

INSPECTION REPORT

Chelmer Valley High School

Broomfield, Chelmsford, Essex

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115345

Headteacher: Mr David Franklin

Lead inspector: Brian Rowe

Dates of inspection: 4th - 8th October 2004

Inspection number: 268771

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:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll;	1,118
School address:	Court Road Broomfield Chelmsford Essex
Postcode:	CM1 7ER
Telephone number:	01245 440232
Fax number:	01245 441774
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Dr Gill Sturman
Date of previous inspection:	10-May-1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Chelmer Valley High is a mixed comprehensive school for pupils aged 11-18 situated near to Chelmsford, Essex. The catchment area is very large and over half the pupils use school buses. Since the last inspection the school has gained specialist status as an engineering college, a DfES Achievement Award for improved examination results, Sportsmark Award, Investors in People status, Training School status, Career Quality Award, Network Learning Community status and an local education authority Schools' community Award. Some of the pupils come from families that are economically and socially disadvantaged, but many are from more professional backgrounds. There are currently 1,118 pupils on roll, including 140 in the sixth form, making it a larger than average sized secondary school. The proportion of boys (562) to girls (546) fluctuates each year. Very few pupils come from minority ethnic groups, a much lower proportion than average, and none are at the early stages of using the English language. There are no refugees or pupils in local care at school. About 5 per cent of the pupils receive free school meals and this proportion is well below the national average. Pupils' attainment on entry is average, but there are fewer very able pupils than usual as many attend local selective schools. About 10 per cent of pupils have been identified as having special educational needs, of whom 20 have a Statement of Special Educational Need. These proportions are below average when compared to other secondary schools. Staff turnover is similar to most schools, although there has been some difficulty in recruiting staff for some subjects. However, the school remains fully staffed. Many areas of the school benefit from new and refurbished buildings.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1695	Brian Rowe	Lead inspector	
16472	Catherine Stormonth	Lay inspector	
22657	Mark Madeley	Team inspector	Mathematics 11-16
33324	Joanna Fullwood	Team inspector	English, including post-16
21906	John Scottow	Team inspector	Science Chemistry post-16
20767	Jerry Royle	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
32672	Stephen Hammond-Evans	Team inspector	Art and design
10288	John Richards	Team inspector	Design and technology, including post-16
3755	Trevor Hulbert	Team inspector	Geography Psychology post-16
10895	David Wasp	Team inspector	History Citizenship
15075	Bryan Goodman-Stephens	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
2032	Christopher Polyblank	Team inspector	Music
14446	Barry Simmons	Team inspector	Physical education
15485	Roger Butler	Team inspector	Religious education
15277	Chris Vidler	Team inspector	Business education Business studies post-16
32919	Sue Hartropp	Team inspector	Special educational needs English as an additional language
11548	David Lee	Team inspector	Mathematics post-16

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Chelmer Valley High is a very good school that continually strives to improve and provides very good value for money. The headteacher, very strongly supported by senior staff, provides outstanding leadership. His clear vision has been a determining factor ensuring success in national and local awards and designation as a specialist engineering college. Management is very good and ensures that teaching, learning and pupils' achievement are improving because of high expectations and rigorous self-evaluation.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The school has an extremely positive ethos and as a result pupils feel secure, have very good attitudes to their learning, are happy and develop into mature and confident young adults.
- The quality of care, welfare and arrangements for health and safety are excellent.
- Standards are above average and pupils achieve well because of their very positive attitudes to learning and good teaching.
- The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and the deputy heads share his clear vision and commitment to raising standards and improving the quality of education.
- Management is very good with very good self-evaluation and staff development.
- Although teaching and learning are good overall, some lessons are not sufficiently planned to match the needs of all pupils.
- The acquisition of specialist engineering college status is contributing much to raising pupils' aspirations, developing a pride in the school and enhancing its reputation locally and nationally.
- The way the school seeks, values and acts upon pupils' and students' views is very good.
- The provision for vocational education in the sixth form is underdeveloped.

Overall, improvement since the last inspection has been very good. The issues identified in the previous inspection have been successfully addressed, with the exception of ensuring that the provision for collective worship meets statutory requirements.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Pupils achieve well throughout the school. The overall standard of their current work is above average. Pupils start school with average attainment, but several have underdeveloped literacy skills. During the last four years, the overall results from the national Year 9 tests in English, mathematics and science indicate that standards have remained above average, with some fluctuations between subjects and years. Recent results in English, mathematics and science show that when compared to prior attainment, pupils make good progress and achieve well. GCSE examinations show a steady improvement over recent years and, although at an average standard in 2003, increased significantly in 2004 to become the highest ever school results. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 make good progress and achieve well. Examination results in the sixth form have remained broadly similar over the last two years and are likely to be average in 2004. Based on work seen, pupils achieve well in relation to their ability and prior attainment. Throughout the school, pupils with special educational needs achieve well in relation to their targets. The very few pupils with English as an additional language progress well and their achievement is good.

The school gives a high priority to both pupils' academic and personal development. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, throughout the school is very good. Attendance is satisfactory and improving. Pupils have very positive

attitudes to their learning and to school. They behave very well and develop very positive relationships with each other and staff.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The overall quality of education provided by the school is good. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Arrangements for assessing pupils' work are good. There are examples of very good teaching in most departments and pupils have very positive attitudes to their work.

Several aspects of the overall educational provision are strengths within the school. These include: the extensive range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities, the excellent level of care given to pupils and the links with the community and other schools being developed as part of its engineering college status. There are no significant weaknesses and the school has a determination to improve all aspects of the education it provides.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality and effectiveness of governance, leadership and management throughout the school are very good. Financial management is excellent. A significant strength is the outstanding leadership and commitment of the headteacher to ensure students and staff aim high. Leadership and management are raising standards effectively. The leadership of middle management is improving through staff training and carefully planned delegation, but the monitoring of teaching and learning by a few subject leaders is not sufficiently rigorous or developed. The arrangements for staff development, performance management and induction are a particular strength of the school.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents have very positive views and the school's image and reputation in the local community are very strong. They raised issues regarding the information they receive on pupils' progress. The inspection found that in part their concerns are justified. Parents would prefer consultations to be earlier in the school year. Inspectors found reports are inconsistent across subjects. Pupils hold very positive views about school. They say that there is a safe and happy environment where everyone is respected and treated fairly. They feel that their opinions are considered, valued and acted upon and are positive about the Student Union. Inspectors agree with the pupils' positive views.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the school should do:

- improve planning to ensure a close match of work to pupils' needs;
- improve the provision for vocational education in the sixth form;

and, to meet statutory requirements by:

- providing a daily act of collective worship;
- ensuring religious education is taught to all sixth form students.

SIXTH FORM SECTION OF THE SUMMARY REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good and it provides good value for money. Teaching and learning are good, overall, and in many instances are very good. Students achieve well and have very positive attitudes towards their learning. Standards are above average and have improved since the previous inspection. Leadership and management are good and any areas for development are fully recognised. These include more rigorous monitoring of departments and a need to increase the breadth of vocational opportunities. Students are very well supported in their learning and their views are actively sought and acted upon. However, insufficient attention is paid to the preparation of students for advanced level study, including the development of their independent learning skills.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Many examination results are above average and students achieve well.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and enthuse the students.
- Students show very positive attitudes to their learning and to the school.
- A limited range of vocational opportunities for students.
- Very strong links with the local community and with other educational institutions.
- There is limited opportunity to develop independent learning and study skills.
- Students are very well supported and cared for in their learning.

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 good . Management is good; the A-level courses are well organized so that students achieve well. The examination results have been above average. Teaching and learning are good and students benefit from a wide and stimulating range of teaching methods.
Mathematics	Provision is good . Students achieve well, building on their performance at GCSE because of effective teaching and good support from staff. The number of students taking the subject is increasing due to effective leadership and management.
Science Chemistry	Provision is good . Students achieve because teachers are enthusiastic, experienced specialists. The subject is well led and there is a strong commitment to improvement. Examination results are above average. Students' relationships are positive and this ensures good learning.
Humanities Psychology	Provision is very good . Students achieve very well because teachers' very good subject and syllabus knowledge provides detailed support. Students feel particularly well supported. Good subject management and leadership has minimized problems associated with recent staffing changes. This is an increasingly popular and successful subject.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing Design technology	Provision is very good . Leadership and management are excellent and high standards are obtained. Students' achievement is very good because of their willingness to learn. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers communicate their knowledge and enthusiasm very effectively.
Business Business studies	Provision is satisfactory . Students are making satisfactory progress. There are limited opportunities to experience the business world. Teaching is improving and satisfactory overall. Leadership and management are satisfactory.
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 college. 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

Overall, students receive good personal and academic guidance and support and this contributes well to their good achievement. Their progress is reviewed regularly and their views are actively sought and valued. There is, however, insufficient preparation for advanced level study skills.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management are good and the sixth form is well organised on a day-to-day basis. There is a clear sense of purpose in raising students' attainment and achievement. There are very good procedures for encouraging co-operation with other institutions. Procedures to review and monitor subjects are not sharply focused. The vocational curriculum is underdeveloped.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students are very positive and supportive of the school. They are very enthusiastic about the quality of teaching and the opportunities for enrichment. They are particularly appreciative of the support and advice given by teachers. In conversations with inspectors, they refuted most of the negative views identified in the students' questionnaire. Students are very good role models and take pride in the example they set for the rest of the school.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

During the last four years, the overall results from the national Year 9 tests indicate that standards have remained **above** average, with some fluctuations between subjects and years. Recent results show that when compared to their prior attainment, pupils make **good** progress overall and achieve **well**. Results in GCSE examinations show a steady improvement over recent years and were at an average standard in 2003. In 2004 the GCSE results improved significantly. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 make **good** progress and achieve **well**. Examination results in the sixth form have remained broadly similar over the last two years and were at the national average. Based on work seen, pupils achieve **well** in relation to their ability and prior attainment. Throughout the school, pupils with special educational needs achieve **well** in relation to their targets. The very few pupils with English as an additional language progress **well** and their achievement is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have been above average in Years 7 to 9 for the past four years and have steadily improved in Years 10 and 11 during the same period. In 2004, results rose significantly in the Year 9 assessment tests and at GCSE and in the sixth form in most subjects.
- Progress and achievement in most subjects throughout the school are good. They are very good in art, drama, design and technology, music and psychology.
- In 2004 the proportion of pupils gaining five A*-C and five A*-G grades was higher than their prior attainment at the end of Year 9 would indicate.
- The good teaching and learning have a positive impact on pupils' achievement.

Commentary

Years 7 - 9

- 1 The national assessment results in Year 9 indicate that pupils reach standards that are, overall, above average in English, mathematics and science. The table below indicates average scores from 2001 to 2003 in English as the results for 2004 have not yet been validated. The profile of pupils' ability is distorted as a significant proportion of the most able pupils attend local selective schools. In addition, a significant minority of pupils enter the school with well below average reading and spelling skills, which impede their progress in many subjects. Given that pupils' attainment on entry to school is close to average, the results obtained by the end of Year 9 represent good achievement.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	34.6	33.3
mathematics	36.7 (35.9)	35.4 (34.7)
science	33.2 (34.3)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 195 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

- 2 The school is successful in raising standards. In Years 7 to 9 the standards observed in lessons and recorded in pupils' written work are above the national expectation in the majority of subjects. Standards are well above average in design and technology, music and art. Overall this represents good achievement in subjects, since standards on entry across the curriculum are average overall. Good and very good teaching and learning have a great impact on raising standards and achievement. The attainment in tests at the end of 2004 showed a marked increase in most subjects. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well overall and make good progress in most subjects in relation to their targets.

The achievement and attainment of the few pupils with English as an additional language are good and in line with that of other pupils.

