure knowledge and are very enthusiastic in their teaching. They manage their classes well, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to learn. Teachers inject fun and enjoyment into their lessons and students respond with great enthusiasm and energy. Their enjoyment of the subject is very evident.
139. The subject leader provides excellent leadership and management. He works closely with a strong team of able and committed teachers who share good practice. Monitoring of the

curriculum is in place and action is taken to improve performance. Relationships amongst teachers are excellent, and they are a well-balanced and highly effective team.

140. This is a very successful and well-managed department that promotes high levels of attainment and makes a positive contribution towards raising students' levels of fitness and confidence. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

141. Business education was not inspected in full in the main school but courses were sampled. Students may choose to study this subject from Year 10 onwards.
142. Standards in 2003 were slightly above average. In 2004 standards improved with students attaining significantly above average. Achievement is very good with the majority of students attaining better than predicted grades Teaching is good with lessons planned well with an effective balance of ICT skills development, knowledge of business practices and the application of these to the world of work. Higher attaining students and those with special educational needs achieve very well because of the good individual support given to them by the teacher. Students enjoy the subject and apply themselves well to tasks within the lessons.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Personal, social and health education

Provision for personal, social and health education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a good programme in place to support the personal development of students.
- The programme is taught well by a team of specialist staff.
- Insufficient time is made available to ensure good coverage of all the topics included within the programme.

Commentary

143. The school has developed a good programme for personal development, which includes provision for careers education, relationships, sex education and alcohol and drug abuse.
144. During the inspection week three lessons in Years 9, 10 and 11 were sampled. In all of these lessons the well structured programme was taught by a team of specialist staff. Very good links have been established with community groups and agencies, for example, the Connexions service and the police liaison officer.
145. The programme has been extended to cover elements of the citizenship and work-related learning programme. In recognition of the additional time needed to fulfill the requirements of these additional elements an additional ten "rolling tutor sessions" spread out throughout the year are scheduled. However, on a weekly basis, there is insufficient timetabled time provided for this area of the curriculum.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is good achievement by students throughout the school.
- There is a well organised and delivered curriculum.
- Good leadership and management by the co-ordinator.
- The subject is taught to a good standard
- Students enjoy this subject and the course relates well to their interests and needs.
- Both students and staff are confused about the differences between this subject, and what is delivered in religious education and personal, social and health education.

Commentary

146. Students attain good standards in this subject. There are no national measures to compare the standards with, but they are clearly above what would be expected in most schools by the end of Years 9 and 11.
147. Much of the work seen in citizenship was completed in lessons that are allocated for the teaching of the subject. The remaining elements of the curriculum are woven into the teaching of the personal and social education delivered by tutors. A good scheme of work is in place enabling students' progress to be followed when they study citizenship in their other subjects.
148. Teaching within the citizenship programme is good. There are well organized activities and a commitment to addressing issues that are relevant to the students. Students' learning is good, the students talk about their studies, discuss issues and their experiences beyond the immediate locality. In class discussions they show that their understanding of complex issues is good.
149. All students are fully included in the learning process. Students of all abilities make good progress in lessons. The achievement of students at the end of Years 9 and 11 is good. Boys and girls achieve equally well and all students are encouraged to contribute their ideas in class discussions.
150. Work is regularly assessed to a good standard. In addition each student makes an assessment of their own work and writes an evaluation. Once this has been completed the teacher makes a comment and these form part of the final report on the subject for parents. The comments made by the students themselves are perceptive and go beyond judging how well they have done. They consider their progress and what they need to do to improve. Taking some ownership for their learning also enhances the aim to develop responsible citizenship .
151. The leadership and management of this subject is good and staff work very well as a team to ensure consistency and continuity between different classes and as students move from year group to year group.
152. At the time of the previous inspection there was no requirement to teach this subject and therefore it was not reported on.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 13 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2003, which is the latest year for which national comparisons are available.

