

## INSPECTION REPORT

**Chew Valley School**

Chew Magna, Bristol

LEA area: Bath and North East Somerset

Unique reference number: 109306

Headteacher: Mr Mark Mallett

Lead inspector: David Darwood

Dates of inspection: 22<sup>nd</sup> - 26<sup>th</sup> November 2004

Inspection number: 268774

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll;	1158
School address:	Chew Magna Bristol
Postcode:	BS40 8QB
Telephone number:	01275 332272
Fax number:	01275 333625
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Peter Sanders
Date of previous inspection:	October 1998

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The school is a specialist Performing Arts College situated in the Chew Valley in a rural area south of Bristol. It is a mixed comprehensive school with 1158 pupils on roll. There are 196 students in the sixth form. It is a popular school, which is oversubscribed. The school has been successful in gaining a number of national and regional awards. It has grown since the previous inspection. It serves a mixed socio-economic area with relatively high levels of employment, a significant amount of which is low income. The majority of pupils come from the immediate area. However, the school attracts pupils from a large number of primary schools, with many from outside the local education authority boundary. A significant number come from the southern fringe of Bristol. Eighty per cent of pupils require transport to school. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is well below the national average. Relatively few pupils come from ethnic minorities and even fewer come from homes where English is not their first language. In the few cases where this is the case, the pupils' command of English is good and does not act as a barrier to their learning. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is below average, although the number with statements of educational need is slightly higher than the average. Few pupils join or leave the school during the school year. The attainment of pupils coming into the school is slightly above average.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
3552	David Darwood	Lead inspector	
10173	Catherine Hinds	Lay inspector	
3472	Kathy MacFarlane	Team inspector	Mathematics
12568	Chris Morris	Team inspector	English
31159	Clive Simmonds	Team inspector	Science Biology – sixth form
35778	Andrew Hicks	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
32672	Stephen Hammond-Evans	Team inspector	Art and design
17156	Ted Graham	Team inspector	Design and technology Special educational needs
16930	Jeffery Plumb	Team inspector	Geography
15576	David Nebesnuick	Team inspector	History
15075	Bryan Goodman-Stephens	Team inspector	Modern Foreign Languages
30072	Joseph Skivington	Team inspector	Music Sociology – sixth form
32225	Christine Hough	Team inspector	Physical education
20716	Arthur Grogan	Team inspector	Religious Education
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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

Chew Valley is a **very good** school. Standards are well above the national averages in the end of Year 9 national tests and GCSE examinations and above in GCE A-level examinations. Pupils' achievement is very good in all years across the school. There is a clear focus on raising standards and achievement as well as the self-esteem, confidence and aspirations of all its pupils. The ethos of the school is excellent and is supported by very good leadership and management. The quality of teaching is very good and pupils have very positive attitudes towards their work. The school provides very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The leadership and management of the headteacher, senior management team and middle managers are very good. The leadership of music and special educational needs is excellent;
- The very good teaching is raising aspirations and levels of attainment;
- Pupils appreciate the excellent care and very good support they receive. Relationships in the school are excellent and contribute positively to pupils' very good personal development;
- The hardworking staff value their pupils and have an outstanding commitment to raising achievement and providing a stimulating and secure environment for learning;
- Performing arts status has greatly enriched pupils' participation in an excellent range of extra-curricular activities. It has also had a positive impact on teaching and standards;
- Recent changes in the organisation of information and communication technology (ICT) have hindered the development of ICT skills, knowledge and capability in some subjects. Currently, standards, although average, are below those reported in the previous inspection;
- Statutory requirements for providing a daily act of collective worship and religious education in Years 10 and 11 are not yet met;
- The school has very effective links with other schools, universities and the local community. These partnerships enhance the range of learning opportunities and experiences offered to pupils.

There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. Standards by the end of Year 9 continue to rise at a rate above the national trend. GCSE results have also further improved. The school has secured performing arts status and this has led to a range of very good links with other schools in the area. Weaknesses in the previous report have been addressed with the exception of religious education in Years 10 and 11 and the provision for a daily act of worship.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Achievement for all groups of pupils is **very good**. Standards of work seen at the end of Years 9 and 11 are above the national average. Results in national tests in Year 9 in 2003, and unconfirmed results in 2004, are well above the national average and the average for similar schools. In 2003, the mathematics and English results were in the top 25 per cent nationally. Science results were also well above the national average. Work seen in science during the inspection shows standards are higher than recent test results indicate. Standards are also well above the national average in art and design and above average in all other subjects except in information and communication technology where they are satisfactory. Pupils enter the school from a wide range of primary schools and have had very different experiences. They make rapid progress through Years 7 to 9. Standards of work seen by the end of Year 11 are well above the national average, as were the GCSE results in 2003 and 2004. Standards of literacy and numeracy are very good. This is the result of very good teaching, high-quality pastoral support and guidance, and the high expectations of teachers. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is **very good**. There is an exceptionally caring and supportive ethos throughout the school and pupils' attitudes towards lessons and school in general are very positive. Behaviour is very good and attendance is above the national average.

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2002	2003	2004	2004
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	A	A	A	C
Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	C	D	B	

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

### QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is **very good**. Overall, teaching and learning are **very good**. Teachers have high expectations, both in terms of work and behaviour, and pupils respond accordingly. Performing arts status and the implementation of the national Key Stage 3 Strategy have had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. They have also led to an increased range of learning strategies to interest and motivate pupils. The curriculum is good, particularly the range of appropriate and relevant courses in Years 10 and 11. However, the school does not meet the statutory requirement for religious education in Years 10 and 11. There is an excellent range of extra-curricular activities, which attract an increasingly large number of participants. The school also provides high-quality support, advice and guidance to all its pupils.

### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school are **very good**. The headteacher is well supported by a very effective senior management team. Together they provide a clear sense of direction for the school and have established appropriate priorities for improving standards and achievement. Heads of faculties and subjects, as well as pastoral leaders, also provide very good leadership and management. They give very good support and encouragement to their colleagues and create purposeful and effective working teams. Indeed, teamwork is a major strength of the school. The governance of the school is good. Governors are committed to the school. They recognise its strengths and weaknesses and work as effective critical friends to the school.

### PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The majority of parents are very supportive of the school. They are happy with the education their children receive, particularly the arrangements for settling new pupils into the school. A number of parents have some concerns about the quality of information they receive about homework and their children's progress. The inspection confirmed their positive comments. Whilst the quality of information given to parents is judged to be good, there are areas where this aspect could be improved. This is particularly true with regard to the usefulness of the information given to parents in the annual reports about how pupils can improve. There is also an issue over the setting of a clear homework timetable. Pupils are very positive about their school. They value the very good relationships they enjoy with staff and the excellent range of out-of-school activities. Some pupils commented on the poor behaviour of a small number of pupils in lessons, but felt that the school dealt with this group effectively. During the inspection there were very few incidents of inappropriate behaviour and when it occurred inspectors agreed with pupils that the school deals with incidents effectively.

### IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- To develop information and communication technology both to raise standards in the subject and improve its use across the curriculum.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Make sure pupils have their entitlement to religious education in Years 10 and 11 and provide a daily collective act of worship

## SIXTH FORM SECTION OF THE SUMMARY REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

Overall, provision in the sixth form is **very good**. It provides very well for its students through a very good range of vocational, AS and A-level courses. The sixth form provides a very positive environment for the personal and social development of students. Teaching is very good and students learn effectively as a result. Overall, progress and achievement, based on attainment on entry to the sixth form, is very good. The cost effectiveness of the sixth form is very good.

### Main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Teaching is very good. Teachers have a very clear understanding of the students' needs, which lead to excellent relationships and very good behaviour and attitudes towards learning.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good.
- Standards of work seen during the inspection were above the national average.
- Students are very well supported and the procedures for and quality of assessment is very good.
- Students demonstrate maturity in their approach to school life and show enthusiasm for their work.
- Students are actively involved in the excellent range of extra-curricular opportunities.
- There is insufficient accommodation for private study.

### 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	Provision in English is <b>very good</b> . Very good teaching produces above average standards and students who greatly enjoy the subject.
Mathematics	Provision in mathematics is <b>good</b> . The excellent level of subject knowledge and enthusiasm of teachers leads to good achievement and standards above the national average.
Science	Provision in physics is <b>good</b> . The achievement of students is good, and in many cases very good. Standards are well above the national average. Teaching is very good.
Humanities	Provision in biology is <b>very good</b> . Very good teaching promotes very good achievement. Students' attainment is well above national expectations.
	Provision in history is <b>good</b> . Standards are above average. Teaching and learning are good and students' achievement is good. Enthusiasm for the subject is very strong.
	Provision in geography is <b>very good</b> . Teaching and learning are very good and this leads to well above average standards and very good achievement.
Visual and performing arts and media	Provision in sociology is <b>good</b> . Overall, standards are well in line with the national average. Good teaching and learning enables students to achieve well.
	Provision in art and design is <b>very good</b> . Standards are well above average and students' achievement is very good. This is the result of very good teaching and learning.

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



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

Support and guidance are **very good**, a judgement confirmed by the students themselves. Information about sixth-form courses is very good. Very good-quality advice is offered to students to prepare them for further education, training and employment.

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

Leadership and management are **very good**. The head and assistant head of post-16 education have a clear view of the diverse needs of students and provide very good support to them and the staff. They lead an effective team of committed tutors who carefully monitor students' progress and attainment. The school has made mutually beneficial links with other schools, particularly the Wells Cathedral School. Day-to-day administration is very good.

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

Students are overwhelmingly positive about the sixth form, the range of subjects offered and the quality of teaching. They believe they are increasingly treated as adults as they move through the school and comment positively on the very supportive relationships between students and staff. They appreciate particularly the support and encouragement that they receive in making decisions regarding the next steps in their lives. The strengths they have identified are confirmed by the inspection. Students have no major concerns about the provision, although they recognise the limitations of their current accommodation.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

#### Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

##### Standards and achievement.

Overall achievement is **very good**. Standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are **well above** the national average. In the sixth form standards are **above average**.

##### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in the national tests at the end of Year 9 are well above when compared to the national average and that of similar schools.
- The school's specialist status as a performing arts college is having a very good impact on standards and the quality of pupils' work.
- Pupils' achievement including those with special educational needs is very good.
- Students make very good progress in the sixth form

##### Commentary.

1. Overall standards of attainment by the end of Year 9 are well above the national average. Attainment on entry to the school in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, are slightly above average. The school takes pupils from over 25 different primary schools and from a wide geographical area. This means that pupils' experiences in the foundation subjects are very varied and many join the school with average, and in some cases, below average knowledge and skills. However, pupils make very good progress and achievement is very good. In 2003 the results in the end of Year 9 national tests in the core subjects were well above the national average and well above those of similar schools. Unconfirmed results in the 2004 tests were similar to those of 2003. Work seen during the inspection shows standards overall to be well above national averages and confirms the recent national test results. They are well above in English, mathematics, science, music and art and above in all other subjects except ICT where they are similar to the national average. The overall trend in results is above that nationally. School targets for the core subjects were challenging but were met in English and mathematics. They were narrowly missed in science. High standards are the result of the school's commitment to raising standards, through improving the quality and range of learning opportunities and teaching strategies. These are underpinned by very effective pastoral care and guidance. Overall achievement is very good.

### Key Stage 3

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	36.7(34.6)	(33.4)
mathematics	38.9(38.3)	(35.4)
science	36.0(35.7)	(33.6)

*There were 182 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*

2. Overall standards of work seen during the inspection in Year 11 were well above the national average. Achievement is very good. In 2003, GCSE results were well above average. In 2004 the school attained its best GCSE results with 70 per cent of pupils achieving 5A\*-C grades. This was above the school's target for that year. This reflects the success of the school in maintaining and building upon the work in Years 7 to 9. Standards of work seen during the inspection are well above the average in English, mathematics, science, art, geography, history and music. They are above in all other subjects except ICT where they are average. The reasons for the high standards are the same as in Years 7 to 9. In addition the provision of a good range of courses and options to match pupils' needs and aspirations also has a

positive impact. Most pupils are confident and believe that they can achieve. Overall boys' attainment is below that of girls in all years, as is the case nationally. However, by the end of Year 11 the gap is less than the national picture.

## Key Stage 4

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	70(68)	53(52)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	96(95)	89 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	98(98)	97(96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	48(47.2)	35.2(34.8)

*There were 186 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

3. The school has met the majority of its targets set down as part of its specialist performing arts college status requirement. Indeed the specialist status has had a significant impact on many areas of the school, including improved standards in the performing arts subjects of dance, drama and music as well as the range of teaching and learning strategies being used across the school.
4. Standards in literacy and language are very good and effectively support learning across the curriculum. Pupils are confident in discussions, read demanding texts well and write in a range of forms. Provision for the development of such skills is very good. Pupils' mathematical skills are very good and allow them to handle mathematical problems in other subjects. Standards in ICT are satisfactory. Pupils show increasing confidence and competence in the use of new technologies and in some areas this is well developed, for example, in science, music and design and technology. In others, however, there is more variability in the use of ICT to support learning.
5. Achievement of pupils with special educational needs is very good and they make very good progress. This is because of the level of support provided and the effective deployment of the learning support staff. In addition the good planning by classroom teachers and the use of teaching material tailored to meet the specific learning needs of individual pupils ensures that they progress very well. The progress and achievement of gifted pupils is also very good. This is as a result of well structured lessons, designed to both motivate and challenge more able pupils. The extensive programmes of enrichment and extra-curricular activities also provide them with many opportunities to extend their learning.

### The Sixth Form

6. In 2004 'A' level examinations results were above the national average. Standards of work seen during the inspection were also judged to be above average and reflected the 2004 examination figures. Overall, given their levels of attainment on entry, students make very good progress. Achievement is very good in English, biology, geography and art and design and good in the other subjects inspected. One of the key factors in this success is the very high quality of teaching students receive. Other important factors relate to the students' very positive attitudes toward their work, the very good support and guidance and the effective assessment procedures which track students' performance and identify strategies for improvement.

