

INSPECTION REPORT

COOMBE GIRLS' SCHOOL

New Malden, Surrey

LEA area: Kingston-upon-Thames

Unique reference number: 102598

Headteacher: Mrs. Carol Campbell

Lead inspector: Brian Oppenheim

Dates of inspection: 29 November – 2 December 2004

Inspection number: 268785

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Modern (non-selective)
School category: Community
Age range of pupils: 11-19 years
Gender of pupils: Female
Number on roll: 1489

School address: Clarence Avenue
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Appropriate authority: The governing body
Name of chair of governors: Mrs. Penny Parker

Date of previous inspection: 8 March 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Coombe Girls' School is a secondary modern school with a mixed sixth form. There are 1489 pupils aged 11 – 19 including 441 in the sixth form. The main school and the sixth form are very large compared with others in England. Most pupils come from the Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames. Just less than two-thirds of pupils come from white British backgrounds: the remaining third represent a wide range of different groups including British Asians from Indian and Pakistani backgrounds and those from Korean families. There are 30 pupils who are at an early stage of learning English but just over 23 per cent of pupils are believed to speak another language at home. The school receives funding for 10 pupils, through the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant but supports an additional 20 with money from the LEA. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is broadly average for England. The proportion of pupils who have identified special educational needs is below average as is those who have a statement of particular need. The number of pupils who join the school after the start of Year 7 is broadly similar to other schools. The achievements of pupils when they join the school at the start of Year 7 are a little above average.

The school is involved extensively in a wide range of national and local initiatives. It is a specialist Language College: as well as developing its own teaching of languages it works with local schools to support their work and with the local community by providing facilities for language classes. Through its work as a Leading Edge school, Coombe Girls' has links strong links with a number of partner schools through including the local boys' school, where it manages the joint Vocational Sixth Form, and through King's School, an independent school. It has achieved a number of awards including: Healthy Schools, Investors in People and the School Achievement Award. The school's facilities are used extensively by the community.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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31238	Gordon Clubb	Team inspector	Mathematics 11-16, P16
1830	Stuart Charlton	Team inspector	Science 11-16; Chemistry, P16
31688	Brian McGonagle	Team inspector	Art and design 11-16, P16
7084	Jack Haslam	Team inspector	Design and technology 11-16, P16
32297	Chris Martin	Team inspector	Geography 11-16
24127	Jim Kidd	Team inspector	History 11-16, P16
6364	Geoff Strack	Team inspector	Information and communication technology 11-16, P16 Biology, P16
19613	Sue Thomas-Pounce	Team inspector	Music 11-16
28178	John Connor	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages 11-16
31163	Alison Brock	Team inspector	Physical education 11-16
14596	Tony Fiddian-Green	Team inspector	Religious education 11-16, P16
33189	Lesley Leak	Team inspector	Drama 11-16, P16
1880	Garry Bignell	Team inspector	German, French P16, Special educational needs, English as an additional language
18447	Ronnie Cohen	Team inspector	Business education 11-16, P16 Work related learning
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a highly effective school. Much of its work is outstanding. Regardless of their background all pupils do very well and achieve high standards in their work. This is because the very good teaching ensures that pupils make rapid progress with their learning. Pupils' personal development is excellent. They are expertly supported and guided through their adolescence. As a result they leave school confident and mature young adults. Much of this is the result of the high quality leadership and management. Senior and middle leaders guide and direct their areas very well. Everyone takes a full part in running the school. One of the school's exceptional qualities is its partnerships with other schools. It uses these very effectively to improve its own work as well as contribute to others'. Tax payers get very good value for money from Coombe Girls' School.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses

- All pupils achieve very well and reach high standards in their work. This is because they are taught very well.
- The school is very well led and managed and this creates an extremely strong climate for learning.
- The outstanding leadership of the headteacher results in strong teams committed to improvement.
- The provision for special needs, drama, music, art and pupils' personal development is excellent and very good in English, mathematics, science, modern languages, design and technology and physical education.
- The monitoring of pupils' experiences in information and communication technology, and in religious education in Years 10 and 11, is not robust enough to ensure that all pupils achieve as well as they should.
- A wide and popular range of out of school activities promotes very good attitudes to, and involvement in, learning.
- Excellent use is made of the school's work as a specialist language college and as a Leading Edge school to benefit pupils and improve the quality of their education.

The school is very successful in maintaining its high performance. The most significant improvements are the continuing rise in test and examination results. Performance in SATs and GCSE examinations is higher than in other schools and they have improved at a faster rate. There were no key issues at the last inspection in March 1999 but the school has worked successfully to tackle most of the minor points identified. The support for pupils with English as an additional language, for example, is now very good.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Pupils achieve very well. At the end of Year 9 and Year 11 pupils reach high standards. They start Year 7 with skills that are slightly above the average and make very good progress as they move up the school. Not only have test and examination results been high over the past five years, they are also rising at a faster rate than in other schools. This is a very significant achievement. Even with high results the school continues to improve its performance each year. Nearly three-quarters of pupils gain five good GCSEs by the end of Year 11 and nearly all achieve at least five

passes. Students in the sixth form reach average standards overall at AS and A-level but achieve well in relation to their starting points. Some start the sixth form with lower than average skills in literacy and numeracy: this makes it difficult for them to achieve high standards in advanced courses. However, standards are rising and the 2004 A/S and A-level results confirm the improvement on previous years.

The work seen during the inspection confirms that pupils make very good progress and achieve increasingly good standards as they move through the school. This is because they are taught very well. Pupils with special learning needs make very good progress. Again, this is because teaching is very good. Similarly, pupils new to English make very good gains in their learning. As a result they are able to do well in all their subjects. In the sixth form students make good progress and achieve well. In most subjects in the sixth form girls do best, often because they start their courses with better GCSE results and literacy skills than boys.

Pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are excellent. Pupils have excellent attitudes to school and to learning. They know they are at school to work but also play a very full part in the life of the school. One of the results of this is that spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Behaviour is very good. One of the main reasons for this very positive picture is the school's extremely strong climate for learning which is very successful in promoting achievement at all levels. Students in the sixth form have very good attitudes but sometimes the behaviour of boys is not as good as that of girls. Attendance has improved and is good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is very good. Teaching is also very good. There is very strong teaching in many subjects and in all years, including the sixth form. Teaching is particularly effective in drama, art, design and technology and media studies. It is also strong in English, mathematics, science, history, modern languages, music and physical education. What makes teaching so effective is its consistency: all teaching is at least satisfactory and nine out of every ten lessons is at least good. Almost a half of lessons are at least very good including some that are excellent. Teachers' enthusiasm, detailed lesson planning, a wide variety of activities and very good relationships all mean that pupils' learning is very effective. Pupils have very positive attitudes to their learning and the pace at which they develop their skills and understanding is rapid. Occasionally, lessons are a little slow or do not focus sharply enough on what is to be learnt and as a result pupils' learning is not as good as it could be. But these are the exception and not the rule and, like teaching, learning is very good. One of the consistently strong aspects of teaching is the high quality of assessment. Here, marking, target setting and the advice pupils and students get about how to improve their work all contribute very effectively to progress and learning. There is no doubt that the school is very successful in giving all its pupils a first class education.