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	23	91.3	80.1	8.7	23.7	31.3	29.9
Biology	20	70	65.2	20.0	11.1	25.0	20.6
Business studies	13	69.2	76.4	38.5	16.3	31.5	26.2
Chemistry	3	66.7	72.7	33.3	13.9	30.0	24.1
Communication Studies	15	80.0	86.4	6.7	23.8	27.3	32.0
Drama	8	87.5	86.5	25.0	19.6	33.8	30.6
Economics	4	75.0	73.6	0.0	20.1	25.0	26.4
English/English Language	4	100.0	82.9	0.00	17.5	32.5	28.7
English Literature	11	100.0	85.9	27.3	19.1	38.2	30.2
French	10	100.0	78.2	50.0	18.9	46.0	27.6
Design and Technology	11	72.7	74.9	9.1	15.1	25.5	25.3
General Studies	11	100.0	73.9	81.8	17.8	50.0	25.7
Geography	6	83.3	74.3	0.0	19.8	31.7	26.5
German	2	100.0	81.5	100.0	19.3	60.0	28.9
History	11	100.0	80.7	54.5	19.5	44.5	28.6
Information Technology	18	88.9	67.0	5.6	10.9	30.0	21.4
Mathematics	8	100.0	61.9	25.0	17.1	35.0	22.1
Music	1	100.0	86.5	100.0	21.4	50.0	30.7
Other Social Studies	14	85.7	69.7	28.6	16.7	31.4	24.1
Physics	7	100.0	68.6	28.6	14.4	34.3	22.7
Religious Studies	2	100.0	80.2	0.0	22.6	40.0	29.8
Sociology	7	71.4	71.8	14.3	18.4	24.3	25.4
Sports/PE Studies	6	100.0	73.2	0.0	11.4	33.3	23.1

Level 3 GCE A-Level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and Design	43	100.0	98.6	46.5	50.2	87.4	87.5
Biology	27	100.0	96.4	42.3	39.2	79.2	78.6
Business Studies	26	100.0	98.7	46.2	36.8	83.8	80.1
Chemistry	18	100.0	97.6	50.0	49.0	85.6	84.9
Communication Studies	18	100.0	99.4	33.3	37.8	77.8	82.1
Drama	14	100.0	99.5	78.6	40.1	98.6	83.6
Economics	9	100.0	98.9	44.4	52.0	82.2	83.3
English/English Language	23	100.0	99.4	30.4	36.3	77.4	80.9
English Literature	24	100.0	99.5	41.7	46.5	85.8	86.5
French	11	100.0	98.8	63.6	51.5	94.5	87.6
Design and Technology	32	100.0	97.8	40.6	35.0	80.6	77.9
Geography	26	100.0	98.7	50.0	44.5	90.8	84.0
German	2	100.0	98.4	100.0	47.9	100.0	84.8
History	21	100.0	99.0	52.4	44.6	92.4	84.6
Mathematics	30	96.7	96.7	60.0	55.6	94.0	88.8
Music	1	100.0	98.8	0.0	38.9	80.0	81.1
Other Social Studies	23	100.0	97.4	39.1	42.7	84.3	81.8
Physics	24	100.0	96.7	50.0	44.6	94.2	81.7
Religious Studies	10	100.0	98.8	80.0	46.7	102.0	85.6
Sociology	17	100.0	98.2	47.1	44.3	90.6	83.6
Sports/PE Studies	19	100.0	98.0	21.1	30.9	76.8	75.2
Business (VCE)	14	85.7	88.6	0.0	20.6	42.9	60.1

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was on English but work in communication studies and media studies were also sampled.

ENGLISH

Provision in English in the sixth form is **very good**. Both English Language and English Literature are offered at A-Level.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Learning is very good as a result of very good teaching.
- The leadership and management of the department have a significant impact on raising standards.
- Excellent teacher/student relationships contribute significantly to learning and achievement.
- Results in A-Level English Language and Literature in 2003 were below the national average.