Years 10 and 11

- 3 The table below indicates that pupils reach standards that are at the national average. Pupils' achievement is good based on prior attainment at the end of Year 9. In 2004 the GCSE results improved considerably and unconfirmed data indicates that 63 per cent gained five or more A*-C grades. Results in English, mathematics and science are above average and pupils achieve well in these subjects.

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	53 (57)	52 (50)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	89 (96)	91 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	98 (98)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	35.2 (37.7)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 184 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the average for the previous two years.

- 4 Pupils' achievement in lessons is good in nearly all subjects and achievement in art, drama, design technology and music is very good. The achievement of pupils gaining five A*-C grades is average compared to similar schools. However, fewer pupils than average gain the very highest examination grades. Good teaching and learning and the very positive attitudes of most pupils result in good achievement. The 2004 examinations continue the trend of improving results.
- 5 Overall, standards attained by pupils with special educational needs are good. Pupils improve their reading skills because of a successful reading intervention programme in Years 7 to 9. Progress in spelling and writing is not as positive, as there is insufficient structured teaching based on diagnostic assessment. Individual support from teaching assistants and teachers allows pupils with special educational needs and the few with English as an additional language to follow examination courses and achieve well.

Sixth Form

- 6 Standards in sixth form examinations were average in 2002 and 2003, but there was a wide variation in subject examination results, with art and design, English, design technology, sociology and sports studies performing above national averages. Standards in biology, geography and information technology were below the national expectation. Results increased in 2004 in most subjects.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	87.5 (89.2)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	26.0 (38.7)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per pupil	215.7 (223.5)	258.2 (263.3)

There were 47 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for 2002.

- 7 The attainment of students on entry to the sixth form is average, as the entry policy for the sixth form is one of open access and intended to include all pupils. The standards seen during the inspection, however, were above average in many subjects, which represents good achievement and progress. The achievement of students in psychology is very good.

Students with special educational needs make good progress in the sixth form, having high aspirations and achieving good examination results.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attendance is **satisfactory** and improving and punctuality is **good**. Pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are **very good**. Aspects of personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are also **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attitudes and behaviour are very good and pupils feel happy, keen and proud of their school.
- The school sets very high expectations for conduct and keeping to the uniform code.
- Pupils' moral and social development are particularly strong.
- The school's action to promote attendance is very good.
- Opportunities for developing independence in learning and study skills are limited.

Commentary

8 Most pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and enjoy a high quality school life. Pupils praised the school's good reputation and engineering specialist status, positive and caring teachers, excellent food and feel that the school builds character and confidence and is innovative and forward thinking. Pupils had to grudgingly concede that the new uniform yellow card system did ensure that they are very smartly turned out in their uniforms, which they wear with pride. The ethos is very positive and most pupils have a real desire to succeed by working hard and taking advantage of the huge number of opportunities to extend their personal development and experience.

9 Pupils are helpful, considerate and consistently behave very well. Break-times and lunchtimes are pleasant and relaxed. At the beginning and end of the school day, pupils show good self-discipline as they make their way to and from the buses. Pupils show reverence during assemblies, when their behaviour is exemplary. The school rigorously implements behaviour policies to successfully deter bullying, racism and other forms of harassment. There is a high rate of fixed term exclusion, which reflects the tough stance the school takes on physical and verbal abuse, which are not tolerated. The rate of permanent exclusion is very low as the table below indicates.

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
No ethnic group recorded

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1010	118	1
1	8	0
61	9	0

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

10 Personal development is fostered very well and the school received the prestigious Essex Award in recognition of this. Spiritual development is good, especially when pupils explore and reflect on values and beliefs and understand feelings and emotions. These elements feature well in high quality assemblies, poetry and writing, in drama, religious education, art, music and in personal and social education. Positive reinforcement of the values of respect, care for others, trust, fairness and high moral standards are real strengths. This helps pupils to be considerate and thoughtful in their approaches to others. Social development is very good and pupils take an active part in very successful productions, musical and sporting activities and many rewarding challenges and competitions. Cultural development is good and learning about local, British and multi-cultural traditions is enriched by visits and visitors. The arts in particular are very strong and music, art and drama extend pupils' appreciation of a wide range of classic works.

11 Pupils with special educational needs take pride in their school, talking with interest and enthusiasm about their work, the support they receive and the activities on offer to them. They build trusting relationships with the key staff. They have positive attitudes towards their learning and to each other. The staff of the special educational needs department work hard to raise the self-esteem and confidence of the pupils so that they take a full part in the life of the school.

Attendance

12 Attendance has improved in the last year and has continued to be satisfactory, it is just above the national average. Unauthorised absence rates are declining and reflect the very effective and efficient follow up of absences. A significant minority, however, have very poor attendance and many students take holidays despite the best efforts of the school to improve attendance and put out pleas to give education a greater priority. Punctuality is good and timekeeping during the school day is also good.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)			
Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data:	7.5	School data:	0.5
National data:	7.2	National data:	1.1
<i>The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.</i>			

Sixth form

13 Students' behaviour and attitudes to work and to school life are very good. Discussions with students found that most are very pleased with the provision, especially the teaching and the school system and trust placed in them for private study. Students demonstrate maturity, self-discipline and commitment to succeed. Students did have concerns with the way they were prepared for the sixth form when they transferred from the main school. They felt unprepared for the additional rigour and demands of advanced level study and not fully equipped with the study skills to cope with the demands of the courses. They felt that more opportunities to develop greater independence at an earlier stage would have been helpful. Students are keen to take on responsibility and lead the impressive students' union in an admirable way. They take an active part in the many enrichment activities, often showing leadership in shared reading, clubs and school events. Students were not always aware of all the opportunities available and called for better communications on what they could do as individuals to enhance their future prospects. Attendance is good and punctuality to school and to lessons is also good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The overall quality of education provided by the school is **good**. The overall quality of the curriculum in Years 7 to 11 and the sixth form is **good**. The opportunity for enrichment, including out-of-school activities, is **very good**. The quality and quantity of accommodation and resources to meet the needs of the Years 7 to 13 curriculum are **good**. Arrangements to ensure pupils' care and welfare are **excellent**. Pupils and sixth form students receive **good** support, advice and guidance. The extent of the school's involvement of pupils and students in its work and development is **very good**. The partnership with parents is **good** and there are **excellent** community links. Relationships with other schools and colleges are **very good**.

Teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning in all years is **good**. Assessment of pupils' work is **good** in Years 7 to 11 and in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Effective teaching promotes positive attitudes and personal development in pupils.
- Teaching motivates pupils and supports them to achieve well throughout the school.

- There is insufficient attention in some lessons to matching work to meet the needs of pupils with different abilities.
- Regular school reviews ensure that senior staff are aware of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning, but there is insufficient monitoring by some subject leaders.
- Teaching in art, design and technology, drama, history, music and psychology are very good.

Commentary

- 14 Teaching is good, overall, throughout the school. The overall quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection. There is now a much higher proportion of excellent and very good lessons and teaching remains a strength of the school. During the last few years important strategic decisions have been made to raise standards and improving teaching has been an important priority for staff development. Effective management has ensured that improvement to teaching and learning has been accomplished in many subjects and examination courses. The pupils are very positive about the school and the teaching they receive. They are well behaved overall and have very positive attitudes to their work. Teachers make a substantial contribution to their personal development.
- 15 Inspectors judge the quality of teaching and learning from a wide range of evidence that includes observing lessons, an analysis of past test and examination results, a scrutiny of pupils' work, talking to pupils about their work and analysing school data and documentation. During the inspection 140 lessons were observed. A summary of the teaching is shown in the table below.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 140 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
8 (6%)	46 (33%)	50 (36%)	33 (23%)	3 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

- 16 The above table indicates a high proportion of good and very good teaching. During the inspection the most effective teaching was observed in art, design and technology, drama, history, music and psychology. Although teaching is good in all years, it is strongest in the sixth form. However, despite this good overall profile there are still aspects that need to be improved. These are related to insufficient planning to match work to pupils' ability or lessons that lacked pace and rigour and where learning was too slow. In a few lessons teachers did not have high enough expectations of what pupils could achieve, especially the most able. In a few subjects there is insufficient internal self-review leading to strategies for improvement, but in others this is a very strong feature. There are examples of very good teaching to be found in most departments. Parents were positive about teaching and their views were borne out during the inspection.
- 17 Pupils have very positive attitudes towards their work and they readily conform to school rules and conventions. Many have well developed learning skills, but some, mostly boys, find it hard to study and research without support from staff. Pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are average when they start school, but soon improve due to effective teaching. Pupils are competent using ICT and these features ensure that learning is good and pupils make good progress in lessons.
- 18 Overall, teaching and learning for pupils with special educational needs across the curriculum are good. The majority of the teaching assistants are experienced and effective. Their individual skills, expertise and interests are mainly used to very good effect in subject areas, for example in art, music and modern foreign languages lessons. However, they are not always sufficiently informed about lesson plans or what is required of them. Individual education plans contain much helpful information about the needs of individual pupils, but

subject teachers do not always take sufficient note of these when planning lessons. Some lesson plans contain different activities for pupils with special educational needs, but these plans are not yet sufficiently developed or implemented to aid individual progress consistently.

Sixth form

- 19 During the inspection, 25 sixth form lessons were observed. Nearly half were very good or excellent, three-quarters were good or better and all were satisfactory or better. A scrutiny of students' work and talking with students confirmed this good level of teaching and learning. The teaching has improved over the years because of the intervention of the senior management team who monitor the quality of teaching and learning and the support given to students on a regular basis. This improved teaching is having a direct impact on students' achievement and standards of work. Regular feedback on how well students are doing is provided and they are appreciative of this drive to raise standards.
- 20 Procedures for assessment are good, overall, across all years. Good progress has been made in the development and implementation of assessment methods. Teachers show pupils what level or grade they are on and what they must do to improve. Most departments have produced clear and thorough reports to inform parents about progress. Teachers are able to get information from a central system created by an assessment manager to track pupils' progress. Books are marked with constructive comments on how to improve, most targets are specific and manageable and report comments are detailed. However, there are some subjects, including science, where pupils do not know how to improve because comments both in books and reports are too vague to be helpful. In Years 9 to 11, pupils know how the work is appropriate to examination requirements and what grade they are likely to get. Gifted and talented pupils are identified and their progress carefully monitored as a separate group, but this is not happening for pupils with special educational needs as assessment data is not analysed closely enough by the special educational needs co-ordinator. In the sixth form, students' work is thoroughly and constructively marked to show its merits, its deficiencies and how to improve it. Teachers are knowledgeable about examination techniques and how work is assessed. In most subjects there is thorough, diagnostic and evaluative feedback.

The curriculum

The overall quality of the curriculum for all pupils in Years 7 to 11 is **good**. The opportunity for enrichment, including out-of-school activities, is **very good**. The quality and quantity of accommodation and resources to meet the needs of all pupils in Years 7 to 11 are **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Curricular opportunities are well matched to the needs of all students and provide a broad range of activities.
- There is a very good range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities.
- The accommodation and resources are good and enhance learning.
- There is no daily act of collective worship.

Commentary

- 21 The curricular opportunities for all pupils are broad and include a good choice of vocational courses in Years 10 and 11. A number of curriculum initiatives have been introduced to provide a more relevant learning experience for those pupils who find the traditional curriculum does not meet their needs. In Years 10 and 11 there are four pathways offered: scientific, traditional, vocational and flexible. The scientific pathway is for pupils wishing to take three science subjects at GCSE, together with statistics. The vocational pathway offers a choice from three dual award courses, equivalent to two GCSEs. The courses include work placements in local schools, hospitals and businesses. Pupils on the flexible course take five GCSEs, vocational courses at the local college and have extended work placements. The curriculum is monitored regularly and any proposed changes are thoroughly evaluated.