### 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	98.6 (89.1)	92.4 (89.4)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	52 (25)	36.2 (32.6)
Average point score per pupil	289.5 (224.4)	265.2 (258.2)

*There were 99 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*

#### Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' and students' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are all **very good**. Attendance is **good** in the main school and **very good** in the sixth form. Punctuality is **very good** throughout the school.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils and students are exceptionally proud of, and loyal to, their school
- They develop excellent relationships with others
- Their very good attitudes make strong contributions to the standards they attain and their achievements
- The school is a dignified community because staff encourage pupils and students to behave very well at all times
- Many aspects of school life successfully promote the personal development of pupils and students

#### Commentary

7. Pupils arrive at school and to lessons in very good time because they like, and are committed to, the school. Pupils have a very good work ethic and a determination to succeed. They willingly apply themselves to their learning, so they work hard and perform very well. They talk enthusiastically about the many opportunities provided for them across a wide range of interest areas. Music and sport are particularly popular. Hundreds of pupils participate in the excellent extra curricular activities.
8. This community has fun learning together. Pupils offer one another exceptionally good support throughout school life. They take good care of any peers with particular or individual needs. Consequently pupils with special education needs feel secure and are happy and confident in their relationships with others. Pupils are valued for their individuality, and are helped to do well in as many ways as possible. They respond positively to this and during their time at school they develop into confident young people. There are many opportunities for collaborative or group work to develop pupils' social skills, and they willingly share and support each other in their learning. The distinctive ethos of the school, which is a significant strength, encourages pupils to accept responsibility for their actions and treat everyone with respect. Pupils are well aware of right and wrong actions, have a very clear knowledge of what is expected of them and respond very well. The school makes particularly good use of rewards to celebrate good conduct and citizenship
9. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is very good. Pupils state that bullying is unacceptable within the school and rarely happens. They are confident that the school deals with any incidents promptly and effectively. Very occasionally a few pupils misbehave. Staff provide exceptionally good support for these pupils and ensure that the learning of others is not disturbed. The school uses exclusion very sensitively, but strictly, to secure adherence to the school's very high expectations.
10. Pupils with learning difficulties are well integrated into classes. They have a very good working relationship with their teachers and particularly the learning support staff including the key worker. This contributes to their good motivation and progress with their learning. Many of the pupils with learning difficulties have a mature and understanding attitude towards their

disability or learning need. In some instances this awareness leads them to being able to prevent difficult situations occurring through a 'Time out' system implemented by the department. This approach places responsibility on the pupil to take action. Gifted and talented pupils have been clearly identified by the school and departments are fully aware of their learning needs.

## Exclusions

### *Ethnic background of pupils*

### *Exclusions in the last school year*

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1120	93	1
White – any other White background	2		
Mixed – any other mixed background	9		
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	1		
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	1		
Black or Black British – African	2		
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1		

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

- The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship. Nevertheless, teachers promote pupils' personal development, including spiritual development, very effectively. Performing arts teachers often stimulate very sensitive emotional responses from the pupils. Assemblies promote pupils' personal development very well. They make a particularly good impact on pupils' moral, social and cultural understanding. Pupils value strongly social, cultural and ethnic diversity. They listen very carefully to the views and experiences of others. They are very highly motivated by the needs of other, less privileged, communities. They organise their own events and raise significant sums for charities. The school provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils to develop their communication skills and to make important contributions to the life of the school. During the inspection week, they proudly presented to the head teacher their design for the completion of a memorial garden.
- The school has very good procedures for promoting attendance and recording absence. Figures were above average for last year and are even better during this academic year. This reflects the allegiance of pupils and their parents to the school, as well as the improved procedures.

## Attendance

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data:	7.7	School data :	0.6
National data:	7.2	National data:	1.1

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

## **Sixth Form**

13. Sixth form students are determined to succeed in their lessons and wider activities and work very hard. They are ambitious for themselves and others, and enjoy the additional activities which the school provides. These very positive attitudes contribute significantly to the students' very good achievement. The students establish excellent relationships with adults and with one another. They show very high levels of interest in school life. They eagerly join in the sixth form council, arranging activities for themselves and for younger pupils. They participate willingly in the extensive range of enrichment activities. They represent their school proudly in competition against other schools. They value the performing arts activities. All recent successful Oxbridge applicants from Chew Valley had participated in performances whilst at the school. The students attend lessons very well. A small minority do not attend registration periods, which reflects their lack of total commitment to the school.

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

### **Teaching and learning**

The overall quality of teaching and learning is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils learn successfully and work independently as a result of the very good range of teaching methods.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent and used effectively to stimulate and motivate pupils.
- Expectation and challenge are consistently high.
- Assessment is good overall and in music it is excellent.
- In the sixth form, teachers skilfully provoke and promote student discussion that is of high quality.

### **Commentary**

14. The quality of teaching is very good in all years. Almost half of all lessons seen were very good or excellent and these were distributed consistently throughout Years 7 – 11. Examples of excellent teaching were seen in English, mathematics, Spanish, music, ICT and geography and the very high standards of teaching and learning overall have been further improved since the previous inspection.
15. Teachers have excellent knowledge of their subjects and this inspires confidence in the pupils. In a mathematics lesson seen, the teacher's experience and specialist knowledge inspired high levels of enthusiasm in pupils and this enabled them to work confidently and independently towards discovering the correct formula to use. Pupils' questions are answered very effectively and as a result, this helps to highlight important teaching points and draw out topics for discussion.
16. There is very good evidence of pupils working and learning independently. This is the result of the introduction of an effective range of active and engaging learning techniques and teaching strategies such as role play and pupil presentations. Very good examples of these were seen in music, design and technology and art lessons. The national Key Stage 3 Strategy has been effectively integrated into much of the teaching. Teaching and learning are carefully and systematically monitored, so that best practice can be identified and shared across the school. Teachers also use, what the school calls, the key moment strategy in which they guide pupils towards focusing completely on a specific concept or teaching point for a few moments, in order to reflect and clarify their own understanding.
17. The school is committed to improving the learning of all its pupils. This is achieved by setting challenging tasks and activities which are appropriate to the ability of the pupils and

successfully build upon their prior knowledge and experiences. Underpinning this is very good support and guidance to ensure pupils recognise their strengths and weaknesses as well as strategies to help them improve.

18. Relationships between pupils and teachers are warm and respectful. On the very few occasions when the quality of teaching was less than good, it was because of the disaffected attitudes and behaviour of a few pupils. Improvement made since the last inspection is good.

**Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 152 lessons**

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
7 (5%)	68 (45%)	59 (39%)	16 (11%)	2 (1%)	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.*

19. The role of the key worker in the learning needs department also provides another layer of very effective monitoring for all pupils with learning needs. The regular contact with pupils to discuss their progress and personal concerns also highlights issues that may need to be addressed through teaching. Pupils with learning difficulties make very good progress because of the high level of support provided. In most subjects, there is good use of teaching and learning material tailored to meet individual learning needs. For example, differentiated textbooks were used in science and enlarged text for a pupil with visual impairment. In one instance, a simple device was designed and made by the design and technology department to assist a pupil working in textiles to complete a practical task. Learning support assistants keep an ongoing record of progress as they support pupils in lessons. The progress and achievement of gifted pupils is very good because in the majority of lessons their learning needs are catered for very well. In the majority of subjects teachers have developed their own teaching material and resources to provide extension activities.

**Sixth form**

20. Overall teaching and learning in the sixth form is very good. Teachers are skilful at drawing out pupils' points of view and encouraging them to justify these in argument. In an English lesson, the teacher was very effective in rephrasing students' original comments, which served to give students a useful overview of the essential elements of the text and prompt further discussion. Well-judged, controversial statements by a teacher during a Spanish lesson prompted students to defend their own points of view robustly and fluently. This led to a heated discussion, in Spanish, on renewable resources that reflected students' very high levels of linguistic skill and their equally high level of preparation for the lesson.
21. Teachers have high expectations of students and this, combined with very effective use of teaching strategies often produces excellent learning and achievement. This was apparent in a geography lesson, where the teacher used a modern poem to encourage students to identify with victims of an earthquake. The poem was a powerful source of imagery and this, combined with the effective use of the key moment strategy encouraged students to reflect on the physical, sociological and emotional effects of world tragedies.
22. The school has worked hard to improve provision for the more able and currently a significant number of Year 12 students are involved in a research project that is focusing on the development of independent learning strategies.
23. The planning and pace of lessons are consistently very good across all subjects. Teachers work hard to encourage independent learning skills and use a range of different teaching methods to enable students to work to their potential. Improvement in teaching and learning since the previous inspection is good.

## Assessment

24. Overall, learning is well supported by assessment which is good. The school is currently redeveloping its assessment procedures to ensure that all staff use assessment as an everyday tool to support learning and raise standards. A new assessment and marking policy has been drafted and is awaiting the approval of the governing body. The assessment of pupils' progress across the curriculum is variable. Excellent practice is seen in music, particularly in Years 7 to 9 where monitoring, especially marking, helps pupils to improve a lot. All pupils know their levels and targets. The targets go up in achievable steps. In some faculties there is too much emphasis on oral feedback in terms of pupil improvement and too often books show little evidence of written comments telling them how to improve. In modern languages pupils understand how to improve, and assessment responds to their specific needs. Assessment in some subjects is not, however, always linked to national curriculum levels nor consistently used to inform planning.
25. In the learning support department, regular visits made to primary schools by the co-ordinator and the learning support staff to see pupils in Year 6 with learning difficulties effectively aids their smooth transition to secondary school. Other pupils who may need help are also identified at this stage so that they can be monitored more closely when they move into Year 7. As pupils progress through the school they are regularly monitored and assessed to ensure work is set at the correct level. Pupils with special educational needs have individual educational plans which provide concise details of the pupil's learning difficulty together with classroom strategies for the teacher. However, the language used is not always clear to all classroom teachers.

## Sixth Form

26. The quality of assessment is very good overall. Marking provides practical guidance to students on how to improve. Teachers have detailed knowledge of examination assessment criteria. Assessment procedures are very good. The provision of statistically likely grades and predicted grades for students allows both students and teachers to have a continuous view of current achievement. Such information provides the basis for reviews at regular meetings with parents where targets are agreed for students who are not making expected progress. From the very outset in Year 12, particularly close attention is given to the progress of students whose prior attainment suggests they may experience difficulties on the new courses.

## The curriculum

The school provides a **good** curriculum overall. The quality and quantity of accommodation is **good** and there is a **good** range of resources.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- In the main school there is a good range of courses which effectively meet the needs of all pupils. In the sixth form the curriculum is very good.
- Very high numbers of pupils continue studying modern foreign languages to GCSE.
- A very good range of short courses is delivered in performing arts in Years 7 to 9.
- The excellent music department has an innovative curriculum
- The school does not meet the statutory requirements for the provision of religious education in Years 10 to 11. This was an issue in the previous inspection.
- There is an excellent range of extra curricular activities throughout the school.

## Commentary

27. Whilst delivering all aspects of the national curriculum, the school has also carefully considered the needs of its pupils in its context as a performing arts college. It provides a very good range of courses and extra curricular opportunities in performing arts to pupils in each age range.

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28. It is particularly successful in ensuring that each pupil has the opportunity to take part in an innovative range of short courses in Years 7 to 9 including stage fighting, disc jockey sessions and break dancing. The curriculum for music is excellent. It provides a creative and innovative approach to teaching and engaging pupils in music. For example there are music clusters in the primary schools, a composer in residence, different choirs and music groups including jazz, guitar and string. Dance and drama are also very effective elements of the performing arts curriculum.
29. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is very good and includes three languages. In addition all pupils have an enterprise and skills lesson in Year 9. There is good provision for personal, social and health education throughout the school. There are good curriculum links with a number of primary schools with sixth form students supporting pupils in these schools in order that they get to know them.
30. The curriculum in Years 10 to 11 includes a good range of courses and options, with the exception of the lack of provision of religious education. There are three broad strands that appropriately match the needs of all pupils. Some follow a broadly GCSE programme with the opportunity to opt from a range of four modern foreign languages. A notable feature of the curriculum is that almost all pupils take at least one language. The core curriculum enables these pupils to study all the major academic disciplines with further opportunities to take a second humanities subject, or a second performing arts, or business studies or PE. Some pupils take vocational subject options including applied science, GNVQ ICT and BTEC introductory courses in construction and health and social care. A third group has a good tailored programme of skills for working life. The new facility at Lake View House effectively enables pupils to follow entry level courses in a wide range of subjects. This includes developing life skills through project work such as, for example, refurbishing the garden area. Apart from the lack of religious education in Years 10 and 11, this is a rich curriculum
31. All pupils and students from Year 7 through to Year 13 benefit from an excellent range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities heavily influenced by the performing arts status of the school through music, drama, dance and physical education. There are an extensive number of activities to take part in within the school during lunchtime and after school. There is a breakfast club and homework club for pupils to attend in the learning support department and this provides additional learning opportunities for staff to work individually with pupils. There is also good use of local facilities, trips to different parts of the country, for example outward bound centres and even trips and exchanges abroad. There is also good support for learning outside the school day through a well-established extra-curricular programme for studying additional subjects, revision sessions and after school homework provision. The school acts on suggestions made by pupils for additional extra-curricular activities.
32. The school has improved its accommodation well since the previous report. It is now good overall. Provision for drama and music has improved very well in line with the school's performing arts status. There are now two additional ICT suites. New facilities for physical education have increased very well the range of curricular and enrichment activities available to students and considerably improved facilities for community use. Good facilities in other departments contribute well to learning in a variety of ways. However, long standing difficulties in providing adequate private study work space for the sixth form remain, although the school works hard to do what it can, freeing up the library whenever possible and developing small ICT suites for sixth form use around the school. Accommodation for mathematics remains an issue as the faculty does not have classrooms together nor are there adequate storage areas. Although the accommodation for the learning support department is satisfactory there is not a room for quiet withdrawal or to meet parents in private. In addition to this, there is not a suitable medical room to deal with medical problems when pupils have to receive ongoing treatment and privacy is required.
33. The range and quality of learning resources have also improved since the previous inspection. Resources overall are good. Specialist equipment in technology, physical education and music is used very well. High quality resources contribute well to learning elsewhere, for

example in English where good anthologies of poems enable students to read widely in their study of literature. The library is well stocked with fiction and reference texts and is used well by students and teachers. Although resources in art are satisfactory overall, the lack of some specialist equipment places limitations on the range of curriculum opportunities that the department is able to offer.

