

INSPECTION REPORT

COLNE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Brightlingsea

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115376

Principal: Mr T Creissen OBE

Lead inspector: Mr M Beale

Dates of inspection: 11-15 October 2004

Inspection number: 268782

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of students:	11 - 19
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1440

School address:	Church Road Brightlingsea Colchester
Postcode:	CO7 0QL

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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr David Wright

Date of previous inspection:	14 September 1998
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CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

This large secondary school, with an average sized sixth form, serves the towns of Brightlingsea and Wivenhoe as well as neighbouring villages from which about 60 percent of the students travel by school bus. Student numbers have increased since the last inspection, although the sixth form is similar in size. As at the last inspection, there are more boys than girls. Free school meals eligibility is below the national average. There are very few students from minority ethnic backgrounds and only one is at an early stage of learning English. The number of students with special educational needs has fallen in recent years and is close to the national average, whereas the number with statements is below average. A small number of students in the area attend selective schools in Colchester, but attainment on entry to the main school is rising and is now broadly average. A significant minority of higher-attaining students leave at the end of Year 11 as sixth form provision in Colchester is more accessible to students living in some of the villages. This accounts for the relatively low numbers who stay into the school sixth form and their overall attainment on entry is below average. Most sixth form students follow AS and A Level courses, although several also study for vocational qualifications. There is some joint sixth form provision with Harwich School for French and German at AS Level and with Clacton County High School for music. The school is a specialist sports college and is taking on the second specialism of mathematics and computing. It has received a variety of awards over the last two years, these being Artsmark Silver, Investors in People, Sportsmark Gold, Inclusion Quality Mark, Specialist Schools Trust Value Added Award and

the Youth Sport Trust Innovation Award.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
19385	Martin Beale	Lead inspector	English as an additional language
14214	Jill Smith	Lay inspector	
4351	Jeanne Strickland	Team inspector	English Media studies (sixth form)
32379	Bob Brewster	Team inspector	Mathematics
7871	Jean Mackie	Team inspector	Science Biology (sixth form)
8052	Ken McKenzie	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
20716	Reg Grogan	Team inspector	Religious education
31685	Val Girling	Team inspector	Art and design
8501	Paul Hartwright	Team inspector	Design and technology
33015	Richard Winter	Team inspector	Geography
8096	Nigel File	Team inspector	History
12408	Alan Frith	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
31705	John Mason	Team inspector	Music
30563	Jackie Pentlow	Team inspector	Physical education
10759	Lynn Bappa	Team inspector	Citizenship Sociology (sixth form)
23268	Kevin Corrigan	Team inspector	Special educational needs Business studies (sixth form)

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This very good school has many excellent features including the influential leadership of the principal, governors and leadership team. This very effectively supports continued improvement. There is much lively and interesting teaching that moves learning forward at pace. Students work and develop in a harmonious atmosphere and are fully involved in helping to shape the school's future. They make at least good progress during their time at the school. Standards are rising and are above average by Year 11. The school provides very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- while achievement is good in most subjects, the progress that the students make in science and physical education is leading to well above average standards by Year 11 in both subjects;
- outstanding leadership has secured significant improvements to the school and provided a driving force for change and progress;
- the high quality of a significant proportion of the teaching from Year 10 upwards is a significant factor in the good achievement of the students and their positive approach to their studies;
- the curriculum is used very well to ensure that the learning needs of all students are met, particularly through the flexibility introduced into the range of courses in Years 10 and 11;
- the students' speaking and listening skills and their ability to work independently are not developed as well as other skills such as their competence in the use of new technology;
- the school's specialist status as a sports college is used to influence all aspects of the curriculum and significantly enhances the students' overall achievements and personal development;
- students' views contribute significantly to the development of the school; they take responsibility well and participate with enthusiasm in the wide range of enrichment activities.

The rigorous approach to monitoring the work of staff, reviewing areas of the school and taking action have been instrumental in the very good improvement since the last inspection. Test and examination results have risen throughout the school and the main shortcomings identified at the time have been tackled with considerable success. For example, standards have risen in Years 7 to 9 and in geography throughout the school as a result of the focused attention given to improving teaching and learning. There has been a significant improvement in the information and communication technology infrastructure, and much greater and more effective use is made of new technology to enhance teaching and learning. Assessment data is now used well to track the progress of students, set targets and monitor the work of departments.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Achievement is good overall. Students' achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good from Year 10 onwards. Results in national tests for Year 9 students in 2003 were average. The 2004 results were similar. Overall GCSE results improved slightly in 2004, although the proportion of students achieving at least five A*-C grades was similar to 2003. Overall standards are average in both Years 7 to 9 and the sixth form and are above average in Years 10 and 11. Students do particularly well in science and physical education where standards are well above average by Year 11. At the same stage, standards are above average in English, mathematics, information and communication technology, art and design and religious education. It is only in music in Year 7 to 9 where students do not achieve all that they should and standards are below average. The support for students with special educational needs and the small number with English as an additional language is effective in enabling them to achieve at the same level as others in their classes.

A Level results have followed a gently improving trend over the last few years and standards are average in most subjects. This represents good progress for most students given that large numbers of higher-attaining GCSE students leave to follow sixth form studies elsewhere.

The students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Attitudes and behaviour in lessons and around the school are good. The students are keen to do well, work with a sense of purpose and participate enthusiastically in all that the school has to offer. They show much care and respect for each other and willingly accept and undertake conscientiously responsibilities they are given. Attendance is good and students are punctual to school and to lessons.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is very good. Teaching and learning are very good overall, but are most effective in Years 10, 11 and the sixth form. The students' learning benefits considerably from the significant number of teachers whose lessons are of a consistently high quality. The focus on improving the work of others is supported well by the team of advanced skills teachers. The curriculum is used very successfully as a means of raising achievement and ensuring that the learning needs of all students are met. It is planned carefully to provide educational pathways for all students from Year 10 upwards. The school is very successful in ensuring the welfare of the students who are given valuable support and guidance. There are extensive structures for involving students in the life of school and for seeking and acting on their views. Strong and productive links have been established with parents, the community and other schools to the considerable benefit of the students' learning and development.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are excellent. The principal's excellent leadership has established a strong and shared commitment for improvement. He is ably supported in driving the school forward by an outstanding governing body and a highly effective and well-organised senior leadership team. Governors ensure that all statutory requirements are met. The school's leadership not only influences provision within Colne Community School but also has been influential in supporting schools elsewhere to tackle the challenges facing them. The highly effective management and administrative systems

ensure both that teachers can concentrate fully on their classes and that the school runs very smoothly.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents' views are sought on a regular basis and their concerns are acted upon where possible. They are very much in support of the school and all that members of staff are providing for their children. The students are also very positive in their views and are proud of their school. They have much respect for the principal and recognise that changes are introduced for their benefit.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- develop the students' speaking and listening and their skills of independent working throughout the school.

THE SIXTH FORM AT COLNE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a good sixth form. The drive to raise achievement is resulting in a steady improvement in standards. Students achieve well and standards are average overall. This is because a considerable proportion of the higher-attaining students continue their sixth form education elsewhere. A substantial proportion of the teaching is high quality to which the students respond by working hard. The sixth form provides good cost-effectiveness.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- much challenging teaching is resulting in good progress in most subjects and particularly so in mathematics, information and communication technology, sociology and physical education;
- courses match well the students' needs and aspirations and build on well from their studies in Years 10 and 11;
- the students play a significant role in the life of the school and have a very strong voice in its development; however, they do not always demonstrate the same level of initiative in lessons;
- the school's detailed sixth form strategic plan provides a clear vision for developing provision and improving retention rates;
- students are very happy in the sixth form; they have a positive attitude to their studies and appreciate the support offered by teachers.

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 satisfactory. A Level results are below average but students achieve well in response to committed teaching.
Mathematics	Provision in mathematics is very good. Students' good attitudes enable them to gain the most from the very good teaching; their achievement is good.
Science	Provision in biology is good. Students are achieving well as a result of good teaching and are reaching average standards.
Information and communication technology	Provision in information and communication technology is very good. A good range of courses is offered. Teaching is excellent and the students' achievement is very good. A Level examination results improved significantly in 2004.
Humanities	Provision in sociology is very good. Students achieve high standards because teaching is challenging and enthusiastic.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Provision in design and technology is good. Teaching, learning and the students' attitudes are very good. Achievement is good, but there is scope to improve the quality of learning resources.
Visual and performing arts and media	Provision in media studies is good. Take-up and standards have improved steadily and students achieve well.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Provision in physical education is very good. Very good teaching and support is enabling the students to achieve very well.
Business	Provision in business studies is good. Students have a positive attitude and achieve well as a result of 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

Sixth form counsellors provide good support and guidance to students. Academic progress is carefully monitored and students receive detailed feedback on how well they are achieving and what they need to do to reach their target grades. Very good advice on higher education choices and other post-16 choices are offered to students.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management are very good. A comprehensive and detailed development plan is in place to develop the sixth form including developing a broader curriculum and improving students' independent learning skills. The sixth form is effectively managed on a day-to-day basis although procedures for registration are not robust. Sixth form counsellors are managed well and their roles in monitoring student progress are developing.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students who stay on to the sixth form are happy with the school and feel positive about their studies and the support they receive from teachers. They appreciate the range of activities offered outside lessons, particularly for sport, and the increasing amount of responsibilities the school offers them.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, good in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form and good overall. Students progress well in the main school from their average attainment on entry so that standards are above average by Year 11. Students who enter the sixth form do so with below average attainment. They make good and at times very good progress in the sixth form and standards are average overall by Year 13.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most of the students make good progress and gain GCSE results that are considerably higher than might be expected given their attainment on entry to the school.
- Overall examination results in the sixth form have been below average, although this represents good progress for the majority of students from their performance at GCSE.
- Achievement is at least good in the key subjects of English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology and standards are above or well above average by Year 11.
- The school successfully enables all students to achieve, whatever their particular learning needs.
- Students master the basic skills well as they move through the school and apply these well to support their learning. However, their speaking and listening skills are not as well developed.

Commentary

1. Test results for Year 9 students have risen at about the same rate as nationally in recent years. Results were above average in science in 2003; they were in line with the national average in English and mathematics. This represented satisfactory progress for most students from their Year 6 test results. Boys did better than girls in mathematics and science. Girls did better than boys in English but by a much smaller margin than nationally. The 2004 results in English and mathematics are at broadly the same level as in 2003. However, as all science papers have been returned to be marked again no comparison is possible for 2004.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	33.5 (32.1)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	35.6 (35.1)	35.4 (34.7)
science	34.7 (33.9)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 239 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. GCSE results rose sharply from 2001 to 2003 when they were above both the national average and the results of schools with similar Year 9 test results. These results

represented very good progress for the students from their earlier Year 9 tests. The 2004 results are broadly similar to 2003. Girls have gained much better results than boys overall, but by a smaller margin than nationally. Results in each of English language, mathematics and science were well above average in 2003. Results fell slightly in 2004 in English language and mathematics and were only above the 2003 national average, whereas science results remained well above the 2003 national average. Results were also significantly above average in 2003 in design and technology, geography, information and communication technology and physical education but fell in 2004 in both information and communication technology and physical education. However, results were significantly below average in English literature and history in 2003 but improved considerably in 2004 to be in line with the 2003 national average.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	62 (55)	52 (50)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	95 (94)	91 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	97 (98)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	38.2 (37.1)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 234 students 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 good overall achievement of the students in the main school is the result of several factors. A considerable proportion of the teaching is good or better. This is leading to the students learning new ideas and consolidating their understanding well. The large majority are well motivated, try hard and attend regularly. Teachers also focus well on meeting the needs of individual students. The curriculum is designed very well so that students follow courses relevant to their aptitudes, interests and needs. Achievement is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9 largely because teaching is more effective as lessons focus sharply on GCSE requirements. However, achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good in science, design and technology, geography, information and communication technology, physical education, religious education and citizenship. Standards are above average by Year 9 in science, design and technology, physical education and citizenship. Standards rise as the students move through the school and are well above average in mathematics, science and physical education by Year 11. Standards are above average by the same stage in English, art and design, design and technology, information and communication technology and religious education. Elsewhere standards are average with the exception of music, where there is scope to improve achievement for a significant minority of students in Years 7 to 9. Achievement is good in music in Years 10 and 11, although the popularity of the subject has fallen at GCSE and the standards of the current groups are below average overall.
4. The needs of students with special educational needs are understood well and catered for by carefully constructed individual education plans. These students generally achieve as well as their peers because of the very good support that they receive.

Standards of students requiring learning support are generally below and sometimes well below average when they enter the school, particularly in terms of literacy. However, they make good progress. There was insufficient evidence to evaluate the overall progress of the very small number of students with English as an additional language; however, they are all integrated well into classes and are enabled by their teachers to access all aspects of the curriculum. Students capable of high attainment are challenged well and achieve at the same level as their peers. Where specific programmes are used to extend gifted and talented students, these are equally effective.

5. The students' basic skills and their ability to apply them are a further contributory factor in their good achievement. It is school policy that all teachers are teachers of literacy; training has been provided in good practice. Reading standards are good overall and are often promoted effectively in morning reading sessions as well as in many subjects. The library is also used well to support the development of reading. The quality of writing varies across subjects but is at least satisfactory and shows a marked improvement by Years 10 and 11. The students' speaking skills are the weakest aspect overall; they are not consistently promoted in all subjects. Students' mathematical competence improves as they move through the school and is good by Year 11. This enables the students to access all areas of the curriculum, although not all teachers take action to develop mathematical skills. The students apply their information and communication technology skills well to support and enhance their learning in other subjects. This is particularly effective in mathematics, modern foreign languages and physical education.