- 22 The time allocated to ICT in Years 10 and 11 restricts the amount of progress pupils make in the full GCSE course. Although there are high quality assemblies each week for each year group, the curriculum does not fully comply with the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship.
- 23 Provision for gifted and talented pupils has recently been established and is an improving area. A co-ordinator has been appointed who is working with subject departments to organise special events for groups of pupils, including a summer school, a challenge day, out-of-hour clubs and other activities to improve their learning.
- 24 The curriculum provides well for pupils with special educational needs. An alternative programme in Years 10 and 11 allows them to study a reduced number of subjects more suited to their needs and interests. Pupils are involved in many extra-curricular activities and feel fully included in these. There is some carefully considered withdrawal from lessons for support with reading, but this needs to be reviewed to ensure that pupils do not always miss the same lessons. There are effective strategies to support the very few who use English as an additional language.
- 25 The school manages the curriculum well. Drama is taught throughout Years 7 to 9 and a second modern foreign language is offered from Year 8. In Years 10 and 11 all pupils, other than the small number on the alternative pathway, take a design and technology subject at GCSE. There is good support for learning outside the school day that includes on-line Internet provision. Pupils can access the school intranet and teachers can set work and monitor the progress of individual pupils.
- 26 Enrichment through extra-curricular provision is very good and all activities are publicised. There are many visits, sporting activities, musical productions and arts events of very high standards. The "Blue Falcons" gymnastics team has a national reputation. The programme of events organised as part of the engineering college provision attracts many participants. A visit by Russian cosmonauts inspired particular interest. Many pupils come to school by bus which means there are restrictions on what they can attend, but the school does well in ensuring that they have every opportunity to take part in as many events and activities as possible. Activities are audited and senior staff have an overview, but monitoring of the take up and range of activities engaged in by individuals has not yet been introduced. Some activities are very well attended, such as the rehearsals for productions that involve over 70 pupils. Pupils are very positive about the quality and range of the curriculum courses and extra-curricular activities on offer.
- 27 The quality and quantity of accommodation and resources are good. Accommodation is well maintained and every available space is used effectively. Every effort has been made to provide access for all pupils. The majority of subjects have their own dedicated areas that are spacious and suitable. Some classrooms, however, are small, in particular some of the English rooms. This is having a negative impact on teaching strategies, restricting the variety of teaching methods that can be used. The lack of a specialist room for teaching business studies has prevented the department creating a business-type environment for learning. The science laboratories have been recently refurbished providing a stimulating area for the subject. The provision for design and technology is very good with a new workshop.
- 28 Resources for teaching and learning meet the curricular needs well. An ongoing programme of investment has improved ICT facilities considerably since the previous inspection. This is particularly good in music and design and technology. In other classrooms there is good provision of other resources, such as interactive whiteboards that are having a positive effect on teaching strategies and pupils' learning. The library is well stocked with a good range of fiction and non-fiction books. The computers in the resources area are good and used extensively by pupils for research and private study.

Sixth form

The overall quality of the curriculum to meet the needs of students in Years 12 and 13 is **good**. The opportunity in the sixth form for enrichment, including out-of-school activities, is **very good**. The quality and quantity of accommodation and resources to meet the needs of the sixth form curriculum are **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Sixth form students have access to a wide range of academic courses.
- Only a small number of vocational courses attract sufficient sixth form students.
- Enrichment opportunities are very broad and much appreciated by the students.
- There is no provision for religious education in the sixth form.

Commentary

29 The curriculum opportunities are broad so that students can choose from a wide range of academic courses. However, currently only one vocational course has viable numbers. The school does everything in its power to meet individual needs and aspirations, but some students cannot attend all lessons in their chosen subjects. There is no provision for religious education in the sixth form.

30 Enrichment opportunities are very good and students are very much encouraged to organise activities for themselves supported by their teachers. Students take part in a very broad range of worthwhile activities both at school and in the wider community. They organise charity events and a good range of social activities, including a valedictory dinner. Students also take part in community projects such as working in local primary schools, involvement in coaching sport and mentoring Year 7 students by providing support for them in their learning.

Care, guidance and support

The care and welfare of pupils and the arrangements for health and safety are **outstanding**. The school provides **good** support, advice and guidance for pupils based on the monitoring of their achievement and personal development. Pupils' views are widely canvassed, valued and form part of school improvement. The school has improved this aspect since the last inspection.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The care provided for pupils and sixth form students is a key strength of the school and this helps them achieve their best.
- The arrangements for pupils' welfare and safety are an example of excellent practice.
- An active and well-organised students' union helps to gauge pupils' opinions and channel ideas toward further improvements.
- Induction is very good and new pupils master routines and the complex building very quickly.

Commentary

31 The school has a fully inclusive approach to helping others in a very supportive and caring community. Pupils confirmed strongly that they have very good relationships with staff and feel that they would always have someone to turn to if they were ever worried or troubled. Effective monitoring enables any under-performance or difficulty to be detected quickly. Those pupils are helped to resolve issues, improve their work and manage themselves better to improve the quality of school life.

32 Pupils receive good support and guidance in their work and in their personal development by effective use of assessment information. Marking is helpful and the advice given encourages improvement. Pupils are helped to be aware of their learning targets and know what to do to achieve higher levels in most subjects. In addition to the excellent pastoral systems, there is peer mentoring, a centre for supporting more vulnerable pupils and a range of other specialist experts to support and include pupils with more complex needs and minority groups very well.

- 33 The arrangements for child protection and for children in public care are very good and all the requirements are met. Pupils with serious medical conditions are catered for very well and the individual care plans are exemplary. When pupils are ill or injured they receive a very high level of care and attention. All the risk assessments and routine checking systems for health and safety throughout the school are thorough and are carried out at the right frequency. The security arrangements for an open site are good.
- 34 Pupils with special educational needs have trusting relationships with teaching staff, teaching assistants, the special educational needs co-ordinator and especially their key workers. They are keen to learn and respond well to the support they are given. They receive good support, advice and guidance. The Quest Centre provides very good support to pupils with learning difficulties. It is used effectively by pupils with special educational needs and they value highly the support they receive there. Pupils with literacy difficulties make good progress with reading skills as a result of a targeted reading programme and paired reading activities.
- 35 The few pupils and students whose home language is not English make good progress, achieve well and gain good results in national examinations, which enable them to go onto higher education where this is relevant to them. These pupils and students are able to participate fully in lessons, as seen in an A-level science lesson, where they were encouraged to use the support of other members of the class. They are also well supported by a specialist teacher for half a day per week. He currently provides individual support for students and also works with subject teachers as and when required.
- 36 Careers education and advice are very good for the choice of further study and employment opportunities. Students going into the sixth form, however, felt ill prepared in Year 11 for the demands of study skills needed for A-levels.

Sixth form

- 37 The school provides good support and guidance for students when they have their regular subject reviews. Students feel that they get good advice on how to achieve higher standards and cope with all the pressures. There is, however, a lack of a systematic approach to developing study skills needed for advanced level study. Careers guidance is very good for those seeking employment. Some Year 13 students, however, were concerned about the variation in tutors' skills and ability to help and support them in their applications for higher education.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Links with parents are **good**. Links with the community are **excellent** and links with schools and colleges are **very good**. This is a big improvement since the last inspection.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are actively encouraged to support learning and the wide range of school activities.
- There are very good links with other secondary schools in a consortium for improvement.
- Excellent links provide exciting and creative learning experiences with an engineering focus across the local educational and wider community.
- Curricular links with primary schools are underdeveloped in some subject areas.
- Some parents have concerns with the information they receive about pupils' progress.

Commentary

- 38 Parents confirmed in a meeting and questionnaires high levels of confidence in the school. They were concerned about the information they receive about their children's progress. The inspection found that their concerns are partly justified. Some consultations, like the planned June Year 8 parents' evening, are late in the year to equip parents to support learning effectively. Although school reports are good overall, some subjects are reported

inconsistently with a little as one line of text on progress. Other information like newsletters, the school's web site and other booklets are very good and keep parents fully in touch with school activities.

- 39 Parents are very supportive of school productions, musical and sporting activities such as the excellent *Les Miserables*. There is an active parents' association and parents were generous in their financial support for the bid for engineering specialist status. There is good contact with parents when issues arise and the joint approaches to address concerns are very effective.
- 40 The school is gaining a positive reputation for developing engineering-related learning within the community. Constructive relationships with local businesses help to raise the profile of engineering and give pupils many opportunities to extend their personal experience. Many visits and visitors enrich learning in all sorts of ways, like the theatre groups and the artist in residence who helped to make a spectacular mosaic. The school takes an active part in many local festivals and events, especially in drama, music and sports, and the Blue Falcons gymnastic squad are famous nationally. The school works with many local groups: charities, churches, hospitals, armed forces, police and committees to enhance learning and when local issues are raised the school takes an active part.
- 41 The school has some very productive partnerships with schools and colleges. Links with contributing primary schools are good for ensuring that pupils transfer easily and settle quickly. Some curricular links, however, are inconsistent and do not enable the school to have a clear idea about new pupils' attainment. Engineering, mathematics and technology links, however, are very good, especially the extension days. Strong links with colleges, universities, engineering and manufacturing bodies and training organisations significantly benefit learning and arrange some of the amazing projects including the use of specialised 'high tech' equipment and the Russian Cosmonauts' visit to the school.
- 42 The special educational needs co-ordinator has maintained and further developed very good links with a wide variety of agencies, for example the local Connexions service and other schools. This aspect is a strength of the department. Liaison with primary schools is particularly notable. He is heavily involved in, and leads, several local initiatives which enrich the work of the whole school. Collaboration with parents is effective.

Sixth form

- 43 Links with the community are very good, with many chances to extend learning and take part in worthwhile community service activities. Very good links with universities enable students to have first hand experiences with engineering, medicine, veterinary school and physiotherapy. There are insufficient links with the business community to effectively support and extend the business studies course.

EXAMPLE OF OUTSTANDING PRACTICE

A Consortium for School Improvement. The consortium was set up by the headteacher of Chelmer Valley High School and director of education and involves a steering group of 11 other secondary schools where the focus is firmly on improvement in learning and raising pupils' achievement.

The emphasis on middle management leadership courses has been changed to focus on learning styles, especially for the gifted and talented and the development of the 14-19 curriculum. The consortium has helped schools become a networked learning community to bring about significant improvements in classroom practice. There is much sharing of good practice and regular research both inside and outside the consortium. Initiatives are monitored and evaluated carefully and pupils' progress is checked to inform future planning. Time is set aside for some serious "thinking outside the box" with partner schools to keep up the momentum of continually trying to improve and move forward. Advanced Skills Teachers from various specialist schools share excellent teaching in their subjects. Provision for gifted and talented students is rapidly improving with new ideas, new training and special projects implemented. Middle managers have extolled the virtues of the excellent professional development they receive and the clear impact it has on improving learning and teaching.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The governance of the school is **very good**. The headteacher provides **excellent** leadership. Other key staff with management responsibilities provide **very good** leadership. The overall effectiveness of management throughout the school is **very good**. The school is aware of any barriers to raising achievement and has good strategies to overcome them.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The commitment, energy and vision of the headteacher inspires all members of the school community to aim high and do their best.
- Procedures for self-evaluation are very rigorous and the school is fully aware of its strengths and weaknesses.
- The school manages its finances very effectively.
- Performance management, induction procedures for new teachers and in-service training for staff are very well organised and very effective.
- Staff who manage the sixth form are clear about future developments; their leadership is good.
- The progress of pupils with special educational needs is not sufficiently managed.