Commentary

153. Standards in A-Level Language and Literature dipped below national averages in 2003. In 2002, they were well above the national average. The department has rigorously addressed this and the 2004 results show standards are well above average, significantly higher than those of 2003. In 2003 girls' performance was better than boys' in A-Level language and boys' performance was better than girls' in English Literature.
154. The rise in standards is directly due to very good teaching and the excellent relationships between students and teachers. Lessons are well planned, well managed, well structured and challenging. Teachers are very experienced and knowledgeable and create a positive climate in which students can contribute readily and freely to discussion. Teachers are very effective at helping students to structure their thinking, sharpen their ideas and analyse texts.
155. Achievement in lessons is very good. Students' learning is very good. Students are positive, enthusiastic and committed. They are extremely confident orally and contribute to and initiate purposeful dialogue. The maturity and fluency of some of their writing shows a high degree of understanding of texts and their ability to analyse them. In English Language they can use and apply complex technical vocabulary. In English Literature they read widely around set books and can successfully apply critical skills to new texts.
156. Leadership and management of sixth form English are very good. The head of department is determined to secure the highest possible standards and staff have the highest expectations of their students. Assessment of work is thorough, diagnostic and evaluative. Students are offered individual support, revision sessions and twilight enrichment sessions. Staff are encouraged to take on new areas of work such as A-Level Language, for example, and are paired with a more experienced member of staff for professional development which also ensures continuity when teachers leave.
157. The department has a programme of sixth form visits to theatres and museums and conferences. Students studying the war poets visit the battlefields in Flanders, which deepens their emotional response to the poetry.
158. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. The quality of teaching has improved, and as a result, the standards achieved by all students are now well above the national average.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

159. Literacy skills in A-Level subjects are very good. In vocational subjects, there is good use of technical language and writing and very good discussion. Key Skills in Communication have been in place for two years. They are well co-ordinated and are carried out in Year 12. Students compile their Communications' portfolios from work in their A-Level subjects.

Communication studies

160. One lesson was observed in Year 12. The achievement of students was good as a result of good teaching. Relationships in the lesson were very good and as a result standards seen were good.

Media studies

161. A-Level Media studies is a relatively new sixth form subject which is increasingly popular with students. Standards at A-Level, which are good, have risen by over 11 percentage points in two years. Achievement in lessons seen as part of the inspection is good.
162. Teachers have a high level of subject knowledge and lessons are well managed and structured. Teachers lead focused discussions with supporting resources, which effectively enhance learning. Relationships between teachers and students are excellent.
163. Students are responsive and confident and contribute well to discussion. They show good understanding of media issues and texts and are able to use technical terms and vocabulary. Some student coursework including video work is of high quality. Teachers' assessment of their work is positive, diagnostic, and evaluative.
164. This is a rapidly developing subject, which is well led and guided by enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff. Planning is good and standards have been well analysed to plan for improvement.

Modern foreign languages

Provision in French is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

Students make very good progress and achieve high standards in French.

The teaching is of high quality and places a strong emphasis on developing students' oral skills.

Commentary

165. Students achieve very well in French. The high standards currently evident in the sixth form have been maintained since the previous inspection. In 2003, the A-Level results were above the national average and the AS-level results were well above average. Students manage the transition from GCSE to A-Level very well, quickly learning to deal with more complex language and a much wider range of conversational and written topics. Students develop all four skills of reading, listening, speaking and writing very well.
166. The teaching is very good. The teachers use their very good command of the language to provide demanding lessons, which help students to build up a wide range of vocabulary and develop their grammatical understanding. They use a very good variety of teaching methods and strategies to engage the students and develop their speaking and listening skills.
167. Students' learning is very good. Most show a very good degree of motivation and participate very well in lessons, responding very positively to the strong emphasis given to oral work. Written assignments are prepared thoroughly, and teachers provide students with helpful feedback in class and when marking their work.

168. The subject is led and managed very well. The teaching is shared effectively between six teachers, and students also benefit from the experience of a foreign language assistant for much of the year. The very good teamwork, which characterises provision in the main school, is also evident in the sixth form.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership creates an ethos of high expectations amongst teachers and students.
- Highly qualified and skilled teachers provide a successful and stimulating learning experience for students.
- Students' conscientious and committed attitudes have a positive impact upon their achievement.
- Short-term assessment procedures do not fully inform students of their progress.