34. The school has addressed the issues mentioned in the previous report with the exception of religious education in Years 10 and 11.

### **Sixth form**

35. The school provides a very good curriculum that reflects the expectations and needs of the students. There are 32 subjects on offer. The majority of courses are offered at AS/A level with critical thinking, philosophy and further mathematics offered at AS level. In addition there are AVCE courses in art, ICT and business and a range of GNVQ and BTEC courses in ICT, sports and exercise science as well as early years care and education. Courses shared with other schools include music technology, Italian and German.
36. A very good range of innovative ways to extend the curriculum is in place including a group of further mathematics students attending the University of the West of England and a video link for GCSE Italian with Wells Cathedral School. All students have work experience to prepare for working life and the vocational students have a further period which is built into the course arrangements. In addition many students complete 200 hours of community service, on a Wednesday afternoon, which includes contributing to school life as well as activities within the wider community.
37. All students have PSHE lessons that include citizenship. For example during the inspection week all Year 13 students staged a series of effective and lively inter group parliamentary debates. The religious education curriculum is delivered through a series of conferences when the existing timetable is suspended.
38. There is very good progression from the BTEC first diploma in sport and exercise science to the AS course. Similarly from GCSE art to the AVCE and AS courses there is good continuity and from the four GCSE modern foreign languages to a high take up at AS level. New curriculum subjects offer students good opportunities to widen their learning. There is very good preparation for the next stage of education and about 84 per cent of students last year progressed to university education. Many ex-students come back to the school and act as mentors for the next cohort of university students.

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

The school has **excellent** arrangements for the health, safety and welfare of pupils and students. It provides **very good** support and guidance and involves pupils and students **very well** in its work and development.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Day to day procedures for ensuring pupils' well-being are exceptionally effective
- Very good induction procedures help incoming pupils to settle quickly
- Pupils and students receive very good advice to help them make decisions about subject choices and career paths.
- Arrangements to track academic progress are good in the main school and very good in the sixth form.
- Pupils and students recognise that their views are valued, because the staff listen carefully to them.

### **Commentary**

39. The school takes exceptionally good care of its pupils and students. Staff work very effectively with many primary schools to ensure a smooth transition into Year 7. Pupils confirm that they

settle well in their new surroundings and quickly establish excellent relationships with staff. Year 7 pupils value the interest taken in their well being by the older pupils. Pupils feel that there is always someone they can trust to help them if they have concerns or problems. Health and safety arrangements are rigorous, for example risk assessments in many subjects, and Internet screening. Child protection arrangements are exceptionally comprehensive. Very well trained staff provide help for sick and injured pupils

40. Pupils value their excellent relationships with staff, particularly their tutors and year heads. Pupils comment that tutors track their personal development carefully and are alert to any change in their demeanour. Staff act promptly to arrest any further deterioration and support the pupils' recovery. Pupils with particular needs know that specialist staff provide very sensitive and well-considered help. The introduction of a key worker for pupils with special education needs is a particularly impressive and effective innovation. This contributes significantly to the excellent provision for these pupils.
41. There is very good support, welfare and guidance of pupils with special educational needs. The co-ordinator has very good links with the main feeder primary schools and this ensures their needs can be catered for very effectively upon transfer to the secondary school. During breaks and lunchtime pupils have open access to the department if they need personal support from staff or as a secure area to go to.
42. There are regular team meetings between the learning support staff and the co-ordinator to review the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and to address specific issues concerning individual pupils. There is also a student learning support group consisting of representatives from each subject area to discuss issues, share information and review strategies used in the classroom. This ensures the close monitoring and care of pupils.
43. Another very good initiative to provide care and support for pupils with learning difficulties is the buddy system. This involves over 40 sixth form students who have volunteered to be attached to individual pupils as a person to contact and talk to. The pupils are really appreciative of this approach which is an addition to the high level of care already provided. The students providing the support have training by the department to develop their skills in caring for pupils.
44. Pupils benefit from clear and helpful guidance in Year 9 when they are choosing courses for Years 10 and 11. From Year 7, careers education is included in their personal and social education programme. The quality of careers information and guidance is very good. The school liaises very effectively with outside agencies. It has developed a very comprehensive network of past pupils, parents and local people called an academic network, which supports the guidance programme.
45. Teachers routinely track pupils' academic progress. They assess pupils' work regularly and share the outcomes with pupils. A few departments such as physical education, art, music, English and special education needs give pupils very clear and helpful guidance on exactly how to improve. These departments involve pupils routinely in evaluating their own work and setting their own targets. Tutors have access to a good and improving range of data about pupils' academic performance. Pupils do not all recognise the tutors' role in monitoring and promoting academic performance because arrangements vary between years and tutor groups.
46. The school is keen to seek pupils' involvement in its future development. Pupils enjoy participating in decisions about the school's development. Year councils and the school council are very active. Pupils respond eagerly to regular surveys of their views. They express their views thoughtfully because they know that staff take their ideas and concerns very seriously.

### **Sixth Form**

47. The school provides a very comprehensive induction programme so that students settle quickly. The vast majority choose appropriate courses, and completion rates are very high.

Students value the very good support that teachers provide. Teachers promote excellent working relationships with their students, who comment that staff know them very well. Teachers systematically track students' progress throughout the year. They assess whether the student's work and achievement is at, above, or below the expected level. The school hosts four sixth form parents evenings each year. These provide students and parents with an acute awareness of current performance, and of measures required to secure improvement. Sixth form staff provide individual students with the care and attention they need to make informed choices about their future careers. Students respond very sensibly to regular consultation, whilst staff respect, and try to act upon, what they say.

48. Registration periods are not as popular with the students as might be expected. Some tutors are better than others at making these sessions interesting and focused. Students' commitment to these periods varies and a few, boys in particular, miss too many sessions.

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

The school has **good** links with parents and **very good** links with the community, other schools and colleges.

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

- Performing arts status promotes very good links with many partners.
- The school is enterprising in its search for partners from the community and other schools and colleges.
- The school strives to improve its partnership with parents.
- Very good links with primary schools ensure that pupils transfer smoothly.
- Annual reports are inconsistent in quality.

#### **Commentary**

49. The school's status as a performing arts school is evident in many aspects of school life. The links that have emerged benefit the school and the wider community in many ways. The school organises an extensive range of concerts, productions, festivals and events. All are attended, and supported, by a wide audience of partners. These activities promote pupils' skills, interest and self-confidence. Theatre groups enhance the personal and social education programme. From as young as seven years of age, primary school pupils use the facilities, attend events and are taught by the school's specialist staff. Teachers constantly share their expertise with other local schools. Pupils, students and staff work co-operatively, organising festivals and competitions for local schools. Pupils and parents feel confident about the move from primary schools to Chew Valley. Secondary and primary staff co-operate to ensure continuity of work and to share expertise. For pupils with special educational needs, reviews are undertaken as required, involving parents, school staff and the appropriate agencies to ensure needs are fully assessed and catered for. There is very good liaison with parents at all times. Agencies are involved if required.
50. The school is sincerely committed to working in partnership with other organisations. The efforts of governors and staff have further enhanced the well-established links with local business and industry. The school hosted an exceptionally successful Enterprise Day in collaboration with the Chew Valley Chamber of Commerce, which brought new organisations to the school. The very good careers programme continues to attract and involve additional businesses. Many people from the community now use the school's improved facilities - the leisure centre in particular. The school extends its innovative approach to its links with other schools and colleges. Students learn Italian through a very successful video link with the Wells Cathedral School. Pupils and students compete in a wide range of sports against state and public schools. The school promotes very good links with initial teacher training institutions. It embraces the new and fresh perspectives trainees bring to teaching and learning.
51. Staff work hard and effectively to include parents in the life of the school. A flourishing School Society of parents and massive support for events testifies to the parents' desire to be

involved. Since the previous inspection, the school has appointed a home-school liaison officer. This enhances the partnership with parents, who now have a direct point of contact. The school harnesses parent views through surveys and a good range of open evenings, and handles any concerns very effectively. The school provides very good general information for parents. Some teachers write very detailed annual reports, particularly in science and physical education; however, a few parents express concerns about the inconsistent quality. Despite good quality overall, reporting details of the skills learnt within individual subjects is too variable. Some subjects give more focused guidance for improvement than others. Parents value the school homework diaries, which pupils use conscientiously, but lack clear details of the homework timetable.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Overall, the leadership and management are **very good**. The leadership of the headteacher is **very good**. The leadership of other key staff is **very good**. Management is **very good**. Governance is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The headteacher and the senior management team have a clear vision and high aspirations for the school. They have a strong commitment to the needs of all pupils and staff.
- Governors are knowledgeable and understand their roles and responsibilities. They are dedicated to the school and give good support.
- Currently, the statutory requirements for religious education in Years 10 and 11 and the daily collective act of worship are not being met.
- Overall, the leadership of heads of faculties, subjects and year groups is very good. It is excellent for music and special educational needs.
- The sixth form meets the needs of its students well and is a strength of the school.
- The performing arts status of the school is very well led and managed and has led to a large number of benefits for all pupils.

### **Commentary**

52. Through very good leadership, the headteacher has the respect of pupils, parents, staff and governors. There is a strong commitment to ongoing improvement. There is also good consultation about plans and procedures with all involved in the school. For example, staff and governors can join one of several working groups in order to give their views and be part of the planning process. The ethos of the school is excellent and ensures that all pupils are fully integrated into the life of the school. The school is extremely popular. Both parents and pupils express high levels of satisfaction with the very good quality of education provided.
53. The senior management team of the school is very effective and has good links with middle managers to both monitor and support work in faculties. Staff appreciate this support. Middle managers are seen as being crucial in the school's drive to further raise standards, both in terms of academic success and personal development. To that end they are given a large degree of autonomy and the headteacher encourages and supports innovation. Middle managers are increasingly involved in self-evaluation and monitoring the curriculum and the pastoral system. However, currently, this is often on an informal basis.
54. Management of the school is very good. It functions very effectively on a day-to-day basis as a very calm and orderly community. Communications are good overall. There is a hardworking and dedicated support staff, who serve the school well and are appreciated by teachers and pupils. There are good arrangements for the financial management of the school. The new finance officer is being well supported both by the headteacher and governors. Budgets are carefully set and controlled and there are very good arrangements to ensure that departments do not overspend. The principles of best value are understood and effectively applied. The school gives very good value for money.

55. The school has made a successful bid to become a specialist performing arts school. This has brought benefits to the school and improved funding, which is being used to enhance buildings and resources. The direct benefits to the pupils are apparent in the excellent range of out-of-school activities and in the confidence and self-esteem of the pupils resulting, in part, from the opportunities to take part publicly in both drama and music activities.
56. Performance management is well established and there are very good arrangements for the induction of new staff. Both of these processes are carefully linked to the very good continuing professional development programme. Ideas generated by training and courses are shared with colleagues. The programme is a major factor in contributing to the improvements in the school. There is a good programme for novice teachers who are part of the school's involvement with initial teacher training. Experienced mentors commented that they enjoyed this interaction with colleagues from outside the school.
57. The governors have been pro-active in pursuing funding for building improvements to the school and are aware of the overall strengths and weaknesses. They have identified clear and appropriate priorities since the previous inspection and overall improvement is good. However, there remains some non-compliance with regard to statutory collective worship and the provision of religious education for Years 10 and 11. This was an issue at the time of the previous inspection. Governance is therefore good rather than very good.
58. The co-ordinator for special educational needs provides excellent leadership with a good team of well-qualified learning support assistants and teachers. The introduction of the role of key worker and the buddy system are excellent initiatives to maximise the level of support and monitoring for all pupils. There is very good management of the department with continuous developments designed to improve the provision for pupils. The learning support staff are deployed very well to support pupils in the classroom. A school governor is attached to the learning support department. The governor has recently taken on this role and has already started to become involved with the department to monitor and support their work.
59. The main contributors to the success of the school are clearly the people involved in its life. Overall, the majority of pupils are mature and responsible and want to succeed, parents are supportive, the leadership provided by staff and governors is very focused, and those employed at all levels in the school are fully committed to the welfare and success of the pupils.

#### Leadership and management of the sixth form

60. Leadership and management in the sixth form are **very good**. Governance of the sixth form is **good**. The head and assistant head of post-16 education are very good role-models and are approachable to both students and staff. Students are known well individually and benefit from very good levels of support. There is a consistent and coherent approach to monitoring and evaluating students' performance and progress. There has been very good collaboration with other schools and post-16 providers to improve the range and quality of courses on offer. There is an excellent range of enrichment activities for all students. Funding has been used wisely to give students a very good curriculum and a very good quality of teaching. The sixth form is cost effective.

#### Financial information

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

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,793,196	Balance from previous year	78,282
Total expenditure	3,542,672	Balance carried forward to the next	220,677
Expenditure per pupil	3129		

The large amount of money carried forward to 2004 is to pay for the Astroturf and includes standards fund available until August 2004.

### **Work-related learning**

The overall provision is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school has very good links with the local community, business and other outside agencies.
- There is a good and well-organised work experience programme and pupils are well informed about the world of work.
- Work-related learning is well managed.

### **Commentary**

61. The school provides a comprehensive mix of experiences, a variety of methods to assess pupils' achievement and many opportunities for enrichment. Very comprehensive careers advice is provided by the Connections service. A good range of vocational courses is provided across the subjects. The business studies department develops enterprise and employability skills with Year 9 pupils. Their work both as individuals and in groups leads to the development of ideas to raise both funds and awareness of community issues. The school provides all Year 10 pupils with a minimum entitlement of a one-week work experience placement. Many other groups also benefit from extra placements, for example GCSE health and social care and the AVCE in art and design. Preparation and feedback for work experience is comprehensive and includes the presentation of portfolios, role-play and extended writing, alongside self-assessment and assessment by employers.
62. Links with other agencies from the world of work are well developed. The rotary club provides mock interviews for Year 11 pupils. The Chelwood Chamber of Commerce help to provide an industry day with many agencies such as the police and fire service taking part. A network of ex-pupils has formed a group to provide interview practice for sixth formers prior to university admission. Army initiative days for Years 9 to 11 are also on offer and large numbers enjoy this experience. The impact of these experiences is good and has changed many pupils' attitudes to school and learning in a positive way. Many of the subject departments in the school have yet to fully integrate work-related learning into their curriculum delivery. The staff responsible for the delivery, co-ordination and evaluation of this area of learning are highly effective, with a clear policy and a vision for progress.