The curriculum is very good. It provides a very broad experience for all pupils. As a result the school is successful in including all pupils in its work and in gaining academic success. The excellent range of activities and additional opportunities for learning outside school hours is one of the reasons why pupils' personal development is so good and their achievement high. The weakness is that pupils' experiences in information and communication technology, and in religious education in Years 10 and 11, are not checked carefully enough. As a result, some pupils do not study these subjects in enough depth and only achieve modest results.

Pupils receive excellent support and guidance. This is one of the reasons why they do so well in their academic and personal achievements. The school is very good at listening to pupils' suggestions and concerns and they, in turn, contribute very effectively to the life of the school: again this helps to create the very strong ethos. There are very effective relationships with parents, other schools and the local community. These support the work of the school and the learning of students very well.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. There is a persistent commitment to high achievement and everyone is able to flourish and realise their aspirations. Senior leaders are very effective and there is creative teamwork at all levels in the organisation. As a result there is a very positive climate for learning which pervades everything the school does including the excellent work done by the school as a language college. Governors have a good understanding of the working of the school. They challenge and support the school, and share a determination to improve. The legal requirement to hold a daily collective act of worship is not met. Subject management overall is very good and middle managers are very effectively supported.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are very positive about the school. This shows in the growing sixth form and the over-subscribed main school. Pupils are extremely positive about the school: they enjoy their lessons and feel that they are given every chance to be successful. This confidence is confirmed by the school's survey of parents' and pupils' views which are also positive.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- raise pupils' achievements in information and communication technology, and in religious education in Years 10 and 11, by ensuring that their experiences are monitored carefully;
 - improve the literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills of some sixth form students;
- and to meet statutory requirements:
- ensure a daily act of collective worship.

The Sixth Form

OVERALL EVALUATION

The Coombe Sixth Form is very effective. It has grown significantly since the last inspection and because it is so popular it does not have room for all those who want to join. It provides a wide range of academic and vocational courses which meet most students' aspirations effectively. Standards are starting to rise and although they are average overall, students achieve well. This is because of the very good teaching, the very positive climate for learning and the very good leadership and management. The sixth form gives good cost effectiveness.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Very good management means that there is a clear focus on raising the achievement of all students.
- The support and guidance provided for students is excellent.
- The work and influence of the school officials contributes very strongly to the whole school.
- Some students' skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT are not as high as they should be.
- The sixth form includes all students in its work regardless of their educational background.

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	Good in English literature. Standards are average, but students achieve well because of good teaching. Very good in French and German. Teaching and learning are very good and lead to good achievement. Students are mature, attentive and very well motivated to learn.
Mathematics	Good. Students achieve very well because the teachers are well organised and have good subject knowledge.
Science	Very good in biology. Standards are well above average as the result of the positive attitudes of students and teachers' very good knowledge of the subject. Very good in chemistry. Students attain above average standards and their achievement is good. Teaching and learning are good overall.
Information and communication technology	Good. Standards are average and achievement is good. This is because students apply themselves well and because teaching, planning and organisation are good.
Humanities	Very good in history. Standards are well above average because teachers' expert subject knowledge and relentless challenge encourage their students to think for themselves and to pursue independent research.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Very good in design and technology. Students' achievements are very good. The quality of work is of a high standard. Teaching and learning are very good.
Visual and performing arts and media	Excellent in art and design. The standard of artwork is high and achievement is very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and provide excellent support for students. Very good in media studies. Students enjoy their work and achieve well as a result of very good specialist teaching. Standards are above the national average and the subject is one of the most popular A-level options. Very good in drama. Standards are well above national expectations for drama. Teaching and learning are very good with excellent features and achievement is also very good.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Good in leisure and recreation. Good teaching means that students achieve well. They make good progress from below average starting points to achieve well.

Curriculum area**Evaluation**

Business

Good. Good teaching leads to average standards by the end of Year 13. This represents good achievement.

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

Care, support and guidance in the sixth form are excellent. Much of the reason for this is that the team of tutors is very effective and very well led. Students are very well supported in their work and get detailed careers advice. Their progress is monitored effectively: those that are not doing as well as expected get individual advice and support which is successful in helping them to improve their work. One of the strengths of the sixth form is the wide range of opportunities that students have to take responsibility and lead initiatives. One example of this is the student council which is led by sixth formers. It is respected by other pupils because it ensures that their opinions are heard and acted upon by the school. Other examples include the school officials such as the head girl and head boy who provide very strong role models for other pupils in the school. Sixth form students play an important part in the work of the school in general and in support for younger pupils in particular. A significant strength is the way in which the boys are welcomed into the sixth form of a girls' school and become an integral part of its life.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good. The link with a local school has enabled Coombe Sixth Form to improve significantly the range of courses offered to students. As a result it caters very well for their needs and aspirations. Good use is made of data to identify areas of weakness and appropriate action is taken to raise achievement. This is one of the reasons why teaching is very good. The sixth form is successful in including all students in its work.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

The school's survey of students' views reveals a positive picture. This is confirmed by discussions with students during the inspection. Students believe, quite rightly, that the school has encouraged them to mature, to develop their strengths further and to address their areas for development. They are grateful for the detailed careers advice they receive and for the support available to them when they apply for courses in higher education.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Pupils' and students' achievements are very good. In Years 7 to 11 pupils make very good progress to achieve high standards, first at the end of Year 9 and then at the end of Year 11. Performance in the national tests at the end of Year 9 is well above average and results are rising faster than in other schools. GCSE results are also well above average and are rising. Students in the sixth form achieve well. They gain average results overall at AS and A-level but make good progress from their starting points to achieve well. Some sixth form students start with below average literacy and numeracy skills. The 2004 AS and A-level results show the improvement made in 2003 has been maintained.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school is continuing to improve its already high standards at the end of Years 9 and 11.
- Standards in many subjects are high and all pupils achieve very well.
- Sixth form standards are improving: standards are average overall but students achieve well given their starting points.
- The lower than average literacy and numeracy skills of some sixth form students make it difficult for them to achieve the highest standards.
- Standards in information and communication technology in are average but some pupils in Years 7 to 11 do not achieve as well as they should.