Commentary

44 The school benefits from the excellent leadership of the headteacher. His leadership is strong, purposeful and provides clear direction. Since the previous inspection he has overseen significant improvements, including the gaining of specialist engineering college status, improved examination results, the gaining of a school achievement award and the school being nominated as one of the first training schools for the education of teachers. He has the confidence of the pupils, staff, parents and governors and the wider community. He is accessible to all staff and has a very clear understanding of the school's many strengths and those areas where future development is needed. He works tirelessly on behalf of the school, promoting its name, ensuring it is properly recognized for the achievements of its pupils and that all agencies are exploited fully if they can be used to the advantage of the school.

45 The headteacher is very well supported by two very good deputies and the leadership team, all of whom constantly strive to improve the already successful practice. The headteacher attributes the school's success to all the teachers and staff working in the school and supports them fully in taking new initiatives and developments that provide pupils with a wide range of educational opportunities. The commitment to the development and training of all adults who work in the school has been recognised by an Investors in People award.

- 46 The vehicle for many of the improvements that are happening in the school is the well-designed and very relevant school development plan. This plan is the result of protracted meetings between senior staff, governors, pupils and parents. It has relevant priorities that are directly and appropriately linked to the school's aims. Targets are clear and unambiguous making it relatively easy to monitor and evaluate progress.
- 47 The overall quality of management is very good throughout the school. The senior management team monitors the work of the subject areas and departments through regular reviews of teaching and learning and by critical analysis of examination results. This ensures that senior staff are aware of what is happening in all areas of the school and can and do support colleagues when the monitoring indicates that it is needed. Responsibility across both pastoral and academic areas has been delegated effectively. There are clear lines of management and accountability that are effectively helping to raise academic standards. Management of areas of learning and departments is very good overall with some excellent examples in music and design and technology. In several subjects heads of departments are new to the school, but because of strong support from senior managers they have settled in well and are having a positive impact on the performance of their departments.
- 48 Leadership and management of special educational needs are good overall. Staff are an effective team who share a common purpose, supporting pupils with a caring, committed and holistic approach. The school invests well in the funding of a large number of teaching assistants who are deployed effectively, using their individual skills and interests appropriately. Staff development is encouraged, but clearer identification and planning of training is required to reflect the needs of individual pupils with special educational needs, for example training in the teaching of pupils with specific literacy difficulties.
- 49 Special educational needs documentation, for example of individual education plans (IEPs), is efficiently maintained and informative. Reviews are conducted appropriately and helpful information arising from these is given to all staff. However, the monitoring and evaluation of performance data for individual pupils is insufficient to track their progress and inform planning more effectively. Departmental self-evaluation and planning is not sufficiently structured and rigorous.
- 50 Financial planning is excellent. The annual budget is clearly based on priorities identified within the school development plan, which currently looks ahead to the school year 2004-5. The school bursar plays a pivotal role in the highly efficient organisation of the school's administrative procedures and financial control. She works with the senior management team, the chair of the governors' finance committee and the responsible officer from the school governing body to set the draft budget. The budget is carefully worked out and those responsible show an excellent awareness of value for money and the importance of using the school's finances for raising standards. Funds allocated to the school for special educational needs, its development as a specialist engineering college and other specific areas are properly used for the designated purposes. The governing body fully carries out its legal responsibilities with regard to the school's finances and has established highly effective controls to ensure that the budget is administered effectively.

Financial information

<i>Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004</i>			
Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	4,387,353	Balance from previous year	260,666
Total expenditure	4,440,737	Balance carried forward to the next	207,282
Expenditure per pupil	3,909		

- 51 Very good provision is made for the professional development of all staff and the school has very effective systems of performance management. These are closely linked to the staff development programme and to the school development plan. The quality of the induction programme for new staff is excellent. The school recruits and deploys teachers from a variety of sources, including the graduate teacher programme and the school-centred initial teacher training initiative. Overall, the arrangements for staff development, performance management and induction are a particular strength to the school. The non-teaching staff, including the senior caretaker, also make a very valuable contribution to the life of the school.
- 52 The governors are very well informed and very committed to raising standards in all aspects of the school's life. They are very well led, well organised and have a very well established committee structure for planning and decision-making. They are very closely involved in the production of the school development plan and make significant contributions to its content. Monitoring the work of the school is achieved effectively through written and oral reports and departmental visits. The governing body is not fulfilling its legal obligation to ensure that religious education is taught to sixth form students and that there is daily act of collective worship.
- 53 There has been good improvement in the leadership and management of the school since the previous inspection. As a result of gaining specialist engineering status the school is now poised to further improve the quality of education for its pupils and the headteacher is capable of leading the school to even more success.

Sixth form

The key staff with management responsibilities in the sixth form provide **good** leadership. The overall effectiveness of management in the sixth form is **good**.

- 54 Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Staff understand the importance of reviewing data on student performance. As an outcome of recent developments, student progress reviews are more regular and monitoring of the performance of those causing concern is a strength. Staff have developed an effective partnership with students that underpins the very positive and mature attitude of the great majority. Management is becoming more rigorous with steps taken to resolve clashes in the timetable arising from the wide choice of subjects. The limited vocational provision does not sufficiently meet the needs of a minority of students. The sixth form is increasing in size and is cost-effective. Facilities for study and socialising are satisfactory but accommodation for some large groups, such as in psychology, is cramped. Students feel very well supported but say that one or two teachers seem unclear about university application procedures. The school is aware of this and supports staff who are new to sixth form tutoring. Advice on study skills provided at the start of the different A-level courses is variable and its impact is not sufficiently monitored.

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

Work-Related Learning

Commentary

- 55 The overall provision for work-related learning is good. The school provides a comprehensive range of curriculum and enrichment experiences, with a variety of methods to assess pupil achievement. For example, the school provides all Year 11 pupils with a minimum entitlement of a two-week work experience placement. Many other groups also benefit from extra placements, such as pupils following the GNVQ health and social care course. A group of pupils following the 'Increased Flexibility' programme also benefit from further work placements. Preparation and feedback for work experience are comprehensive and include the presentation of portfolios, role-play activities, extended writing tasks, self-assessment exercises and assessment by employers.
- 56 The English department uses work experience effectively as an opportunity for oral presentations. In modern foreign language lessons, pupils prepare CVs and practice work-related interviews. Links with other agencies from the world of work are well developed. These include Young Engineers and Chelmsford Engineers to create further opportunities. There are well-established links with the local Education Business Partnership who are presently piloting a scheme in school for 11 gifted and talented pupils who are linked to regional businesses. The impact of these experiences is good and has changed many pupils' attitudes to school and learning in a positive way. Many of the departments in the school have yet to fully integrate work-related learning into their curriculum. However, the staff responsible for the co-ordination and evaluation of this area of the curriculum are highly effective and have a clear vision for further developments.

The impact of the school's specialist engineering status

- 57 In a very short time the school has established a reputation as an engineering specialist college of high quality. It has in many ways exceeded the aims and objectives in its mission statement to become a centre of educational excellence, with an engineering bias. It is developing innovative practice in the teaching of subjects associated with engineering and promoting an ethos for learning that is technological, enterprising and vocational.
- 58 Pupils, sixth form students and teachers are justly proud of their exciting learning environment. The many partnerships developed and fostered with other schools, colleges, universities, industry and the community are crucial to the school's development and success. This high achievement is reflected in students' confidence, good quality learning and the high standard of personal development. There is increasing interest in subjects across the curriculum to promote engineering-related career opportunities.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Well-planned lessons and varied teaching ensure good achievement by pupils.
- Thorough feedback to pupils about their work helps them to improve.
- The harmonious and stimulating environment positively influences pupils' learning.
- Marking and target setting arrangements do not always give enough guidance to pupils.
- Data about pupils' performance is not used enough to raise teacher expectations.

Commentary

- 59 The standards attained in English throughout the school are above the national average. Pupils enter in Year 7 with average standards of literacy and achieve well, attaining above average standards by the end of Year 9. The results in national tests confirm these above average standards. This trend is reflected over the last three years and is similar to the outcomes in science, but not as good as mathematics. At GCSE pupils achieve well and results are above average. In 2003 a high proportion of pupils attained A*-C grades and this has been improved upon in 2004, indicating a rising trend. However, there are more lower grades than usual. This is because work is not always well matched to the needs of the middle and low attaining pupils. Overall, pupils learn and achieve well in all year groups. Learning is enhanced by the pupils' positive attitudes to their work.
- 60 Teaching is, in general, good throughout the school. In the most effective lessons, good planning ensures that learning is logical, enjoyable and pupils build successfully on previous work. Lesson aims are shared with pupils so that they know what will be assessed and can see the relevance of what they are doing. Verbal and written feedback shows pupils how they are performing and how they can improve. It is effectively linked with the National Curriculum levels and examination requirements. Good use of interactive whiteboards raises the level of pupils' involvement because they provide stimulating visual resources. Time is used effectively and relevant homework reinforces and develops learning. In less effective lessons, pupils do not learn well because explanations are not clear and pupils are unsure of the work to be completed. Tasks are not always well thought out and little, if any, constructive comment is made about pupils' work, so they do not know how to improve. In these lessons, work is not well matched to meet pupils' needs and, consequently, a number of lower -attaining pupils underachieve.
- 61 Management of the department is good. It runs efficiently on a daily basis because of good delegation of responsibilities and good resources. Clear policies and programmes of work guide the teaching and assessments. Teaching and the curriculum are monitored well through lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work. Data is used to track pupils' progress, but this aspect is still underdeveloped. Pupils' learning is enriched by good extra-curricular activities that take place in a pleasant, yet busy environment.
- 62 Leadership is satisfactory. There is good communication between the members of the department and a good team spirit has been fostered. This has led to improvements in the teaching. However, inconsistencies still exist causing standards to be affected. The department has made good progress since the previous inspection. It is successfully developing assessment for learning; has incorporated several new initiatives into the programme and examination results have improved.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

- 63 The standards of literacy across subjects are good and improving. A working group of representatives from all departments has devised a development plan to further raise literacy standards across the school. Posters and competitions have raised pupils' awareness of the ways in which to improve writing and spelling. They have also been informed of important words in each subject. Following training, heads of department are including literacy development in their programmes of work so that consistent attention is paid to writing skills across the school. There is good evidence of this being translated into practice, especially in art, where they are beginning to use structured worksheets to improve extended writing, and in modern foreign languages where they correct spellings.

Drama

- 64 The work in drama was sampled. Drama is very popular, with many pupils taking part in clubs and regular performances as well as opting for the subject at GCSE and in the sixth form. In the three lessons seen, teaching was very good. Teachers develop excellent relationships with pupils, making a big impact on their social and personal development. Co-operation, self-discipline, tolerance and encouragement are emphasised in the teaching and pupils are challenged by high expectations to achieve the highest level of performance and behaviour. They are provided with good opportunities to examine complex social and moral issues. They respond with maturity, enthusiasm and imagination. The department is well organised and resourced. Its methods of assessment encourage pupils to analyse their own performance against clear guidelines and this in turn raises standards further. Pupils show maturity and perception in their discussions and character portrayals. They are able to make informed decisions about practical work because of their very good prior learning. They are keen and very involved in their work. This is reflected in the way they dedicate personal time to the subject.

Modern Foreign Languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and learning result in good achievement in French, German and Spanish.
- The very good leadership and management result in teachers working towards common goals in all three languages.
- Teachers' very good linguistic skills ensure that pupils' listening and speaking skills are well developed.
- Teachers use information and communication technology very effectively to enhance pupils' learning.