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

### **SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4.**

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

##### **English**

Provision in English is **very good**.

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

- Standards by the end of Years 9 and 11 are well above average and pupils achieve very well.
- Very good questioning in lessons ensures that pupils are fully involved and challenged.
- Very good relationships between teachers and pupils engender confidence and a willingness to attempt difficult work.
- Very good leadership and management provide a clear focus for the department.
- Difficulties of arranging access to ICT facilities limit the regularity of use by pupils.
- On some occasions, end-of-lesson review sessions are too rushed.

##### **Commentary**

63. In 2003, results in Year 9 national tests were well above the national average and also well above average compared with schools with pupils of similar prior attainment. Unconfirmed results for 2004 are also well above average. These high standards are reflected in work seen during the inspection. All pupils achieve very well by Year 9. GCSE results in 2003 in English language and literature were well above average. Results for 2004 are slightly lower in language, but are still above average. They are higher in literature. Work seen during the inspection is well above average in both subjects. As the pupils in Year 11 entered the school with average standards in English, they have achieved very well. Reflecting the national pattern, girls' results are higher than those for boys. Pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented, achieve very well.
64. By Year 9, virtually all pupils are confident about expressing views in small groups or in front of the whole class. They listen well to each other. By Year 11, the highest attaining pupils are skilled in constructing arguments orally and adopting a suitable tone to emphasise important points. By Year 9, the highest attaining pupils discern meaning beneath the surface in their reading, whilst the very weakest pupils rely on retelling the narrative. By Year 11, pupils are increasingly successful in understanding authors' intentions and how they influence readers. By Year 9, many pupils are varying sentence structure for effect. By Year 11, although the weakest pupils still experience some difficulty with organisation of more extended writing, most pupils write cohesively in a consistent style.
65. Teaching and learning are very good. The quality of teaching is remarkably consistent and no teaching is less than good. Very good questioning occurs in most lessons. This ensures pupils' attention is focused on salient points throughout. It is also used to involve and challenge pupils of all abilities. There is a very good balance of activities in most lessons, where each task builds upon learning in the previous one. The pace of lessons is usually good with precise time limits given for individual activities. Nevertheless, within the confines of 50-minute lessons, the end-of-lesson review sessions do not always have enough time allocated and are too rushed. The very good subject knowledge of teachers is an important feature of teaching. It enables pupils to be given frequent examples and references from other texts and other media. All of the above strengths are embedded in a department where relationships between teachers and pupils are very good and engender confidence in pupils who are accordingly keen to attempt difficult work. In a Year 8 class, where pupils were reading Shakespeare for the first time, pupils of all abilities were eager to be given parts and read aloud. Subject teachers and learning support staff are careful to ensure that pupils with special



educational needs receive sufficient support in lessons. The marking of work is often very good with a positive tone and explanations of what is good and how to improve. Although good overall, it is, however, variable in quality. The impact of the very good teaching and enthusiasm of staff is reflected in the equal enthusiasm of pupils.

66. The curriculum for pupils in Years 7 to 9 provides both comprehensive coverage of the Key Stage 3 Strategy objectives and good preparation for the types of reading and writing encountered in later years. In many lessons and assignments there are very good opportunities provided for the social and moral development of pupils with consideration of ethical issues and dilemmas. In each year there is a well-planned opportunity for an ICT-based activity, but difficulty of access to facilities means pupils' use of ICT is too infrequent to have maximum benefit. Very good extra-curricular provision, including writing clubs, reading activities and productions and theatre trips, extends pupils' experience of the subject.
67. There is an energetic corporate approach from members of the department. Very clear analysis of areas of concern leads to clear actions. A good example is the recent introduction of extension sets in Years 10 and 11, which are taught extremely well and provide extra challenge for gifted and talented pupils. Both results and the quality of teaching have improved since the previous inspection. The report from that inspection was very positive with only a small number of issues and there has been good improvement in those identified areas.

### **Language and Literacy across the Curriculum**

68. Standards in literacy and language are very good and effectively support learning across the curriculum. Pupils are confident in discussions, read demanding texts well and write in a range of forms. Provision for the development of such skills is very good. The introduction of a whole-school literacy strategy was based on a detailed survey of existing practice. Analysis of the results of this survey informed the content of whole-school INSET. All faculties were represented on a literacy working party and an external consultant was employed to provide training. The teaching of literacy is very good overall. It is, however, only satisfactory in ICT as the treatment of literacy and language skills is not sufficiently systematic. In many lessons in other subjects there are extended opportunities for discussion and a good range of writing opportunities.

### **Modern Foreign Languages**

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

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

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which results in good achievement by pupils.
- The school teaches modern foreign languages to all pupils from Years 7 to 11.
- The relationships with pupils are very good and facilitate collaborative learning.
- Leadership and management are very good and support for new teachers is very strong.

### **Commentary**

69. Standards are above average in Years 7 to 9 in French, Spanish and German lessons and in written work. Higher- and middle-attaining pupils in Year 9 ask and answer familiar questions and confidently express their opinions. In French, Spanish and German, pupils' pronunciation is good. Pupils effectively consolidate their oral work in writing. Most high- and many middle-attaining pupils write short compositions and dialogues containing past, present and future tenses with few errors. Most high-attaining pupils have a very good understanding of grammatical structures and are familiar with some grammatical terminology. Most pupils understand lessons in the foreign languages and can pick out simple details from recorded and written texts. Lower-attaining pupils and pupils with special educational needs confidently use short phrases and words that they have learned off by heart. They also understand classroom instructions and can pick out details in short texts when well supported by the

teacher. This represents good achievement for the vast majority of pupils in all three languages in Years 7 to 9. A few pupils, mainly boys, underachieve because they are easily distracted or because work is not pitched at their level.

70. Results in GCSE modern foreign languages over recent years have been broadly average and in 2004 these standards were maintained. These results represent good achievement, since the school enters nearly all pupils for a GCSE in modern foreign languages, whereas nationally modern foreign languages are options taken generally by only high- and middle-attaining pupils.
71. Standards of work observed in French, German and Spanish in lessons and in written work are above average in Years 10 and 11. By the end of Year 11, most high- and many middle-attaining pupils produce work of GCSE A\* to C standard. Generally, these pupils understand the spoken language well and their pronunciation is good. Many use a good range of tenses and more complex structures. The French of a few pupils, however, is weak and they have many gaps in basic structures and vocabulary. Lower-attaining pupils understand simple questions, vocabulary items in context and simple short texts. Their pronunciation is satisfactory. Overall, pupils' achievement in French, German and Spanish in Years 10 and 11 is good. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well because of the step-by-step approach in lessons, the good use of mime, visuals and the individual support from the teachers and learning support assistants.
72. Teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11 are good. Teachers' very good linguistic skills, good subject knowledge and good awareness of National Curriculum and GCSE requirements have a very positive impact on learning. The consistent use of French, German and Spanish is especially effective in developing listening and speaking. Pupils generally respond well to well-planned lessons, which have a brisk pace and that make use of stimulating activities and resources. Most pupils learn well in pairs or groups, although some pupils are occasionally off-task and consequently underachieve. The marking of pupils' work is regular and comments are encouraging, but do not always contain advice on how to improve. The very good relationships between teachers and pupils have a very positive impact on learning and, as a result, pupils are keen to participate orally, accept error correction and ask questions for information or clarification. ICT is used effectively in some lessons, but lack of regular access to computers is a barrier.
73. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The department head has a very clear vision and teachers work diligently to achieve their agreed goals. Standards are improving, as is the quality of teaching and learning. Most of the targets on the departmental development plan have been achieved. Support for new teachers is very strong. There is effective monitoring. The trips abroad and the exchange link with France motivate pupils.
74. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The department continues to offer modern foreign languages to all pupils in Years 7 to 11, the majority of pupils enjoy the subject and most are successful in gaining accreditation.

## MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in national tests are well above the national average and are improving.
- Teaching is very good overall and leads to very positive attitudes to mathematics.
- Very good, enthusiastic leadership and management provide clear priorities for the department.
- Marking does not always help pupils know how to improve.
- The mathematics curriculum offers a very good range of experiences and learning opportunities.
- ICT experiences are limited because of difficulties in accessing computers.

### Commentary

75. Pupils begin Year 7 with standards in mathematics slightly above the national average. In 2003, results in national tests at the end of Year 9 were well above the national average and the average of similar schools. Results at the higher levels were also well above average. Overall, results in the GCSE examinations in 2003 were significantly above the national average. Results in 2004 were similar to those in 2003. Standards of work seen are also well above average overall, particularly for pupils working at the higher levels. Achievement for all pupils in Years 7 to 11 is very good. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress, as do the more able.
76. Teaching and learning is very good in Years 7 to 11. All lessons seen were at least good and 40 per cent were very good or excellent. This very good teaching is a result of very good planning, which includes a variety of stimulating activities. Teachers are excellent mathematicians, who promote their subject very well. Their hard work and enthusiasm is transmitted to the pupils, who respond very well and have very good attitudes to their work. Overall, teaching and learning meets the needs of all groups of pupils and this leads to very good results. Pupils at all levels are challenged by their mathematics lessons. The higher attainers are accelerated through the national schemes in Years 7 to 9, resulting in high levels of motivation. In Years 10 and 11, the most able can begin the sixth-form syllabus early so that they are not held back.
77. All pupils are well supported by their teachers and the vast majority are confident at their level of mathematics. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress as a result of high levels of support from their teachers and learning support staff, who work and plan well together. The department makes a good contribution to their personal development. Pupils are given appropriate choices about their work, enabling them to make decisions for themselves, which they do sensibly. For example, when doing practice questions they are often required to decide at what level they need more consolidation. Very good behaviour techniques are used by teachers, resulting in a calm and purposeful atmosphere in classrooms. Assessment systems are good overall. However, marking, although completed regularly, does not always enable pupils to know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. This makes it difficult to set targets and monitor overall progress.
78. Leadership and management are very good. The head of faculty is a good role-model through his own teaching and the faculty has very clear priorities for further improvement. Management is also very good. The faculty work very well as a team and are very supportive of each other, despite the fact that two rooms are some distance from the rest of the team. Currently, ICT to enhance mathematics is limited as a result of difficulties in accessing the facilities. However, some good use of graphical calculators was seen, which contributes well to pupils' ICT skills.

79. The curriculum enables pupils to experience a very good range of mathematical experiences. Pupils enjoy investigations and are constantly challenged to think mathematically. There is a very good range of additional out-of-lesson activities as part of the performing arts initiative. These enrich pupils' experiences and include special sessions for the more able in Years 7 and 8, opportunities for maths challenge competitions and a 'Building Bridges' architecture workshop. The department has made good progress since the previous inspection.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

80. Overall, the very good standards in mathematics enable pupils to use their skills very well in other subjects. Although very few examples of pupils using mathematics were seen during the week, their mathematics in science lessons was very good. Pupils were able to analyse and hypothesise about a range of distance/time graphs, use the correct units, substitute successfully in algebraic formulae and rearrange them as appropriate.

## **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very good achievement leading to improved GCSE results.
- The quality of leadership is very good and provides a clear vision.
- Teaching is very good.
- There are a few inconsistencies with day-to-day marking.
- There is very good use of ICT.

### **Commentary**

81. Results in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 were well above the national average in 2003. They have improved since the previous inspection, particularly in the proportion of pupils achieving a Level 6 or above. The results are in line with those of pupils in similar schools based on their relative achievement in Year 6. Girls did better than boys. The results in 2004 dropped slightly, but are still well above average. Results in the 2003 GCSE examinations in double award science were very high compared to the national average in both the A\* to C grades and the higher grades of A\* and A. Boys did better than girls in achieving the higher grades. The results dropped in 2004. This can be linked to a staffing problem. Results were still well above the national average.
82. By the end of Year 9, standards seen in science are well above average. Pupils are very confident when doing practical work and accurately predict outcomes of experiments. Pupils of all prior attainment can safely carry out experiments and name the products of these reactions. Most can write word equations for the reactions and as a result have a clear understanding of what is happening. Pupils with special talents in science can write chemical equations, which gives them an understanding of the proportions of reactants and products. All pupils have a good command of scientific vocabulary, which allows them to express themselves clearly in both speaking and writing. Scrutiny of exercise books shows that all pupils, including those with special educational needs, make very good progress throughout Years 7 to 9. By the end of Year 11, pupils' practical skills have become more sophisticated. They collate, tabulate and analyse results effectively, identify anomalies and hypothesise why they occur. Achievement is very good, as shown by the very high proportion of pupils gaining an A\* or A grade in GCSE, and standards overall by the end of Year 11 are well above average.
83. Teaching is very good across the subject. This leads to very good learning. The strongest features of the most effective teaching are the very good subject knowledge, planning and challenge that the teachers present to the pupils. Planning ensures that time is used extremely well. There is always an effective starter activity to get the pupils focused and a summing-up

at the end of the lesson to see what they have or have not understood. Teaching in class leans towards checking and developing understanding. The searching questions from the teachers encourage the pupils to consider their answers more carefully and therefore develop their thinking skills so that they learn more quickly. The sharing of innovative ideas and good practice is helping to raise standards. For example, pupils in Year 7 have made a film about fossil fuels and their uses. This was directed by technicians from the performing arts department and links in with the performing arts status of the school. Homework is regularly set and is of a high quality. It re-enforces the work done in lessons, but the marking does not always let the pupils know what they have to do to improve.