Sixth form

6. A significant proportion of higher-attaining Year 11 students choose to go to the local sixth form college. Consequently, the attainment of students entering the Colne sixth form is at best below that seen nationally. Overall results in A Level and AVCE courses have risen slightly over the last few years, although they remained below average in 2003. The further slight improvement in 2004 puts results in line with the 2003 national average; there is no national data to enable comparisons for 2004 to be made. The number of students taking the various vocational courses has been too low to make valid national comparisons, although virtually all students entered at both intermediate and advanced levels in 2004 gained at least the results predicted for them from their earlier GCSE results. Male students did better than female students in 2003. An analysis of data for 2004 shows that the vast majority of students gained better overall results than students nationally with similar GCSE results. This was particularly the case for those with average GCSE grades. However, students with good GCSE results did not consistently achieve all that might have been expected of them. The numbers of students taking individual subjects and the wide variation in their attainment on entry makes it impossible to identify any valid patterns to performance by subject.

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	85.7 (86.4)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	12.8 (19.4)	32.6 (35.3)

Average point score per student	226.9 (195.3)	258.2 (263.3)
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There were 62 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

7. As in the main part of the school, the good achievement of the students is largely a result of the high quality of much of the teaching as well as the high levels of motivation of the students. Achievement is at least good in all of the subjects inspected in detail and is very good in information and communication technology, sociology and physical education. This enables the students to work at levels above those predicted by their GCSE results. Standards are at least average in all subjects. They are above average in mathematics, design and technology and information and communication technology and well above average in sociology. Achievement is supported well by the students' good literacy skills and their effective application of their skills in information and communication technology. However, as in the main school there are weaknesses in the students' speaking skills. Their competence in mathematics is satisfactory. Students with special educational needs continue to make the same good progress as in the main part of the school. As in Years 7 to 11, there was insufficient evidence to evaluate the overall progress of the very small number of students learning English as an additional language.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attendance is good, because of action by the school, which has secured recent improvements although absence rates are similar to the national average in the main school and in the sixth form. Students' punctuality is good. Attitudes to learning and behaviour are good in the main school and very good in the sixth form. Permanent exclusions are very rare. Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Sixth form students have very good attitudes to their work and make a significant contribution to the life of the school.
- Rigorous procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance have helped to reduce absence during the most recent school year.
- Students of all ages are keen to take part in the wide range of opportunities available and are very quick to use their initiative.
- Procedures for managing bullying and harassment are very effective.
- The school is particularly successful in promoting students' moral and social development.

Commentary

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.7	School data	2.2
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.

8. Attendance was good at the time of the last inspection. However, it dipped two years ago and ended up below the national average. The school has since tightened its monitoring procedures and these have helped to raise attendance so that it is now similar to schools elsewhere. Procedures for promoting good attendance are very comprehensive. House leaders, the education welfare officer and senior teachers work as a very good team. Students with poor attendance are tracked very closely. All unexplained absences are followed up on the first day and a very good range of incentive schemes rewards students who have outstanding or improved attendance. The school strongly discourages parents from booking holidays during the term and sticks firmly to its policy of never authorising these absences unless the circumstances are truly exceptional.
9. There are many opportunities for students to take an active part in the day-to-day life of the school and they respond with great enthusiasm. They enjoy having responsibility and many help to organise and take part in the very wide range of house and extra-curricular activities. Students' out-going and confident approach makes a significant contribution to the school's lively and vibrant atmosphere. Students are very aware of each other's needs and organise fund raising events for local and national charities. There have been improvements in the opportunities for the promotion of students' spiritual development such as through thought-provoking assemblies. This is resulting in them exploring with confidence some deeper questions and extending their spiritual awareness. Students also consider ways in which school life can be improved. For example, during a school council meeting during the inspection, students discussed disabled access and ways in which road safety can be improved for students when they are walking to the playing fields. Visits by disabled speakers and athletes are very effective in raising students' awareness of the needs of individuals who have physical difficulties. The students develop a good understanding of cultural diversity and show respect for the values and traditions of the cultures represented in today's diverse British society.

10. Students are proud of their school and classroom relationships are warm and mutually supportive. Teachers have very high expectations of behaviour and the overwhelming majority of students willingly comply. Racist incidents are very rare and students of all nationalities get along well. However, during the pre-inspection meeting a small number of parents said they were concerned about the standard of behaviour during some lessons and the impact this has upon other students' learning. Inspectors found that teachers manage behaviour well and do not allow these students to restrict the learning of their classmates. Students are friendly and helpful towards visitors and behave well and often very well, during lessons and break times. The refectory is small for a school of this size, but students queue in an orderly manner and everybody manages to have their lunch in the limited time available. The school regards bullying as a very serious matter and during discussions students said that teachers managed any such incidents very well. The school has introduced a diverse range of initiatives intended to pre-empt and resolve such behaviour. Students are acutely aware of the difference between right and wrong and were closely involved with the recent revision of many of these procedures.

Ethnic background of students

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1397	63	1
White – any other White background	15	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	2	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	1	0	0
Black or Black British – African	1	0	0
Chinese	5	0	0
Any other ethnic group	6	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	5	0	0

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

Sixth form

11. Around half the Year 11 students stay on into the sixth form and they develop into confident and sensible young people. They are proud of their school and committed to their studies. Students make very good progress because they attend regularly, behave very well and work hard.

12. Students get along well with each other and working relationships are productive and mutually respectful. Students wholeheartedly support a wide range of activities within the school and the wider community. Their very positive attitude helps them to grow in confidence and to appreciate the needs of others. For example, students assume various positions of responsibility within the house system and play a major role in running the numerous inter-house competitions. As part of the sports leader award scheme, students coach primary school pupils in a range of sports activities. Students also raise funds for charity. For example, students recently held an auction in order to raise money for a local hospice. Students who join the sixth form from abroad are encouraged to play a full part in all activities. Two students, one of whom is the head girl, attend the curriculum and students committee of the governing body. Furthermore, school and college councils and senior prefects in Years 12 and 13 help to support younger students who are experiencing particular problems. These diverse activities help students to develop into self-assured young adults who are capable of making a valuable contribution to society.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a very good quality of education. Much of the teaching is sharply focused on supporting the learning of all students. Their needs are carefully assessed and the curriculum planned to ensure that there are opportunities for all to succeed. Students participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities with enthusiasm. Resource levels are good and improving. Care is taken to ensure the well-being of all students, who are given well-planned support and guidance. The school goes out of its way to seek the views of its students and act on them wherever possible. Strong and highly effective links with the community and other educational institutions support well the students' achievements as do the links with their parents.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are very good overall and are more effective in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form than in Years 7 to 9. Assessment procedures are good overall and are very good in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A significant proportion of lessons are taught by highly skilled teachers who make learning interesting.
- Well-prepared teachers make good use of the time available to provide challenge and to generate pace to learning.
- Students rise to the high expectations of their teachers by working with enthusiasm and interest.
- Students' skills of independent learning are not sufficiently well developed.
- Teachers are successful in ensuring that the learning needs of all students are met.
- Rigorous assessment of the students' attainment is used well to plan the next steps in their learning.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 178 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
10 (6%)	41 (23%)	74 (41%)	44 (25%)	9 (5%)	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.

13. The principal and staff have worked with considerable success to develop a culture in which striving to improve the quality of teaching and learning is a continual aim. A wide range of strategies has been employed to focus teachers both on how students learn and on the styles that can be adopted to enhance the learning of all. The result of this is that a very considerable proportion of lessons are at least well taught and a substantial number of teachers regularly teach very good or excellent lessons in which the students' learning thrives. These teachers are highly skilled. They use their skills for the benefit of the students in their classes and to improve the teaching of other staff. The work of the advanced skills teachers is particularly effective in this respect. A small minority of teachers do not reach these high standards. A small number are

less experienced than others, although their teaching benefits considerably from the school's constant focus on improving teaching and learning. There was no significant pattern to any unsatisfactory teaching during the inspection. Unsatisfactory teaching was observed by teachers who taught satisfactory or better lessons at other times. Any shortcomings in teaching are generally associated with not handling effectively any inattention that stems from not fully engaging all students.

14. Teaching in the best lessons is lively, vibrant and captures the imagination of the students. Teachers here use their subject expertise and their understanding of how students learn to very great effect. They adopt a wide variety of methods and adapt their teaching style and activities to enable all students to gain the maximum benefit from each lesson. Questioning is sharply focused and probing. Students are expected to respond in detail and may well be required to explain and justify their answers. Many participate with interest and much enthusiasm, putting considerable effort into their work. Where teaching is perhaps only satisfactory, teachers take too great a lead and do not fully engage students actively as learners. They create an over-reliance and dependence by the students on the teacher. Consequently, students do not develop skills that enable them to take responsibility for their learning.
15. The high expectations of the most successful teachers are apparent through the level of challenge and the demands they place on the students. Lessons are well-structured so that learning can move forward at rapid pace and knowledge and understanding can develop systematically. Assessment information is used to establish the prior attainment of the students and then to plan carefully for the next stages of their learning. The structures of the national strategy to improve teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 are applied well and inform teaching throughout the school. There is scope to raise the level of challenge for students in a small number of lessons. Many teachers are starting to use the new technology available to them to make their lessons more interesting; they also ensure that the students apply their information and communication technology skills to enhance their learning.
16. Teachers have good information on the needs and appropriate strategies for teaching students with special educational needs. They usually plan activities and adapt their teaching very well to support the learning of these students. Teaching in withdrawal classes is generally good and is characterised by patient teaching that is based on a secure understanding of the students' needs and thorough preparation. Teaching is less effective where the focus is on covering the topic rather than listening and responding to the students' needs. The needs of the small number of students with English as an additional language are also catered for well so that they have full access to the curriculum and learn similarly to their classmates.
17. Assessment procedures have improved considerably in recent years and are a focus of further attention. Regular assessments are undertaken in all subjects, based closely on National Curriculum requirements. Teachers within each subject have a common understanding of the standards needed to meet specific National Curriculum targets. Teachers have a wealth of accurate data on which to base their planning. They have a sharp understanding of the students' levels of attainment and use this well to plan individual and sequences of lessons. Marking is variable in quality and consistency, but is generally used well to enable the students to see how they might improve their

work. This, coupled with verbal feedback on their work enables the students to identify how they can meet the targets that they have been set.

Sixth form

18. The high quality of much of the teaching in the sixth form inspires and motivates the students to try hard and give of their best. Teaching is stimulating and consistently challenging, driving learning forward at considerable pace. In approximately three-quarters of lessons observed, teaching was at least good; in a very considerable proportion, it was very good or excellent. Much of the teaching of information and communication technology is outstanding. Lessons here are expertly planned and prepared and are taught in a lively and vibrant manner that generates much interest and excitement. New technology is also used well in subjects such as mathematics to make learning more interesting. A substantial proportion of the teaching in mathematics as well as sociology and physical education is consistently of a high quality.
19. Teachers use their knowledge of the students' prior understanding and their capabilities to plan lessons that meet individual needs. Assessment procedures are at least good in all of the subjects inspected in depth, and are very good in the majority. Information is accurate and used very well to plan the next stages in the students' learning and to enable them to have a clear picture of how they can improve the quality of their work. Teachers use their skills and expertise not just to teach the difficult concepts carefully and patiently but also to be flexible enough to appreciate where students might be experiencing difficulties. Questioning is often sharply focused and probing as in a Year 13 business studies lesson. In the very best lessons, methods are well selected and time is used productively for independent and collaborative work. However, there is a tendency for students to take a passive role in some lessons and not initiate discussions or raise pertinent questions of their teachers. While students apply themselves well to tasks set, including during the recently introduced daily period of private study for Year 12, a significant minority have not developed skills of participation in discussion or taking initiative in their learning. Members of staff are aware that this matter can best be tackled throughout the school rather than just in the sixth form.

The curriculum

The breadth of curricular opportunities is very good. Enrichment is also very good with excellent provision in sport. Accommodation and resources are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum provides very well for the learning needs of the students, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- The provision for students with special educational needs is very good.
- Physical education is a core feature of the curriculum, reflecting the specialist status of the college.
- There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities to enrich the students' experiences.
- Members of staff are well qualified to teach the subjects of the curriculum.

- There are good levels of support staff, both technical and administrative, within faculties.
- Whilst accommodation is good overall, there are some shortcomings within design and technology, information and communication technology and business studies.

Commentary

20. As part of the very effective leadership within the school, focused on innovation, there has been an imaginative approach to curriculum planning which has resulted in the recent development of a range of programmes designed to cater more effectively for the needs of all students. The developments that have been put in place ensure that breadth and balance have not been compromised - a shortcoming identified in the previous inspection - and that all statutory requirements are met.
21. In Years 7 to 9 students have access to a second language which can be continued into Years 10 and 11. Numbers taking up this second option are presently modest, however. The citizenship programme for this age range is well developed through discrete lessons and complements effectively the strong personal, social and health education programme. The curriculum for Years 10 and 11 has been revised in the last two years and now provides a greater coherence with the provision in the sixth form. In addition to the main core subjects, the school provides a wide choice to the students of both academic and vocational courses such as drama, psychology, sociology, business studies, leisure and tourism, in addition to those traditionally found in Years 10 and 11. Provision within science has been extended to enable students to opt for either a GNVQ course or the three separate sciences rather than the double science which is followed by the majority. This step has resulted from a clear evaluation of the needs of the students and is one of the factors which accounts for the success of the faculty. Students with a particular aptitude for English and/or modern foreign languages are encouraged to sit the GCSE examination a year early, enabling them to embark on further study more quickly. Personal development within Years 10 and 11 builds securely on the programme in Years 7 to 9.
22. Given its specialist status, the leadership team has been very focused on establishing physical education as a key building block underpinning the revised curriculum. As a result, all students participate in either a short or long course in the subject in Years 10 and 11, with a considerable number taking a Sports Leadership Award. The provision is very flexible and even those students who are not especially keen on the subject say that their needs are well catered for. As part of its remodelled curriculum in Years 10 and 11, the school introduced the concept of 'Personalised Learning Advisers' where every member of staff acts as a mentor for two or three students to guide them through their choices in Year 9. This means that not only are all students advised and their progress monitored regularly but all members of staff now have a very clear picture of the rationale underlying the curriculum for Years 10 and 11. Students reported that they found this arrangement very helpful.
23. Students requiring learning support have access to the full curriculum where appropriate. This access is enhanced through additional literacy and numeracy support, particularly for those whose basic skills are very poor. Students with behavioural or social needs are handled sensitively, have appropriate targets and are carefully monitored with a view to integrating them fully into the life of the school.