Commentary

169. Grades attained by students in the 2003 A-Level examination were just below the national average as they were for the previous year. The achievement of these students was good based on the grades achieved at the end of Year 11. Unvalidated results for 2004 indicate that standards have risen sharply. Although the number of male students entered for the examination was significantly greater than the number of females, the overall standard achieved by female students was marginally higher than that of males. Standards of work seen by students in Years 12 and 13 were above average with some that was well above average. Students studying further mathematics were working appropriately at a higher level than those studying to advanced level.
170. Results for 2003 in the AS level examination were well-above average with some students being awarded the highest grades. These results were similar to those of the previous year. Unvalidated results for 2004 were similar.
171. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers are highly qualified with a strong and secure command of their subject. They are skilled in their teaching techniques and allow students to learn and understand by explaining complex aspects of the subject very clearly. Teaching is lively and stimulating and teachers relate topics to wider aspects of mathematics and to other subjects.
172. Students are encouraged to work collaboratively and individually. They willingly demonstrate and discuss solutions of problems with their peers and exhibit supportive qualities towards each other creating a confident learning environment. Their conscientious and committed attitudes have a positive impact on their learning. Their work is of very high standard, including some especially impressive work on advanced statistics by a Year 13 student.
173. Very good and confident leadership by the head of department creates an ethos of high expectations amongst teachers and students. Teachers mark work but assessment procedures do not fully inform students of their progress.
174. Progress since the previous inspection has been very good. Progress from GCSE to A-Level is now good and teaching and learning very good.

Key skills in mathematics

175. Numeracy skills of all students in the sixth form are assessed by mathematics teachers through a key skills policy that has been designed by the school. Teachers assess students at regular intervals throughout the year on their skills in interpreting information, carrying out calculations and interpreting results and presenting findings. Students are assessed as being at standard, intermediate or advanced levels using as evidence work from any subject in their courses of study. The policy provides an effective assessment of the numeracy skills of all students in the sixth form.

SCIENCE

Biology

Provision in biology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teachers are well qualified subject specialists who are enthusiastic about biology.
- The teachers and students share very good relationships and co-operate well.
- The planning for the two year course is very good.
- The achievement of most students is good at A-Level.
- There is not enough sharing of good practice.
- The achievement of some boys is lower than the other students.

Commentary

176. In 2003 the attainment at GCE ALevel was at the national average. Girls attain higher grades than boys. The data for the individual students demonstrates that most girls attain their predicted grades. However, some lower attaining boys fail to reach their potential. Attainment at AS-level was below the national level in 2003. Again the boys' attainment was well below that of the girls. The attainment in 2004 was higher with boys doing as well as girls.
177. Standard of work seen in lesson is at the expected national average for students in Year 12. Standards of work seen in Year 13 were above the national level. All students show an interest in the subject and are active participants in the lessons.
178. Teaching is good overall and leads to above average achievement in Years 12 and 13. The teachers are well qualified with very good knowledge of the subject and the examination requirements. The course is well planned into modules. The lessons are also well planned using a wide range of teaching styles and approaches. The teachers work as a co-operative team and all show an enthusiasm for the subject. This effective teaching and the commitment of the students ensure that most students achieve well especially at A-Level. The teachers and students share a very good relationship and work in a constructive atmosphere.
179. Students appreciate the quality of the lessons and the support they receive from the teachers. Teachers are willing to spend extra time with any student who does not fully understand a topic or any aspect of the course. Teachers regularly test students understanding and are aware of their progress. In some cases students who are struggling are not effectively supported. The department is aware of this and has plans to introduce a co-ordinated approach by all teachers.
180. The leadership of the department is very good. The team of teachers are committed to raising attainment in biology and are fully aware of the issues needing to be addressed. The management of the department is good with all aspects of the course being well organised including an annual field trip. The teachers are very well qualified and effectively

supported by a specialist biology technician. There are examples of very good practice within the subject but these are not sufficiently identified and shared.

181. This subject was not reported on in detail during the previous inspection.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are very good relationships between teachers and students.
- The students have very good attitudes to the subject.
- The team of four teachers is enthusiastic and very well qualified.
- The identification and support of students who are underachieving are too infrequent.
- The lessons are well planned and delivered in an effective manner.

Commentary

182. In 2003 the attainment at GCE A-Level was at the national average but was higher in 2004. The department has some individual student data from 2003 and 2004 that clearly demonstrates that the majority of students reach their potential grades and in many cases exceed them. Attainment at AS level is at the national level in 2003 and was maintained in 2004.

183. The standard of work seen is at the expected national average in Year 12. The standards seen in Year 13 were above the national level. The students are motivated and have a good attitude to learning. Their achievement is good in both Years 12 and 13 due to these attitudes and the quality of the teaching they experience.