84. The department is led and managed very well and there is a focus on ensuring very high standards. Innovation occurs regularly, and curricular changes have seen the development of a GCSE applied science course. This course links very well with the world of work. It gives pupils opportunities to listen to visiting speakers, who talk about the wide range of employment opportunities that are linked to science. The leadership places a high priority on helping to develop teachers' skills. All have been trained to develop further their undoubted skills in teaching the National Science Strategy in Years 7 to 9. The improvement in standards reflects a department with ambition. Very good progress has been made since the previous inspection. Accommodation is much improved and most of the laboratories are ideal places in which to teach and learn. The use of ICT has improved considerably and teachers are expert in the use of the interactive whiteboards. These are used regularly and add a new visual impact to learning. This was seen in a Year 9 class of higher-attaining pupils, who were considering the position of metals in the periodic table. The department fulfils its statutory duty in using data logging, which gives the pupils insight into how ICT can help improve their learning in science, particularly in displaying and analysing complex results. The department is extremely well supported by a team of very efficient technicians.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The introduction of new courses has interrupted long-established school practice and led to a decline in standards compared to those reported in the previous inspection.
- Teaching is centred on well-planned practical tasks that develop pupils' knowledge and skills well.
- Pupils' positive attitudes to work and self-motivation contribute well to their own achievements.
- Pupils make good use of ICT to support learning in subjects across the curriculum.
- Leadership of ICT is good, but there has been insufficient evaluation of recent initiatives to determine their impact on pupils' achievements.

### **Commentary**

85. The school is part way through a major reorganisation in the way it teaches ICT. At the time of the previous inspection, ICT was taught entirely through other subjects. The most recent development, begun in 2003, is the introduction of specialist ICT lessons for pupils in Years 7 to 9. Teachers are growing in confidence with the new course following its cautious introduction last year. However, assessment of pupils' performance in summer 2004 shows a fall compared to the standards reported earlier. About three-quarters of pupils reached the standard expected for Year 9 pupils or attained at higher levels. This is in line with national expectations. Standards on entry to the school are broadly average. Current Year 9 pupils achieve satisfactorily and are on course once more to reach national expectations by the end of the year. Additionally, since the previous inspection, the school has introduced optional GNVQ ICT courses for pupils in Years 10 and 11. Just under half of pupils in these years are currently registered. Results in 2004 ranged from distinction to pass awards, in line with the

school's predictions overall, although some pupils failed to gain accreditation. However, there is no data by which to compare performance with other schools. Current Year 11 pupils are on course to meet their target grades and they achieve satisfactorily in the longer term. Achievement in individual lessons is often good because pupils are taught well. For most pupils in Years 10 and 11, ICT is still taught through other subjects. Standards are in line with national expectations overall and pupils achieve satisfactorily, although overall performance is lower than that reported at the previous inspection, for reasons explained later in this report.

86. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Good explanations and demonstrations of new skills ensure that pupils are clear about what they are to learn and understand the tasks that they have to do. Short discussions and well-organised practical work structure learning effectively and ensure that pupils' knowledge and skills build systematically on what they already know. For their part, pupils are interested in what they are doing and behave very well. Consequently, lessons move on purposefully and pupils make good progress. Pupils with special educational needs receive good support both from teachers and classroom support staff. Close or often individual attention helps them make good progress towards their targets and ensures that they achieve as well as others in the class.
87. The quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9 is more variable than in Years 10 and 11. In the best lessons, teachers have the confidence to teach the new course materials from the National Strategy for ICT and have high expectations. For instance, in one lesson, pupils were challenged to improve multimedia presentations about themselves by adding a range of visual and other technical effects. Working mostly on their own, but skilfully guided when needed, they significantly improved their work. They achieved very well because they were given every encouragement to use their initiative and demonstrate the wide range of skills they already possessed. In lessons where teachers are less familiar with the new course, teachers do not always make best use of time or set tasks that challenge pupils as well as they could. Consequently, pupils make slower progress than they might.
88. In Years 10 and 11, good-quality, home-produced technical support materials and good guidance from the examination board enable pupils to track their own progress as they work through each unit of the GNVQ course. Teachers discuss work with individual pupils and give them good advice on how to improve. However, similar guidance when marking written work is much less evident. There are some good examples, but practice is inconsistent.
89. Leadership and vision for the development of ICT are good. The school has a clear view of what it hopes to achieve, building on its achievements since the previous inspection in developing the curriculum and facilities for ICT. Overall, management is satisfactory. The ICT co-ordinator works very hard to oversee all the developments in ICT and gives very good support and advice to colleagues. The school has not yet evaluated the impact of its development initiatives on pupils' achievements and is, therefore, not best placed to plan most effectively to restore the high standards previously attained.

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

90. Pupils make good use of ICT to support learning in other subjects. It is very good in science, design and technology and music, which use specialist equipment located in the department, for instance in the development of multi-part compositions in music for GCSE coursework. However, the introduction of GNVQ and ICT lessons in Years 7 to 9 has reduced teacher and pupil access to ICT in some subjects even though the school has significantly improved its computer provision. This in turn has led to a decline in ICT standards overall, especially for pupils in Years 10 and 11, compared to those reported at the previous inspection.

## HUMANITIES

### History

Provision in history is **very good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good relationships support very positive attitudes towards the study of history.
- Standards in recent examinations were excellent.
- The department is very well led.
- Marking is inconsistent and does not always give a clear indication of how a pupil can improve.
- There are very high expectations of the pupils and they work very hard in lessons.

#### Commentary

91. Standards in history on entry to the school are just below expectations. By the end of Year 9, standards are above average and achievement overall is very good. All pupils, including gifted and talented and those with special educational needs, achieve very well. The National Curriculum teacher assessment results in 2004 were a little above the national average. By Year 11, standards are well above average and this represents very good achievement. Pupils are able to write very fluently and their listening and oral skills are very well developed. Pupils are prepared very thoroughly for their examinations. Results in the 2003 GCSE examination were far above the national expectation with 95 per cent securing A\* to C passes. This represents excellent attainment. In 2004, these very high standards were maintained.
92. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. The strongest features are the very good teacher knowledge, the very careful planning of the learning activities, the fast and challenging pace, and the very good and often excellent attitudes of the pupils to their learning. Very skilful questioning ensures that pupils systematically develop their learning and the full range of pupils is actively encouraged to participate. Historical artefacts are used very imaginatively in a Year 9 class and the use of the interactive whiteboard to illustrate Elizabethan portraits ensures a very high level of interest and understanding. The very high quality of the historical storytelling very successfully develops the pupils' ability to identify closely with conditions on the Western Front in the Great War. In almost all lessons there are very high expectations of pupils and they respond very well and work very hard with considerable focus. Assessment is good with self-evaluation and peer-marking. Marking is, however, inconsistent and ranges from comprehensive advice to light-touch marking with few comments. Although pupils have a good knowledge of their statistically likely grades, many were less sure of how to improve their performance.
93. Leadership and management of the department are very good. There is an excellent vision for the subject's direction and to achieve this the curriculum is regularly reviewed and improved. The schemes of work are very comprehensive and provide very good support for the highly effective teaching team. There are many strategies in place to ensure that the primary focus of the department is to develop very good learning. The head of department is an exemplary role-model for his commitment, enthusiasm and consistently very good teaching skills. The accommodation is very good and the display of pupils' work and historical evidence is excellent. This is a very good and highly successful department. The very high standards achieved at the time of the previous inspection have further developed and improvement is therefore good.

## Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is very good across all years because of the exciting, dynamic and challenging teaching based on excellent subject knowledge and stunningly good relationships.
- GCSE results at grades A\* - C are consistently at least above the national average.
- More use could be made of ICT to support learning.
- Leadership is inspiring. Management is very good.

### Commentary

94. Teacher assessments in recent years show that standards by Year 9 are in line with national averages. GCSE passes at grades A\* - C were well above the national average in 2003 and above the national average in 2004. The drop in 2004 reflects a staffing issue, which has since been addressed, and an anomaly in the examination syllabus, which is under review.
95. Current Year 9 pupils are above the national average. Given that attainment on entry in Year 7 in geography is below average, this demonstrates very good achievement. The difference between attainment in the current Year 9 and that evidenced in recent teacher assessments reflects the fact that the teacher assessments are a little harsh. Achievement continues to be very good throughout Years 10 and 11, so that by Year 11 attainment is above the national average.
96. Teaching and learning are very good. The quality of teaching ranges from satisfactory to excellent. The best teaching is exciting, imaginative and inspirational. It is characterised by excellent subject knowledge, cracking pace, fascinating activities, skilful questioning and high expectations. Because pupils are interested and enjoy their learning, as seen in a Year 9 lesson on earthquakes, they make rapid gains in their acquisition of facts and skills. On rare occasions, pupils are not always sufficiently clear about what is expected of them when they are set a task to do in the lesson and so flounder a little until their difficulty is picked up by the teacher and dealt with. Due to very good support and effective planning between teaching assistants and teachers, pupils with special educational needs achieve very well. Dynamic activities for pupils identified as gifted and talented ensure that they are extended and so their achievement is very good. Although the use of ICT to support teaching and learning is satisfactory, it is limited. This is partly due to the difficulty in accessing the computer suite, but also because of the somewhat dated equipment within the department.
97. Leadership is very good. The new head of department has successfully empowered an effective team of teachers to aspire to the highest expectations for all pupils. Management is very good. Effective monitoring of teaching and learning results in the sharing of good practice and raised achievement. Assessment is very good, but in keeping with the high expectations within the department has been identified as a priority for further development and refinement. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.



## Religious education

Provision in religious education is **unsatisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision is unsatisfactory because the school does not fulfil its legal obligation to teach religious education in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils on the GCSE course are achieving well and standards are above average.
- Very good leadership supports non-specialists teaching the subject in Years 7 and 8.
- Effective teaching is promoting good learning through opportunities for independent enquiry.
- Assessment through common assignments is improving, but is not yet able to produce the data to monitor pupils' performance across a year group.

### Commentary

98. Non-compliance with statutory requirements was a key issue in the previous inspection. For a variety of reasons, nothing was done about it until this year. A series of half-day conferences have now been arranged for pupils in the current Years 10 and 11, and all pupils will receive lessons in religious education from September 2005. A small number of pupils, mainly girls, take the subject at GCSE level and results have been above the national average in recent years.
99. Standards are average in Years 7 and 8, rising to just above average by the end of Year 9, where there is greater concentration of specialist teaching. Year 9 pupils show good ability in finding out information for themselves on aspects of Judaism and Buddhism and have a good understanding of differences between various religious groups within these faiths. Higher attainers are able to see parallel distinctions between orthodox and liberal traditions within Christianity. Teaching through themes has helped most pupils to compare different religions, but lower attainers are sometimes confused about basic beliefs. Pupils are thoughtful in devising their own creeds and are sensitive to expressions of faith through different forms of worship. Girls produce more detailed written work than boys, but the gender gap is similar to that found nationally.
100. Standards are above average on the GCSE course, particularly in the quality of the Year 11 coursework. Pupils have full sets of notes on the topics studied, but their assessed work, evaluating different views on religious issues, does not reflect their true potential. Religious education is currently not a core subject in the school in Years 10 and 11, but pupils have had the opportunity to consider religious and moral issues in some half-day conferences. This provision falls well short of the requirements of the local agreed syllabus. Consequently, their standards are below average.
101. Pupils' achievement in the subject is good by Year 9 and at GCSE level. There is a wide variation in pupils' knowledge of other faiths than Christianity when they enter the school. Progress is satisfactory in Years 7 and 8, reaching expected standards on a shorter allocation of lesson time than other humanities subjects. Progress is more marked in Year 9, enabling many to achieve their potential for higher levels of attainment. There is limited opportunity for pupils to continue their religious education beyond the age of 14 years.
102. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Lessons are well planned by the subject specialist and delivered effectively by humanities teachers in Years 7 and 8. Teachers establish very good working relationships with their pupils that promote focused learning. Pupils respond well to working in groups and finding out information for themselves from the Internet. Where teaching was just satisfactory, it either lacked sufficient challenge for higher attainers or tasks and materials were not adapted for less-capable pupils. Discussion tended to be whole-class question and answer, rather than in small groups to increase the scope for participation by lively-minded pupils. Very good teaching was observed at GCSE level, where multimedia approaches to revision consolidated pupils' learning most effectively. Common

assessment tasks are not sufficiently focused on levels of attainment in the subject. As a result, they do not generate sufficiently accurate data for monitoring pupils' performance more rigorously.

103. The school's failure to manage the curriculum, so that pupils receive their entitlement to religious education in Years 10 and 11, has hindered the subject's development. Consequently, improvement since the previous inspection has been unsatisfactory. Plans are now in place to remove these constraints and establish religious education as a core subject in Years 10 and 11, making the necessary specialist teaching available. The head of department has worked tirelessly to address the issue of non-compliance in Years 10 and 11 and a clear vision of what should and could be achieved. Her leadership is good. Management is good. Highly efficient organisation of courses and resources and close teamwork has equipped the humanities team to deliver the curriculum effectively in Years 7 to 9. Teaching has improved as a result.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **Design and technology**

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

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

- The very good leadership and management of the department provide a clear focus for improvement.
- There is a very good team of specialist teachers in the department.
- There are consistently very good results in all of the GCSE courses.
- Assessment across Years 7 to 9 is very effectively established and good use is made of data for target setting and monitoring pupils' progress.
- There are very good ICT facilities within the department for control and computer-aided design and manufacture.
- Schemes of work in Years 7 to 9, although well planned, do not identify cross-curricular themes.

#### **Commentary**

104. Teacher assessment shows that the standards attained by pupils at the end of Year 9 in 2003 and 2004 were above the national averages for design and technology. Standards of work seen during the inspection confirm the teacher assessments. Overall, achievement is good. There is a good focus on both designing and making activities to learn practical skills and to gain a good understanding of design. Graphical skills are developed well from Year 7. Pupils gain good experience in using electronics, control systems and computers for manufacturing processes.
105. GCSE results in 2003 and 2004 were well above the national averages. In Years 10 and 11, standards in lessons are above average and achievement is good. Pupils develop a good knowledge and understanding of their chosen material area. Pupils have good skills in graphical communication and are able to present design ideas clearly. Good use is made of different forms of modelling to explore and develop design concepts. The use of ICT is well embedded in coursework for presentation and graphical design.
106. The overall quality of teaching and learning in lessons is good and sometimes very good. Where lessons are good or better, the planning is thorough, the work is challenging, expectations are high and learning is reviewed very well with pupils. Teachers have a good working relationship with pupils that contributes to their good motivation and progress in lessons. Pupils with learning difficulties and those identified as gifted or talented are supported well in lessons and also make good progress.