Subject areas plan their curriculum to accommodate the needs of students who require learning support. They work well with the learning support co-ordinator to plan appropriately differentiated¹ lessons and use the suggested support strategies.

24. There is a very good range of trips and visits which enhance the students' learning. Students have been taken to the battlefields in Normandy. Field trips are arranged for geography students and language students undertake study visits to France and Germany. Some students have travelled further afield to China, Africa, Canada, USA and South America. Good use is made of local higher education institutions with sociology and physical education students visiting Essex University. There are excellent opportunities for students to use the extensive sports facilities and participate in out-of-hours activities. Participation rates are very high. After-school clubs for photography and musical groups such as the jazz band and choir are also on offer. All faculties provide additional after-school sessions to help the students to reinforce their learning through revision programmes and booster classes.
25. There is a good match between the staffing levels and the demands of the curriculum. The close involvement of the school in initial teacher training means that it has good systems in place to support new entrants to the profession and those who are newly qualified. As part of the workforce remodelling programme, the school has appointed a good number of support staff - both technical and administrative - who provide invaluable support to teachers at both a strategic level and on a day-to-day basis. Accommodation is good overall with well resourced faculties. For example, the modern foreign languages faculty has its own computer suite and art has a multimedia facility. In general the school has more computers than most schools of a similar size. This has enhanced the provision for the teaching of information and communication technology across the curriculum since the last inspection. However, some of the rooms are now rather small for the number of computers and students using them. Whilst resources are generally good, the design and technology faculty lacks appropriate equipment for computer-aided manufacturing. The business studies department has no fixed base so it is difficult for the staff to establish a sense of identity and display students' work.

Sixth Form

26. The sixth form curriculum has been developed along with the provision in Years 10 and 11. It provides a very good range of pathways for the students who have access to a wide variety of advanced courses, including vocational options in health and social care, leisure and recreation and travel and tourism. The choice is enhanced by less familiar courses such as archaeology, law and photography. Good links have been established with a neighbouring school to share the provision for French and German. Sixth form students are also provided with Spanish as an additional optional language.
27. Arrangements for the personal development of the students are good, with many opportunities provided for them to take on responsibilities within the school. The shortcoming identified in the previous inspection with regard to non-compliance for sixth form religious education has been tackled through the general studies

¹ Differentiated refers to arrangements within lessons to meet the needs of pupils of different ability.

programme which now ensures an appropriate coverage for all students. Sixth formers benefit in the same way as students in the main school with regard to extra-curricular provision, trips and visits. Good use is made of the locality and students going on to higher education have regular access to both visiting lecturers and visits to universities of their choice. Staffing and resources within the sixth form are good. The overall impact of this improving provision is reflected by the increasing number of students considering staying on at the college to study in the sixth form rather than go to the college in Colchester.

Care, guidance and support

Arrangements to ensure students' care, welfare, health and safety are very good. The school provides good support, advice and guidance and involves students exceptionally well in its work and development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school is committed to students' welfare and good teamwork ensures that they are very well looked after during the day.
- Good academic support and close monitoring of students' personal development helps them to make very good progress in their work.
- Outstanding procedures help incoming Year 7 students to settle quickly.
- The school strongly encourages students to voice their opinions and it takes full account of these when planning for the future.

Commentary

28. The standard of support and guidance provided for students was high at the time of the last inspection and this continues to be the case. Child protection, medical and health and safety procedures are thorough and members of staff fully understand their responsibilities.
29. The school has recently introduced a house system and the four house leaders oversee students' academic and personal welfare. They work closely with individual class tutors, the various heads of department, senior teachers and the education welfare officer. Strong teamwork ensures that students receive educational and personal support and guidance that is closely matched to their needs. During discussions, all students said that they would feel able to seek help from at least one person, should the need arise. A student support room is also being established in order to provide informal 'drop in' sessions for students who are experiencing particular problems.
30. Each term, the school has an assessment week during which students undertake various tests in the subjects they are studying. Teachers then evaluate the progress that individual students have made and they work together to identify personal targets for improvement and complete their learning profile. This process allows students to reflect upon how well they are doing and to understand what they have to do to improve. Students like this system and feel that teachers provide support that is closely matched to their needs.

31. Students with special educational needs are supported in lessons through a team of dedicated and experienced learning support assistants. They also receive additional support through withdrawal lessons, particularly for those with poor literacy skills. Informal support is also offered during the day and at lunch-times with students having access to the 'learning zone' which provides a safe and secure environment for them as well as access to appropriate staff. Learning support assistants track student progress and performance in lessons and this is carefully documented and then used as input into students' annual reviews. Daily meetings of learning support assistants provide an effective medium of communication to discuss student progress, daily administration and other relevant issues. Students' needs are well understood and catered for by carefully constructed individual education plans which detail learning needs, appropriate support strategies and relevant targets to which the students can aspire.
32. Through its Sports College status, the school has regular contact with many of its contributing primary schools. Teachers regularly visit in order to advise their primary colleagues on aspects of the curriculum and sixth form students also help during lessons and extra-curricular clubs. In addition, Year 6 students spend two full days in school during the summer term when they have lessons in a wide range of subjects. These close links help incoming Year 7 students to form friendships long before they actually move up; they speak very warmly of the support provided. At the start of the autumn term, Year 7 students also come into school one day early and are chaperoned by some of the older students. Students speak very highly of these arrangements and say that they meet their needs exceptionally well.
33. The school is keen to hear students' views and provides several ways in which these can be expressed. For example, they can channel their views through the house and school councils and those in Year 11 complete an exit questionnaire. Students have been able to amend proposed alterations to the school uniform, introduce house suggestion boxes and nominate charities for which they raise funds. They are very pleased about the way the school seeks and takes account of their views. A recent, very detailed survey confirms that there are few areas of school life that students would like to change.

Sixth form

34. The school has recently established a team of sixth form counsellors to provide support and guidance to students; this is working to good effect. Students have good access to the counsellors and this is appreciated. They also appreciate the access to subject staff who make themselves available to discuss their work. There are excellent opportunities for students to express their views and participate in decisions made about sixth form provision. Students have access to computers and value the library as a resource for research. Academic progress is carefully monitored and students receive detailed feedback on how well they are achieving and what they need to do to reach their target grades. Very good advice is given on higher education and other avenues and students regularly visit universities to inform their choices.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Links with parents are good. Links with the community are excellent in the main school and very good in the sixth form. Links with other schools and colleges are very good in the main school and excellent in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Comprehensive links with the community and other schools and colleges enrich the curriculum and promote students' personal development very effectively.
- Sixth form students are very well prepared for their transfer to higher and further education or the world of work.
- The school actively seeks parents' views and is very responsive to their suggestions or concerns.

Commentary

35. This school is an active member of the Coastal Confederation and its status as a specialist Sports College creates many opportunities to engage students, parents and the wider community. Diverse and very well established links extend to many primary and secondary schools within the Confederation. For example, the school hosts weekend workshops for gifted and talented Year 6 students and teachers support their colleagues in primary and secondary schools as and when the need arises. Advanced skills teachers observe lessons in other schools and provide specific training courses and support to share their knowledge and experience. As part of the junior sports leader award scheme students in Years 10 and 11 lead activities at primary schools and help out during physical education lessons. In addition, the school regularly hosts inter-school sporting events and these activities provide very good opportunities for students to develop their leadership skills. A group of Year 11 students attend vocational courses at the local college of further education and a small number undertake extended work experience placements abroad. Students also benefit from contact with schools overseas and there are plans to re-establish e-mail links with several such schools.
36. Links with the community are excellent and they play a major part in fostering students' strong sense of local identity. The school hosts the annual May Fair and carol services are held in local villages each year. Students visit nearby nursing homes and support the annual election of the 'Brightlingsea Deputy'. Students also support numerous community activities such as 'Brightlingsea in Bloom' and links with local churches are close. International links are extensive and students have recently undertaken trips to several countries including America, China and Canada.
37. The school is keen to work in partnership with parents and encourages them to be open and frank if they have any concerns or suggestions. The school takes their views very seriously and, wherever possible, they are incorporated into the school improvement plan. As well as on-going, informal day-to-day contact, a biannual questionnaire is circulated to a random selection of 500 parents in order to gauge their more general views. Analysis of the most recent findings shows that there is little that parents would like to change. Parents of Year 6 students also complete a questionnaire during the summer term information evening and all parents can contribute towards the identification of their children's learning targets during the annual review day.

Sixth form

38. Educational links with other schools and colleges are outstanding. Students undertaking the higher sports leader award work in several primary schools and sometimes assist during lessons when members of staff are absent. These activities provide valuable practical support for the schools involved, contribute to the students' coursework and extend their development as responsible citizens. Students also use specialised equipment and attend sports science lectures at Essex University. French, music and physics teaching is shared with other sixth forms within the Coastal Federation.
39. Links with the community are close and the school is keen to work more directly with the world of business. A reflection of this commitment is the school's very active participation in the Haven Gateway project. The school is eager to raise students' awareness of the diverse employment and training opportunities that will arise from this collaborative scheme for the development of docks within the Tendring peninsula. Students have already visited Harwich docks as part of their AS Level art and photography coursework. Students are also deeply involved in many aspects of community life. A recent example of their wholehearted support for local groups was the recent auction of 'two-minute celebrity doodles'; significant funds were raised and these were donated to a local hospice.
40. Close links with Essex University help to give students an insight into higher education and members of staff visit to lecture on subjects such as sociology. Teachers also liaise with colleagues at Anglia Polytechnic University and this makes a major contribution to their own professional development.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school benefits from excellent governance and excellent leadership by the principal. The leadership of other key staff and the overall effectiveness of management are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Governors make an extremely positive impact on the development of the school through expert support and challenge.
- The principal promotes a powerful vision, driving all areas of the school's work.
- Planning is sharply focused on immediate and long-term goals.
- The school shares innovative practice throughout the field of education.

Commentary

41. The governors are supportive, but also challenging and very well informed. They base decisions on first-rate information from the school leadership team, as well as by visiting the school, making full use of the committee structure and using the link governor role. The curriculum committee includes students who provide governors with first-hand reports. Governors are well aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses and often review the improvement plan. They fully understand that their first priority is to represent the interests of the students, but they also feel responsible for creating an environment in which everyone can grow. This attitude is a testament

to their influence in reflecting upon performance and promoting change. Governors fully understand and support the school's financial planning, as they are able to rely on concise and sharply focused advice from the principal and the school's finance officer. The school obtains grants from a variety of sources and uses them wisely to enhance the funding available from the local authority. The school constantly compares its expenditure with that of other schools.

42. The principal has very successfully and enthusiastically promoted a clear vision for the school, based on a "passion for learning". Combined with an outstanding team ethos amongst senior staff, shared with the rest of the staff, this encourages innovative and forward thinking at all levels. Working with the governors, the senior team sets challenging targets and gives staff opportunities to be imaginative about how they set about meeting them within the school's overall philosophy of including all students in the opportunities it offers. Making full use of the school's status as a Sports College, members of staff foster healthy attitudes across the whole curriculum, encouraging the promotion of fairness and supportive behaviour, as well as the ambition to achieve the highest personal goals. The specialist status influences the school's work profoundly and successfully in a variety of ways. When helping members of staff to improve professionally, the school uses the concept of coaching to enhance performance. When developing the curriculum, departments apply the principles of fair competition to ensure that students achieve as well as they can.
43. The school's day-to-day organisation and its long term strategic management are both very effective. It has introduced several measures to deal effectively with teachers' workload and uses technology very well to ensure the smooth running of the entire institution. The school guarantees continuity and progression for students aged 14 to 19 and deserves the awards it has won, including Sportsmark Gold and Artsmark Silver. The processes of school development planning dovetail with departmental planning and with procedures to manage the performance of staff so that every individual sees clearly how their work affects the whole institution. All subject leaders have a clear vision for their subject area and are good at building teams. The advanced skills teachers meet independently and work together to achieve the targets set for them, leading coherent whole-school curriculum developments and making an effective impact on teaching and learning. Examples of inconsistency of practice exist in certain areas, but they are few. The management of English, mathematics, information and communication technology, religious education, physical education and special educational needs is very good; that of the other departments is good, except music, which is satisfactory.
44. Over a period of several years, the school's initiatives have influenced work elsewhere in education. Members of staff have visited institutions abroad, including countries as far away as the USA and China, in order to spread good practice and gain ideas and experience, which can benefit the school. Work with institutions of higher education enables the school to encourage ever higher rates of participation and contact with senior politicians enables it to contribute to national debate. As a major partner in such diverse organisations as the Haven Gateway Partnership, the Coastal Confederation and the Schools' Forum, the school and the principal in particular disseminate good practice. Locally too, the school has achieved successes. The leadership team has worked with a school with serious weaknesses and has helped them make the required improvement. Work with local primary schools has expanded and resulted in awards, such as Activemark Gold to two of them.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	5,331,826	Balance from previous year	170,224
Total expenditure	5,452,853	Balance carried forward to the next	49,197
Expenditure per student	3,804		

Sixth form

45. The sixth form is very well led and managed on a daily basis. A newly appointed co-ordinator manages a team of counsellors who provide support and guidance to students and are developing their roles in monitoring student progress. However, procedures for improving attendance are not robust and the new registration system is experiencing technical problems. The overall responsibility for the strategic objectives is with the principal who has established a clear vision for the direction of the sixth form. A comprehensive and detailed strategic plan has been produced to develop the sixth form with, among many objectives, that of improving the number of students who stay on into the sixth form. With this in mind, there are plans to widen the range of courses in the sixth form, including having more vocational based courses, and to establish clear pathways for students from Year 10 into the sixth form. There is also a focus on improving students' independent learning skills and sharing best practice in sixth form teaching to provide the most appropriate learning environment for these students. Leadership and management of the sixth form subjects inspected are generally at least good, and very good in information and communication technology, mathematics, physical education, design and technology and sociology.