Commentary

- 65 Results from the Year 9 2003 teacher assessments in modern foreign languages were in line with the national expectation. In 2004 the number of pupils reaching the expected level rose significantly. In GCSE French in 2003 results were at the national average, but girls achieved better than boys. In 2004, results improved significantly. In GCSE German in 2003 results were well above the national average. In 2004, GCSE results in German rose even higher. In 2003, Spanish was not taught in Years 10 and 11.
- 66 In work seen in Years 7 to 9, standards are above average in French and German and below average in Spanish. This is because many pupils opting to take Spanish in Year 8 are middle or lower attaining. Most Year 9 pupils in French and German cope well with lessons conducted almost entirely in the foreign language. They express their opinions clearly and write and speak about familiar topics using common verbs in present and past tenses. Their pronunciation is good. In Spanish, pupils understand simple details in recorded and written texts when supported by the teacher. When they speak pupils are

generally monosyllabic and pronunciation is sometimes anglicised. Pupils with special educational needs and pupils with English as an additional language contribute well to lessons in French, German and Spanish. Achievement is good in French and Spanish and pupils achieve excellently in German in Years 7 to 9 because they attain above average standards in a very limited amount of time. Gifted and talented pupils also achieve well in French and German.

- 67 Teaching and learning in all three languages are good. A few lessons were satisfactory, but most were good and several were very good or excellent. Teachers have very good linguistic skills and very good subject knowledge, which develop pupils' learning very well. Pupils in all three languages enjoy brisk, well-planned lessons with clear objectives conducted in the foreign language. They respond well to lively, stimulating activities and resources, especially the interactive whiteboard. In a few satisfactory lessons two or three pupils were not fully engaged in oral work or worked at a slow pace on written tasks. Very occasionally teachers speak too much in English, which does not develop pupils' listening and speaking skills sufficiently. Pupils learn very well in pairs or groups. The very good relationships facilitate this type of collaborative learning. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and their comments are very positive and pupils have sound advice on how to improve. Teachers also correct pupils' mistakes in lessons in a very positive way which creates a positive learning atmosphere. In several lessons pupils also evaluate their own work and the work of others, which motivates pupils and also raises standards.
- 68 Teaching assistants have a strong impact on raising the standards and achievement of pupils with special educational needs. Modern foreign languages make a very strong contribution to improving pupils' general literacy and work-related learning.
- 69 The leadership and management are very good. There is a very clear vision, very good development plan and good documentation and management systems. The day-to-day running of the department is very efficient. The monitoring of teaching, learning, standards and achievement is very effective. Teachers are very skilled and work very hard to achieve common goals. The well-established trips and exchanges with France and Germany also motivate pupils and raise standards.
- 70 Teaching, learning and achievement in lessons are much better than at the time of the previous inspection. Results in examinations have improved, information and communication technology is now used very effectively and pupils with special educational needs are supported more effectively. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers utilise their good subject knowledge to help pupils gain above average standards and achieve well.
- Pupils say that staff set homework consistently, expect it back and that it is marked in a supportive way that helps them improve.
- Leadership and management are effective and this results in good improvement in the subject.
- Teachers are inconsistent in offering pupils good opportunities to explain their methods and talk through their answers.

Commentary

- 71 Pupils start school with average skills in mathematics. In the 2003 Year 9 national tests, results were above the national average. Analysis of data shows that pupils' achievement compared to their prior attainment was above average. Results have been improving steadily for four years. The 2004 results are even better with more pupils reaching the

higher levels. Inspection evidence indicates that pupil's attainment in Year 9 is above national expectations and this represents good achievement. The school comfortably beat its target for 2004 and has set itself a very challenging target for 2005.

- 72 The 2003 GCSE results were above the national average because larger proportions of pupils achieved the A and B grades than was common nationally. The 2004 results are better again, with both boys and girls improving on the previous year's high standards. Inspection evidence indicates that pupils' attainment in Year 11 is above national expectations and this represents good achievement from Year 7.
- 73 Teaching and learning are good. All teachers are qualified to teach mathematics and use their good subject knowledge well. They all used the school's behaviour management strategies effectively. They also made most lessons interesting and so pupils were keen and behaved well. Pupils particularly appreciated the teachers' marking of their work, which they found useful. Most teachers used Interactive whiteboards and computer programs well and this helped pupils understand better what was taught. A new computer suite is used well and pupils were highly motivated when working there. However, because some teachers did not demonstrate the program to the class, time was wasted getting started. Experienced teachers used questioning really well, expecting pupils to explain their methods, but this wasn't consistent across all teachers. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. It relies heavily on setting arrangements and a high staff to pupil ratio to support the weaker pupils. In some lessons the work set was not matched to meet the needs of all pupils. Too little clear direction was given to the teaching assistants as to what they should do during lessons.
- 74 The leadership and management of the subject are good. The head of department provides a very good role model for colleagues and they all work well as part of a team. The action plan is based on good evaluation of data and contains the key points to help achieve its targets. However, it is not clear when the targets will be achieved because the action plan has no success criteria. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have been improved in both Years 9 and 11, greater use is made of computers and investigations are used more regularly in all age groups.

Mathematics across the curriculum

- 75 Pupils' use of their numeracy skills in other subjects is good. The department has managed to include games and puzzles in tutor times in Years 7, 8 and 9 once a week. This helps pupils with basic skills and raises the profile of mathematics across the school. In most subjects, pupils use their arithmetic skills well. They represent data in a variety of ways in science, physical education and geography. They measure to the required degree of accuracy in design and technology and physical education. Pupils realise that mathematical skills are useful and have a practical application. The department has not talked to other departments enough to find out what skills pupils will need in order to get the maximum learning out of other subjects.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils have very positive attitudes and this helps them to achieve well.
- Teachers have very good knowledge of their specialist subjects.
- Teachers plan and prepare lessons thoroughly and give good support to pupils.
- Marking of work is variable in quality.
- Leadership and management are good and examination results are carefully analysed to identify under-achievement.
- Pupils make insufficient use of ICT in lessons.

Commentary

- 76 Results of national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2004 were above average. This shows an improvement from 2003 when they were average. In comparison with schools with similar levels of attainment, results have been below average in recent years. This is because fewer pupils than expected have achieved the higher levels. Pupils' attainment on entry to school at the start of Year 7 is average. By Year 9, standards improve to above average and this represents good achievement. Boys and girls make good progress in most lessons.
- 77 GCSE results are improving steadily and in 2004 are likely to be above average. Standards of work seen in the current Years 10 and 11 are also above average. The introduction of triple science in Year 10 is providing suitable challenge for the highest attaining pupils. Most pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve well in science.
- 78 Teaching and learning are good and account for the pupils' good achievement. Teachers plan thoroughly and structure lessons well with clear learning objectives that are explained well to the pupils. During the inspection, teaching was very good in almost half of the lessons seen. These lessons captured the pupils' interest using a variety of activities carefully chosen so that they learn well. Some teachers use ICT very effectively to present information and to relate theory to everyday situations. They combine this with very clear explanations and good questioning to ensure pupils gain greater understanding of the topic being learnt. In other lessons the teachers' questioning tended to lead pupils to expected answers and they were not allowed enough time to develop their own understanding. Tasks were not always well matched to all pupils' abilities, leaving some pupils too inactive and not making sufficient progress in parts of these lessons.
- 79 Most pupils enjoy science lessons, particularly the practical activities, but they do not make enough use of ICT. Pupils with weak literacy skills in Years 7 to 9 record their work on well-designed worksheets so that they develop their writing and spelling of scientific words. Teaching assistants are effective in supporting pupils with special educational needs in lessons. Pupils respond positively to their teachers and so behaviour is very good. Teachers use assessment and examination questions effectively in lessons to ensure that pupils know the levels they are working at and how to improve their answers. Work is marked regularly, but practice is not consistent within the department and when pupils are given guidance it is not always followed up.
- 80 The leadership and management of the department are good. The recently appointed head of department has a clear vision of how to improve standards. Departmental review is rigorous and together with the engineering college status it has provided a focus for development. Detailed analysis of examination and test results is used to identify under-performance of individuals and groups of pupils. The technicians are well organised and make a very positive contribution to the work of the department. There has been good improvement since the last inspection and the department is in a good position to improve standards further.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have a good understanding of presenting information and use this skill effectively in other subjects in the curriculum.
- Pupils achieve well due to focused teaching and the effective use of the intranet.
- Planning lacks challenge for the higher-attaining pupils.
- Assessment procedures are good, contributing positively to pupils' achievement.

Commentary

- 81 The teachers' assessment of Year 9 pupils shows that standards are well above the national average. These results are inflated and evidence during the inspection did not support this evaluation. The work completed by pupils currently in Years 7 to 9 is average. In the 2003 GCSE ICT examination, results were below the national average. These low results are partially due to staffing problems in the past that have now been resolved. Provisional results for the 2004 GCSE examination show a significant improvement. Boys' and girls' achievement is similar.
- 82 Pupils join the school with standards in ICT that are generally below the expected level. Pupils make good progress and by the time they reach Year 9 are at the expected level. Pupils' achievement is good, having benefited from additional lessons in Year 7 and focused teaching in line with the national strategy for the subject. Pupils' skills of presenting information are good, successfully using a range of applications to present their work. Pupils are beginning to establish an understanding of data handling and have a sound knowledge of spreadsheets, using the formulas for calculations with understanding.
- 83 The good achievement continues in Years 10 and 11. Pupils in Year 11 studying GCSE are at the expected level at this point in the academic year. Standards in Year 10, however, are higher. Pupils having started and completed the data handling GCSE assignment a year early in Year 9. Pupils have a sound grasp of the complexities of a data handling program, higher-attaining pupils successfully using more complex features, for example the validation procedure to check that the data entered is accurate.
- 84 The overall quality of teaching and learning is good in all years. Teachers have good subject expertise and use it effectively to guide and advise pupils. The planning of lessons overall is good, teachers making effective use of the school intranet to support pupils' learning. The planning, however, does not always include specific strategies for the higher-attaining pupils who, on occasions, are insufficiently challenged. This was evident in pupils' previous work, when higher- and average-attaining pupils achieved similar levels. All the lessons start briskly with clear explanations of the task, quickly engaging pupils' interest. Although most lessons finish with a session to assess pupils' progress and understanding, learning is better when pupils have the opportunity to present their work to others. Teachers move around the class effectively helping and advising pupils. However, when pupils seek help about particular procedures teachers tend to give the answer without first of all questioning pupils as to how it might be done. The procedures for assessing pupils' progress are good, contributing positively to achievement. The marking of work is very thorough; pupils know the levels they are achieving and what to do to improve.
- 85 The leadership and management of the subject are good. The headteacher has taken on temporary responsibility for the subject, effectively leading the subject through a difficult period. He has delegated many responsibilities to the two key stage managers who have worked effectively to implement initiatives in order to raise standards and the profile of the subject. The improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

- 86 The overall provision for ICT across the curriculum is good. Students have competent ICT skills that are sufficient to meet the curricular needs across subjects. Many subjects make good use of ICT to enhance teaching and motivate pupils. Improved resources have resulted in an increased use across the curriculum to support learning. The most effective use has been with the interactive whiteboards that are being used by an increasing number of teachers, contributing positively to pupils' learning. Pupils benefit from opportunities to use a wide range of ICT skills in most subjects. Where use is less developed, access to the well used computer suites is a barrier.

HUMANITIES

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- Standards are above national expectations.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to their learning.
- The department is led and managed very well.
- Higher-attaining pupils would benefit from more challenging tasks.
- There are limited opportunities for pupils to visit historical sites.