107. The leadership is very good with high expectations for improvement and raising standards. This is impacting positively on standards and leading to improvements in teaching and learning. Management is very good, planning is thorough and the specialist teachers work together as a very effective team. Monitoring by the head of department is very good through lesson observation and pupil interview. There is a well-structured development plan to extend provision and to raise standards further. Assessment practice is now well established across Years 7 to 9 and used effectively to set targets, monitor progress and for reporting to parents. In Years 10 and 11, assessment is detailed and provides good direction to pupils on how to improve their work. Schemes of work in Years 7 to 9 are well planned, but do not fully identify cross-curricular themes, for example numeracy, ICT and citizenship. As a consequence, it is difficult to monitor the contribution of the subject to these areas.
108. The accommodation for design and technology is very good. Teaching rooms are well maintained, well organised and provide a stimulating learning environment for pupils. The resources for teaching and learning are good, including very good ICT facilities within the department for control activities, research and manufacture. Display is of a very good quality and very effective use is made of work produced by pupils to show expectations of quality, content and presentation. Two technicians provide very good support for the department, enabling teachers to concentrate on their lessons.
109. There has been good progress since the previous inspection. The overall quality of teaching has been maintained. The previous report commented on the unsatisfactory development of graphical skills. This has now been addressed very well. Standards in all design and technology subjects, including graphics, are now all above national comparators.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

### **Drama**

110. Provision in drama was sampled. The results for GCSE in 2003 were well above average, as they were in 2004. Standards of work seen during the inspection are good overall. Pupils are well motivated and achievement is good as a consequence. The targets for drama, as laid out in the performing arts plan, have been met. Teaching and learning are good. Excellent extra-curricular provision has enriched pupils' experience of the subject. Many pupils have taken part in school productions and theatre visits. As a result of the high quality of such provision there has been a great increase in the number of pupils taking the subject at GCSE level.

### **Art and design**

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

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

- Teaching and learning are very good and achievement is very good as a result.
- The development of ideas through sketchbooks and project work is excellent.
- Mature and positive attitudes and behaviour contribute to the very effective learning.
- Very good drawing and painting skills are developed through challenging activities.
- Assessment is fully embedded into the working practices of lessons, which helps pupils know if they are successful and how to improve.
- ICT is underdeveloped and provides little opportunity for digital image work.

### **Commentary**

111. Current standards seen in Years 7 to 9 are well above average. This represents very good achievement as pupils join Year 7 with below average standards in this subject. These standards are made possible by very good teaching and the constant promotion of very high standards. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 are accurate and show well above average standards. GCSE results in 2004 were average. Standards seen in Years 10 and 11 are above average and this represents very good achievement from Year 7. In Years 7 to 9, pupils create lively images with card, printing, paint, plaster sculpture and paper, which

demonstrate high levels of competence in working with line, shape, colour and tone. Pupils' use of sketchbooks is excellent. These show a rapidly growing confidence in the use of colour and texture, but above all show their very personal ideas that are developing and growing. Extension and enrichment opportunities for the gifted and talented pupils are provided and ensure these pupils make very good progress. Pupils with special educational needs are identified and make very good progress across all years.

112. Teaching and learning are very good in all years. A vast range of wet and dry media is used throughout the teaching and enables pupils to explore ways of working best suited to them, which maximises success. Teachers have very high expectations of all pupils and an atmosphere of challenge, inspiration and success exists. This atmosphere for learning is maintained by focused individual advice, which encourages pupils to think further and explore ideas for themselves. Teachers and pupils use assessment in all the lessons seen and as a result they know when they have been successful and how to develop approaches to become better. Great trust exists between pupil and teacher, which helps pupils take risks in this supportive atmosphere. Literacy skills are well developed as individual pupils talk to the whole class about the development of their project work and the class makes supportive and challenging suggestions in return. The positive, articulate and excellent attitude of the pupils is a major strength of the department and as a result, pupils try hard in lessons. Very strong links are made in all years between the work of artists, art movements and the developing ideas of pupils. Observational drawing and painting are very well developed and have produced many intense and vivid outcomes, which enables pupils to make rapid gains in knowledge, skills and understanding of the subject. The possibility of using ICT to extend and enrich the pupils has yet to be developed within the classroom. Image and photographic manipulation software and appropriate hardware are not sufficiently available.
113. Leadership and management are very good. The shared ambition, direction and energy of the staff in establishing the subject as a major influence in the school are very positive features of the department. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Standards have been maintained and improvements have been seen in the teaching and learning.

## **Music**

Provision in music is **excellent**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Excellent innovative leadership and management inspire and enable music to flourish in the school.
- Teaching, which is challenging and has high expectations, results in very good learning.
- Assessment for learning is excellent and has a major impact on raising achievement.
- Extra-curricular music enrichment opportunities abound, and pupil participation is excellent.

### **Commentary**

114. The results in GCSE examinations in 2004 were well above the national average, with almost half the pupils achieving A\* and A grades. This continued the improving trend seen in 2003 results.
115. The pupils' prior attainment on entry to the school varies widely, but is below the national average. By the end of Year 9, work seen, and teachers' assessment, indicates that most pupils are attaining above the national average. Pupils are able to compose work, which is well written. Most have a good grasp of basic musical skills, such as sight-reading notation and performing, with growing confidence, in front of others. They understand chord construction and progression, and are able to play in ensemble. Literacy and numeracy skills are well developed. Terminology is well embedded and pupils are confident in counting and identifying note values. The use of ICT to support learning is not fully in place at this stage, but pupils increasingly have access to music technology. Achievement is very good, and pupils

with special educational needs achieve as well as the others because they have extra support. Gifted and talented musicians are identified and challenged both in composition and performance in public.

116. Work seen and listened to in Years 10 and 11 is well above average. The quality of instrumental playing is very good, and pupils are able to compose in a variety of styles. Compositions are well structured and shaped, and therefore very pleasing to the ear. Pupils perform confidently and are able to assess their own and others performance by suggesting improvements and refining their work. Listening skills are evident in the sensitive ensemble playing and generally good intonation. Achievement continues to be very good.
117. Teaching and learning are both very good, with some excellent teaching observed. Lessons are well planned, the mutual expectation of both teachers and pupils is high, and pupils are constantly challenged to improve even further through their own efforts and self-motivation. A probing questioning style, for instance, uses phrases such as 'What do you think the next step could be?' which challenged pupils to think very hard. Pupils, as a matter of course, are encouraged to evaluate their own learning, starting in Year 7. As a result, almost all pupils in Years 10 and 11 are self-learners and make remarkable progress in a short time, both in and outside lessons. Because of the very good variety of challenging activities, pupils respond with enthusiasm and make very good intellectual and creative efforts. A few pupils are disengaged and do not want to learn, but even these are well managed, do not disrupt others and are for most of the lesson making steady, albeit slower, progress. Pupils' personal development is supported, both in the spiritual and emotional response shown by the pupils to the beauty of music, but also in the social skills and confidence required to play in ensemble and in public. Pupils are also introduced to the cultural richness of other countries through African drumming and Asian music days in addition to the South American and Indian musical traditions.
118. Assessment for learning is excellent. Every individual pupil's progress is planned in detail and levels of attainment are broken down into very challenging, but achievable steps, all recorded in a project log. This is of particular benefit to lower-attaining pupils, and boys particularly rise to the challenge because it appeals to their spirit of competitiveness. Pupils themselves decide what the next step should be, with the result that they improve rapidly and are inspired to achieve even more. Teachers monitor their progress frequently, and encourage and demand in equal measure, with helpful commentary on their work.
119. Leadership and management are both excellent. Leadership is dedicated to ensuring the highest possible standards and achievement in every area of the department. It is inspirational and is influential beyond the school, particularly in the growing links with the primary feeder schools, with large numbers of Years 5 and 6 pupils attending music days. There are also links with the Wells Cathedral School, and Year 9 workshops with the gifted and talented musicians, in partnership with similar schools. There is clear strategic thinking and planning for improvement, based on reflection, self-criticism and a vision, which is innovative and shared with enthusiasm. Management is confident and well informed, and the very comprehensive assessment procedures provide a very clear insight into pupils' progress within and across all years. It provides a model for the development of other departments.
120. The excellent extra-curricular music enrichment programme is very well supported by dedicated peripatetic instrument teachers, so that large numbers of pupils are flocking to take up musical instruments. Already, over 250 pupils participate in musical activities and more are joining. The results are enjoyed by parents and the local community in many successful concerts, and the impact of music and the other performing arts is evident in the growth in confidence and positive self-image of the pupils themselves.
121. The department is moving into new, custom-built, spacious accommodation, which is also designed to allow access for every pupil to music technology. This aspect is already a strength of the department and is well supported by two full-time technicians. Computer programmes such as Sibelius and Cubase already aid the learning of musical notation and compositional skills. The services of a resident composer have been secured to raise achievement still

higher. It is planned that the music centre will be used not only by other schools, but also by the local community. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good, with the accommodation issue now addressed, very good to excellent teaching now the norm, and an increasingly effective use of music technology to support learning.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The provision in physical education is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership is very good.
  - Community links, the extra-curricular programme and enrichment are all excellent.
  - The range of curricular opportunities is very good across all year groups.
  - The use and analysis of performance data is not sufficiently rigorous.
  - The accommodation for teaching the examination groups is not consistently fit for the purpose.
122. Overall, standards across Years 7 to 11 are at least in line with national expectations and pupils' achievement is good. Pupils enter Year 7 with standards that are below the national average and by the end of Year 9 standards are above this average. Their achievement is very good. The GCSE results for 2004 were above average, which represents good achievement. Standards in core physical education lessons are in line with the national average. The GCSE group is working at standards that are above average and pupils' achievement is good.
123. By Year 9, pupils can combine their skills and techniques with control and fluency and adapt them to different situations. At the start of Year 7 they can describe the effects of exercise on the body and understand how and why these can vary.
124. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent and they consistently challenge pupils to achieve their potential. In a very good Year 7 dance lesson, pupils were inspired to create imaginative movements and shapes in response to different stimuli. They developed their ideas into clearly structured sequences and, as a result, pupils could successfully analyse and evaluate each other's work, and suggest ideas for improvement. A pupil with severe physical difficulties participated in all aspects of the lesson and was very well supported by both peers and a learning support assistant.
125. In Years 10 and 11, all pupils are entered for the Junior Sports Leadership Award (JSLA) and elements of the JSLA course are often incorporated into core physical education lessons. This is an outstanding feature of the curriculum because these lessons enable pupils to make consistent, equal progress in each of the strands of the National Curriculum. In lessons, pupils supported one another very well in leading and organising tasks. Their evaluative skills were further developed through giving constructive feedback on each other's performance. Assessment is good and in Year 7 is very good, when baseline assessment is carried out on pupils' entry to the school to ascertain prior skills and knowledge.
126. In the GCSE group, pupils' written work shows good understanding of current issues, for example, the different types of sport coverage given by the media. There is evidence of good independent learning through a range of research tasks. The availability of teaching accommodation for the examination groups is not consistent. At times, each group works in a temporary room that is not fit for its purpose and this restricts the quality and range of their learning experiences.
127. The curriculum opportunities across all year groups are very good. In Years 7 to 9, both gymnastics and dance are taught and there is a unit of outdoor education. The schemes of

work for dance are of very high quality, which reflects the input of the dance specialist teacher. In Years 10 and 11, pupils can choose between two types of option programme, according to their preferences. The community links and extra-curricular programme are excellent. Through teams, the community sports programme and the new, shared leisure centre facilities, very high numbers of pupils participate in a broad, rich range of activities, which complement the curriculum. Junior and Community Sports Leadership festivals, organised by the school sports co-ordinator, and an annual dance festival, reinforce the existing, excellent links with local primary and secondary schools.

128. Leadership is very good and management is good. There is a clear focus on raising achievement. Leadership inspires both staff and pupils, and opportunities to increase the participation of all are maximised. Self-evaluation is rigorous and teaching is monitored systematically. Performance data is readily available, but not sufficiently used to support the closer monitoring of the results of different groups of pupils or for comparisons with national results. The procurement of additional funding has been highly successful, resulting in the new leisure centre facilities, the Astroturf pitch and the development of a proposed outdoors education facility. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good.

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

The overall provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The enrichment programme for citizenship is very good.
  - The ethos of the school provides very good support for citizenship.
  - The combined programme of personal, social and health education and citizenship ensures good coverage of the curriculum.
  - Explicit links between citizenship and other curriculum areas are not made in lessons.
  - The monitoring and evaluation of the teaching of citizenship is not sufficiently rigorous.
129. The personal, social and health education programme is well structured and covers the key issues relating to health, drugs, sex and careers education. Citizenship is taught as part of the PSHE programme. By the end of Years 9 and 11, pupils are working at the appropriate level descriptors for citizenship. Within the strands of participation and taking responsible action, many pupils are working above the required levels.
130. Form tutors teach citizenship through the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme and there is one timetabled lesson each fortnight. Across the year groups, pupils' achievement is good. The quality of teaching and learning overall is good, although there is a greater variation in the quality of teaching than seen in most curriculum and subject areas.
131. In several lessons seen, the teaching of specified topics and the development of pupils' skills of enquiry and communication were very good. However, there was no explicit link made between these and the citizenship curriculum. In a very good Year 8 PSHE lesson on smoking, pupils took part in lively group discussions that were skilfully directed by the tutor to encourage their listening skills and respect for one another's opinions. Pupils spoke confidently to the group and were able to support their own arguments for and against a ban on smoking in public places. The tutor introduced the wider perspective of the situation in other countries, explaining how different laws prevail, but the link with the relevant strand of citizenship was not made clear. Similarly, when a Year 11 science group visited a nuclear power station as part of their GCSE course, their discussions about the ethics of the application of nuclear power did not focus on or refer to any part of the citizenship curriculum. Consequently, teachers are not able to plan for progression and it is difficult to track pupils' progress.
132. The enrichment programme is very good and this, in conjunction with the school's excellent ethos, ensures that students' skills of participation and taking responsible action are very well

developed throughout all year groups. In Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form, pupils follow the JSLA courses and many visit primary schools to organise and lead sports tournaments and competitions. The school is committed to the millennium volunteer scheme in which all students in the sixth form carry out 200 hours of community service. All students in the school are regularly involved in charity fundraising and last year pupils from Year 9 upwards voted in the United Kingdom youth parliamentary election, for which the school was a polling station. Such events are embedded within the life of the school as part of its ethos that promotes confident learning and student involvement in the community. Off-timetable days and visits from outside speakers are organised to support and enrich further the PSHE programme.