WORK RELATED LEARNING (WRL)

Provision in work related learning is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good quality work experience and careers advice provides effective opportunities for students to learn through work.
- The good range of vocational courses supports the students learning, but it is only through these courses that an assessment of work related learning skills takes place.
- The school has made a good start to implementing requirements.

Commentary

46. Students are achieving well in the good range of vocational subjects offered by the school, and they are generally motivated to learn about work. They show a good understanding of aspects of the workplace such as confidentiality issues, recent disability discrimination legislation, and changes happening in the world of work.
47. The school's programme for WRL has been well planned in accordance with national guidance; it meets statutory requirements. Many departments have identified

curriculum activities that explore the way in which business enterprises operate. In geography, for example, students look at the impact of the tourist industry in resorts such as Ayia Napa. Growing business links, such as with the Haven Gateway Project and with the army, support the school's provision effectively.

48. Work experience is well planned. Preparation and debriefing for those on work experience are good. Students in Year 10 have a work experience programme that is popular with them and well regarded by employers and parents. Students with special educational needs are supported well in their preparation for work experience. Students have very good careers guidance, including individual interviews through the Connexions Service.
49. WRL is well led, with an identified co-ordinator and clear planning for the future. The management and monitoring of provision is in the early stages of development and the school does not yet evaluate its impact on the students' achievements.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results represent very good progress for the students from their Year 9 results, particularly in literature, and a fast track programme offers higher-attaining students early GCSE entry.
- Teaching is good overall and some very good practice in the department provides models for further improvement.
- There is insufficient access to new technology for students and teachers.
- The subject is very well managed; under good leadership relatively new teachers work together confidently as a team, ready to evaluate and improve their work.

Commentary

50. Results in the national tests for Year 9 students showed marked improvement in 2003 after two years in which they were below the national average. Although there was a slight drop in 2004 they remained in line with the national average. These results represented reasonable progress for the students in relation to standards reached when they entered the school. The 2003 improvement has not been sustained and the department recognises this area as a priority in their work and development planning.
51. Work seen during the inspection shows that standards are average and achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. Students make a good start in Year 7, where there is valuable primary liaison and planning which makes very effective use of the literacy strategy and National Curriculum requirements. Achievement in Years 8 and 9 is less consistent and not all students achieve as well as they could by the end of Year 9. Some very good writing was seen in exercise books or folders and displayed on walls. Some very lively talk was heard in the best lessons but in general students do not produce enough sustained and varied writing and in some lessons there is insufficient challenge to thought and imagination to give students excitement in their learning and extend their range.
52. In GCSE language and literature the department has an excellent record of high entry rates, above the national figure in both subjects. GCSE results in 2003 were well above average in English language, although literature in that year was below average. However, this still represented good progress particularly in relation to the levels those students had attained in their previous national tests. In 2004, despite a slight drop in the language results, standards remained above the 2003 average, while results in literature rose to well above it. Boys' performance in literature in 2004 was well above the 2003 figure.

53. Students achieve well in Years 10 and 11. Work seen shows that in general these above average standards are being well maintained. The setting arrangements provide fast track opportunities for higher attainers and effective support for those working at lower attainment levels. In upper ability set lessons seen in both years, students worked closely on their literature anthologies developing both interest and understanding. Two lower sets achieved well in their language lessons in response to imaginatively planned activities which kept them alert and interested throughout. In the lessons where pace and content were less carefully judged, students, whether higher or lower attainers, did not learn or do as much as they should and in one lesson this led to some poor behaviour and time wasting.
54. Standards of listening are satisfactory in English and often good, but there is scope for improving speaking and reading aloud. Good opportunities for presentations were seen in Year 11, but students chose to read rather than talk to the class and their reading aloud was poor.
55. Teaching is good overall and some very good lessons were seen. Teaching is most successful when teachers use the schemes or units of work flexibly, with lively personal input which arouses students' curiosity and challenges them to think and argue. It is less successful when opening sessions are used for little more than task setting and when the worksheets, writing frames or exercises produce dutiful compliance rather than evident enthusiasm for the work. The best teaching uses these devices, and also the lesson objectives and national strategies as a means to an end: better thinking, talking, reading and writing. They were not seen as the main purpose of the lessons. Although resources are good, few books were seen in classroom or in students' hands, other than the GCSE anthologies. Use of handouts for stories, poems or Shakespeare scenes does not give students enough opportunity to browse, read on, or simply to have the pleasure of using a book instead of a photocopied sheet.
56. The lack of the use of new technology was noted in the last inspection and has not been remedied. However, this is recognised in the development plan and better access is promised to ensure that it will happen. Teachers use computer presentations and there was an excellent example of this in a Year 8 lesson which provided an exciting range of learning experiences as a very good stimulus to writing.
57. Assessment procedures are well organised, and there are examples of good comments on students' work, which help them to evaluate their writing and set targets for improvement. Good marking in GCSE folders engages with students' ideas and analyses and indicates that productive discussion is taking place in lessons. In some marking as in some lessons, teachers who are understandably keen to encourage students over-praise work when more precise or analytical comments would be more appropriate and helpful.
58. Very good leadership and management have given a strong sense of common purpose to a large team which includes experienced teachers and relative newcomers to the school and the profession. Work in Year 7 is led by an ex-primary headteacher who is able to strengthen primary curriculum links and ensure good continuity of learning. Teachers feel well supported by the head of faculty and its senior members,

and enthusiasm and initiative are evident in the work they are doing. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. Library access is much better. The monitoring of teaching and learning then recommended is now in place, although with potential for further development.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

59. Standards in language and literacy are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. The school has a literacy policy which stresses that all teachers are teachers of literacy. All departments have had some training in good literacy practice, with examples of strategies that can be used across the curriculum. Each has a policy for the development of literacy in the subject area and the co-ordination of whole-school literacy is the responsibility of the English department. Booster classes and extra sessions are offered to students who need more individual help. A whole-school audit of strategies for writing and marking took place in 2003 and a further audit is planned for the current year.
60. The morning reading sessions, when students and staff spend twenty minutes reading, is a valuable whole-school initiative. Evidence from the inspection indicates that reading standards are good in science, history, geography and citizenship and satisfactory in other subjects except music, where they are poor. Library facilities have improved since the last inspection and the library is well used. Writing standards overall are satisfactory rather than good and in several subjects there was marked improvement in Years 10 and 11.
61. Speaking and listening skills are weaker overall and activities to develop these are not used in enough lessons. Lack of opportunities for students to speak to the class, discuss and make presentations was noted in several subjects. In art and design and in music this was a particular weakness and standards were unsatisfactory. There were good opportunities for speaking and presenting in citizenship lessons, but listening skills were not well developed.

French and German

Provision in French and German is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Some inconsistent practice in teaching remains, although achievement is satisfactory and standards are average.
- Leadership and management of the department are good.

Commentary

62. French GCSE results in 2003 were average for both boys and girls, but higher ability students achieved better than expected. Candidates gained significantly worse results in French than in the average for all their other subjects. In 2004, girls' results fell, and boys' remained similar. German GCSE results in 2003 were average for girls and below average for boys, a pattern which occurred amongst students of all ability levels. Girls did a little better in this subject than in the average for all their other

subjects, but boys did significantly worse. In 2004, results were very similar to those for the previous year, amongst both boys and girls. Standards seen in lessons and students' work are average in both languages by Year 11, and achievement is satisfactory in Years 10 to 11.

63. Standards seen in lessons and in students' work are average overall in both languages and there are few examples of high attainment. Achievement overall is satisfactory in both French and German, but the numbers choosing languages after Year 9 have fallen in both languages and there is disaffection in a minority of classes in Years 7 to 9. The achievement of students with special educational needs is satisfactory, but few of them continue with languages after Year 9.
64. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in both languages and in all age groups. Lessons are well planned, with good pace and variety of activity. Students usually behave well and teachers use innovative methods to motivate and promote learning. The department uses its own suite of computers well, except that the foreign language spelling and grammar checks are not available for students to use. Half the teachers use the foreign language most of the time and expect students to do the same, but the others rarely use it or mix it too much with English, failing to provide adequate models for students to follow. Teachers and students do not focus enough on the development of independence in language learning and in some lessons there is a lack of challenge for more able students.
65. In post for two years, the head of department provides a good role model and has made important policy changes, making the subject more accessible to a wide range of students. Staff shortages have reduced the impact, but the department is now fully staffed by qualified teachers, who share a good team ethos. Data is analysed so that improvements can be made, the handbook is well written and resources are well organised, but some inconsistent teaching practice remains. Students in Year 8 benefit from trips to France and Germany, but there are no current links with foreign schools. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very strong team of experienced teachers are having a good effect on standards.
- Good use of new technology aids teaching and learning.
- The faculty is well led and committed to raising standards.
- Students' learning is well supported through very good provision of extra-curricular activities.
- The well organised scheme of work provides a good framework for teaching.
- Limited curriculum links with feeder primary schools reduce the effectiveness of Year 7 teaching.

Commentary

66. Achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, very good in Years 10 and 11 and good overall. Standards achieved in national tests at the end of Year 9 are in line with

national averages, with boys performing marginally better than girls. By GCSE, results attained have risen to well above average. Girls outperform the boys at this stage by a greater margin than nationally. Since 2001, the school's results have risen faster than the national average. These results reflect work seen in lessons with standards average by Year 9 and well above average by Year 11. Students' books contain good quantities of well marked work which covers all aspects of mathematics and shows good progression in all aspects.

67. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9, very good in Years 10 and 11 and good overall. Good planning ensures that time is used effectively and that pace and challenge are promoted. These elements are more in evidence in Years 10 and 11. Students' good attitudes mean they respond positively to make good or very good progress. Structured beginnings and endings to lessons are used effectively to reinforce learning. Homework is used well to support and extend learning. Good use of the students' computer skills are also employed as a further aid to learning. Students benefit from the many after school revision sessions. University links, mathematics competitions and booster classes challenge the gifted and talented. Relationships are very good. Staff and students treat each other with proper respect allowing lessons to proceed in an atmosphere free of tension to the benefit of progress. Members of staff are fully aware of the needs of their students through the very good use made of assessment. Work is planned accordingly. Frequent references in Years 10 and 11 to GCSE levels helps stimulate students to strive for challenging target grades. Students with special educational needs are well catered for. Individual education plans are used to determine lesson planning. Support staff and teachers work well together in lessons resulting in students with special needs making progress comparable with that of their peers.
68. Leadership and management of the faculty are very good. Improvements since the previous inspection have been good. A very experienced group of teachers are well led as a team by the head of faculty. Their line manager supports the head of faculty and team members effectively. Recruitment to the faculty is being managed well. The head of faculty's enthusiasm for the subject is a good role model for staff and students. A development plan gives a clear outline of future intentions, but requires greater detail, indicating action to be taken and costs, if it is to become a tool for successful implementation. The benefits to learning in Year 7 provided by good curriculum links with feeder primary schools are not being realised.

Mathematics across the curriculum

69. Students' mathematical competence in Years 7 to 9 is average and is above average in Years 10 and 11. Their skills enable students to access all areas of the curriculum. Staff awareness of the part they can play in developing mathematical competence has been raised through a curriculum audit supported by staff training sessions. However, the policy of all faculties taking active steps to develop mathematical skills is not embedded in the work of the school. Some faculties, for example modern foreign languages, identify opportunities to practise skills in their work scheme. Despite this not being a universal practice, faculties across the school do provide all the expected opportunities for students to develop their skills through practice.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are achieving well and reaching well above average standards by Year 11.
- Innovative leadership throughout the faculty has secured sustained improvement.
- Secure subject knowledge of teachers underpins a range of stimulating activities which capture the imagination of the students; however there are insufficient opportunities provided for students to develop independent learning skills.
- The monitoring of individual student's progress is good but the information from assessment is used less systematically to compare the progress of different groups of students.

Commentary

70. In the 2003 national tests taken at the end of Year 9, the students achieved results that were above both the national average and the average for similar schools. The results represent good progress for the students given their attainment on entry to the school. Results have improved at a slightly faster rate than those nationally, with boys regularly performing better than the girls. The 2004 results were slightly lower, but there was no evidence of a decline in standards in the current Year 10. GCSE results for 2003 were well above the national average. The students who took these examinations made very good progress from their attainment levels in Year 7, with girls performing slightly better than the boys. The 2004 results are marginally lower than those of 2003 but remain well above the 2003 average.
71. The good teaching within the faculty enables the students to achieve well and acquire a broad knowledge and understanding of the subject. The carefully planned curriculum ensures that key scientific themes are developed systematically so that the students can consolidate their understanding of important ideas and concepts. A well-developed programme of revision and booster classes is in place. The combined impact of these strong features within the faculty enable the students to reach standards that are above average by Year 9 and well above average by Year 11.
72. The teachers plan their lessons carefully and have taken on board many of the approaches promoted by the National Key Stage 3 Strategy. Learning objectives are shared with the students, for example, so that they are aware of what they are expected to have achieved by the end of the lesson. Introductory sessions are often brisk and lively, setting the scene well for the main activity of the lesson. Teachers utilise their good subject knowledge to provide clear expositions about both scientific principles and practical procedures. As a result, students are able to undertake their own work, both theoretical and practical, with confidence.
73. Teachers generally use assessment information well to plan lessons and motivate the students who are all aware of their target levels in Years 7 to 9 and target grades in Years 10 to 11. As a result, the wide range of activities provided by the teachers is usually well matched to the needs of the class. Lessons sustain the interest of the students who respond well by listening attentively, answering questions willingly and undertaking practical activities with due care and attention to safety. On a few

occasions, lessons are not quite so well pitched and the students' responses are subsequently less positive. Learning support assistants are deployed effectively to work with students with special educational needs. They are well aware of the students' targets and intervene appropriately to ensure that they achieve as well as others in the class.