Commentary

1. Coombe Girls' School performs very well. This is confirmed by all the available data and the wide range of interpretations and analyses of these data. The first set of data is the results of the national tests that pupils take at the end of Year 9: these are well above average. But what is really significant about these results is that even at this high level they are continuing to rise faster than the national picture. This is a very strong achievement and shows how effective the school is in raising standards year on year. Further analysis of the data using the so-called "value-added measure" shows that pupils make very good progress from the start of Year 7 to the end of Year 9: the school adds very significant value to pupils' learning over the three years and pupils achieve very well.

2. A similar picture is clear in Years 10 and 11. GCSE results are also well above the national average. They too are rising; not quite as fast as the Year 9 national tests but they are keeping up with the national picture. Again, this is a significant achievement and the school is maintaining a 21 percentage point lead over the national average for pupils gaining at least five good GCSE passes. The 2004 GCSE results are a good example of the way the school is working successfully to raise standards. Here, all pupils achieved at least one GCSE pass and all but three achieved five passes. As with the national test data, an analysis of GCSE results shows that the school adds significant value to pupils' learning: pupils achieve very well from the start of Year 10 to the end of Year 11.

3. As with the data, all the information from the inspection shows that pupils do very well: the work seen during the inspection confirms that pupils make very good progress and achieve increasingly good standards as they move through the school. The evidence also shows very clearly that this is because the teaching is very good and leads, not surprisingly, to very good learning.

4. Standards are well above average and achievement is high in many subjects. In English, mathematics, science, art, drama, design and technology, business studies and music achievement is very good and pupils achieve high standards. Very good teaching, the high value the school

places on learning and the high quality leadership all contribute much to this high achievement and the year on year improvement in standards. Achievement in French is very good and in Spanish and German it is good. Standards in history, geography and religious education are above average and pupils achieve well. In history and geography this is because of the good teaching and subject management although the development of skills is not as strong as it might be: this is why teaching and achievement are good and not very good. In religious education, the reason is slightly different. Here, the time allocated to religious education in Years 10 and 11 is limited. As a result the depth of study is not as great as for those who take the GCSE course.

5. Only in information and communication technology are standards average overall but this hides a more complex pattern. Those pupils that take the GCSE examination do very well and achieve high standards. There are also good opportunities for pupils to enhance their learning of information and communication technology in subjects such as modern languages, design and technology, history and physical education. However, it is not as strong in all subjects and this means that overall achievement is good rather than very good.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2003 (figures for 2004 are unavailable)

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	35.8 (37.5)	33.4(33.3)
mathematics	37.7 (37.6)	35.4 (34.7)
science	36.2 (36.4)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 210 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for 2002

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	74 (73)	52 (52)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	99 (94)	89 (88)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (96)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	42.6 (42.4)	34.9 (34.7)

There were 210 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

6. Pupils with special needs make very good progress because they receive high quality support in their subjects. In curriculum support lessons teaching is very good and is another reason for the swift progress. Particularly good examples were found in science, music and vocational studies, amongst others. Performance data show that nearly nine out of ten special needs pupils made clear progress during Years 7 to 9, for example in their reading accuracy, and about half improved by at least one national curriculum level. A similar proportion of pupils gained at least one GCSE grade higher than predicted in one or more subjects.

7. Pupils learning English as an additional language make very good gains in their acquisition of English: this gives them good access to other subjects. In the GCSE examinations of 2004, pupils gained some creditable results in a range of subjects, including English language and literature. Some very impressive achievement by individuals is worthy of note, for example, a girl who gained six higher grade GCSE passes after only two years at Coombe. Another girl who had been only four years in the UK prior to taking her GCSEs passed nine subjects at grade C and above.

8. One of the results of the school's strong performance in tests and examinations is that all pupils do well regardless of their educational background. Those who are particularly gifted or

talented, for example, are encouraged successfully to develop their interests and extend their learning. As a result they achieve very well and reach some of the very highest standards.

Sixth form

Standards in GCE A/AS level and VCE examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2004

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	93.3 (91.5)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	38.6 (28.2)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per pupil	282.8 (238.1)	253.1 (254.5)

There were 151 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

9. In the sixth form students AS and A-level and AVCE results are broadly average. They rose in 2003 to become average and the 2004 results have maintained this level. The evidence from both the data and the inspection shows that students achieve well by the end of Year 13. The important point here is that students' starting point is broadly average but with some, particularly boys, who have below average standards. This is mainly because the criteria for entering the sixth form are designed to encourage all students to stay on at school after the age of 16: as a result, some students have only limited skills in areas such as literacy and numeracy or do not have the higher GCSE results of others. This is partly why achievement is good rather than very good. Of course, some students achieve very well in the sixth form: moreover, all grow considerably in maturity regardless of their ability or prior learning.

10. In most subjects in the sixth form girls do better than boys, often because they have better GCSE results. The best subjects are art and design, drama, media studies, biology, design and technology, and history. French, German and chemistry also do well. Standards in business are broadly average as are those in vocational subjects such as leisure and recreation. These subjects are often those that students with only limited GCSE results choose to study. However, they tackle their courses well and achievement is good as a result. As in Years 10 and 11, students with special educational needs achieve very well because they get very good support.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils have excellent attitudes to school and to learning. They develop their personal qualities extremely well and have a strong sense of right and wrong. They play a very full part in the life of the school and relationships are very strong. The school's extremely strong climate for learning ensures that behaviour is very good. Sixth form students have very good attitudes. Attendance has improved and is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' and students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent.
- The very good behaviour is the result of the very good teaching.
- The strong team of year heads, deputy year heads and tutors sets high standards of conduct.
- There are very good opportunities for building confidence and self-esteem.
- Relationships are very good: as a result racial harmony is excellent.
- Behaviour in the sixth form is good but sometimes boys joining the school find it hard to adjust to the new ethos.

Commentary

11. The attitude of pupils to learning is excellent. They respond to very good teaching and show considerable interest in their work and in the life of the school as a whole. They also behave very well, in lessons and around the school. This does not happen by accident: the school has its share of pupils with challenging behaviour but is more than capable of responding. It does this by focusing on the quality of teaching and learning, believing that good behaviour will flow from this. Parents and governors are consulted and involved effectively. Exclusions are rare, with most problems being dealt with by internal sanctions. Pupils are given a voice in this school, and consequently do not want to undermine its values. As a result much of what is provided for them raises their self-esteem and leads to the very positive attitudes and behaviour.