184. Teaching is good overall. The lessons observed were delivered with enthusiasm by teachers who have very good subject knowledge. Lessons are well planned and delivered in a very clear and detailed manner. Students share very good relationships with the teachers and work in a very co-operative manner. This gives students the confidence to enter into class discussions. Modular tests and homework are marked in great detail, with many constructive comments that help the students improve and clearly indicate the attainment of the students. The department has started to use this information to identify students who are underachieving and have devised resources and strategies designed specifically to raise attainment.

185. Teachers support all the students and ensure they all understood the work covered by asking well-structured specific questions throughout lessons. Students appreciate the support and guidance given by the teachers and the fact that the teachers were prepared to help and assist.

186. The leadership of the department is very good. There is a shared clear vision of how the department can improve further. The management of the department is good with well planned units of work and lessons. The monitoring of teaching and learning by observation is not performed with sufficient rigour. The department is determined to raise attainment to an even higher level by ensuring all students reach their potential. The teachers are very well qualified and effectively supported by a specialist chemistry technician.

187. This subject was not inspected in the previous inspection.

Physics

Provision in physics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The AS and A-Level examination results are impressive and have been consistently high.
- Teachers' high expectations and challenging work bring about very good learning.
- ICT is used very well by teachers to support students' learning.
- Students have extensive opportunities for independent work.
- Prior attainment data is not used consistently to establish targets for student attainment.

Commentary

188. Students' attainment in both AS and A-Level examinations since 2002 has been consistently high and well above the national averages. The subject is very popular, and student numbers are large enough to require two teaching groups in both Year 12 and Year 13. Retention of students within the subject is impressive. Almost all students progress from the AS-level course to complete the full A-Level. In Year 13, students' achievement is well above the national average based on their GCSE results. The results from their AS-level coursework assignments completed during Year 12 confirm this.
189. Teaching is very good overall. It is varied, interesting and consistently challenges students to think scientifically. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives, which are shared with students. By making explicit links to students' previous work and using very good probing questions teachers are able to explore and develop students' knowledge and understanding of new ideas.
190. Very good working relationships exist between students and their teachers based on trust and mutual respect. Students enjoy practical activities, are interested because the teachers show the relevance of the physics being taught and respond positively to the teachers' consistently high expectations to work hard and understand new ideas. The teachers provide regular and clear feedback to students on the accuracy of their work but some students are not provided with an acceptably accurate target examination grade. This is because the two teachers of each group derive these from the students' prior attainment data in different ways.
191. Students complete a wide range of different tasks including their assessed coursework assignments. The assignments provide them with extensive opportunities for independent learning, which enables them to effectively develop the skills of researching, making links between ideas from different parts of the syllabus and presenting the outcomes of their work. The students have very good access to ICT facilities in the laboratory and this extends the range of learning opportunities available to them. Teachers make very good use of ICT to support students learning in physics.
192. The leadership and management of the department are good. Teachers share a common purpose based on a drive for improvement and work effectively as a team. The department reviews its performance systematically, which supports a strong focus on raising standards. However, there is a lack of effective co-ordination in relation to assessment practice and target setting.
193. This subject was not inspected during the previous inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The provision of ICT is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are knowledgeable and confident teachers.
- There is sound provision to meet the students' individual needs.
- Students have a positive attitude to their learning.
- Students have a low level of experience and knowledge when they begin the AS course

Commentary

194. In the AS information technology examinations in 2003 all students passed but few gained the highest grades when compared with the national average. No student gained a grade A. Girls achieved better grades than boys. No student sat the A-Level examination at the higher level. This is now available for the current Year 12 group. This will provide students with a broader and more challenging course.
195. The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Good planning and high expectations enable students to complete their individual studies with the secure support of an experienced and knowledgeable teacher. Although students learn to a satisfactory standard, the small number of students limits excitement and rigour because there are insufficient numbers of students to generate a variety of ideas in group discussions and to extend understanding of the subject further.
196. The students are confident and motivated. They are attentive and concerned with the quality and accuracy of their work. They work independently when required to do so to research their studies. Consequently all the students make sound progress and they achieve soundly within their capabilities.
197. The students' work is monitored regularly. Helpful and supportive comments are given which enable the students to identify their weaknesses and improve further. The students feel that they are informed about the progress they are making with their work. Students who are not studying this subject receive a sound education in the use of ICT as part of a basic skills course. There is good access to the computers for all the students outside of formal lessons to facilitate independent research.
198. Post-16 provision for this subject is managed to a satisfactory standard. This is because the students are assessed regularly and they are adequately supported by well maintained computer equipment and facilities. This subject was not reported on during the previous inspection.