74. Computers are much more in evidence than was the case in the last inspection and laptops are being used confidently by students to display results in both tabular and graphical forms. Teachers use computers regularly in the classroom and the animated displays help to reinforce some of the more abstract ideas within science. Whilst reading and writing skills are promoted adequately, there is less of a focus on the development of speaking and listening skills. Opportunities are missed to get students to discuss their ideas and predictions on a regular basis. As a result, the development of the students' independent learning skills is being limited.
75. Leadership and management are very good. There is a clear vision well focused on student achievement and a strong team ethos within the faculty. Technical staff are fully included within the team and they provide invaluable support both in terms of curriculum advice and practical expertise. The two Advanced Skills Teachers are deployed effectively to develop teaching and learning expertise both within the faculty and at whole school level. Monitoring and evaluation is well established and there is a clear understanding of strengths and areas for development. Innovative approaches have been undertaken to explore the impact of single sex science groups on achievement and steps are being taken to evaluate the initiative. Data is used very well to track the progress of individual students and to target those for additional support. However, the systems for monitoring the relative achievements of specific groups of students and setting targets at cohort level for all years are underdeveloped. Given the increased rate of progress of students over time and the well above average standards now being reached, progress since the last inspection is good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11.
- The level of resources is good enabling all students to follow a GCSE course in ICT where standards are above average.
- All required aspects of information and communication technology are covered well.
- The leadership and management are very good.
- The department supports non-specialist teachers well, although there is scope for continued professional development in the use of some software and the effective use of interactive white boards.

Commentary

76. GCSE results in 2003 were above the school average and well above the national average. In the latest examination in 2004 results were not as impressive and are

nearer to the national average for 2003. Standards seen in lessons and in samples of work are in line with the national average by Year 9; this represents good progress for the students because standards in the early stages of Year 7 are often below average. This improvement is the result of teaching which is mostly good or very good, especially when lessons are taken by specialists. Lessons are supported by a comprehensive and challenging scheme of work based upon the National Strategy for information and communication technology.

77. Standards continue to improve for all students in Years 10 and 11 as they become critical users of information and communication technology. They follow either a full or half GCSE course which ensures that all students in these years continue to develop their skills and knowledge. Because of this comprehensive provision, students in all years cover all of the required aspects of information and communication technology and have their competence assessed appropriately. Standards seen in lessons were above average and some well above average work was seen in Year 11. Achievement is good overall and often very good.
78. Teaching is good overall and very good in lessons taken by specialists. The team of teachers which covers the large number of lessons in Years 7 to 11 is well co-ordinated and supported by the specialists within the department, although there is more variation in learning in classes taught by non-specialists. Students with special educational needs are well supported and the department has a support assistant who is effectively deployed to meet specific needs in designated lessons. Very good opportunities are provided for students to use information and communication technology facilities after school for coursework and homework.
79. There has been a very good improvement in provision since the last inspection and the school has well developed plans to improve further. Leadership and management of the department are very good. The school has a clear, well-judged development plan which is being very effectively implemented. Assessment procedures are firmly in place and used well throughout the department, but particularly in the examination courses. There has been a significant expansion of resources which makes it possible to timetable information and communication technology lessons for all students. Very effective use of interactive whiteboards by some teachers is having a positive impact on teaching and learning, although there is scope for this practice to be adopted more widely by non-specialists.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

80. There has been a very good improvement in the use of information and communication technology in subjects since the last inspection. Students have at least satisfactory and more often good information and communication technology skills and knowledge, which are used to enhance learning in other subjects. The use of new technology in subjects is satisfactory and continues to develop in response to whole school planning. A growing number of departments now have their own computer suites or clusters of computers and an increasing number of interactive whiteboards are being used effectively to enhance teaching and learning. Students are able to use and improve their skills in the majority of subjects although there is variation between departments. The school is endeavouring to reduce this through the work of the "Expert User Group" which meets every month. As well as the

increase in information and communication technology provision for students, all teachers have laptop computers, which is helping to stimulate teachers' knowledge, and skills. Information and communication technology use is very good in physical education and good in both mathematics and modern foreign languages. The use of computer-aided manufacturing is a weak area in design and technology. The use of information and communication technology by students for monitoring and measuring in practical science lessons is underdeveloped.

HUMANITIES

81. Geography, history, and religious education were inspected in depth and sociology and psychology were sampled. Students who sat for the GCSE in **sociology** in 2004 achieved standards broadly in line with national averages. One lesson was sampled during the week of the inspection. Students in the lesson achieved well and have made a good start to the course. The lesson was clearly linked to the requirements of the examining body and was well organised so that students were clear about what is required of them. Teaching was satisfactory in the lesson of **psychology**. Achievement in this lesson was satisfactory and standards were average.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a wide range of well planned and creative activities which enables students to enjoy their learning.
- Teaching and learning are less effective when there is insufficient consolidation of lesson objectives.
- Effective leadership and management help to ensure that standards at GCSE rise in a sustained way and enable students to achieve beyond expectations.
- There are extensive fieldwork opportunities particularly on the GCSE course which enable students to achieve well.

Commentary

82. It was a key issue at the last inspection to improve standards in geography. This has been tackled very successfully. Attainment recorded by teachers at the end of Year 9 in 2003 was above national averages. Results at GCSE in 2003 were well above national averages and above results obtained in other subjects in the school, for both boys and girls. Results in 2004 were at a similar level but from a small number of entries. Standards in lessons are average by Years 9 and 11. However, ample time allocation, small groups at GCSE level, the use of innovative learning styles, excellent fieldwork opportunities and the careful attention paid to assessments, all help enable students to achieve beyond expectations in tests and examinations.
83. The achievements of students are good in lessons across the age range because lessons are planned imaginatively to capture their interest and enable them to make good progress. Students fail to concentrate only when they are unsure of what they are doing. Students with special educational needs achieve well because of effective learning assistant support. There is good communication between teachers and support assistants both before and after a lesson. However, when this support is not available, special educational needs and lower-attaining students are not always provided with written resources at a level that suits their needs and which would enable them to achieve better. Similarly, more able students only achieve well when they are given extension tasks that challenge them further. Information and communication technology is used well, particularly for GCSE coursework and there is appropriate use of the Internet for research.
84. Teaching and learning are good across the age range and are very good where imaginative tasks to suit all abilities and learning styles are clearly explained by enthusiastic teachers. This results in highly productive students. Students in a Year 7 lesson enjoyed working together at producing contour models because they were able to choose the level of difficulty to suit their needs. Learning is good when teachers consolidate learning by implementing effective lesson summaries. When this is done, the overall effectiveness of a lesson rises considerably. However, this is not always the case. Sometimes teachers supply too much information rather than persisting with questioning. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory when there is limited tuning of resources to individual needs. When students are copying from textbooks, some finish quickly whilst others have insufficient time. However, when students are

asked to produce extended writing, it is done very well, such as when writing a script for a TV interview of an earthquake disaster. Good contributions to numeracy are made through the production of graphs and the use of statistics. Assessment and marking are thorough and constructive and used to respond to individual needs. This helps students to improve their work. They find their teachers helpful and approachable and appreciate the opportunities to attend after-school sessions.

85. Leadership is good because the department has been taken to a position of relative success in examinations. Effective teamwork has been enabled to thrive, for example, in the preparation of resources and assessment tasks as well as imaginative learning activities and extensive fieldwork opportunities at GCSE. Management is good because the department is well-organised, self-evaluative and makes changes where necessary. Because of this and sustained improvement in GCSE results, improvement since the last inspection is very good.

History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results improved in 2004 and GCSE students are now achieving satisfactorily.
- Teaching in Years 7 to 9 has improved but lacks coherence and does not enable higher attainers to achieve as well as they should in the short teaching and learning time available for students in Years 7 and 9.
- Assessment and feedback are good for examination students but underdeveloped for Years 7 to 9 so that they do not receive effective guidance on how to improve.

Commentary

86. This is a department in evolution which is beginning to make progress. Instability and staffing problems in recent years have contributed to the situation in which GCSE results at the end of Year 11 were significantly below national averages in 2003, although GCSE results improved to marginally above average in 2004. Teacher assessment of National Curriculum levels is over-inflated.
87. Achievement is now satisfactory because of more good teaching by specialists and thorough support for the non-specialist teachers. Standards are now in line with the national average by Years 9 and 11. Students with special educational needs achieve well because of energetic and knowledgeable learning support, and also where they investigate historical situations and share their ideas in small groups.
88. Teaching is good with a marked improvement in Years 7 to 9. Students respond well to the strong visual resources. Individual lessons are well planned but Year 7 and 9 teaching time is short and units of work lack a tight, coherent focus. Teaching does not yet enable the higher attainers in Year 9 to be taught to give the detailed explanation and analysis expected at the higher attainment levels.
89. The appointment of a new head of department in September 2004 is already beginning to improve the overall performance of the department. Leadership and

management are both now satisfactory, with much potential for further development through a review of schemes of work and assessment arrangements to provide a better overview and depth studies in Years 7 to 9. Good GCSE assessment uses written comments and focuses on individual improvement.

90. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. New technology is better used to support learning and to improve teaching. There has been improvement, though not yet an improved trend, in GCSE results.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- All students in Years 10 and 11 follow the GCSE short course and the results are above average.
- Students have a positive attitude to their studies and are achieving well across the school, although girls are doing significantly better than boys in Years 7 to 9.
- Enthusiastic and well planned teaching is engaging students' interest, using a variety of methods to produce good learning.
- Resources do not always cater for the needs of the most and least capable students.
- Very good leadership and support for colleagues has created an effective teaching team.
- ICT opportunities have been limited hitherto but now have the potential for improving learning with the availability of a new humanities computer room.

Commentary

91. In common with other subjects in the core curriculum, the religious education department enters all students for GCSE at the end of Year 11. Results on the short course in 2003 were above the national average. Girls did better than boys by a margin slightly above the national average. Results this year dropped by ten per cent. Very good teaching of an experimental all boys group produced the best progress, effectively narrowing the gender gap for those students.
92. High expectations by teachers, evident in the close monitoring and marking of students' work, are maintaining above average standards in the current Year 11. Students studying issues around the sanctity of life showed good understanding of religious views against abortion and euthanasia. Their work is closely geared to examination questions and the acquisition of the necessary techniques for writing good answers. Students' progress against their minimum target grades shows they are achieving well. The number of students who choose to upgrade to the GCSE full course is low but the standard of work of those who do is above average and they are achieving well.
93. The school's own baseline assessments show students' knowledge of features of Christianity and other religions to be below average on entry to the school. Their achievement is good over Years 7 to 9, so that, by Year 9 the majority of students are reaching the standards expected in the local Agreed Syllabus and attainment overall is average. Girls are producing more detail in their writing than boys, which accounts for the much higher proportion of girls reaching expected standards at Year 9. Students with special educational needs achieve well when supported by teaching assistants but, in some lessons, there is not enough matching of learning materials and tasks to meet the needs of the most and least capable students.
94. The quality of teaching is good overall and more consistently so in Years 10 and 11. The specialist teachers are producing very good lessons, using small group discussion effectively to enable students to explore their own beliefs and values, and using

drama to increase students' understanding of the significance of religious ceremonies. Non-specialists make a valuable contribution to the good teaching, bringing skills from allied subjects, enthusiasm and thorough lesson preparation. Homework is used particularly well to research information in preparation for the next lesson and teachers' detailed comments on students' work both encourage and guide them to raise their standards. Literacy is well promoted through careful attention to religious terms and concepts but there is scope for extending the writing of students, boys in particular. Use of new technology to support learning has been limited and access to computers has been problematic. The new humanities computer room has increased availability and Year 8 students' impressive multi-media presentations on churches showed the potential development now possible.

95. Leadership of the subject is inspirational, creating an enthusiastic and effective teaching team. Non-specialists are well supported and provided with opportunities for training. Successful implementation of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy has improved the range of learning styles for students. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good, improving the quality of teaching and maintaining above average standards at GCSE. Good management has lessened the effects of staffing problems this term but the lack of a second in department restricts development of the subject. Assessment is well managed on the GCSE course but, whilst satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, it is limited in the range of assessed work and the amount of standardisation to determine accurately students' levels of attainment. Good links with local churches enrich the curriculum through visits and the involvement of clergy and a liaison worker in lessons.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have very good attitudes and achieve well.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Some accommodation needs refurbishment and there are weaknesses in the provision and use of new technologies.

Commentary

96. GCSE results for 2003 were above the national average overall and show a significant improvement since the 1998 inspection. Girls' results were generally better than those for boys. Results for the separate subjects for recent years show that textiles has consistently achieved GCSE results well above the national average. Food technology, graphics products and resistant materials also gained results significantly above the national average. As students enter the school near the national average in their technological capabilities, this represents good progress.
97. Students achieve well through Years 7 to 9. At the end of Year 9, standards in design and practical work is generally above average in each of the technology subjects. By

the end of Year 11, both textiles and food technology are able to demonstrate above average attainment in coursework because much of the work is detailed and well presented. Practical work in these subjects also has a high standard of precision. Hence achievement is good across Years 10 to 11. Those with special educational needs and gifted students are given specific learning materials and additional help to maximise their potential. As a result they too achieve well.