Commentary

- 87 In lessons seen and pupils' work analysed during the inspection, standards are above those expected nationally by the end of Year 9, despite the fact that many pupils enter the school with below average levels of subject knowledge. During this stage, pupils become familiar with the use of sources and are able to analyse changes in society to considerable depth; for example, in some very detailed project work from Year 9 pupils on life in the trenches during the First World War. All pupils achieve well in relation to their prior attainment.
- 88 In 2003, GCSE examination results in the A*-C range were below national averages, but provisional results from the most recent examinations show a marked improvement and are well above national norms. In Years 10 and 11, standards are also above average and pupils develop their historical understanding further. In this context, some very good note taking and essay writing was seen from Year 10 pupils on the Treaty of Versailles. Lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs are supported well in class and their achievement matches that of their peers. Higher-attaining pupils also achieve well, but are not sufficiently challenged in their written work.
- 89 The quality of teaching and learning is currently very good. Teachers now use a very wide range of techniques to promote very good learning, including role-play, historical games, group work and use of video. Teachers also use questioning techniques well to include all pupils in class discussions. Lessons are planned very well and classroom organisation is very strong, so that all pupils are encouraged to demonstrate their historical skills. As a result, very good relationships are forged in the classroom and there is a heartening sense of purpose and enjoyment in lessons. Pupils respond very well to teachers' expectations and display very positive attitudes and behaviour.
- 90 The department is now led and managed very well by a new head of department after a period of considerable change. Marking is very thorough and teachers employ a range of assessment techniques to monitor pupils' progress, including the use of levels and individual targets. The subject also makes a very positive contribution to pupils' personal development. ICT is playing an important role in the work of the department, but there are limited opportunities for pupils to visit sites of historical interest.
- 91 Overall, the department has made good progress since the previous inspection and is rapidly becoming a considerable strength to the school. The key issues now are to build upon the most recent successes at GCSE and to increase the number of pupils attaining the highest grades in that examination.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well and standards reached by the end of Year 11 are above average.
- GCSE pupils understand how well they are progressing, but pupils in Years 7 to 9 cannot describe what they need to do to become better at geography.
- The very recently appointed head of department provides good support for the subject team.
- Teachers plan and deliver fast moving and interesting lessons.

Commentary

- 92 Pupils arrive in Year 7 with a limited range of geography skills and standards on entry are below national expectations. They make good progress and achieve well because of the specialist teaching so that by Year 9 standards are at the national average. Those who choose geography for GCSE receive very good guidance and make good progress. In 2003, three-quarters of the pupils gained the higher A*-C grades. The proportion was even higher in 2004 and every pupil achieved a pass A*-G grade so standards in both years were good. The proportion of pupils getting the top A*/A grades was below the national average in 2003, but this improved in 2004. Work seen, including fieldwork based on a study of Newmarket, was of a similar standard. There is no clear difference in the performance of boys and girls. Girls did better than boys in 2003, but slightly less well in 2004. Overall, performance in geography was above the average for GCSEs for other subjects in school. Pupils achieve well in all year groups.
- 93 Teaching and learning are good. Teachers plan lessons that use a range of activities and these help pupils develop an understanding of the many links between people and places. Displays of pupils' work promote high standards of presentation. Teachers explain what pupils need to learn in every lesson. They are careful to explain specialist language and actively encourage pupils to use it when speaking and writing. Good use of PowerPoint enlivens lessons and selective use of videos and projected pictures promotes interest and understanding. The lunchtime 'Geo Club' is well attended and pupils make good supervised use of the computers in the humanities area and in the resources centre.
- 94 Teachers treat pupils as young adults and this encourages mature understanding. For example, a Year 9 class was able to explain most sensibly the impact of AIDS on the populations and economies of poor countries. Classroom support staff know what to expect in lessons and they encourage pupils with special educational needs to work increasingly independently. These pupils make the same good progress as the others. Teachers are very good at involving pupils in discussions, but are sometimes too ready to accept correct answers without encouraging others to add more detail to them. Teachers prepare different tasks to match pupils' learning needs, including the gifted and talented. A number of lower aspiring pupils, often boys, do not attempt the more challenging tasks. They keep themselves busy, but tend to let the girls do the harder work. As a result, fewer boys in Years 7 to 9 attain the higher standards. Joint lesson planning ensures that different teachers present similar good quality lessons. They discuss how these went and this leads them to make improvements.
- 95 Leadership and management are good. The new head of department provides very good support for her colleagues. There is a clear vision for the development of the subject. Within four weeks of appointment, changes to the syllabus and the way that the subject is taught are already apparent. Performance data on GCSE work is used to track progress, but its use in Years 7 to 9 has not yet had time to develop into a systematic setting of progress targets. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good achievement is evident in all year groups.
- Good results have been attained by pupils in the GCSE short course.
- The use made of ICT in some lessons is a particular strength of teaching.
- Pupils respond well to lessons and exhibit a good attitude to the subject.
- The head of department provides a very good role model for colleagues and students.

Commentary

- 96 Pupils arrive at the school with standards in religious education that are typically below the expectations of the Essex Agreed Syllabus. They achieve well in Years 7 to 9 so that by the end of Year 9 their standards are in line with the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus. This good achievement continues through Years 10 and 11 where virtually all students now follow the GCSE short course. Only one year's results for this examination are available but they suggest that pupils have significantly outperformed pupils nationally in terms of grades A*-C. The gap between the attainment of girls and boys is significantly lower than is the case nationally. Pupils did not match national expectations in the highest A* and A grades and this is explained by this being the first cohort taking the examination and also that there are fewer higher-attaining pupils in school than is normal. Pupils not taking the GCSE examination follow a certificate of achievement in the subject and are achieving well.
- 97 Teaching and learning are good. Religious education is taught by a number of teachers of whom two are trained, specialist teachers of the subject. Those teachers who are not specialists are well supported in their teaching. Planning for lessons is thorough and takes account of the needs of individual pupils in each class. Some lessons are effectively supported by teaching assistants. Good use is made of computers to support teaching and an interactive whiteboard was well used in one lesson seen. Pupils' work is marked regularly and is generally accurate and encouraging.
- 98 Pupils show good attitudes and behave well in lessons. This is due to the well-chosen activities that promote learning and engage the interest of the pupils. Pupils themselves report that they consider themselves well taught in this subject and particularly appreciate the opportunities to express their own opinions and to participate in discussion. They also say that their questions are well answered and they are always clear about what they are doing.
- 99 Leadership and management are good. The head of department is a very good teacher and a very good role model to colleagues and pupils. She is supportive to colleagues and has overseen continual improvement in the subject since her arrival in the school. Religious education benefits from its placement within a humanities faculty with shared facilities and procedures. The work of all teachers is monitored and evaluated carefully.
- 100 Good improvement has been made in this subject since the last inspection. All the good features commented on then have been maintained and the school now provides adequate time and a suitable curriculum for pupils in Years 10 and 11.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The department makes a major contribution to the specialist engineering school status through a rich and varied curriculum.
- Leadership and management of the department are excellent.
- Attainment overall is well above national expectations and pupils achieve very well.
- Teaching and learning are very good overall, with some excellent teaching.
- Learning is enhanced by very good links with industry, other educational establishments and the local community.
- Inclusion of the work of designers, past and present, is not sufficiently developed.

Commentary

- 101 Pupils start school with varying experiences and understanding of design and technology. Because of very good teaching, standards in all aspects of design and technology at Years 7 to 9 are well above average. The results of the Year 9 national assessments confirm these high standards. Pupils of all ability are working to their individual capabilities and their achievement is very good. In all years, pupils follow the design process well when designing and making products. Above average GCSE examination results are gained in a wide range of design and technology subjects and standards, overall, are well above national expectations. In Years 10 and 11 pupils' achievement is very good, with a high standard of designing and making in all areas of the subject. In recent years, GCSE results have steadily improved and the number of A*-C grades is very high when compared to the national average. Results in food technology have not been as good as the other areas, but are still well above average. In recent years, boys' achievement has made impressive progress and boys' results are now much closer to those of girls. The department makes a major contribution to pupils' personal development through visits, links with other educational institutions, industry and the community and through the many extra-curricular activities that are organised.
- 102 Overall, teaching and learning are very good, and some is excellent. Teachers plan the work well, they have good command of the subject and this inspires confidence and promotes interest. A very purposeful, productive learning ethos has been established in lessons. Pupils respond with very good, often excellent attitudes, and behaviour is usually exemplary. Strengths of teaching in all years include: meticulous lesson planning; very clearly stated demonstrated lesson objectives; very good lesson pace; and the effective use of questions and answers to reinforce learning and gauge the understanding of individual pupils. Teachers often refer to National Curriculum levels and examination assessment criteria and this enables pupils to understand how their work can be improved. Health and safety and environmental issues are well addressed. Pupils are encouraged to use the Internet for research and the facilities are used well for realistic assignments. Schemes of work are not sufficiently referenced to designers and technologies of other countries.
- 103 Leadership of the department is dynamic and inspirational and high standards are promoted in all areas of the subject. The department achieves high standards in all years and makes a key contribution to the engineering school specialist status. A good range of courses are offered in all years, including resistant materials, graphics, food technology, textiles and electronics. Team spirit amongst staff is excellent. Management of the courses, accommodation and resources is outstanding. The monitoring of teaching and learning and the moderation of pupils' achievement and progress are meticulous. Development plans are appropriate and innovative and there is clear vision of how the department can progress. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching and learning are very good and, as a result, pupils achieve very well and have very good attitudes and behaviour.
- Very good drawing and painting skills are developed because of challenging activities.
- Assessment is fully embedded into the practice of the subject, which helps pupils know how to improve.
- Residential trips, gallery visits and artists in residence help to promote and support high standards and create further opportunity for pupils to develop their own ideas.

Commentary

- 104 Pupils enter the school with standards below average and quickly make progress. Standards seen in Years 8 and 9 are well above average. This rapid improvement is a result of very well organised teaching, with lessons characterised by good planning and clear objectives that are linked well to the requirements of the National Curriculum. Both boys and girls achieve very well in Years 7 to 9.
- 105 The 2003 GCSE results were above average and the 2004 results indicate a further dramatic rise in standards. Current work seen in Years 10 and 11 is well above average and represents very good achievement at GCSE. Pupils' work shows a rapidly growing confidence in the use of colour and texture, and gain great skill with pencil, producing intense studies of work by artists such as Lichtenstein, Degas and Vermeer.
- 106 Overall, teaching and learning are very good in all years. Teachers maintain very good pace and challenge by focused individual advice, encouraging pupils to think further and discover ideas for themselves. Drawing and painting skills are highly developed, often using the work of artists as the starting point, but also as a platform for developing personal ideas. Pupils show very good attitudes and behaviour. The atmosphere of supportive learning and success within the art rooms has helped to encourage pupils to be articulate and mature in their attitude. As a result, pupils listen and try very hard in lessons. The work is very well matched to the needs and interests of the pupils. The use of interactive whiteboards in this subject makes a significant impact on pupils' learning. Technical support when available is very good, but insufficient for this intensely practical subject.
- 107 Teacher assessments are accurate and the tracking of progress and feedback to pupils is embedded into the practice of the department. Pupils evaluate their work well and know how to improve. Work inspired by residencies, visits to galleries and artists working within the school have added considerably to the breadth of learning opportunities for pupils, and the resulting work from the pupils shows a considerable upward trend in standards and personal idea development. Pupils have many other opportunities to extend their work with extra-curricular classes, at lunchtime and after school. This extension of the arts' experience is very good practice and impacts well on standards.
- 108 The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The team of teachers have a shared ambition in establishing the subject as a major influence within the school. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. Achievement, teaching and learning and the leadership and management of the subject have all improved.

Music

Provision in music is **very good, with some excellent features.**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Music is a strength of the school.
- Music's excellent leadership and very good teaching promote very good learning.
- High standard extra-curricular activities develop pupils' musical skills.
- Pupils are confident in practical music activities in Years 7 to 9 and in their use of music technology in Years 10 and 11.
- Further work in listening could extend pupils' achievement.
- Inadequate soundproofing in the music rooms has a negative effect on pupils' learning.