Information and communication across the curriculum

199. All the students receive good support from the use of computers to enhance their studies. They learn the basic skills to do this in a course provided for all students. There is easy access to the computers whenever required for their independent research. The computer is also used effectively as part of their courses. The students use the computer confidently as an effective tool wherever it will enhance and extend their studies, for example, in physics.

HUMANITIES

Geography, history and social studies were the focus subjects in this area of the curriculum. Work was sampled in psychology and religious studies.

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A-Level examination results were above average in 2003 and improved further in 2004.
- The very good joint leadership and management of the department evaluates the work of the department very effectively.
- Teachers use a wide range of attractive resources to engage and challenge students so they achieve very well.

Commentary

200. Standards are well above average. Examination results at ALevel in 2003 were above average and in 2004 unvalidated results indicate further improvement with over two thirds of students gaining the highest grades. These results represent very good achievement for the large group of students concerned when compared to their attainment at GCSE.
201. Students achieve very well because teaching and learning are very good. Teaching is never less than good and sometimes excellent. Teachers create and use a wide range of very attractive resources, including ICT, which engage students' interest and challenge them to think in a geographical way. Teachers' knowledge is very good. They are enthusiastic about their subject and students respond very well to the high expectations teachers have of them. Students use specialist subject vocabulary with accuracy and show a very good understanding of more complex geographical concepts. High quality fieldwork enriches the A-Level course for all students.
202. The department benefits from the complementary strengths of its joint leaders whose leadership and management are very good. Teachers in the department continually evaluate their work and are committed to further improvement. Teachers collaborate well and the quality of learning and teaching is monitored effectively.
203. An area for development is the increased sharing of good practice to promote consistent teaching of very high quality.
204. Improvement since the previous inspection is good because examination results have continued to rise. The department has both the capacity and the commitment to improve further.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are well above average.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which they use effectively to promote very good learning.
- Students are well supported with note-making skills.
- Students display very good attitudes to learning.
- The monitoring of students' progress is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

205. AS and A-Level results were well above average in 2003. All students who were entered for the A-Level examination in Year 13 gained a pass grade, and over half the students gained the highest grades, A and B. The AS-level examination results were also good. All students who started the course completed it, gaining a pass grade, and over half gained the highest grades, A and B. Provisional results for 2004 are similar to those of 2003. The results for many students are above those expected from their GCSE results. Overall there is little difference in the performance of boys and girls. Retention rates are good, and in 2003 most students completed the AS and A-Level courses.
206. Standards in the current Years 12 and 13 are well above average. The evidence from inspection is that the achievement of students on AS and A-Level courses is very good. They have a very good knowledge and understanding across all aspects of the course. Students analyse historical sources critically and evaluate a wide range of evidence effectively to produce well balanced arguments, as observed in a Year 13 lesson on collectivisation during the Stalin period. Their written work is carefully organised and well structured. Essays on Stalin's power struggle and Mussolini as prime minister indicate good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter and their ability to evaluate and select appropriate evidence. Students are able to discuss their ideas with accuracy and confidence.
207. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. Lessons are well organised with a very good range of strategies and resources that promote very good learning. Teachers give good quality explanations and provide challenging questions to extend the students' understanding of the subject matter. A very good feature is the support that students are given with note-making and recording information. The marking of students' work is good and they have good guidance on how to improve. Relationships in lessons are good and students demonstrate very good attitudes to learning. They are attentive and work effectively, both independently and collaboratively.
208. Work in history is well led and managed. Teamwork is a good feature in planning and delivering the AS and A-Level courses. The curriculum is good and is enhanced by a residential visit to Berlin for students in Year 13. Teachers' expertise is very well matched to meet the needs of the curriculum. There is a good stock of reference materials held in the department and the school library. The use of data is underdeveloped. There is insufficient use of examination results and assessment data to monitor students' progress.
209. This subject was not inspected in detail during the previous inspection.