12. Pupils' spiritual development is excellent and is enhanced in many subjects across the curriculum. Among them, drama, English, art, religious education and physical education all contribute to the very high standards. For example, in art pupils are encouraged to draw upon their own life experiences, beliefs and values as starting points for exploration through art, craft and design. Some assemblies and 'Thoughts for the day' also add times for reflective thinking about some of life's major issues. Pupils are often asked to "stand in others' shoes" giving excellent opportunities for empathy.

13. Moral development is also excellent. Pupils have a hand in the expectations and rules of the school through councils and the chance to take responsibility. Teachers provide excellent role models and consistently set very high expectations for behaviour. Further examples are pupils learning how to make safe and legal use of the Internet in information and communication technology and in physical education how to play to rules and laws in games and sports. Among many, one excellent feature is the Bullying Textline offering support for younger pupils, using their mobile phones.

14. Social development is outstanding with a wealth of activities and opportunities to live, work, and play games together. Pupils are encouraged to work collaboratively in lessons, in groups or pairs. Out of hours activities add much to this aspect and provide a wide spectrum of experiences. These include Latin, homework clubs, choirs, sports teams, dance, and fitness clubs. Councils provide pupils with the chance to take responsibility and the system allows all pupils to be represented fully. Whenever possible, staff stand back and let the pupils themselves organise events and councils.

15. Cultural opportunities are developed to a very high standard. The school celebrates the ethnic diversity found among the pupils. Major festivals from world religions are observed in assemblies. For example, one assembly brought Eid, Diwali and Remembrance together in one act of observance. Visits to galleries, theatres and trips abroad all make major contributions. Art, music, and dance play their part and provide experiences of cultures from all over the world. For example, there is a magnificent display of Aztec art and culture in the main corridor of the school. This celebration of different cultures is one of the reasons why pupils' respect for the beliefs of others is so good. They are adamant that racial harmony is very good.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.7	School data	0.3
National data	6.9	National data	1.1

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

16. Attendance is good and has improved since the last inspection because of the increased monitoring and the wider range of strategies being implemented such as the first day call for

unexplained absence. The punctuality of pupils, both at the start of the school day and to lessons, is also good.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	876	15	
White – any other White background	103	4	
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	28	1	
Mixed – any other mixed background	52	8	
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	107	2	
Black or Black British – Caribbean	11	1	
Any other ethnic group	86	1	

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

Sixth form

17. The attitude of students to learning is very good. Those who join in the sixth form, including boys, feel the positive learning ethos of the school and they respond very well to what the school provides. Those students who have positions of responsibility illustrate this very positive response well: they are very confident young adults who are a credit to themselves and the school. Behaviour is good: the calm, mature approach at Coombe comes as a shock to those more used to imposed discipline elsewhere, but most adjust to the standards of self-discipline that are the norm.

18. Attendance is good. It was an issue at the time of the last inspection because of the inconsistent way students were registered. This has been tackled successfully: students are now registered at each lesson and absence is followed up appropriately. Many students are in receipt of education maintenance payments. It is in their interest for these records to be accurate and as a result they are taking more responsibility for making sure that register their attendance at school. Students register themselves as they arrive on site so health and safety requirements are met.

19. The school provides personal development for students in the sixth form to a very high standard. They are given many responsible roles in the school through councils, mentoring and support for younger pupils. For example, sixth formers staff the Bullying Talkline whereby younger pupils can share their worries using their mobile phones, thus preserving confidentiality. Students organise a rag week each year, raising funds for charities. Last year, they raised over £2000 in this way.

20. All major school officers are chosen through a full election process, and candidates must prepare pre-election speeches and manifestos. Students in the sixth form are encouraged to take a full and active part in the school community and they make a major contribution towards its excellent ethos.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is very good. This is mainly because teaching and learning are very good but there are some outstanding aspects of the school's provision. The curriculum is very good. The opportunities for learning outside of school hours are excellent. Excellent support and guidance is one of the reasons why pupils do very well in their academic and personal achievements. The

school is very good at listening to pupils' suggestions and concerns. There are very strong relationships with parents, other schools and the local community.

Teaching and learning

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 228 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
14 (6%)	97 (43%)	94 (41%)	23 (10%)	0	0	0

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

Teaching and learning are very good. Nearly all the teaching across the school is at least good and nearly half is at least very good. As a result pupils' learning is very good: very brisk progress, excellent attitudes and high levels of motivation are all features of pupils' learning. In the sixth form the proportion of very good teaching is also very good: this is why students' learning is also very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching and learning means that pupils make rapid progress with their work.
- Teachers have a very thorough knowledge of the subject.
- Assessment contributes very effectively to pupils' and students' achievements.
- Very good relationships encourage pupils and students to learn and make the most of the excellent opportunities for broadening their experiences.
- Teachers' planning is very good: it is detailed, provides a wide variety of activities and motivates pupils very effectively.

Commentary

21. There is very strong teaching in many subjects and in all years. Teaching is very good in English, mathematics, science, modern languages, history, drama, art, design and technology, media studies, music and physical education. There is a high level of consistency in the quality of teaching and it is because of this that pupils' learning is very good: this is what makes teaching so effective. Pupils get a consistent experience across nearly all their subjects and with all their teachers: expectations, relationships and teachers' subject knowledge are frequently high quality.

22. Teachers' very thorough knowledge of their subjects is one of the reasons why pupils are so well motivated and interested in their work. Teachers use their knowledge very well to support and enhance pupils' understanding and skills. The effectiveness of this is shown in the very high standards achieved by pupils and the strong progress they make over time. Often, teachers have a real passion for their subject and bring to lessons a sense of excitement that captures the interest of pupils. As a result, pupils are highly motivated and work hard to achieve high standards.

23. One of the effects of planning lessons in detail is that teachers are clear about what they want to achieve and pupils know what is expected. Lessons are brisk as a result and, because they are carefully planned, time is used well to pack in as much as possible. This helps to ensure that pupils' learning is also brisk: very good learning and progress are features of many lessons. Well-planned lessons also mean that teachers ensure a good range of different activities. The school has used the national strategy for teaching and learning effectively to support lesson planning: as a result lessons have a clear beginning, middle and end. Often, lessons include whole-class work, paired or group work and individual work thus providing a variety of ways for pupils to learn. What this does is to break up lessons into manageable chunks and keep the pace brisk. Homework, too, contributes very effectively to pupils' learning because it links directly with, and extends, the work being done in lessons.

24. In some lessons there are minor weaknesses in planning. Learning outcomes – what pupils are expected to learn by the end of the lesson – are not clearly identified. This means that pupils are not quite clear enough about what is expected of them and this takes the edge off an otherwise good or very good lesson.