Commentary

- 109 By the end of Year 9, standards are well above national averages. This represents very good achievement, as the standard on entry to the school is average. Pupils are making good progress with improvisation using keyboards and most pupils can play a 12-bar blues. They make informed comment on performances, using correct musical vocabulary. Pupils in Year 8 achieve a very good performance of a gamelan piece, which makes a strong contribution to their cultural education.
- 110 By the end of Year 11, recent GCSE results have been very high with 100 per cent achieving A*-C grades; but no pupil as yet has gained an A*. The department is working hard to address this by focusing on listening activities. Pupils' use of correct musical vocabulary is very good and their familiarity with music technology at Year 11 in composing are well above the national average. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 perform at a high standard and achieve well in all aspects of the course. Girls tend to give stronger performances in class, but boys do equally well in examinations. The pupils with special educational needs who take the examination also achieve very well.
- 111 Teaching is very good, and often excellent in Years 7 to 9, and learning is consistently very good. Teaching is invariably well paced and structured, with very good starts and ends to lessons. Teachers' musicianship is strong and there is a very good focus on the correct use of musical vocabulary. In Years 10 and 11 teaching is very good and often excellent. Learning is very good and pupils respond to the teachers' use of praise. Pupils contribute well orally to lessons. The teachers' musically focused teaching encourages pupils to work hard in class and rehearsals producing some polished music-making. Attitudes and behaviour are very good in all years. Instrumental teaching and learning are also very good.
- 112 Music's excellent leadership and very good management ensure a full programme of exciting musical opportunities for pupils, including outstanding musical theatre productions, several ensembles and a string quartet of rare quality. Over 10 per cent of pupils receive individual instrumental lessons, including music technology. Lessons for examination pupils are free. Accommodation is reasonably spacious, but there are problems with inadequate soundproofing, which has an effect on learning. Resources for the department are very good and the school has made a significant and worthwhile investment in music technology and instrumental teaching provision.
- 113 Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. Attainment is now consistently very good and pupils are confident orally, with music technology still a strength. Pupils value music highly and the school has a deserved reputation for its excellent concerts and productions.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is good with knowledgeable and enthusiastic teachers setting high expectation in terms of participation and behaviour.
- Pupils have a positive and lively attitude towards physical education.
- The on-site facilities are very good and have a positive impact on the performance of the pupils.

Commentary

- 114 Pupils start school with varied prior experiences from their primary schools and many have significant gaps in their skills. By the end of Year 9 attainment is generally in line with national expectations and pupils have achieved well. There is no significant difference in the standards of boys and girls. Teaching strategies and individual attention ensure that pupils with special educational needs attain standards that are commendable. They perform well in a wide range of activities. They demonstrate good ball skills in soccer, rugby, netball and basketball and a significant number demonstrate a high level of gymnastic ability.
- 115 Since the previous report the number of pupils gaining A*-C grade passes in GCSE has progressively improved. There was an exception in 2003 when the number gaining the higher grades dropped and was below the national average. However, in the 2004 examinations there was a very significant improvement in the results with the number of pupils gaining the higher grade being well above the national average. Results overall are likely to be close to the national average. Inspection evidence indicates that the current Year 11 group is achieving standards in line with that attained in previous years.
- 116 The majority of pupils in Years 10 and 11 are also performing at the level that would be expected, with some, particularly those in the examination groups, doing even better. In all year groups there is a wide spectrum of attainment, but teachers ensure good learning through individual support and encouragement. As a consequence, pupils in all year groups achieve well.
- 117 Teaching and learning are good and a strength of the department. Teachers have a depth of knowledge that ensures that pupils have a solid grasp of skills and games strategies. The management of pupils through the use of established routines and the high expectations of the teachers is leading to an improvement in standards of pupils' performance. Teachers inject fun and enjoyment into their lessons and pupils respond very positively. Pupils work hard and behave well. Their enjoyment of the subject is very evident.
- 118 Since the last inspection leadership and management have been good. At the time of this inspection the head of department had been in post for only three weeks. In this very short time he has made a significant impact on the organisation of the department's work. He has revised schemes of work and produced a high quality department handbook. In May 2002 the school gained the Sportsmark Award. This is a nationally recognised award that signifies high quality provision in physical education. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection. GCSE results have improved and the overall standard of teaching has improved.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business education

Provision in business education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Improved departmental planning and organisation is contributing to the rising standards.
- Accommodation limits the range of teaching strategies that can be used.
- Insufficient attention is being paid to developing vocational aspects of business courses.
- Teachers have good relationships with the pupils, which helps them to learn more effectively.

Commentary

- 119 Since the last inspection, examination results in business studies have been relatively poor and in 2003 they were below the national standard. There was a considerable improvement in 2004, when results are likely to be in line with the national average. Pupils starting business courses are drawn from the whole ability range and from the evidence of current work in school pupils' achievement is satisfactory. This is reflected in the work of students in Year 11. They show a good understanding of basic business concepts and can apply them to the actual businesses they study. However, their ability to analyse and reflect critically on this work is much more limited.
- 120 Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There have been several changes in staff since the last inspection which have resulted in a fall in standards, but the new head of department has adopted a much more rigorous approach to the planning and organisation of all courses. Better assignments have been produced which encourage independent research and pupils are given much more detailed help in order to improve their understanding of the work. Although teaching is satisfactory, its effectiveness is severely constrained by having no specialist business rooms and teachers have to move from room to room for business lessons. This means that it is very difficult to create an appropriate business environment that could be used to stimulate greater student involvement and challenge. There are few opportunities for collaborative working, role-plays and business simulations. Students have not been on any industrial visits, nor have they benefited from speakers from the world of work. In these difficult circumstances, teachers do well to ensure that all pupils make progress in their understanding of basic business concepts.
- 121 The school has already identified these shortcomings and a development plan has been produced to improve provision. Progress has been made in implementing some of its objectives, new appointments have been made and there are indications that improvements will be forthcoming. Leadership and management are, therefore, judged to be satisfactory. Business education was not reported in detail in the last inspection so it is not possible to judge whether improvements have been made.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in Citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils have very good opportunities to participate in the life of the school and in the local community.
- The personal, social and health education and citizenship programme is managed well.
- Plans for the assessment, recording and reporting of citizenship have yet to be fully implemented.
- Some departments have yet to incorporate citizenship opportunities into their planning.

Commentary

- 122 There is a well-planned programme of personal, social and health education through which issues of citizenship are addressed in specific topics during Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11, both personal, social and health education and citizenship are taught through specific themed days on a variety of topics. It is not possible to reach an overall judgement on standards and achievement in citizenship as no lessons were observed during the inspection week and there has been little written work on the subject so far this year. However, in lessons observed where citizenship was planned for and identified, pupils exhibited a good understanding of issues within society, for example in a personal, social and health education lesson in Year 8 on rules within groups. Pupils also develop skills of enquiry and communication within some subject areas. In religious education, for example, Year 9 pupils investigated the work of Amnesty International and, in Year 10, pupils in a business studies lesson have undertaken an assignment based on public sector provision of local services. Pupils have very good opportunities to participate and take responsible action throughout the school and the wider community. The student union is a very effective channel of communication between staff and pupils and the latter are involved in a number of fundraising activities in the local community. Pupils are also encouraged to become fully involved in the life of the school through peer mentoring and the prefect system.
- 123 Citizenship falls within the remit of the personal, social and health education programme and this is led and managed well by a recently appointed co-ordinator. A departmental audit of citizenship opportunities has been undertaken and reviewed. Some departments have incorporated citizenship fully into their schemes of work, especially design technology and music, but others have yet to do so. There are plans for assessing, recording and reporting pupils' achievements in citizenship, but these have yet to be fully implemented. Time allocation for the subject and for personal, social and health education is low throughout the curriculum due to timetabling constraints.
- 124 Overall, citizenship has yet to make a full contribution to the school's curriculum, but there are clear and viable plans in place to rectify this situation.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, six subjects were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects 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.

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
Biology	9	55.5	81.4	0.0	33.0	18.8	
Chemistry	8	62.5	84.5	0.0	39.0	17.5	
D&T	16	100.0	88.1	68.8	29.6	46.3	
Drama	15	100.0	95.9	73.3	38.1	50.7	
English literature	21	100.0	94.6	23.8	34.7	38.6	
Geography	11	100.0	89.9	0.0	40.3	31.8	
German	1	100.0	92.5	100.0	44.3	50.0	
History	2	50.0	92.7	0.0	39.7	15.0	
ICT	13	84.6	79.3	30.8	15.6	30.0	
Media Studies	24	95.8	95.1	33.3	39.7	39.1	
Music/Music technology	8	100.0	91.3	25.0	37.7	40.0	
Physics	11	72.7	83.1	9.0	38.9	24.5	
Psychology	26	100.0	82.5	34.6	30.3	38.0	
Sociology	6	100.0	86.8	66.6	35.2	46.6	
Sport & P.E.	6	83.3	87.4	33.3	27.0	28.3	

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 / Fine Art	4	100.0	96.9	25.0	52.1	80	
Biology	13	100.0	93.4	30.8	43.7	68	
Business VCE	15	93.3	88.1	46.6	20.0	69	
Chemistry	7	100.0	95.8	57.1	54.0	63	
D&T	7	100.0	96.4	42.8	37.6	108	
Drama	5	100.0	98.8	20.0	43.4	104	
English literature	14	100.0	98.4	21.4	44.3	64	
French	3	100.0	96.4	0.0	60.2	47	
Geography	9	100.0	98.2	44.4	51.0	78	
German	4	100.0	98.0	0.0	57.3	65	
History	5	100.0	97.9	20.0	50.4	52	
ICT	1	100.0	93.0	0.0	24.0	60	
Mathematics	11	90.9	95.2	45.5	59.2	62	
Further mathematics	1	100.0	97.8	100.0	75.7	100	
Media studies	11	100.0	98.2	0.0	41.4	67	
Music	2	100.0	96.3	50.0	44.3	90	
Music technology	3	100.0	96.0	0.0	44.3	80	
Physics	4	100.0	94.0	50.0	49.1	75	
Psychology	19	100.0	94.7	42.1	40.5	94	
Sociology	10	100.0	96.6	30.0	43.2	88	
Sport & P.E.	8	100.0	95.3	12.5	31.7	68	
Travel & tourism	2	100.0	88.3	0.0	18.1	70	

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well because teachers support them very well.
- Teaching and learning are good and positive relationships are fostered that motivate students to do well in examinations.
- Excellent feedback to students enables them to raise standards.
- Students' self-reliance is not adequately promoted by the development of independent learning skills.

Commentary

- 125 The current standards of work and past examination results are above average. Students' achievement is good, especially as there is open access to the course and some students start with limited success at GCSE. The trend in past examinations has been for almost all students to gain a pass grade and for a third of the groups to attain grades A or B, which represents good achievement.
- 126 Teaching and learning are good. Teachers use a wide variety of methods to challenge students to interact and to debate sophisticated concepts in literature. Good checks are kept of students' understanding by regular small analytical pieces of writing following the work in lessons. Teachers provide excellent opportunities for students to talk about their progress and they get constructive advice about how to improve their work. Every group is taught by two teachers, one of whom is very familiar with the course and students to ensure continuity in the students' learning.
- 127 Students are treated as mature young adults, relationships are good and consequently students enjoy the subject. The library resources for the subject are only just adequate, but inhibit independent work. However, wider reading is encouraged by teachers, although not all students follow this up as much as they should.
- 128 Leadership and management of the department are good and a positive team spirit has been created. Teachers are deployed well according to their expertise, which ensures a good learning experience for the students. The department is well organised and assessment is thorough.

Modern foreign languages

No foreign language was inspected in depth but two lessons were sampled.

- 129 In a Year 13 **German** class the teaching, learning and achievement were very good. The teacher's linguistic skills were very good. Students communicated their views very well on topics such as euthanasia and mercy killing. Students made excellent use of information and communication technology to make presentations. Students are enthusiastic and highly motivated. Standards of spoken and written work at this stage in the course are average.
- 130 In a Year 12 **French** class the teaching, learning and achievement were good. The teacher demonstrated very good subject knowledge. The students' listening and reading skills are above average, They coped very well with a lesson conducted almost entirely in French and picked out details from recorded texts. However, students have many gaps in their knowledge of basic grammar and vocabulary.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at A-level are improving with all students gaining a pass grade.
- Teachers are well qualified and students' learning and achievement are good.
- Students have very good attitudes and commitment to A-level study.
- The variety of approaches to learning is too narrow.
- Students are not aware of their predicted targets or of what they need to do to meet them.