Sociology

Provision in sociology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in A-Level examinations were above average in 2003 and improved further in 2004.
- Students achieve very well, teachers have high expectations and lessons are challenging.
- The subject is very well led and managed and teachers collaborate well to give students a rich and varied learning experience.

Commentary

210. Examination results have been either above or well above average for the last three years. In 2003 students achieved better results in A-Level sociology than in many other subjects they took. Unvalidated results for 2004 show that almost half of students gained the highest A-Level grades. These results represent very good achievement for all the students concerned. In work seen during the inspection standards are well above average. Students can discuss complex issues confidently and have a very good understanding of specialist terminology.

211. Teaching and learning are very good because teachers are knowledgeable, they explain their subject very clearly and lessons are conducted at a fast pace. Students have very mature attitudes to learning and respond very well to the challenging teaching they receive. Teachers are particularly good at developing positive and enthusiastic dynamics within the groups they teach. The use of ICT to support learning is presently underdeveloped.
212. The department is very well led and managed. Teachers collaborate very effectively and their contrasting teaching styles engage the interest of the students and allow them to learn in different ways. The department is characterised by the way in which it treats students as individuals and allows them to study flexibly. Improvement since the previous inspection is good and the department has both the capacity and commitment to improve further.

Psychology

213. One lesson was observed in Year 13. In this lesson the achievement of students was good. The teacher demonstrated very good subject knowledge and as a result standards of work seen are high.

Religious studies

214. In 2003, results in ALevel religious studies were very high compared to those achieved nationally. Ten students were entered for the examination, all of whom gained a pass grade, and eight gained the highest grades of A and B. Students achieve these high standards as a result of the very good teaching they receive. One lesson was seen in Year 13, and the achievement of the students was very good. The teacher demonstrated very good subject knowledge, relationships were very good and the students were highly motivated and engaged in their learning.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

No subjects were inspected in depth but the work in product design was sampled.

Product design

215. In 2003 standards are above average for AS students at the end of Year 12. Standards are also above average for the ALevel students at the end of Year 13. In lessons, standards are above average and achievement is good.
216. The quality of teaching and learning is good and sometimes very good. Teachers' expectations are high and the work is challenging.
217. At both AS and A-Level, students experiment and explore a range of design concepts leading to creative outcomes. Design ideas are effectively based on extensive research using a number of sources. Very good use is made of ICT in coursework folios for research and presentation.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and design

The focus for the inspection was on art and design and theatre studies. Work in music was sampled.

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- In GCSE AS and A-Level courses standards are well above average.
- The very good achievements of the students are supported by very good teaching and learning.
- The range of the taught curriculum is very good.
- There is insufficient storage and display space for students' work.
- Teamwork amongst teachers is excellent.

Commentary

218. In the GCSE and AS course standards are well above average. The trend over time is that standards are above or well above average. There are a very good range of opportunities for students to study various aspects of art and design. These include fine art, graphics, photography and contextual studies (history of art). The students achieve very well. Many students choose to study the subject in further and higher education institutions and achieve good results.
219. Students understand very well what they are doing and produce work of a high level of originality and quality. They achieve very well when working in both two and three dimensions. They show very good attitudes, striving to produce their best work. They produce detailed, well designed and composed sketch books, with very good written justifications and evaluations. In their work the students show a very good interpretation of the wide range of artists they study and how they influence their own style. There is a very good link between the various aspects of work they study, and aspects of fine art, graphics and photography are very successfully integrated into their final work.
220. Teaching and learning are very good. The well qualified teachers cover a wide range of subject expertise applying this very well to the evaluation of the work of each student. Assessment procedures and its use are very good. Expectation and challenge are very high and the students respond accordingly.
221. There is excellent teamwork amongst staff supported by the very good leadership and management of the head of department. Staff meet together frequently to discuss provision and the progress of the students. There is a good balance between two-dimensional and three-dimensional works. Overall standards are further enhanced with the very good provision for photography and for ICT. However, except for the photography work room in a separate building, the accommodation is cramped with limited storage space and opportunities to display work. Good displays around the school celebrate well the students' high standards. There has been a good improvement since the previous inspection.