25. Relationships are very good. Teachers treat pupils with a great deal of respect and in turn, pupils respect their teachers. This is another reason why pupils are highly motivated and have very positive attitudes to their learning. One of the particular characteristics of Coombe is that these relationships extend beyond the classroom. The excellent out of school activities, the way pupils take responsibility for running the year councils and the school council, and the extremely strong climate for learning are all examples of the impact of the very good relationships between staff and pupils. Moreover, it helps to explain why the school is so successful in promoting achievement at all levels.

26. Assessment is very effective. It is used very well to test what pupils know and understand. However, it is the way teachers use this information that makes assessment so effective: teachers use marking very effectively to advise pupils about how to improve their work or what they need to do to achieve a higher grade. What is particularly remarkable about this is that marking differs slightly from subject to subject but this does not confuse pupils: on the contrary, pupils said they understood the different marking and knew how well they were doing. Assessment is also used very well to track pupils' progress and to plan the next piece of work or the next lessons. As a result, teachers ensure that pupils are doing the very best they can and, for example, those with particular talents are encouraged successfully to develop their skills further. All these factors contribute very effectively to pupils' progress and learning.

27. The setting of personal learning targets for pupils with special educational needs is very effective. They are agreed between teachers and pupils and focus well on aspects of work that pupils find difficult. These targets provide the basis for much of the work done in curriculum support lessons and assist teachers to keep pupils engaged with their learning. Training has been provided in pupil behaviour management and dedicated staff ensure that those pupils with behavioural, emotional or social needs are appropriately supported and mentored. In a good Year 8 curriculum support lesson, the teacher ensured that a girl clearly understood that the praise given was because she had complied with a request without arguing. Teachers plan curriculum support lessons very carefully and tailor the work to pupils' specific learning needs.

28. The teaching and in-class support for pupils who speak English as an additional language is provided by teachers of modern foreign languages. Although these teachers are not trained and qualified specialists, in support for pupils who speak English as an additional language, they have the necessary expertise and teaching ability to provide high quality input. They have the added advantage of being known to pupils around the school and often help in supporting the pastoral needs of new entrants.

29. Pupils at the early stages of learning English are withdrawn in small groups for specific language tuition which is of very good quality. Teachers know individual pupils, and their language backgrounds, very well. Stimulating resources and teaching techniques which include the use of visual prompts, gestures and verbal clues enable pupils to make connections between written and spoken English.

Sixth form

30. Teaching in the sixth form is very good overall. In all the subjects inspected in detail teaching is at least good. As with the main school teachers have a very secure knowledge of their subject and the demands of the examination syllabus. They use this knowledge most effectively to bring enthusiasm to their teaching. Again, teachers have a passion for their subject. As a result students are motivated and interested in their work. Lesson planning is also very thorough and is influenced by the information that teachers have of students' progress and targets. Here, assessment is used effectively to gather important information about students' progress. It is also

used well to guide and support students. Students were very clear about the high quality of support they get from teachers. They are helped to improve their work, and realise their aspirations.

31. The very good relationships also play a central part in the whole process of teaching and learning, motivating, supporting and encouraging students to achieve well. The vast majority of sixth form students have a mature approach to learning and take their work seriously. However, those students who come from other schools take time to adjust to the sixth form ethos and sometimes lack a sense of urgency. This is one of the reasons why achievement in the sixth form is good rather than very good.

The curriculum

Curriculum provision is very good overall. The range of additional activities is outstanding. Accommodation is satisfactory overall but some areas of the school are good. The range of resources available is good. The expertise and experience of staff is matched very well to the demands of the curriculum.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The excellent range of activities and additional opportunities for learning outside school hours has a positive impact on pupils' personal development and achievement.
- Opportunities to use information and communication technology in some subjects are limited.
- The wide range of subjects available to all pupils provides very good breadth and balance.
- There is very good support for pupils' learning from the learning resource centre.

Commentary

32. The school provides a very broad range of subjects for all its pupils. Statutory requirements for the curriculum are met. The school seeks to include all pupils in access to the curriculum and in academic success. In this it is largely successful and arrangements for ensuring that everyone is able to follow a set of subjects that meets their particular needs are very good. The school still does not meet the recommended minimum amount of overall teaching time: this has an impact in physical education especially in Years 7 to 9 where achievement is good rather than very good. However, the use of an excellent range of out of school curriculum opportunities has enabled the school to enrich the learning experience and limit some of the difficulties caused by the time constraints. Moreover, the school has well-founded and convincing plans to resolve the difficulties: with the new building the school plans to change the way the timetable is organised.

33. The language college philosophy is reflected well in the range and choice of languages throughout the school. The range of languages from which pupils can choose adds very effectively to the breadth to the curriculum in Years 7 to 9. Arrangements for teaching information and communication technology means that for some pupils there are not enough opportunities for them to study the subject in depth. Overall, however, the wide choice of subjects at the end of Year 9 motivates pupils to learn and to take a greater responsibility for their future learning.

34. In Years 10 and 11 the curriculum is very good. Arrangements provide a wide choice and ensure that the curriculum meets pupils' aptitudes and needs very effectively. Vocational courses such as health and social care and hospitality, travel and tourism, help to meet these needs effectively.

35. The curriculum is planned well to ensure smooth transition from primary to secondary school. However, the school takes pupils from a large number of primary schools each with a different way of organising their curriculum. This makes it somewhat difficult for some of the non-core subjects to build on what has been learnt at primary school but as the high standards show, teachers tackle this successfully. Pupils are prepared very well for their transition into post-16 work or education. Senior staff monitor the impact of the curriculum on teaching and learning and so are well aware of the quality of education. However, pupils' experiences of information and

communication technology, and of religious education in Years 10 and 11, are not monitored carefully enough. This means that some pupils do not study these subjects in enough depth and achieve modest results.

36. There is a well-planned personal social and health education programme. This gives pupils a broad experience and covers areas such as sex education, citizenship, drugs and alcohol awareness and relationships well. This work is supplemented well by work on ethics which is part of the school's extended curriculum studies programme.

37. The school has worked effectively to recruit and retain well-qualified teaching and support staff, which has had a positive effect on pupils' attainment. There continues to be a good balance between new and experienced members of staff. In almost all areas of the school, the staffing provision is either very good or excellent and non-teaching staff make a significant contribution to pupils' achievement.

38. Accommodation has undergone much improvement since the last report and is now satisfactory overall. A modern building provides a very good suite of rooms for art and design and technology. The facilities in modern foreign languages have been upgraded and are now very good. Provision is good in English, mathematics and media studies where rooms are of a good size and in good order. In science most of the laboratories have been refurbished and are good but three are satisfactory only. Music and drama are housed in temporary accommodation: this is unsatisfactory but the new building will undoubtedly improve significantly the quality of the classrooms for both subjects. The school provides good facilities for special educational needs, as well as a base room for administration. Space, however, remains at a premium. The catering areas are very good and pupils have the choice of cafeteria style or traditional dining facilities. The library is of a good size, and well-stocked with books, and provides a good learning resource. The buildings are kept very clean and very well maintained, providing a pleasant learning environment.