98. During the Years 7 to 9 most of the teaching is very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge enabling appropriate lessons to be planned. Good standards of behaviour are required and teacher expectations are high ensuring that learning is also very good. A Year 9 graphics lesson was very good because the teacher planned the lesson in several parts, was decisive, kept good pace, boosted the confidence of students and finished with a useful summary session. Teaching is good during Years 10 and 11 with some of the best lessons being seen in catering and food technology where organisation is often excellent. However, pace is too slow in some resistant materials and graphics lessons. Teachers ensure that all aspects of the design process are taught. Homework is very well used to increase knowledge and understanding and to encourage independent study. Students appreciate the rapid return of work so that their understanding of their progress can be quickly revised. Key words are emphasised and dimensions are usually included on drawings. Quantities of materials and costs are generally calculated in students' project work. Teaching has improved since the last inspection; however there is room for improvement in the provision and use of new technology.
99. Although the departmental manager is new in post, leadership of the faculty is good and there has been good improvement since the last inspection. Members of staff work well together in each of the departmental areas although co-ordination is made more difficult by the separate arrangement of the accommodation. Room size is sufficient if class size is not too large, but some rooms are in need of refurbishment. There is room for improvement in the departmental analysis of examination results and in the establishment of more frequent and more consistent assessment of students' National Curriculum levels. Teaching efficiency could be improved if projection equipment was more easily available in the classrooms so that full use could be made of the notebook computers.
100. The vast majority of students take one of the technology options. The curriculum provides for students to experience working with fabrics, wood, plastic, metal, card and food. However, as noted at the time of the last inspection, electronics and pneumatics for controlling systems are underdeveloped. The use of the computer pro-Desktop program provides the students with computer-aided design experience; however, computer-aided manufacture is insufficiently developed to ensure that students have an understanding of modern manufacturing processes. In resistant materials, sustainable resources are used when possible so that students understand the need for conservation. Food technology provides students with a good understanding of the requirements and preferences of other cultures.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

101. Art and design and music were inspected in depth and lessons were also sampled in drama. With its clubs and regular performances, often shared with the music

department, **drama** is making a significant contribution to the cultural life of the school and to the personal and social development of students. Forty-nine GCSE entrants in 2003 and a similar number in 2004 attained results well above the national average, and boys' achievement was outstanding.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Learning through independent research is good and as a result students relate their own work well to that of famous artists.
- Planning for lessons is not always in enough detail to ensure students of all abilities achieve well.
- Teachers use practical demonstrations effectively in Years 10 and 11 to ensure all students understand.
- Three-dimensional work is particularly successful.
- Computers are used but not creatively enough to develop ideas.

Commentary

102. According to teacher assessments in 2004 the percentage of Year 9 students working at levels above national expectations was well above average. This was not supported by evidence seen during the inspection. GCSE results have been around average but improved in 2004 to be above average. The trend has been for students to generally do slightly better in art than in the other subjects they took and for girls to achieve much better than boys.
103. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 11 overall as are the students' achievements. Students arrive in Year 7 with broadly average skills. Over the next three years their skills, knowledge and understanding improve gradually through satisfactory teaching so that they end Year 9 working in line with the level expected nationally. Students achieve well in Years 10 and 11 because teaching and learning are good and are clearly focused on the GCSE examination content and marking is guided by the examination criteria. Students are working at a level above average by the end of Year 11. However, standards in printmaking and clay work are not as high because these techniques have not been developed earlier and are being introduced for the first time to students in Years 10 and 11. Teachers use practical demonstration effectively to ensure all understand these new techniques. Students benefit from investigating and reflecting on the work of famous artists and can discuss the influences on their own work. Journals are used well, but there is scope for developing more creative methods to record these thoughts to help those students, particularly boys, who find contextual work difficult.
104. The department is well led and managed. There is good communication between teachers and they work well together. Many of the areas that are likely to move the department forward have been identified in forward planning, such as teachers sharing their expertise with one another resulting in all of them being able to teach a wide variety of media to the same high standard. Ways to improve the quality of

marking at the end of Year 9 have been formulated but are not yet implemented fully. Students are helped to reach their targets by attending GCSE workshops after school. Other ways to raise the achievement of boys have not been identified; neither have areas in teaching and planning that need development if standards and achievement are to improve in Years 7 to 9.

105. Art and design makes a good contribution to the cultural development of students through looking at the work of artists and craftspeople both in Europe and across the world. This is supplemented by occasional visits to the Tate Modern and to work on location, as in the Haven Gateway project. Displays of artwork around school are impressive and inspiring and add a great deal to the whole school environment. Improvement since the last inspection has been good, with all issues addressed or improved upon.

Music

Provision in music is **unsatisfactory** in Years 7 to 9 but **good** in Years 10 and 11.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' achievement in Years 7 to 9 is unsatisfactory, because the quality of teaching is inconsistent.
- Although standards are below average in Year 11, students achieve well in Years 10 and 11.
- Students have good opportunities to extend and develop their musical interests out of class.
- Good leadership of the department is laying a solid foundation for re-establishing the quality of provision after a period of substantial turbulence in staffing.

Commentary

106. Results in GSCE examinations for 2003 and 2004 were below the national average. Standards in Year 9 in 2004, measured by teachers' assessments, were below average. These standards were confirmed during the inspection in observation of the current Year 9 and Year 11. By Year 9, students recognise a range of musical features, but inconsistent command of technical vocabulary prevents them comparing different styles successfully. Those who play instruments perform well from memory in ensembles and use notation constructively. When developing their own songs, few are able to work effectively with chords or melodic ideas to fit their own texts. There is no significant variation in achievement between boys and girls, although boys' attitudes are less conducive to satisfactory achievement. Students with special educational needs achieve well when they are helped by support staff. By Year 11, students who have learned instruments over an extended period of time perform best in all aspects of the course. They are able to apply themselves to listening and composing tasks better than others. There is a wide ability range in the group. Lower-attaining students, while also achieving well, come to terms only slowly with the breadth of knowledge and aural perception required. Many use new technology well to develop compositions. There is little variation between boys' and girls' achievement, although the majority of students are boys, counter to the national trend.

107. Teaching in Years 7 to 9 has shortcomings in a significant minority of lessons. Students who want to work are held back by those who do not concentrate fully and disturb learning. However, they benefit from the emphasis on practical work in groups, the good relations between teachers and students and well-devised worksheets to guide learning. In lessons where routines are established, varied activities capture students' imaginations and work is well tailored to meet the needs of all. Effective use of video and new technology enlivens lessons. In Years 10 and 11, very good teaching uses a range of techniques to build confidence and motivation among lower-attaining students. Assessment is well used to help students understand how they can improve and to bring focus to lessons. Overall, a lower than average proportion of the students take instrumental and singing lessons; however, the on-site evening music school compensates for this. Instrumental and singing teachers are encouraged to provide expert leadership for extra-curricular choirs and bands. These add much to the cultural ethos of the school.
108. Since the previous inspection the subject has seen unsatisfactory improvement. Considerable turbulence in staffing over the past two years has left a deep scar from which the department is only just beginning to recover. This has unsettled both staff and students in Years 7 to 9. The recently appointed subject leader is very experienced, with a very clear vision for the subject and has done much to build teamwork among the staff. Management of the department is satisfactory. While areas defined for improvement are well identified, improvement to the quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 is not identified.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The Sports College significantly influences the curriculum provided and the achievement of the students.
- Students progress well from their levels on entry to the school because the very good teaching stimulates the students' interest and moves learning forward rapidly.
- Very good attitudes to the subject and teacher-student relationships create an environment for good learning.
- The wide range of activities available within lessons and extra-curricular activities enhances the experience of students.
- Peer evaluation is insufficiently used as a vehicle for improving performance.

Commentary

109. Students enter the school with physical skills that are broadly average. The liaison work with the primary schools through the Sports College work is leading to rising students' standards on entry to the school, giving a secure base on which to work. Achievement is good in Years 7 to 9. Standards in Year 9 are above average when compared with national standards in a wide range of activities. Students benefit from

taking part in a wide variety of activities and although girls and boys have strengths in different areas overall there is no significant difference.

110. Achievement is very good in Years 10 and 11. Students taking the full GCSE course in 2003 had overall results that were well above the national average; students did slightly better in physical education than in their other subjects. The results fell slightly in 2004 with students following full and short courses in physical education and a full course in dance. Work of the current Year 11, where all take a GCSE course is well above the national average; the students are stronger in the practical element of the course. Students routinely attain results above and well above those predicted by prior attainment levels. All groups of students make similar progress with special provision for gifted and talented students and those with physical difficulties.
111. Standards have risen since the last inspection, far more activities are on offer and the profile of the subject as a whole has improved. This represents very good improvement. Leadership and management of the department are very good. There is a clear vision for constant improvement. The large department has been welded together as a team and the members of staff are good role models. There is realistic self-evaluation of the department, but data is not analysed to identify and focus on specific areas of improvement. The Specialist Sports College influences the whole school. Within physical education, the excellent practical facilities and the provision of a very wide range of extra-curricular activities support the learning of all students.
112. The lively teaching where all groups of students are included and the work provided offers a good level of challenge, keeps the students fully involved and stimulates students' interest. Teachers tap into the enthusiasm of the students. This, combined with the very good attitudes, the high participation rates of the students and the very good relationships between staff and students and between the students themselves creates a positive environment in which very good learning can take place. Overall teaching and learning in physical education is very good. It is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. Students are able to evaluate their own work and, when asked, that of others but opportunities to use peer evaluation to improve their work further are missed.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

113. Two lessons of GCSE business studies were sampled; both were characterised by very good student-teacher relations. The authoritative delivery of a Year 11 lesson on market research and good use of targeted questions and personal experiences ensured all were able to understand the various means by which businesses research consumer needs. Inspirational delivery and electric pace of an excellent Year 10 lesson ensured the total engagement of students and excellent progress in understanding the fundamentals of the share market.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

114. Personal, social and health education was sampled, while citizenship was inspected in depth. Provision for students' **personal, social and health education** is good and reflects the ethos and values of the school well. Drugs awareness and sex education

are taught in a sensitive and informative manner. Schemes of work and other supporting documentation are thorough and helpful. Teachers deal well with sensitive issues. As a result of this provision, students are well-informed and knowledgeable about a range of topics. They empathise with people in different situations and respond confidently and maturely in lessons.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are becoming informed citizens and participate very actively in the life of the school because of the good teaching they receive.
- A good start has been made towards the introduction of the subject, particularly in Years 7 to 9.
- Students do not listen attentively enough to their classmates in discussions.
- More work needs to be done towards embedding the subject in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

115. Standards are above average in all years. Students learn very well about what it means to be an informed citizen. They participate very actively in all aspects of the life of the school. They take full advantage of the very wide range of opportunities to participate in the democratic activities provided for them. Students of all abilities achieve well. They are learning to understand their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society. They learn to appreciate opinions and cultures that differ from their own.
116. The quality of teaching is good overall. Teachers are enthusiastic and make use of relevant contemporary examples to illustrate what they are saying. During the week of the inspection, for example, several lessons looked at the theme of recent disability discrimination legislation. Students show an interest in what they are doing and are prepared to work hard and take an active part. Although they are always keen to participate in lessons by offering comments or answering questions, many students lack skills in listening attentively to their classmates and then building on their responses.
117. Leadership and management are both good. The school has made a good start towards the introduction of this comparatively new National Curriculum subject, and the teacher in charge is clearly committed to it. She has a good understanding of what needs to be done to develop citizenship further. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is particularly strong and is delivered via the personal and citizenship education programme (PACE). Although opportunities for students to develop skills in active citizenship are very good in Years 10 and 11, there is still work to be done to ensure that students are systematically taught in more depth the knowledge and understanding of what it means to be an informed citizen. Citizenship was not reported on at the last inspection so no judgement is possible on any improvement since then.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

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

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	13	76.9	80.1	0.00	23.7	26.2	29.9
Biology	12	50.0	65.2	8.3	11.1	15.0	20.6
Business studies	4	100.0	76.4	0.00	16.3	27.5	26.2
Chemistry	5	40.0	72.7	0.00	13.9	14.0	24.1
Communication studies	11	100.0	86.4	9.1	23.8	30.9	32.0
Drama	7	100.0	86.5	28.6	19.6	32.9	30.6
English / English language	12	58.3	82.9	0.00	17.5	16.7	28.7
Design and technology	8	75.0	74.9	0.00	15.1	18.8	25.3
General studies	41	70.7	73.9	9.8	17.8	22.2	25.7
Geography	1	0.00	74.3	0.00	19.8	0.00	26.5
German	2	50.0	81.5	0.00	19.3	10.0	28.9
History	3	66.7	80.7	0.00	19.5	16.7	28.6
Information technology	13	53.8	67.0	0.00	10.9	15.4	21.4
Mathematics	6	100.0	61.9	33.3	17.1	36.7	22.1
Music	2	50.0	86.5	0.00	21.4	20.0	30.7
Other languages	1	100.0	82.6	0.00	42.9	40.0	36.2
Other sciences	5	80.0	71.4	0.00	15.8	24.0	24.3
Other social studies	8	100.0	69.7	0.00	16.7	28.8	24.1
Physics	1	100.0	68.6	0.00	14.4	20.0	22.7
Religious studies	1	100.0	80.2	0.00	22.6	40.0	29.8
Sociology	4	75.0	71.8	0.00	18.4	22.5	25.4
Sports/PE Studies	9	66.7	73.2	0.00	11.4	18.9	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	16	100.0	98.6	31.3	50.2	83.8	87.5
Biology	7	100.0	96.4	0.00	39.2	54.3	78.6
Business studies	4	100.0	98.7	25.0	36.8	55.0	80.1
Chemistry	4	100.0	97.6	25.0	49.0	70.0	84.9

Communication studies	13	100.0	99.4	7.7	37.8	70.8	82.1
Drama	5	100.0	99.5	60.0	40.1	92.0	83.6
English / English Language	18	100.0	99.4	11.1	36.3	70.0	80.9
Design and technology	7	100.0	97.8	85.7	35.0	97.1	77.9
General Studies	14	100.0	94.7	0.00	31.0	60.0	73.1
German	3	100.0	98.4	66.7	47.9	100.0	84.8
History	4	100.0	99.0	0.00	44.6	70.0	84.6
Information technology	11	100.0	95.6	27.3	24.6	74.5	69.5
Mathematics	5	100.0	96.7	60.0	55.6	92.0	88.8
Music	4	100.0	98.8	25.0	38.9	75.0	81.1
Other sciences	2	100.0	97.3	0.00	41.5	50.0	80.3
Physics	6	100.0	96.7	16.7	44.6	73.3	81.7
Sociology	6	100.0	98.2	0.00	44.3	70.0	83.6
Sports/PE Studies	8	100.0	98.0	0.00	30.9	65.0	75.2
Health & Social Care	11	100.0	67.7	0.00	14.5	61.8	63.5
Leisure and Recreation	4	100.0	62.9	50.0	10.2	80.0	57.9

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is good progress in relation to students' standards on entry.
- Teachers are enthusiastic, have satisfactory subject knowledge and lead harmonious working groups.
- Attainment at AS Level and retention into the A Level year need to be improved.
- Results are well below the national average, though the school has a 100 per cent pass rate and no students below D grade in the past two years.
- Students do not show sufficient initiative and independence in their learning.