133. Leadership is good; the vision of active citizenship is clear and there is a strong awareness of how existing good practice elsewhere can improve the teaching of citizenship in school. Management is satisfactory. The schemes of work in place are good and complement the PSHE programme very effectively across all year groups. Currently, however, they are not sufficiently tailored to meet more closely the different needs of the form tutors and ensure that they are secure in their own knowledge of the topics and issues. There are no formalised procedures for monitoring and evaluating the teaching of citizenship. As a result, there is no consistent linkage across the different curriculum areas and this makes it difficult to ascertain pupils' attainment and progress in citizenship.



## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2003.

### *Level 3 GCE AS level courses*

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and Design	6	50	80.1	33.3	23.7	21.7	29.9
Biology	19	84.2	65.2	21.1	11.1	27.9	20.6
Business Studies	7	85.7	76.4	28.6	16.3	38.6	26.2
Chemistry	16	75	72.7	6.3	13.9	21.9	24.1
Drama	5	100	86.5	0	19.6	24	30.6
English Language	12	91.7	82.9	41.7	17.5	39.2	28.7
English Literature	3	100	85.9	0	19.1	26.7	30.2
Design and Technology	7	83.7	74.9	14.3	15.1	32.9	25.3
Geography	13	84.6	74.3	23.1	19.8	33.1	26.5
German	3	66.7	81.5	0	19.3	23.3	28.9
History	6	83.3	80.7	0	19.5	21.7	28.6
Mathematics	18	44.4	61.9	5.6	17.1	12.2	22.1
Music	4	100	86.5	0	21.4	30	30.7
Physics	7	85.7	68.6	28.6	14.4	35.7	22.7
Sociology	11	100	71.8	18.2	18.5	35.5	25.4
Spanish	1	100	78.5	100	17.1	50	27.3
Sports / PE Studies	8	100	73.2	37.5	11.4	37.5	23.1

**Level 3 GCE A-level and VCE courses**

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	6	100	98.6	66.7	50.2	93.3	87.5
Biology	23	100	96.4	39.1	39.2	84.3	78.6
Business Studies	10	100	98.7	50	36.8	84	80.1
Chemistry	10	100	97.6	60	49	90	84.9
Drama	3	66.7	99.5	33.3	40.1	53.3	83.6
English Language	15	100	99.4	20	36.3	73.3	80.9
English Literature	10	100	99.5	40	46.5	88.8	86.3
French	4	100	98.8	50	51.5	85	87.6
Design and Technology	5	100	97.8	40	35	72	77.9
Geography	14	100	98.7	35.7	44.5	84	84
History	23	100	99	21.7	44.6	76.5	84.6
Mathematics	15	100	96.7	66.7	55.6	94.7	88.8
Music	2	50	98.8	0	38.9	30	81.1
Physics	12	100	96.7	16.7	44.6	73.3	81.7
Sociology	10	100	98.2	40	44.3	82	83.6
Sport / PE Studies	16	93.8	98	0	30.9	52.5	75.2

**Level 2 vocational qualifications**

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
ICT	22	86.3		9.1		0	
Health and social care	5	100		60		20	
Leisure and tourism	4	100		0		0	

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

### English

Provision in English is **very good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average and students achieve very well.
- Teaching is consistently very good, thus providing continuity of learning for students.
- Students very much enjoy opportunities for sustained discussion and respond very well to them.
- Leadership and management are very good and help to maintain the enthusiasm of the teachers.
- For some single lessons, teachers plan too much work so it is not possible to fit in all the activities.

#### Commentary

134. Seventy-four students follow English literature and English language and literature (combined) courses in the sixth form. Staying-on rates are good.
135. Standards in English literature at A-level in 2004 were above the national average. Work seen during the inspection is also above the national average, which represents very good achievement as students start the course with a wide range of GCSE grades, including D's. English language results in 2003 were slightly below the national average and the small number following the course in 2004 gained similar results. This course has now been replaced by a combined English language and literature course and standards seen in Year 13 during the inspection were above the national average. In the light of the prior attainment of these students, this represents very good achievement.
136. By Year 13, most students have learned to analyse texts in detail, paying close attention to linguistic, structural and thematic aspects. They identify literary devices and confidently use the language of literary criticism. They enjoy formulating their own interpretations of texts and marshalling evidence to justify these. In one Year 13 lesson where students were discussing one student's presentation of his views on *The Great Gatsby*, the class were so adept at sustaining a discussion on Fitzgerald's intentions in the novel that the teacher was able to act as chair whilst the students themselves continued a focused debate. Essays often demonstrate students' facility to use relatively succinct quotations to telling effect. Students on the combined language and literature course demonstrate by Year 13 good use of quite complex terminology to discuss language itself. They also demonstrate understanding not just of how social context influences language, but how all language carries social and political implications. Throughout both courses, students in Years 12 and 13 justify their views and interpretations in increasingly well-constructed essays.
137. Teaching and learning are very good. The subject knowledge of teachers is of such a standard that they regularly bring in examples of literature beyond the texts studied, suggest wider reading and illustrate points with cultural references familiar to students. They actively promote inquiry and extended discussion and successfully develop both personal and critical responses from students. Much of this occurs because of the pertinent and challenging tasks in lessons. Such tasks are also enjoyable. Occasionally, however, teachers are over ambitious in planning too much work for single 50-minute lessons. Care is taken to involve all students in oral work and to provide supplementary support for students where necessary. Assessment of students' work is very accurate, as confirmed by reports from external coursework moderators. Marking contains both recognition of achievement and focused advice on how to improve.
138. Leadership and management of English are very good. The evident enjoyment of the subject by both teachers and students is proof of this. Clear decisions have been made on the

suitability or otherwise of different syllabuses and action taken accordingly. The very good range of extra-curricular activities both inside and outside school demonstrates the commitment of staff to enhancing students' experience of the subject. A well-attended weekly creative writing club for sixth-form English students further ensures that benefits of taking English go beyond examination success. The previous report on English in the sixth form was very positive and the high quality of education to which it referred has been fully maintained.

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

139. Standards of literacy and language are very good and contribute well to learning across the curriculum. Provision for the development of literacy is very good. Wider reading is encouraged and there are good opportunities for extended discussions. The teaching of language and literacy skills is very good in all subjects except physics where it is good. Teachers pay close attention to subject-specific terminology and precise, accurate use of other vocabulary. Students are given many opportunities to write in a variety of forms and styles. Note-taking skills are carefully developed in many subjects.

### **French**

140. One lesson of French was sampled in Year 12 and one in Year 13. The teachers' subject knowledge and linguistic competence were very good and the lessons were conducted in French, which promoted students' oral skills to the full. Students were involved actively in their learning and they responded in a motivated and focused way to all activities. Relationships were very good. The teaching, learning and achievement were very good and the standards of listening, speaking and reading were above average.

### **German**

141. One lesson of German was sampled in Year 12. The teacher had very good subject knowledge and very good linguistic skills and taught the lesson entirely in German, which fully developed listening and speaking skills. There was a good variety of creative and imaginative strategies, which were successful in promoting vocabulary and grammar acquisition. Relationships were very positive and there was a very good work ethic. Homework played a significant role in raising standards. The teaching, learning and achievement were very good and standards were above average.

### **Italian**

142. One lesson of GCSE Italian was sampled in the sixth form. The students were from both Years 12 and 13 at Chew Valley School, and additionally a group of sixth-form students from Wells Cathedral School participated through a video link. The teaching and learning were very good and students had made very good progress since the beginning of term. The teacher built very effectively upon the students' previous learning experience in other foreign languages, which contributed to their very good achievement. The students were very highly motivated and keen to participate orally. Relationships were very good with both groups of students.

### **Spanish**

143. One lesson of Spanish was sampled in Year 13. The students and the teacher engaged in a very lively debate in Spanish on non-renewable resources. The students were very well prepared and they defended their opinions robustly and fluently. This contributed considerably to raising the standard of speaking and listening, extending students' knowledge of grammar and very effectively developing their general and specialist vocabulary. The teaching, learning and achievement were excellent. The standard of listening and speaking was high. Students' attitudes and relationships were excellent.

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

**Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The excellent mathematical knowledge of teachers leads to clear explanations of the concepts required for sixth-form courses.
- The quality of leadership is very good and is leading to improving standards.
- Students recognise their difficulties, seek help and apply themselves well.
- There are very good methods of assessing attainment.

**Commentary**

144. The faculty offers AS and A-level mathematics, as well as a GCSE re-take course. Further mathematics is available using e-learning links and two lessons per week at the University of the West of England. Further mathematics students also receive weekly support and guidance from a member of the faculty. This is a new course, which began in September this year. Students who are following the course speak highly of the arrangement.
145. In 2003, standards in A-level examinations were above national results and all students obtained a pass grade. These results were an improvement on 2002. Results in 2004 improved by 17 per cent and again all obtained a pass grade. Students begin the mathematics courses with average GCSE results. Standards of work seen are above average overall as students' achievement is good.
146. Teaching is good, leading to good learning. Teachers' excellent understanding of the subject is used to very good effect, particularly when questioning students. They give good support to their students and are mindful of the wide range of ability within the groups. The most able engage in interesting discussions with their teachers. Teaching, although good, is not judged to be as good as in Years 7 to 11, largely because it relies on giving information and doing practice questions. Overall, there are too few opportunities in lessons for students to demonstrate their understanding and too few different activities.
147. Students have a mature approach to the challenging level of work and are well motivated. In the best lessons, teachers conduct their lessons at a stimulating pace, resulting in rapid gains in knowledge, skills and understanding.
148. The improvement in standards is also the outcome of very good leadership, which has a clear understanding of what is needed for students to succeed at a high level. Management is good. The wide range of topics within the curriculum provides students with good opportunities to study new areas of the subject, ensuring that interest and motivation are maintained and extended. There are very good procedures for assessing and monitoring students' performance as they progress through the sixth form.
149. There is insufficient information in the previous report to make a judgment on progress since the previous inspection.

**Mathematics across the curriculum**

150. Standards of mathematics are above average for the majority of students. This provides them with a firm foundation for continuing well in courses that require good skills. As a result they are able to make good use of their mathematics wherever needed. Those students who are less confident are able to do a GCSE course in mathematics.

## SCIENCE

### Biology

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

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good.
- The students have a very good attitude towards learning.
- Management is very good.
- There is a very good range of modern textbooks and specialist magazines.
- Some microscopes are very old and there is not enough analytical equipment.

#### Commentary

151. The A-level results in 2003 were above the national average with all students achieving a pass. At the higher grades of A and B, results were in line with the national average. Girls achieved better results than boys in the higher grades. In the AS examinations taken at the end of Year 12, the results were above the national average both in the proportion achieving passes and achieving the higher grades of A and B. Boys achieved much better results than girls in the higher grades. The number of students studying biology has remained high since the previous inspection. The staying-on rate of students from Year 12 to Year 13 is good and all students generally complete the course. Both the AS and A2 results improved considerably in 2004. This is because of improvements in teaching and learning.
152. Standards seen in the current Year 12 and 13 are well above national expectations. Students enter the sixth form with the full range of GCSE pass grades, so this represents very good achievement for many of them. There is a strong value added element with many A-level students in 2003 achieving grades above their predicted grades based on their GCSE performance.
153. Students have a very positive attitude to their lessons and as a result have made massive gains in knowledge and understanding since GCSE. Year 12 students have a very good knowledge of how the heart works and how pressure inside changes during contraction. Year 13 students have a very clear understanding of how plants and animals are classified into different groups. Most students are very competent in ICT and numeracy and have been taught how to use statistics. This helps them to analyse large populations of plants during their field course.
154. Teaching is very good and this has led to very good learning. Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of biology and this allows them to clear up any misconceptions the students may have. The coursework is a real strength and makes a strong contribution to them achieving higher grades. Lesson notes are well supported by a wealth of up-to-date texts. Some microscopes, although serviced annually, need replacing and there is not enough analytical equipment such as electrophoresis kits. This would increase the range of practical activities available to the students. Students know what they need to do to improve as a result of regular testing and focused feedback using examination board criteria and grades.
155. Leadership and management of the subject are very good and the head of biology ensures that students are aware of how well they are doing. There is a focus by all teachers on ensuring very high standards. Innovative teaching strategies, for example modelling, are helping students to raise standards. There is a high priority placed on sharing good practice, which exposes the students to a wider range of strategies therefore improving their learning. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. As well as using ICT in sense and control units, students research the Internet for information, which they will show to their peers as a scientific presentation using multimedia techniques. This gives them opportunities to extend their independent learning and improve their research and communication skills.

## Chemistry

156. Chemistry was sampled during the inspection. In A-level chemistry, the 2003 results were above average and all the students were successful. The latest 2004 results show a greater proportion of students reaching the higher A-B grades. These results indicate good achievement based on the students' earlier GCSE results. One well-paced lesson was observed. Students made good progress because of the good teaching from an enthusiastic and well-qualified teacher, who clearly explained the principles of nuclear magnetic resonance and its use in identifying compounds. Effective use of the interactive whiteboard and challenging examples added to the engagement of the students and to the success of the lesson.