39. Resources for learning are generally good and further improvements are planned as the school's investment in advanced technology for the classroom is put in place. The ratio of five pupils to every computer is satisfactory and the school plans to invest in further computer provision.

Curriculum enrichment

40. The school provides an excellent range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities at lunchtime and after school. This has enabled the school to extend the curriculum by running twilight classes, booster classes and a wide variety of clubs and other activities. A high proportion of pupils use the school's facilities outside normal school hours. A strength of the school is staff and pupil commitment to out of hours learning. Nearly all teachers are involved in at least one club or activity. The extent to which the school's curriculum goes beyond the usual lessons is excellent and all activities are open to every pupil. As a result the school caters well for gifted and talented pupils: they are encouraged to follow their interests and develop their expertise in a wide range of activities. The orchestra and choirs are good examples.

41. There is a wide range of activities especially in languages such as the six extra languages available for beginners and a programme of overseas visits and pupil exchanges. A wide range of sporting and recreational opportunities is offered. The music department runs a large orchestra and various choirs and the art department offers a wide choice of artistic and creative activities. Indeed all departments in the school are eager and able to contribute to this extensive programme of out of school learning. The school responds well to pupil demand so there is an ever changing variety of activities. A large number of pupils take part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and there is a wide range of trips and visits such as the geography visit to south Dorset in Year 10.

42. Many of these additional opportunities have a direct impact on pupils' personal development and achievement either through the study of extra GCSEs or through additional sessions where pupils build on what they have learned in lessons. The learning resource centre provides good study support including access to the Internet outside school hours both before and after school.

Sixth form

43. The sixth form curriculum is very good. The school provides all students with a very wide choice of AS and A-level courses, a good range of vocational courses, and an excellent range of opportunities for extending learning beyond the normal school day. The school's arrangement with a local boys' school to establish a joint sixth form has enabled a specialist vocational centre to be created in addition to the traditional GCE courses. This has given considerable flexibility to the post 16 curriculum and students are carefully inducted into these courses to ensure they are appropriate to their needs and aptitudes. Poor literacy does remain a barrier to learning for some of the new entrants to the sixth form.

44. There is much curriculum innovation in the sixth form with many subjects such as photography being taught as part of an after school teaching programme. The school is always willing to encourage and support pupils to take up some of the adult evening classes held at the school. In addition the school has funded correspondence courses such as law and accountancy. This range of provision directly reflects the school's desire to meet the needs of its students. In turn this leads to the pupils being very positive about the sixth form curriculum.

45. Students have many opportunities to enrich their learning outside the classroom. A wide and varied programme of additional activities is available to them. Drama productions and very successful choirs and orchestras provide many creative opportunities. Regular trips to France, New York and Iceland and other areas help to develop a corporate spirit and widen the pupils' experiences. Many positions of responsibility, field studies, theatre trips and clubs also greatly extend pupil learning and contribute significantly to raising standards and producing well-rounded citizens.

Care, guidance and support

The school's provision for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety is excellent. The quality and extent of the support and guidance they receive is excellent. Similarly, the school listens to the pupils' and students' opinions and the involvement of pupils and students in the work of the school, as a result of valuing and acting on their views, is excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school takes the welfare of its pupils very seriously and works hard to ensure that all members of the school community work in safety.
- The school has a very good knowledge of its pupils' strengths and weaknesses: mentoring of pupils' academic performance and personal development is very effective.
- Induction arrangements for pupils new to the school in Year 7 are outstanding and pupils settle down quickly in their new surroundings.
- The school listens to the suggestions and concerns of its pupils and the student council has been responsible for several initiatives.
- Sixth form students play an important role in mentoring and supporting younger pupils and in encouraging them to take full advantage of what the school has to offer.

Commentary

46. Support and guidance for pupils is outstanding and is a major strength of the school. Coombe is a member of the Healthy School's Charter and liaises with a wide range of professionals in order to ensure that pupils' needs are met. Among a wide range of initiatives, there are 'drop-in' sessions with the school nurse, regular careers advice from members of *Connexions*, anti-bullying and drugs awareness sessions as part of personal, social and health education and co-operation with the local education authority to support vulnerable pupils. The welfare of pupils in all areas of their lives is, therefore, integral to the work of the excellent pastoral team and is central to the

underlying philosophy of the school. To this end, heads of year and their deputies evaluate the effect of their work regularly and honestly.

47. Regular academic mentoring is a key feature of the guidance programme. From close consideration of pupils' performance, potential and effort, form tutors emphasise study skills with each individual and generate targets and action plans, which are reviewed half-yearly. Parents are involved at every stage and new targets are established. Pupils speak highly of these sessions and make very positive comments of the encouragement and support they receive from their teachers. Moreover, they value the active tutorial work and 'circle time' which serve to recognise and celebrate their personal development and which also give them many opportunities to discuss moral and social issues with their teachers and with their classmates.

48. Year 7 pupils settle down quickly and effectively in their new school as a result of the excellent induction procedures which begin well before they arrive. Each pupil is visited in the primary school and there follows a full day at Coombe and a meeting for parents. In addition, information on the curriculum and assessment is sent home and there is a progress meeting with parents at the end of October, when concerns are shared and when success is celebrated.

49. Pupils have the highest regard for the school council and are grateful for the value the school places on their opinions. Each form elects representatives to the year council, who, in turn, speak on behalf of their pupil-constituents in the wider student council. Several initiatives have resulted from council proceedings and working parties on a variety of initiatives are already in place. In addition the Year 11 prefects take their responsibilities very seriously and carry out their duties well. This work contributes very effectively to their understanding of citizenship and is one of the ways in which the school involves pupils successfully in its work.

50. Because every aspect of the school's work is designed to encourage everyone to become involved in what is on offer, there is a palpable generosity of spirit among all members of the school community. Teachers, non-teaching staff and pupils have the highest regard for their school and are willing and proud to play their part in supporting those who are in need of help.

Sixth Form

51. Care, support and guidance in the sixth form are excellent and the vast majority of students feel they have an adult who knows them well and in whom they can place their trust. The head of sixth form and his deputies lead the very effective team of tutors with skill and verve. The school gives sixth-form students a variety of opportunities to take responsibility and to lead initiatives. Male and female students who have joined Coombe from other institutions speak highly of the way in which they are welcomed into the school and have nothing but admiration for the support and guidance they receive and for the way they feel fully included in all activities. Moreover, the school is well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of its students and does all it can to encourage them to succeed.