Commentary

118. Although English is a popular AS subject, the numbers staying on for the A Level examination are currently low. Standards are well below the national average for the proportion of students gaining the A/B grades. Nor do they compare strongly with other subjects in the school. However, a 100 per cent pass rate with no students below Grade D indicates good progress in relation to students' standards on entry to the course.

119. Achievement in Years 12 and 13 is good. Work observed during the lessons shows that students, though keen, find the work difficult. Those who take English at AS and the smaller number at A Level make progress and enjoy their learning but in Year 12 and to some extent in Year 13 also there is less evidence of higher attainment. There

is some lack of confidence and initiative in students' work on the literature texts. They do not readily make independent judgements, question assumptions or argue points, and they are very reliant on the teacher guidance which is given in the small tutorial groups.

120. Their writing indicates that most students are working steadily to develop the necessary skills of analysis and appreciation and to understand and use literary theory. While not of the highest standard, the best work indicates enjoyment of the texts and increasing understanding of the literature they are studying. The texts they read in Year 12 often make considerable demands. The background reading experience and language proficiency they bring are not always of a kind to ensure an easy transition from GCSE to A Level work.
121. Teaching is good overall. That observed in two AS groups and one A2 group was well prepared and usually responsive to students' needs. Teachers are familiar with the examination criteria and they help students to understand these and what is required of them. They are keen to motivate their students and to extend their range. In the small group discussions they encourage students to answer questions and to read with close attention. However, more time and thought could be given to the pleasure in reading which should precede critical analysis. When tackling new texts such as the poetry of Keats or the metaphysical, Year 12 students need first to enjoy and understand the works before being asked to answer complex questions on them. Essays on the metaphysical written by some students in Year 12 showed that the poems had not been fully understood and that they were struggling to make critical judgements without this essential understanding. For example, a consideration of society's values in an essay on Marvell's *To his Coy Mistress* has little meaning unless students have understood what the poem is about and responded to its wit, erotic appeal and the powerful images of death, decay and time. Writing and talking more simply about their initial responses to such literature, with guidance, would help their critical analyses. It might also prevent them, at this stage, from using terms or approaches which they do not fully understand and which may not be relevant.
122. As in the main school, subject management is good. Examination requirements are well understood, staffing well organised and careful use made of data and resources. Staff are ready to give students extra time and help with their work when this is needed. Much of the extra-curricular effort, here as in the main school, is devoted to extra support of this kind, with occasional theatre visits. This is valuable and much appreciated by students. There is scope, however, when the department is again fully staffed, to develop a wider range of activities which will help to extend students' own interests and experiences. The setting up of a debating society is a good start and other possibilities might include a literary magazine and a reading club, with occasional visits by outside speakers such as writers, actors or academics.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

123. The efforts the school has made to promote literacy in Years 7 to 9 have resulted in some very effective work in the sixth form and above average standards in language and literacy across the curriculum. Although a number of higher-attaining students leave school after GCSE to take A Level courses elsewhere, sixth form students achieve well and standards are rising steadily. Improved library facilities and whole-

school reading initiatives have helped to train students in reading more regularly and in skills of research and information retrieval, which are now broadly average. The improvement in writing standards noted in several subjects in Years 10 and 11 has led to continuing good work in the sixth form and standards are above average. There is evidence of good language use in information and communication technology, and in English students work hard to develop skills of analysis and summary in their writing. There is very helpful guidance for writing in sociology, where coursework standards are particularly high, with all AS students attaining A grades in the last examination.

124. As in the main school, there is scope to improve speaking and listening skills. Students do not readily take the lead in discussions or express and challenge opinions. Even in the sixth form they usually seem more willing to answer questions than to ask them. Drama is successful in encouraging confident speaking and good listening skills, but opportunities could be more frequent and expectation higher across the curriculum as a whole. Poor reading aloud and lack of confidence in discussion were noted in sixth form English and media groups, where they might be expected to be particularly strong.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching by experienced, enthusiastic staff inspires students to make good progress.
- Students' good attitudes ensure their positive response to the work.
- New technology is used well to aid teaching and learning.

Commentary

125. Results attained in A and AS examinations are around the national average, and this is reflected in current standards. This is a good performance for a sixth form where a proportion of the highest achieving students seek their education elsewhere. There is no pattern in the relative performance of female and male students. Achievement at both AS and A Level is good. Students have very good attitudes. The good quantity and quality of work seen indicates that they are prepared to work hard. Topics covered are at least in line with expectations and show good progression through the syllabus. Presentation of work was at least good.
126. Students have well founded confidence in the abilities of their teachers and relationships are very good. The overseas students in classes are well integrated and able to progress as well as their peers. A very strong team of staff, experienced and enthusiastic, ensure that teaching is very good. Teachers encourage students to strive for their high target grades. Explanations are clear and concise. Teachers know the abilities of their students well so are able to maintain a good pace to lessons. Examples used represent an appropriate level of challenge to which the students respond positively. For example, the intersection of straight lines and curves was dealt with successfully by Year 12 students only five weeks into the course, while Year 13 A Level students could work with functions and their inverses. The use of new technology as an aid to teaching and learning has increased, although there remains scope for further development. Students apply their information and communication technology skills well to progress their learning. Good use of questioning by staff prompts students to think through problems. Learning is very good as a result.
127. Leadership and management are very good. The development plan is a clear statement of the vision for the future, even if it is insufficiently detailed on how this vision will be implemented. In addition, care is taken to advise students about sixth form mathematics and to encourage appropriate recruitment to A and AS Level classes. Teachers' enthusiasm for the subject is a valuable element in this exercise.
128. The school faces considerable local competition for sixth form students so to have maintained the good position outlined in the previous report means that improvements since the previous inspection have been good.

Mathematics across the curriculum

129. The mathematical competence of the students is good and is more than sufficient to allow access to all areas of the sixth form curriculum. A policy to ensure that the various faculties take proactive steps to develop mathematical competences is not embedded in the work of the school. However, staff awareness of the issue was raised in the recent past through an audit of the use of mathematics by different faculties, supported by staff training. In addition mathematical skills are developed through practice as required by the various faculties, such as the use of formulae in spreadsheets for information and communication technology and statistical methods in biology.

SCIENCE

Biology

Provision in biology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are achieving well as a result of good teaching.
- Effective leadership is underpinning the drive for improvement.
- Whilst student attitudes to the subject are very good, their capacity to work independently is underdeveloped.
- There is a lack of clarity regarding the respective roles of the head of department and the head of post-16 science for monitoring and evaluating the work within biology.

Commentary

130. Results at A Level in 2003 were well below the national average, with no students gaining either an A or B grade. At AS level, the Year 12 students reached standards that were below the national average. The results for 2004 are stronger at A Level, with all students gaining a pass grade and one gaining a grade B. These results represent good progress for the students given their prior attainment on entry to Year 12. Overall results have improved rapidly since 2002 when only half of the students entered gained a pass grade in the subject.
131. Staffing within the subject is much more stable than at the time of the last inspection with the two advanced skills teachers, along with one other member of staff having responsibility for the four groups. Teaching is good overall and enabling the students to achieve well and reach standards that are now average. This is a significant improvement on the position reflected by the most recent examination results.
132. The teachers provide a very wide variety of activities which ensure that the students' attention and interest are sustained. Important information is collected from a wide range of sources and is well presented to the students, often through the use of new technology. In a Year 12 class, for example, the teacher had brought together a selection of documents which described the nitrogen cycle and challenged the students to make sense of the various representations in order to construct their own version. The use of information and communication technology within the department is widespread and enables students to access the extensive range of current biological data beyond that provided within the text books. In addition to

expositions, teachers provide good opportunities for research, student-led presentations and practical work. Explanations are clear and questioning is well-focused to challenge and probe understanding. The students respond very positively to all of these techniques and, as a result, they are gaining secure levels of knowledge and understanding at a good pace. Practical skills are also developed well. Teachers provide good opportunities for the students to consolidate the key skills necessary for coursework requirements and help those new to the post-16 course to become more accustomed to working individually on practical exercises. However, there is room for further challenge to ensure that students participate more actively in the lesson so that their confidence in discussing biological ideas grows and understanding deepens further as a result.

133. Assessment procedures are very good. There are effective systems in place to assess the progress of the students and teachers make themselves available on a regular basis to provide additional individual support. This is much appreciated by the students, who cite this aspect as one of the significant features that helps them to learn more effectively. This is clearly important for the students but needs to be balanced with the need for students to develop more independent approaches to work.
134. Leadership is good. The head of department has a clear vision focused firmly on raising achievement of the students studying biology. Steps have already been taken to improve provision by establishing clear schemes of work, for example, which were not previously in place. The small team of teachers work well as a group, sharing ideas and planning together. Management is satisfactory at present given the shared responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the work of the department. Roles are not clearly defined and, as a result, the action plan for development is rather general and not sufficiently focused on aspects of biology in need of further improvement. Nevertheless, given the rapid rise in standards, improvement since the last inspection is very good with good potential for further development.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

135. The school offers information and communication technology at AS and A Level, and these courses were inspected in depth. There is currently a very small group in Year 13 completing the advanced vocational course in information and communication technology and a group in both years following a practical technical vocational course in conjunction with a multinational company. These courses were sampled. Standards in the Advanced Vocational course, which has 2 candidates, are satisfactory and achievement is good. Coursework is comprehensive and well presented. Students are able to discuss their work effectively justifying research methods and conclusions. Teaching and learning in the lessons seen were good. This course is not currently running in Year 12.
136. Students following the technicians' course in Year 13 are continuing to make good progress after a successful first year. Students in the all male class observed were highly motivated and keen to attain high standards in their tasks and tests. Teaching, by a qualified instructor, was good as was the learning. She prepared students very effectively for their practical test, which involved configuring computer network routers and switches. The practical aspect of the work was conducted quickly and

accurately and the theory aspects completed successfully on line. Attainment was good. The teacher made frequent, very useful links, to aspects of the A Level information and communication technology course which these students are also taking. The routers and switches in use are now comparatively old for the practical aspects of this course.

Provision in information and communication technology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A wide range of courses is offered where teaching is often excellent and students' achievement is often very good.
- Teaching seen in the A Level and AS courses was never less than very good and much teaching was excellent.
- Resources for use in the A Level courses are now very good.
- The leadership and management is very good.
- Results at AS Level are improving, but there are still too many ungraded candidates.

Commentary

137. Examination results at A Level were above average in 2003; the proportion of A and B grades was better than the national average and all students passed. This was a significant improvement over the previous year and represented good progress for the candidates from their GCSE results. In 2004, the percentage of A and B grades was well above the national average for the previous year and all candidates again passed the examination. Results at AS Level have not been so good. They were below average in 2003, which was similar to the previous year. There were no A and B grades. In 2004 results improved in terms of A and B grades but the percentage of ungraded candidates increased.
138. Teaching is excellent overall, and is leading to excellent student learning. This is a major factor in the students' very good achievement and their above average standards at AS and A level. Lessons are exceptionally well planned and feature excellent use of interactive whiteboards. They are conducted with great skill and pace, ensuring that course requirements are covered in detail. Teachers provide excellent challenge for the students who are very motivated and respond well to questions and in all other aspects of the lesson. In one Year 13 lesson, the teacher worked skilfully with the class to review aspects of students' coursework using an interactive board with excellent effect in whole-class discussions. This ensured full student participation and proved very effective in furthering understanding. Students were attaining at a high level and making excellent progress. The majority of students are highly committed to their work. Work is assessed very effectively and students are well aware of what they need to do to improve. A Level teachers collaborate well in the classroom and in the department in general.
139. There has been a very good improvement in provision in the sixth form since the last inspection. Management and assessment procedures have been reviewed and revised; these ensure higher completion rates in the AS Level courses. In addition steps are being taken lower down the school to tackle the gender imbalance by

encouraging more girls to consider information and communication technology at AS and A Level.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

140. There has been a significant improvement in information and communication technology provision across the curriculum in the sixth form since the last inspection; provision is now good. Students' standards are good and they apply their skills well to support their learning in many subjects. There is much autonomous use of information and communication technology by students for coursework and home work in all subjects. Students have benefited in recent years from a successful GCSE information and communication technology course in Years 10 and 11 combined with the rapidly expanding provision of computers throughout the school. As a result, most have at least good keyboard skills, and are at least competent, often very good users of core software. This includes word-processing, presentation software, spreadsheets and knowledge of database construction. Students following information and communication technology courses at A Level are generally building upon very good general skills.
141. In most subject areas in the sixth form, the use of information and communication technology to enhance teaching and learning is developing well. There is very good use of information and communication technology in mathematics, physical education and business studies lessons. Use is good in modern foreign languages. The use of computers is satisfactory in most other subjects. Greater use of information and communication technology in the English department has been identified by the school as a priority and is beginning to improve.