Commentary

- 131 Because there were very few students taking A-level in 2003 it is not possible to make comparisons with national averages. However, all three students gained a pass grade. The unconfirmed results for the 12 students entered for A-level in 2004 show an improvement with five gaining the higher A/B grades. These results represent good achievement given students' below average attainment on entry to the sixth form.
- 132 Students completed their GCE AS level in Year 13 and therefore it is not possible to make meaningful comparisons of their achievements against national averages. However, the number of students continuing with their mathematical studies into Year 13 continues to rise and currently there are nine students studying to A-level. Inspection evidence confirms that these students are achieving standards in line with expectation based on their performance in the AS level modules already taken in Year 12. This represents good achievement.
- 133 The current Year 12 students begin their AS level course with a sound base of mathematical knowledge and understanding gained at GCSE. As a result, they quickly bridge the gap to AS level. As a result, standards are improving and students are making good progress with their learning. Both male and female students and those from different cultural backgrounds are achieving similar standards to their peers.
- 134 The quality of teaching and learning is good, overall. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of mathematics and the requirements of the various courses is very good. Teaching is rigorous and ensures all students are taught basic principles well. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and this is transmitted to the students. The best lessons are characterised by very good relationships and collaborative learning. Students, in their turn, appreciate their teachers' commitment and the level of support they give. Teachers have high expectations for students and encourage them to do well. However, there are too few occasions for students to widen their learning approaches through more open-ended tasks and independent research. Students are informed of their progress through the regular marking of their work and discussion in class. However, they are not provided with targets to achieve or given sufficient guidance on what to do to improve.
- 135 Leadership and management of mathematics in the sixth form are good. Results are analysed, but better use could be made of this and assessment information collected during the year to inform future planning and set students targets for improvement.. There is a strong team of experienced mathematicians who are knowledgeable about the requirements of the examinations. This is a major factor in the increasing numbers of students wishing to study the subject and the improving standards. The department has undertaken detailed preparation for the new Alevel courses beginning this September. Limited use is made of ICT and practical activities to support learning. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

SCIENCE

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average and students achieve well.
- Enthusiastic and experienced specialist teachers motivate the students.
- Students are very well supported with their learning.
- Some aspects of coursework are not developed sufficiently in Year 12.

Commentary

136 Results in A-level examinations are above average. Over the last three years all students have achieved pass grades, with a higher than average proportion achieving higher grades. Boys and girls achieve equally well. Numbers taking the subject have been small, but are increasing, with 17 students currently in Year 12. Students begin the course with a wide range of ability and this is reflected in the AS level results which have been below average, although most students do as well as expected. Standards seen during the inspection were above average. Students in Years 12 and 13 are confident and well organised in their learning.

137 The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers communicate their extensive subject knowledge with enthusiasm so students are motivated to learn. Teachers plan and structure lessons carefully so that activities are well matched to students' attainments. They supplement the course textbooks well with additional information, worksheets and practice examination questions so that students learn effectively. Students have very positive attitudes and work co-operatively with their teachers and each other so that they make good progress in the lessons. There is a purposeful working atmosphere in all lessons. Students with special needs are very well supported by their teachers and by other students. At the start of Year 12, students find the course very demanding, but the majority respond positively to the challenge.

138 Marking is thorough and gives good guidance through useful written comments that are followed up in lessons. Students make good use of the additional support that teachers organise regularly after school and at lunchtimes. However, there is a tendency for students in Year 12 to over-estimate their attainment because they achieve better results in the regular assessments than in the AS examinations. Students improve their study skills when they complete the individual investigations in Year 13 and they make good use of ICT to present their work.

139 Leadership and management are good. The staff team works closely, combining subject expertise, industrial and examination experience to ensure student success. They have made effective changes to the courses to improve learning as a result of active membership of professional organisations and very good training. Students' progress is monitored against expectations and examination questions are being used more effectively to give better indications of grades. The accommodation is good and the very good resources for practical work are well managed. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

This subject was not inspected.

HUMANITIES

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very good with many students, mostly girls, achieving grades higher than those that are suggested by their GCSE results.
- Highly effective teaching stems from teachers' profound understanding of psychology and the way students' work is externally assessed.
- Students are deeply appreciative of the hard work and detailed support they receive from their teachers, but boys are less well motivated than girls.
- The acting subject co-ordinator has succeeded in steering the subject through a challenging staffing situation and secured continuing high standards of provision.

Commentary

- 140 Examination results and the standards of work are well above average. In 2003 and 2004 all students attained pass A-E grades. Students enter the course with no prior knowledge of psychology. They make very good progress and achieve very well because of the successful way that teachers introduce new and difficult concepts. The departmental analysis of progress indicates that girls make particularly good progress. The proportion of A/B grades is around the national average, but is significantly higher than those predicted from GCSE scores on entry. Boys achieve less well than girls. Current Year 13 students have limited mathematical confidence and find some statistical concepts difficult to master. However, the quality of oral and written work is uniformly very good.
- 141 Teaching and learning are very good, with areas of excellence. The expert subject and syllabus knowledge of the teachers results in planning and teaching that exactly meet the changing needs of their students. Accordingly, lessons are challenging and the pace varies, slowing when difficult concepts need reinforcing. In an excellent lesson, Year 12 students were treated to a sequence of activities that developed their understanding of the characteristics and processes related to stress and its management. Teacher expectations are very high and combine with very positive student/teacher rapport. In consequence, most students are careful to complete preparatory reading and lessons can develop understanding rather than introduce basic facts. Boys are less highly motivated and limits to the breadth of their reading result in lower grades. In a Year 13 lesson the dialogue between students and teacher on features of parental investment in humans was of a quality more often seen in university tutorials. The detailed tutorial advice on written work is of a very high order. Students know how well they are doing and what they need to improve in order to score even higher marks.
- 142 Considered use of technology, including computers, PowerPoint presentations and videos, highlights key concepts. Use of information and communication technology includes access to high quality research materials and provides e-mail contacts with part-time staff. Students are proficient users of computers and make selective use of web sites. They are careful to acknowledge such sources in their coursework. Students feel very secure in the quality and availability of tutorial support and they have well placed confidence in the commitment and effectiveness of their teachers.
- 143 Leadership and management are good. The acting and part-time subject leader has helped the school successfully bridge a short-term staffing difficulty. She has effectively drawn

teachers new to the course into a proficient team. Her own teaching and tutoring skills are a model of good practice and she has a clear understanding of the strengths of the department. There has not been time to develop systematic monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning. Plans to develop electronic resources are well advanced.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- All students entered for the A-level examinations gain pass grades, many at a high level.
- Leadership and management are excellent; courses are well planned and taught.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Students' achievement and enthusiasm for the subject are very good.
- Work experience opportunities and links with designers are not sufficiently developed.

Commentary

- 144 Students follow GCE A-level and AS level courses. In recent years, students have gained high grades and indications are for the high standards to be maintained, even as student numbers increase. Students achieve very well due to very good teaching and excellent leadership and management.
- 145 Students are very keen to learn about the properties of materials and design concepts and learning is very good. Students' attitudes to working independently and collaboratively are very good and all achieve very well in relation to their individual capabilities. Students talk about their work with understanding and enthusiasm. Design folders show that students have carried out thoughtful investigation and careful research. Some students show exceptional initiative in their design solutions. However, although students present their work to a high standard and have a good knowledge of the product design examination requirements, folder work is not sufficiently referenced to design principles. Insufficient reference is made to designers and the technologies of other countries. Opportunities for design and manufacturing work experience are limited.
- 146 The quality of teaching is very good. Courses are well planned and presented. Teachers have very good command of the subject and knowledge of the examination requirements and assessment criteria. They make very good use of new technology. Teachers integrate theory and practical work in lessons very effectively. Students receive high quality individual feedback and all work is carefully monitored. Students speak highly of the support that teachers provide. Teachers insist on a professional approach to the subject and a relaxed yet purposeful atmosphere is established in the workshops.
- 147 Leadership and management of the courses are excellent and high standards are promoted. There is a clear vision of how post-16 design and technology education needs to develop. Students benefit from enthusiastic teachers who work well together. Courses are effectively linked to partnerships with other educational institutions, industry and the local community. This is effective in promoting engineering-related career opportunities. Improvements since the previous inspection have been very good, standards are rising and student interest is growing.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

No subjects were inspected in depth, but the work in art was sampled. A Year 13 lesson was observed. The teaching was very good with well-planned and organised activities that challenged students and led to very high achievement. Standards seen in this lesson were well above average. Students' work was imaginative, demonstrating mature personal styles and very good practical skills.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

No subjects were inspected in depth, but the work in physical education was sampled. There are a small number of students studying A-level physical education. Teaching and learning are good and students are achieving well. In the lessons observed, students were hard working and very committed to the course. They are producing work that is in line with that achieved nationally.

BUSINESS

Business education

Provision in business education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have established very good relationships with students, which enables all to make good progress.
- Timetabling issues have reduced access to business classes for some students.
- Assignments are being improved to help students achieve higher grades.
- Students have not benefited from industrial visits or other contacts with the wider business community.

Commentary

- 148 Although vocational business courses have been well established in the sixth form, their popularity has dropped in recent years. Recent results have been below the national average. Standards are now improving and are in line with national expectations. The grades obtained for coursework are much better than those for externally assessed elements of the examination. The quality of work seen of both past students and those in the second year of their course is of average standard. Students tend to perform better at the descriptive treatments of various business functions rather than in analysing and comparing effective business practice. Students join the sixth form courses with average attainment and their achievement is satisfactory.
- 149 Teaching and learning are both satisfactory. Assignments have been redesigned to reduce unnecessary content and to improve opportunities for students to undertake independent research. Students have positive attitudes towards learning. They work well together and have a good understanding of what they need to do to improve their work. Their study involves extensive use of student experiences of the world of work and is closely monitored by teachers. The support of teachers is highly valued by students, but they have not undertaken any industrial visits nor have they benefited from speakers from the business world. However, one newly recruited member of staff has extensive commercial experience that is being used to ensure that students are familiar with current business practice.
- 150 Timetabling does not enable all students in Years 12 and 13 to attend all business classes. Some have to work on their own while some classes contain a mix of students from both Years 12 and 13. There are only four students on the second year of the course and, although this means that they receive a high level of individual attention, it limits opportunities for wider interaction and discussion. There are no specialist business rooms and this makes it harder for students to access the wide range of teaching materials that could be used to increase the degree of challenge in their learning.

151 Leadership and management are satisfactory. These weakness in provision have been recognised and recent changes in staffing and management are beginning to have a positive impact on standards. Planning and organisation are improved and recruitment into Year 12 is much better this year. Much remains to be done to ensure that vocational business courses contribute fully to the curriculum. Business education in the sixth form was not reported on in the last inspection.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school	3	2
How inclusive the school is		3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3	2
Cost effectiveness of sixth form/ value for money provided by the school	3	2
Overall standards achieved		3
Pupils' achievement	3	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		2
Attendance	3	4
Attitudes	2	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		2
The quality of education provided by the school		3
The quality of teaching	3	3
How well pupils learn	3	3
The quality of assessment	3	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	3	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		2
Accommodation and resources	3	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		1
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		3
The quality of the school's links with the community	2	1
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	2
The leadership and management of the school		2
The governance of the school	2	2
The leadership of the headteacher		1
The leadership of other key staff	3	2
The effectiveness of management	3	2
<i>Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).</i>		