52. Arrangements for the induction of students into the sixth form are outstanding. The school places great emphasis on ensuring that all students, irrespective of their gender or of the institution in which they studied for GCSE qualifications, are fully prepared for the demands of advanced study. Teachers attempt to prevent any mismatch between students' choice of subjects and their career aspirations. Furthermore, teachers are concerned to identify underachievement and form tutors and other pastoral staff monitor the progress of their charges regularly and with rigour. Students who are underperforming are monitored closely and benefit from detailed advice on their progress.

53. The student council, led by sixth form students, is a respected body within the school and ensures that students' opinions are canvassed and that their voices are heard. The head girl, head boy and their deputies work closely with the senior prefects, heads of house and other sixth-form officials to ensure that older students and younger pupils take full advantage of opportunities in all areas of school life.

54. Sixth form students play an important part in the work of the school in general and in support for younger pupils in particular. They have established a pioneering anti-bullying textline, by which youngsters can inform older students of any concerns they have in this area. Moreover, sixth-formers deliver paired reading sessions and are actively involved in peer mentoring as part of their work with Year 7 tutorial groups. Sixth form officials are on duty throughout the day and pupils have the confidence to approach them with concerns they may have.

55. Sixth form officials, who are students with particular responsibilities in relation to sport and the arts, for example, believe, quite rightly, that the school has encouraged them to mature, to develop their strengths further and to improve in areas where they need to develop. They are grateful for the detailed careers advice they receive and for the excellent support available to them when they apply for courses in higher education. Students are, therefore, extremely loyal to their school and are very keen to continue its work. As a result, they mentor their peers and younger pupils with pleasure and skill.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

There are very strong relationships with parents. As a Leading Edge school and a specialist language school the partnerships with other schools and the local community are excellent. The wide range of activities supports the work of the school, the achievements of students and the work of its partner schools very effectively.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are very supportive of the school at all levels and receive very good information about its work and regular communication about their child's progress.
- There are excellent links with the local community and enhance students' experiences.
- The partnerships with other schools are excellent: they support the school's commitment to improvement very effectively.

56. The school has established very good relationships with parents and are seen by teachers as key to ensuring pupils achieve high standards. These very good contacts are established from the time of parents' initial visit to the school. One of the ways it achieves this is through its Working with parents policy, which lays out exactly what parents should expect in their dealings with the school. Parents are kept informed about the life of the school well through an attractive prospectus and regular newsletters. At the start of each academic year parents receive a brochure about the curriculum that will be taught and they are sent details of the targets set at academic monitoring days. Again, this helps to establish good contacts with parents but it also ensure that they are involved in their child's education. They have good opportunities to discuss progress at parents' evenings and are invited to other information evenings such as those to discuss options in Year 9 and applying to university in the sixth form. This year a meeting for Year 7 parents about how they can support their daughter's learning was successfully introduced. Parents are consulted regularly through questionnaires and evaluations of events and action is taken as a result of these. This is another illustration of how seriously the school takes the need to improve and develop its work. Concerns and complaints are handled quickly and effectively.

57. The majority of parents support the school very well by ensuring that students attend regularly and complete their homework. This is confirmed by the survey carried out by the school: parents' responses are generally very positive and show a high level of satisfaction with the school.

58. Community links are very strong. The school is used by the community for a range of language classes and the Silver Surfers' group meets there regularly. There are good links with adult education and the school's facilities are used extensively. The building programme is a very good example of the school's commitment to the community. As well as new facilities for sports, music and drama the building work includes a health centre for the local Primary Care Trust.

59. The school has Leading Edge status and in this role has developed excellent links with other schools which are having a very positive impact on its work. Staff have offered support to other schools in the development of their curriculum provision such as in the maths department of the local boys' school and in ICT at the sixth form vocational centre. Many courses laid on by the school for its own teaching and non-teaching staff are open to other schools in the area and these are particularly successful for new teachers and middle managers.

60. Modern foreign languages plays a very important part in leading the school's work as a specialist language college. The subject is very active in its work with primary schools and links have been made with the local independent school and gifted and talented pupils from both establishments are involved in joint history projects. In these ways the academic and personal development of students is enriched and staff development opportunities are maximised. In addition, the school provides language tuition at two pupil referral units in the borough and in local primary schools. Without this specialist input, those pupils would not be able to learn a modern foreign language. Support is also provided to secondary schools and Coombe Girls' hosts meetings for language teachers from across the borough. Classes are held for employees of local businesses and for adults living in the community. For example, members of the large Korean-speaking community in New Malden benefit from teaching and accreditation provided through the school.

Sixth form

61. The very positive relationship with parents continues to support students' work as they study in the sixth form and parents are actively involved in discussions about students' progress. The sixth form provision has been improved by the development of the vocational centre. Students who attend this are welcome to visit the Coombe site and attend assemblies and other events. Links with the community and other schools are especially strong: for example, during the inspection the head boy and senior prefect from the independent school visited the sixth form and met with Coombe students to discuss how students undertook responsibilities within the running of each school thus enhancing their personal development.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. The senior leadership team is very effective and this results in very good teamwork at all levels in the organisation. Governance is good. Governors challenge and support the school well. Subjects are managed very well and middle tier leaders are very effectively supported.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Outstanding leadership by the headteacher ensures high standards in all areas of the life of the school.
- The senior leadership team has a strong commitment to, and success in, raising standards.
- The leadership provided by key managers is very good: they are supported and developed effectively.
- Solutions to maintaining a work-life balance have been creatively and successfully established.
- Communication and team work are strengths of the school.
- Pupils' experiences in information and communication technology, and in religious education in Years 10 and 11, are not monitored carefully enough.

Commentary

62. The school is led and managed very effectively. The headteacher and key staff make sure that all parts of the school community are made welcome. Staff, student and parent contributions are valued highly and suggestions acted upon so that the learning culture created is inclusive, accessible and diverse. The excellent leadership of the headteacher has instilled an ethos of striving to improve and a generosity of spirit that ensures that this happens both in and out of

school. The recognition of the value of innovative partnerships has had a knock-on effect in many areas of school life. The impact of the high order leadership and management skills is used very effectively to benefit other schools through the school's work as a Leading Edge school and as a specialist language college.

63. What is special about the way the school is led and managed is that it is about people rather than systems. This is not to say that procedures for ensuring the school runs smoothly are ineffective: they are clearly very effective. But it is the human side of things that really makes the difference. Individuals are valued and developed in a way that emphasises their contribution to the whole. This is partly because the school places a high value on supporting and developing staff. The workforce remodelling project, for example, has been used creatively so that there is a planned balance between school improvement initiatives that occur within and outside the school. What this means in practice is that teachers not only contribute to improvement in other schools, they also gain significantly in relation to their own professional development. This, in turn, contributes to the improvement in the school as a whole because they bring back into school the experiences of working elsewhere.