## Physics

Provision in physics is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- In most years there is a pattern of high attainment at A-level with virtually all students gaining success in both AS and A-level examinations.
- Teachers are enthusiastic and knowledgeable subject specialists and form an effective team.
- There is very good teaching and learning, which incorporates good use of ICT and is based on very good student-teacher relationships.
- Students have a good level of interest and involvement in their own learning, which contributes to the high staying-on rate in both courses.
- This modern physics course provides few opportunities for students to practice written communication skills, apart from coursework.
- Very few female students study physics despite the best efforts of the department.

## Commentary

157. Although the standards at A-level in 2003 were just below the national average, these results were expected from a weak student entry. The latest 2004 results are impressive and closely match those of 2002, which were well above average. The standard of work seen in the current Year 13 is above the national level for students at this stage of the course. The AS results in 2003 were well above the national average, though the much larger 2004 entry produced results closer to the expected average. Standards seen during the inspection for Year 12 are slightly lower as these students are still making the transition to the new style of learning, but are broadly above national expectations.
158. Students' attainment on entry into the sixth form is broadly average. Their achievement in Years 12 and 13 is good and very good for some, with many attaining higher than the target grades set by the school. Nearly all students who start the courses sit the appropriate examinations and apart from one student in 2002, all students gained success. Almost all the 2004 examined AS students are now studying the second year of the full A-level course, which indicates a high level of student satisfaction with this modern physics course. In the lessons observed, the achievement of students was very good, particularly in Year 13. These students engaged in a lively discussion on a series of possible facts about the universe, followed by attempts to estimate the distance to the sun based on energy emitted from a light bulb. Although Year 12 students were less confident in discussions, they had good ICT skills and understood the principles of modulated radio waves and the effect of filters on bandwidth.
159. The department has a team of well-qualified and enthusiastic teachers, whose teaching practices closely match the philosophy of this modern student-centred course. The development of core skills is emphasised, as is the use of ICT and independent learning coupled with continuous self-evaluation. Teachers give the students good support with regular opportunities provided for oral feedback and guidance, both in lessons and at lunchtimes.

Students appreciate this and feel they are making good progress. The teaching and learning in lessons are very good and this results in very good achievement by students. The teachers are expert at using the interactive whiteboard and this valuable teaching aid figures prominently and adds to the quality of the lessons. However, the nature of the course limits opportunities for students to practise and develop extended writing skills, apart from coursework. For some students this could place them at a disadvantage. A strong feature of the department is the very good relationships between teachers and students and the co-operative learning atmosphere generated.

160. There is good leadership and management. A strong team spirit is present with a good spread of experience within the department that is used for the benefit of the students. The teachers are fully aware of the course requirements and use this knowledge to plan and prepare lessons well. Access to computer suites can be difficult unless booked well in advance. The department has access to detailed data on students' previous attainment and potential grades. The department makes positive efforts to promote physics to girls during Year 11, although as nationally, the response rate is relatively low.
161. The previous report lacked any great detail of physics, but based on the current 2004 data, results have much improved since 1997. The current course is well matched to the students' needs and the quality of teaching and leadership remains high. This indicates good improvement.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

162. A Year 13 A-level lesson and a Year 12 key skills lesson were sampled. Teaching and learning were good. Group sizes were small, enabling the teacher to teach each student individually, moving from one to another as required. High-quality printed and on-line materials support individual learning very well. For example, developing students' understanding of how Internet service providers tackle the problems of Internet crime and develop systems to protect their customers. Standards are just below the average expected at the start of each course. However, teaching is good and students use their time well. Portfolios contain a good range of completed work in line with the slightly ambitious, but attainable grades predicted for each student. This represents good achievement. Teachers assess work thoroughly, especially on the A-level course, and use the grade criteria to substantiate the marks awarded. Consequently, students are very clear about how well they are doing. Feedback in lessons is also good, enabling students to resolve difficulties and move on briskly.

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

163. All pupils follow a key skills programme in ICT in Year 12, which is certificated at Level 2 or Level 3. The course only focuses on the practical elements of the programme and there is, therefore, no full accreditation. However, students' ICT skills and knowledge in the sixth form are sufficient to allow them to access information as appropriate to the needs of their sixth-form courses.



## HUMANITIES

### History

Provision in history is **good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching supports good learning through the effective use of skilled questioning.
- The students' attitudes are very positive towards history; they value especially the strong encouragement and individual support that they receive.
- There are high expectations of the students.
- The assessment of students' work does not always give sufficient guidance on how to develop evaluative skills.

#### Commentary

164. AS and A-level results in 2003 were below the national average in terms of A and B grades. The AS students achieved well and the A2 students achieved satisfactorily. In 2004, 74 per cent of AS students secured an A or B grade, one of the best results in the school, and 47 per cent secured an A or B grade in the A2 examination. This is a considerable improvement on the previous two years and is the result of changes in the course, which more effectively engage the students and good teaching. The students really enjoy American history and this has improved standards.
165. In work seen, standards by Year 13 are above average and this represents good achievement. In a Year 12 class, the students worked with considerable enthusiasm and skill in examining a wide range of resources illustrating the impact of slavery in the American Civil War. Year 13 students can effectively discuss the impact of the Civil Rights movement, listening carefully to each other's contributions.
166. Teaching is good and underpins the effective learning observed. Lessons are very well planned with a very extensive range of sources and materials used to develop knowledge and understanding. Students are actively encouraged to extend their understanding through the use of skilled questioning and the majority of students respond very well to this approach. Students are very positive about history because of the strong support and encouragement that they receive. Students receive considerable individual oral advice to develop their ideas. Assessment is thorough, in particular through oral feedback; however, much of the support strengthens historical knowledge rather than systematically developing the students' evaluative skills, particularly through written work.
167. Leadership and management are very good because of the enthusiasm and commitment developed both amongst the staff and the students. The revision of the curriculum to strengthen the emphasis of American history has improved both achievement and interest. Staying-on rates on each course are good. The majority of students who were interviewed confirmed that they rated their sixth-form history experience very highly.

### Geography

The provision for geography is **very good**.

#### Strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very good.
- Teaching is inspiring and motivates students to learn.
- Very good achievement results from the high-quality provision.
- Very good leadership and management have raised achievement.

## Commentary

168. Standards were above average in the AS level GCE examinations in 2003 and in line in the A-level examinations in the same year. At AS level female students were well above and at A-level male students were above average. These gender differences reflect the capability of the students concerned. Results at AS and A-level in 2004 are significantly better. Because of the timing of the inspection, national comparative data has not been published, but these results will undoubtedly be well above average. This is to the credit of a new head of department and her team of teachers, who have successfully raised achievement in Years 12 and 13 as a result of the energy and commitment they have put into developing the subject.
169. Attainment in the current Year 12 and 13 groups is well above average and achievement is very good. In their assessed work, Year 12 students use technical vocabulary of hydrology accurately when explaining the discharge of water from river basins. Their understanding of change in rural environments is above average. Year 13 students have a very good grasp of the methods required to set up investigations and they understand the significance and usefulness of different sampling techniques. In their coursework they frequently use advanced statistical methods when testing their hypotheses. Their fluency in essay writing is likely to ensure that they obtain the highest A-level grades. Discussion with Year 13 students revealed a high level of emotional intelligence surrounding complex issues such as globalisation by large corporate companies, and so the course has made a very significant contribution to students' spiritual and moral development.
170. Teaching and learning are very good. Teaching is shared and the two teachers involved have excellent subject knowledge and relationships with students. Because of the rapport between students and teachers, students ask profound question in lessons, such as in the Year 13 lesson on new industrial countries. This leads to a deepening of their knowledge and understanding because the answers given by the teachers are based on outstandingly good subject knowledge. Teaching challenges students to think about issues of immense importance, as seen in the Year 13 lesson about attitudes to the European Union. Very good marking and use of assessment makes a valuable contribution to the very good achievement students make.
171. Leadership is very good and contributes to the very good achievement. The two teachers teaching the subject complement each other exceptionally well. Management is very good. Very good monitoring of teaching and learning results in very good shared practice, which raises achievement. Students' progress is monitored meticulously and very effective support is given to students when they are struggling with any aspects of the course. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good.

## Sociology

Provision in sociology **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Assessment and marking are very effective in showing students how to improve.
- Students' commitment and effort contribute significantly to their good learning.
- The subject makes a good contribution to the personal development of the students.
- Some teaching styles do not encourage students to be self-learners.
- There are insufficient enrichment experiences to develop students' understanding beyond the textbook.

## Commentary

172. The results at A-level in 2004 were in line with the national average and an improvement on the results of 2003. Results were below average at AS level in 2004 and repeated a pattern

over the last three years. Some students are not well matched to the demands of the course at this stage.

173. The standard of work seen in the present Year 13 is well in line with the national average. Students have a secure grasp of methodology and sociological perspectives. Literacy and numeracy skills are good, evidenced in the students' understanding and appropriate use of sociological terminology and statistics. The writing of the higher-attaining students is of a good standard. They are able to source authorities and use them tellingly in support of their arguments, and they evaluate and summarise well. The lower-attaining students struggle with the theoretical aspects and make fewer intermediate judgements in their essays, often forgetting to link their paragraphs back to the title and skimping the conclusion. Students in Year 12 are at an early stage in a new subject, but already work seen suggests that standards are in line with the national average. Early essays lack structure, but improvement is noticeable, especially in the understanding of terminology and how it is used. This is the result of very helpful guidance. The students' work-related skills are less well developed, and their understanding restricted to their texts, because there are as yet few opportunities for enrichment experiences outside of the classroom. Achievement in both Year 12 and Year 13 is good.
174. Teaching and learning are both good. Good teaching is characterised by well-prepared material and strategies, which involve the students in their own learning, for instance, peer presentations of a particular subject. There is a very good rapport between teacher and students so that students are eager to please and give of their best in hard work and commitment. Where teaching is less than good, the teacher dominates the lesson and there are missed opportunities for interactive learning. Although knowledge is passed on, students have less involvement in their own learning.
175. Assessment of students' work and progress is very good. The marking of assignments is consistent across the department, comments are very full and really helpful because they show the students in detail how they can improve. As a result, students make good progress over time and are well rehearsed in examination techniques.
176. Leadership and management are both good. There is a vision and commitment to continuous improvement. The other teachers in the department are well supported, but there is little opportunity to share good practice, especially in the teaching and learning styles, which promote independent learning. The subject makes a good contribution to the students' own personal development, which they recognise and appreciate. The advantages of ICT for research are fully embraced, but its use to support learning in the classroom is not fully developed. There is no judgement on improvement as the course was not reported on at the previous inspection.

## **ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING**

**Design and technology** was sampled during the inspection.

177. The 2004 results show, standards were above the national averages at the end of Year 12 for AS design and technology students. Standards were also above the national averages for the A2 students at the end of Year 13. In lessons, standards are above average and achievement is good. At AS level, design ideas are based on thorough research using a range of sources. Effective use is made of ICT for research and presentation. At A-level, students undertake original research and explore designs leading to creative outcomes.
178. The quality of teaching is good. Learning is good through well-prepared and challenging activities. Teachers' expectations are high for the quality of work produced, and learning is reinforced and extended very effectively. Students are keen and well motivated.

179. The leadership and management of this course are very good. There are high expectations and a well-planned programme of work ensuring students are well motivated and that the work is challenging. Assessment is good and students know how to improve their work.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA**

### **Art and design**

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

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

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Current standards are well above average.
- Highly personal ideas are developed by all students through sketchbooks and project work.
- Mature and positive attitudes and behaviour contribute to the very effective learning.
- ICT provision within the department is insufficient.

#### **Commentary**

180. In 2003, A-level results showed above average standards and below average standards in the advanced vocational certificate of education. The 2004 results indicate an upward trend in standards. Standards seen are well above average and represent very good achievement as students enter these courses with below average standards, many of whom gained low grades in the GCSE examinations. Achievement is very good as subject knowledge and course content are carefully presented by a team of teachers, each offering a differing expertise and experiences. Well-focused lessons enable students to understand the assessment criteria and the requirements of the examination specification very well. The students know their weaknesses and their strengths and are well guided by experienced and enthusiastic teaching and support staff on how to improve. Students are very articulate and their work is strongly individual, best seen through the development of ideas within their sketchbooks and project work.
181. The quality of teaching is very good and this lead to very good learning. Students are mature and very positive. All enjoy the choices and freedoms that these well-planned courses offer. They work hard and enjoy the mature way that teaching staff treat them. Carefully prepared resources, clearly stated aims and objectives and well-communicated subject knowledge result in very effective learning. Gallery visits to London have strongly influenced students' work and have produced many very strong responses and bold individual studies. Students are encouraged to be independent, innovative and creative, as can be seen in the quality of ideas in their sketchbooks and projects.
182. The department's ICT provision for this course is inadequate. Students do not have enough direct access to computers within the subject area with suitable software and image manipulation hardware. Because of this, the students on the advanced vocation course cannot link their work with industry standard hardware and software when they are on their compulsory work placement.
183. The department and subject are very well led and managed. The students benefit enormously from the range of expertise, opinion and interests that the team of teachers bring to this subject.
184. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good, particularly in relation to improved standards and achievement.

## Sports Studies

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185. A Year 13 sports studies lesson on anatomy and physiology was sampled. Achievement was very good as a result of very good teaching, which challenged students to learn independently. At the start of the lesson, students worked on a revision exercise that recalled previous learning and the key concepts of the different energy systems. They all did this successfully, collaborating with one another when they needed to. Subsequently, the high quality of the lesson materials and very well-structured tasks enabled students to make independent deductions about the links between the concept of flexibility and the properties of joints and bones.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
<b>The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
How inclusive the school is		1
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3	3
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	2	2
<b>Overall standards achieved</b>		
Pupils' achievement	2	2
<b>Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities</b>		
Attendance	2	3
Attitudes	2	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		2
<b>The quality of education provided by the school</b>		
The quality of teaching	2	2
How well pupils learn	2	2
The quality of assessment	2	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	2	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		1
Accommodation and resources	4	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		1
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2	2
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	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	2
<b>The leadership and management of the school</b>		
The governance of the school	3	3
The leadership of the headteacher		2
The leadership of other key staff	2	2
The effectiveness of management	2	2

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