HUMANITIES

142. Lessons were sampled in geography and history while sociology was inspected in depth. **History** AS Level teaching is carefully structured to take account of the modest prior attainment of some students and the response of all is good. The one Year 12 lesson observed was well taught although standards were below average. The good teaching deepened the students' understanding of the problems generated by World War 1 for the liberal Italian government.
143. Standards in **geography** lessons are above average. The 2004 results at AS and A Level maintained the average standards of previous years, but for small numbers of students. Learning is good and students achieve well because good teaching provides appropriate challenge and caters for a variety of learning styles. Students are well prepared for examinations because of effective teacher planning and thorough assessment of their progress. The single lesson observed in Year 13 was imaginatively taught and enabled the students to achieve well as they learnt why there are anti-cyclones and depressions.

Sociology

Provision in sociology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good; therefore students achieve very well and their standards are well above average.
- Students have very positive attitudes because they are provided with a relevant and challenging curriculum.
- Leadership and management are very good and there is a clear commitment to high standards.
- Students need more opportunities to develop and reflect upon their spoken answers.

Commentary

144. Teaching and learning are very good in sociology. This means that students achieve very well in their lessons in both years. Although it is difficult to compare A level results with national averages because group sizes are relatively small, the evidence indicates that standards in Year 12 are above average, rising to well above average in Year 13.
145. Students in Year 13 build well on what they learnt in Year 12 and are beginning to develop a very good understanding of sociological theory which they are beginning to apply to unfamiliar situations. Students in Year 12 have made a good start to the course and they achieve particularly high standards in their coursework. This happens because of very good teaching and because students want to do well and are prepared to work hard. Lessons are challenging and teachers work hard to ensure that content reflects current issues and concerns. Teachers are particularly good at providing students with the right degree of support so that they develop independence within a secure environment. As a result, students clearly enjoy their lessons and work hard. Although most students are gaining in confidence as a result of the very good teaching, they are not being provided with enough activities to help them develop and reflect upon their spoken answers.
146. Leadership and management are both very good. Teachers work well together, sharing good practice and expertise. The head of department has a clear vision of how to improve the department and has a very good understanding of how to achieve this. Sociology was not reported on at the last inspection so no judgement is possible on any improvement since then.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good and teachers give considerable encouragement to students.
- Student attitudes are very good.
- Resources are insufficient to promote an understanding of modern manufacturing processes.

Commentary

147. In 2003 overall results for AS Level in textiles and graphics with resistant materials were below the national average. However, A Level results were well above the national average and all students gained at least a pass grade. The results over the last few years vary considerably due to the small size of the classes and no significant differences between boys and girls result are apparent. Achievement is good. Teachers give every opportunity for students to make progress in both textiles and graphics so that most make good progress. This is helped particularly by small classes where individual attention is generously provided. Standards are broadly similar to those reported at the last inspection and are above average overall.
148. Teaching and learning are very good in both textiles and graphics. Some teachers have previous industrial experience that gives considerable help to students' learning. One is an advanced skills teacher who provided very effective learning by rapid discussion and exchange of ideas with a Year 13 graphics group. Two teachers share the work in both subjects. Lessons are well planned and teaching methods are effective. In particular the encouragement given to students is excellent. The teachers encourage students to develop independent study skills so that they research and develop their own ideas by investigating a variety of sources. For example, in a Year 12 textiles group students used new technology to present to the class the results of research into the fashions of previous decades. Students develop their knowledge and understanding through the design process. The students are well motivated and enjoy the work they do. They appreciate the help given by the teachers in an environment that is conducive to learning. Students and teachers develop a very good rapport so that the learning process takes place on an efficient basis but without undue formality.
149. Leadership of the two subjects is very good and mainly co-operative. Teachers jointly plan sections of the work and discuss the progress of individual students so that overall management is good. Assessment of students' work is thorough. Targets for improvement are quickly provided so that students can continue or modify their work. Students need be in no doubt of their attainment level at any time.
150. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. The curriculum for sixth form technology is largely driven by the students' choices. At present textiles and graphics are viable courses. Several opportunities are provided for students to visit industrial establishments to increase their experience in the subject areas and often in their specific project area. Most students follow particular interests when devising project work. Although the accommodation is appropriate, the availability of new technology is insufficient in the textiles area. The teaching of computer-aided manufacturing processes is impeded by the lack of modern equipment.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

151. Media studies was inspected in depth and lessons sampled in dance, art and design, drama, music and photography. Small numbers of students study A Level **dance**. The results over recent years have fluctuated and the small numbers make a statistical evaluation impossible. Most students do as well as predicted. They achieve well in the practical element of the course but do significantly worse in the theory

papers. One lesson of dance was seen when students were developing their group dance to present as part of their assessed work. This was rather heavily teacher led and was satisfactory.

152. For the last three years results in both art and design and photography have been average with most students attaining much as expected. Results in 2004 improved in photography with a higher proportion of students achieving grades A and B. From work seen during the inspection, the majority of students in **photography** in both Years 12 and 13 are working at a level above average whilst in art and design students' work is average. In photography there are some talented, high attaining students who are achieving very well as a result of consistent very good teaching which ensures all students understand basic principles and gain in confidence in Year 12 before moving on in Year 13 to more ambitious projects that are very successful. Working out and about in the local community provides inspiration for their work.
153. **Drama** is taught throughout the school and is a very popular and successful A Level course. Although the numbers taking drama in the sixth form remain small, students attain high grades in the A Level examination. The well taught Year 13 lesson observed on preparing for a presentation to a local primary school produced good learning. The achievement of the students was good and standards across the group were close to the national average. The teacher skilfully related the work the students were doing to the theories of drama that they had been studying. The students were wholly involved, responsive, articulate and keen as they discussed their drama experiences and plans.
154. Very few students study **music** in the sixth form. Teaching in the lessons observed was satisfactory overall but did not employ sufficient strategies to enable the students to think for themselves. Consequently, although achievement was satisfactory standards were below average.
155. In **art and design** all students are achieving as expected due to teaching that is good overall, but with areas of weakness. Students develop ideas into three dimensions and use various media successfully with high attaining students creating some exciting structures. Independent learning is successfully encouraged but feedback on how to improve work is not effective enough to influence subsequent progress. Few students fully understand the use of shading in pencil to show form and texture and lines lack variations of quality and sensitivity. Computers are used but not creatively enough to develop ideas.

Media studies

Provision in media studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The AS and A Level results in 2004 represented good progress for the students from their earlier GCSE results.
- Though numbers have dropped this year, the staying-on rate has been good.
- There is scope for developing the students' communication skills.

- Good teaching, accommodation and resources have established the subject as a popular A Level choice.

Commentary

156. The entry figures for the A Level examination has improved steadily over the past three years. Fifteen students took the examination in 2004, when a 100 percent pass rate was achieved with four students gaining A and B grades. This is not high in comparison to national averages but it represents good progress for the students and compares well with their results in other subjects.
157. Achievement is good. Standards of practical work in the lessons seen were average with potential for these to rise further. Students enjoy the subject and are acquiring technical skills and confidence in their use. Some good work has been done on filming and editing. Folders from last term contained well recorded work on the making of a thriller film which involved analysis of the nature of the genre, some historical reference and appropriate use of story board and diary records. However, students are weaker in presenting and commenting on their work orally. Their apparent reluctance to talk through their presentations, or engage in discussion, limits what they can learn from each other. They have not identified that good communication skills and also knowledge of the wider social and political contexts are relevant to their course.
158. Teaching is good overall. Teachers motivate students and sustain their interest in the subject. In the lessons observed, the teacher was relaxed and friendly, establishing good working relationships. However, students were too relaxed in one lesson seen, and their work lacked sufficient interaction and argument.
159. The subject is well led by a subject specialist. Further training is being provided to strengthen the subject expertise of other teachers. The speed of change in the technologies and their social impact makes in-service training a key element in development planning. Accommodation and resources are good, and media studies is now well established as a popular and successful A Level option. Media studies was not reported on at the last inspection so no judgement is possible on any improvement since then.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

160. Physical education was inspected in depth and two lessons were observed of the travel and tourism advanced vocational course. Both the **travel and tourism** lessons were well taught and resulted in the students achieving well. There was plenty of student input in the Year 12 lesson, although some struggled with higher-order research skills such as searching for information rather than searching through information presented to them. Year 13 students responded well when the teacher played devil's advocate as they examined the impact of all-inclusive holidays on the host destination. A case study video was used to very good effect to enable the students to explore the morality of holiday development on countries such as The Gambia.

Physical education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Lively active teaching is promoting very good achievement.
- Good relationships between students and teaching staff and the individual support given to students promote very good learning.
- Students benefit from the additional qualifications gained from the leadership courses.
- Questioning does not always challenge students sufficiently to develop their understanding.

Commentary

161. Students obtained examination results in 2003 that were below the national average, although they improved in 2004. Over the previous three years results had been broadly in line with the national average, although the relatively small numbers entered means an accurate judgement of the trend in these results is not possible. These results are much improved since those at the time of the last inspection. Achievement is very good. Students taking the course have a wide range of GCSE qualifications and virtually all students do significantly better than the level predicted by their prior levels of attainment.
162. The standard of work seen during the inspection supports this and shows the current Year 12 students have made a good start to their course. They appreciate the support given to them by the staff in adjusting to the demands of the AS course. The Year 13 A Level students are working at a level that is broadly in line with the national average and at a level above that predicted by their previous examination results.
163. Very good teaching, when students are involved in a variety of activities is resulting in very good learning, with the methods and ideas giving the students innovative ways of remembering key facts. The range of methods provided by the different teachers and the good relationships by which valuable individual support is given also contribute to the very good learning. However, a small number of lessons can be heavily teacher-led and the tendency to fill in the answer with more detail means opportunities to develop the students' deductive skills and examination answering techniques are missed. This limits the development of the students' deductive skills. The work of the students is supported by a variety of opportunities to participate in enrichment activities. Links with Essex University give access to additional facilities. All students complete the Community Sports Leader Award and most of them complete the Higher Sports Leader Award, gaining experience in local schools. The 'gap year' programme, where students who have left the school act in a support capacity in lessons, is enabling these students to complete this course. They put the knowledge learnt into practice in a variety of class situations thus gaining very good experience of a leadership role. Timetabled physical education is available to students not taking an examination course.
164. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The staff provide good role models and have a commitment to building on what has already been achieved. Students are appreciative of the support that they receive. Very little was said about

A Level physical education in the previous report. However, improvement since then is very good as standards have risen significantly and the subject has become firmly established.

BUSINESS

165. Business studies course was inspected in depth and two economics lessons were sampled. Both **economics** lessons were taught with enthusiasm, utilising a good range of activities and challenging questions which engaged students' interest in the subject. As a consequence, they made very good progress in both lessons. In the Year 13 lesson on monopolies, the students were able to explain the advantages and disadvantages of different forms of government regulation. In the Year 12 lesson on the world economy, excellent use of current writing on the subject was used to very good effect to develop the students' understanding of the global economy and other important economic issues.

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well at A Level with students achieving above what might be expected given their earlier GCSE results.
- Teachers are knowledgeable, very well prepared and have developed very good relationships with students.
- Students have a positive attitude to the subject and work productively and co-operatively in lessons but their folders are disorganised.
- There is no formal development plan for business studies, no dedicated area for the subject and business partnerships are limited.

Commentary

166. The achievement of the students is good largely as a result of good teaching and the students' positive approach to their studies. All five students entered for the 2004 A Level achieved a pass grade including one A grade. This represented good progress for these students with all attaining at least as well as their GCSE results would predict, three more than predicted. The 19 AS students made similar progress, with two overseas students who began studying with just basic English gaining passes. Although two AS students did not gain a pass in this year, students taking business studies have always gained at least a pass grade in the final examination in 2002 and 2003. Standards are in line with the national average in Years 12 and 13. Students are able to use basic business terminology to good effect, for example in analysing business product portfolios and planning marketing promotions.
167. Teaching and learning are good overall with knowledgeable teachers producing a range of relevant lesson activities which maintain student interest. In a good Year 13 lesson, the teacher had initiated an interesting student presentation on dispute resolution as an introduction to the role of trade unions. A good Year 12 marketing lesson involved students well in discussing niche and mass marketing using a range of

real products. Students generally work productively in lessons and have a positive attitude to the subject. However, whilst lessons are well structured they do not always contain explicit learning outcomes which precisely define the knowledge, skills and understanding students are to assimilate and then to have this checked at the end of the lesson. Whilst student learning is good their work folders are invariably disorganised and hence do not assist with revising for tests and formal examinations.

168. Leadership and management of the subject are good with an effective team created to teach the subject and share good practice. The enthusiastic head of department sets high expectations of students in terms of performance and students appreciate the access to their teachers for support and guidance. However, there is no formal development plan to further the aims and of the department which clearly and explicitly states the vision and direction of the department. Analysis and evaluation of student performance is good and business links, whilst currently limited, are being developed for example through the Haven Gateway Project. Students have good access to computers during and outside lessons and there are a good range of relevant business resources for them but there is no dedicated business area to provide an appropriate business learning environment. The subject was not inspected at the last inspection.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

169. No subject was inspected in depth in this curriculum area; however, one lesson of the advanced vocational course in **health and social care** was observed. This class contained students from both Year 12 and Year 13. This was a very good lesson because the teacher skilfully enabled the students to develop independent skills that supported their learning. All students are very enthusiastic about the course and talk with great enthusiasm about their work.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

170. A considerable proportion of the students study **general studies** at AS Level and a smaller proportion continue to A Level. Results at AS Level in 2003 were average; this was an improvement over the previous year. A Level results were below average in 2003, but this was again an improvement over the previous year. AS Level results fell slightly in 2004 while A Level results improved marginally. One lesson was observed, which was a lecture on nuclear families by a visiting sociology professor from the local university. This was a good session because the issues raised were wide-ranging and thought-provoking.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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