Theatre studies

Provision in theatre studies is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are consistently well above average in the GCE A-Level examinations and students achieve very well.
- Teachers have a deep knowledge of what they teach.
- Students work diligently to improve the quality of their performance.
- There are occasional missed opportunities to extend students' written language.
- The department's leadership and management are sharply focused on raising standards even further.
- The curriculum is enriched by a very good variety of extra-curricular activities.

Commentary

222. Standards are well above average in AS and A-Level examinations. In their practical work, students use a very good range of techniques in dramatising the texts they study. Many show exceptional refinement in conveying character and atmosphere in their improvisations

and scripted work. The students' written work, though above average, does not always do justice to the insight they reveal in their practical work. Very good standards have been maintained over the last four years. The students come to their course with above average standards and build very well on their knowledge of the theatre and its conventions as they move through Years 12 and 13. The standards students reach represent very good achievement in relation to their earlier knowledge and skill. Students achieve particularly well in their practical work.

223. Teaching is invariably very good in Years 12 and 13, with some that is excellent. All teaching is informed by the teachers' excellent knowledge of the theatre and their enthusiasm for the subject. The students, in turn, thrive in the creative atmosphere for learning established in the department. They work very well together and are eager to refine and perfect their work. There are occasional missed opportunities to encourage students to justify their views by the use of more logical arguments.
224. The department is very well led and managed. The head of department has established a very well-informed, cohesive, self-critical group of teachers with a passion for excellence. There is very good range of extra-curricular activities that deepen students' knowledge of the theatre and help them to see the relationship of their studies to the world of theatre. Almost all students who start the GCE courses complete them. A high proportion of the students in Year 13 intend to continue their studies at college or university. The department has gone from strength to strength since the previous inspection. Assessment has been strengthened and is now very good.

Music

225. Standards are above average and there is good achievement. This is as a result of teaching that provides challenge and a high level of individual support. Students value the breadth of extra-curricular provision and the expert tuition provided from members of the department and the visiting instrumental teachers. The well resourced accommodation includes adequate ICT provision to support their studies. The deployment of staff for teaching the classes fails to enable students to experience a wide variety of teaching styles and expertise.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL SUBJECTS

The focus was on business studies. Work in economics was sampled.

Provision in business education is **good** with **some very good features**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are good with very good achievement.
- Teachers' very good subject knowledge is shared effectively with students with a commitment to improving standards.
- Students' very good attitudes make a valuable contribution to a productive learning environment.
- Cramped accommodation restricts access to resources and limits activities undertaken by students.

Commentary

226. Standards in A and AS Level were well above and above average in 2003. In 2004 standards in AS level improved but A-Level standards were lower. Standards for students taking AVCE and GNVQ Intermediate are good with students obtaining at or above expected grades in 2003 and 2004. Achievement is very good, particularly when compared to standards achieved at GCSE level. Recruitment is good and the majority of students successfully complete their chosen course.

227. Teaching is good with examples of very good teaching. Very good subject knowledge is shared with students so they are able to consolidate and apply their knowledge of business organisations effectively. Teachers' planning is good, and provides opportunities for students to develop a range of techniques and in-depth understanding of business concepts necessary for success on their course. Students have very good attitudes and work productively in teams. A and AS level students use case study materials well to analyse information and make appropriate business decisions. Students have good written and very good oral skills, using technical language well in discussions and coursework. The use of ICT is good, but there is limited access to resources because of cramped accommodation. This restricts opportunities to develop investigative skills and independent learning. Teachers review students' work regularly and the identification of strengths and weaknesses helps them to improve and gain high standards.
228. Leadership and management of the department are good. Data is used well to monitor students' progress and attainment. The head of department is aware of the strengths and weaknesses but the informal monitoring strategies result in inconsistencies across the department.
229. Overall, progress since the previous inspection has been good although the use of assessment data to inform planning and refine schemes of work remains an area for further development.

Economics

230. Standards in 2003 were below average but in 2004 were well above with a high percentage of students achieving A and B grades.
231. Standards seen in lessons are good. Students achieve a high level of knowledge and understanding of a range of economic concepts. Teaching is good with well-planned lessons incorporating activities that encourage students to explore and examine issues effectively that affect the local and national economy. Students' attitudes are mature and they participate productively in their learning.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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