64. Another significant feature is the way the programme to restructure staffing has been integrated successfully into the school improvement plan. As a result it has been monitored and evaluated rigorously and has ensured a flexible response to the task of raising standards of teaching and learning. The school has also been successful in building its capacity to manage change. The school takes every opportunity to be part of funded initiatives. A good example is a project designed to help managers make the most of the school's success. This project has enabled the school to develop and maintain strong partnerships with external organisations and remain a high performing school, where valuing individuals and encouraging potential are fundamental features. Attention to the development of communication has meant that the school has effective structures for staff and pupils to take responsibility for the quality of learning that takes place. The headteacher and senior staff are visible around the school and staff morale is high because they know the leadership is both caring and responsive.

65. The effective induction programme and professional development for staff contributes very effectively to the high achievement of pupils. The system to introduce new teachers to the school's work and procedures continues to be strong. Staff, who are new to teaching or new to the school, confirm that there are very good opportunities to develop their expertise and understand the particular needs of pupils. One strength of this programme is that those who provide the opportunities are experienced teachers and have particular areas of expertise to offer. What this means is that not only does the school tap into teachers' expertise it also uses this as an opportunity to develop their skills further. This is another illustration of how the school values its staff and the commitment to training and to developing its capacity to become even better. It is, too, a measure of how effectively the school is led and managed and the drive for improvement.

66. Key staff share the aspirations of the headteacher. One of the real strengths of the school is the strong commitment to effective teamwork. Teams are encouraged to celebrate success and formulate plans for further improvement. In this way there is a real sense that responsibility for leading aspects of the school is devolved. As a result everyone takes responsibility and the leadership and management of subjects are very good. Development planning in subjects is good, has appropriate timescales and is reviewed against clear criteria. All planning is closely linked to the objectives of the school; this ensures learning is at the centre of every school activity. In some respects, however, the monitoring of subjects that are taught either as part of the PSE programme, or through other subjects, is less well organised than other aspects of school organisation. What this means is that some pupils do not study information and communication technology, or religious education, in sufficient depth.

67. The very effective leadership and management of the school is exemplified by the way the school has used its Leading Edge status to establish excellent links with other schools and the wider community. A commitment to improvement and raising achievement, and a concern for the individual are combined effectively. Since gaining specialist status in 2002, for example, the range of languages offered has expanded tremendously and there is now a very rich languages

curriculum, including after school classes, from which students can choose. The demanding targets set over the past two years have largely been met and some have been surpassed. The school's work as a Leading Edge school is also used very effectively to improve teaching and thus enhance pupils' achievement and experiences.

68. In addition, the school provides language tuition at two pupil referral units in the borough and in local primary schools. Without this specialist input, those pupils would not be able to learn a modern foreign language. Support is also provided to secondary schools and Coombe Girls' hosts meetings for language teachers from across the borough. Classes are held for employees of local businesses and for adults living in the community. For example, members of the large Korean-speaking community in New Malden benefit from teaching and accreditation provided through the school.

69. The governing body is highly committed, and have a clear view of the direction in which the school is going. They are well informed about the school's achievements and have played a central role in the application for specialist language school. Governors receive good information about the school's budget and monitor it effectively. The governing body has also been closely involved in the development of the Coombe vocational centre: again this is an example of how effectively the school works with its community but it also shows governors' commitment to innovation. Whilst governance is good, the statutory requirement to ensure that all pupils experience an act of collective worship is not met.

70. The special educational needs co-ordinator expertly leads a very effective learning development team who know pupils' needs extremely well and take great care to adapt and utilise resources to maximise learning. The handbook and policy are excellent documents which guide practice and inform how pupils are identified, supported and assessed. The special educational needs register is regularly updated and full information is provided to all staff, including suggested strategies for teaching and effective support. A report produced by the special educational needs co-ordinator is a rigorous appraisal of the work of the department and points towards further improvements.

71. The school spends much more than it receives on special educational needs support and this enables the quality and range of provision to be so good. It is a mark of the school's commitment to inclusion that such an investment is made in those girls who need the most support to achieve their best.

72. As a person who speaks English as an additional language, the co-ordinator has a good understanding of language learning and has produced targeted plans for all supported pupils. She is enthusiastic and keen to improve the provision further. Weaknesses at the time of the previous inspection have been successfully dealt with. Provision is now well organised and good use is made of teachers with experience and skill. Language college funds have helped to provide teaching resources for those who speak English as an additional language.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	5,323,605	Balance from previous year	273,644
Total expenditure	5,149,437	Balance carried forward to the next	447,812
Expenditure per pupil	3,606		

73. Financial management is very good. Broadly, the school's income and expenditure are around the national average. The projected surplus for the current financial year is money allocated to the new building. The high standards, very good achievement and the very strong teaching show how effectively the school uses its resources: as a result the school provides very good value for money. The school is particularly good about applying the best value principles: pupils, parents and staff are regularly consulted and their views contribute to decision making. A good example is the

letting of its catering contract. Here, pupils were part of the interviewing panel and their views had a direct influence on the outcome.

Sixth form

74. As with the main school, leadership and management of the sixth form are very good. A particularly significant aspect of the sixth form is the establishment of the Vocational Centre based at the local boys' school. This has enabled Coombe Girls' to improve significantly the range of courses offered to students, particularly vocational courses. As a result it caters very well for students' needs and aspirations. The head of the sixth form has overall management responsibility for the Vocational Centre: this is effective in bringing students together and in creating a common ethos across both schools. It has also presented some challenges not least, for example, the attitudes of the boys who are not used to Coombe Girls' School particular way of doing things. However, these are being tackled well. Data is used effectively to identify those students who are not performing as well as predicted. As a result teachers give advice and take appropriate action to raise achievement. One of the unique characteristics of the sixth form is its inclusiveness: all students, from a wide range of education backgrounds and experiences, are welcomed and supported.

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

What is the effectiveness of work related learning?

Provision for work related learning (WRL) is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- WRL is led very effectively, giving a clear direction for its further development.
- Vocational provision is very well established.
- Innovative curriculum development has resulted in the provision of a very wide range of courses.
- The work experience programme offers a wide range of opportunities for all students, which enhance and enrich school provision.
- There are very good post-16 opportunities with clear pathways towards further study.
- An audit of existing provision in curriculum areas is complete, but provision for WRL is uneven across the curriculum.

Commentary

75. The school's long-term commitment to including a wide range of vocational courses in its curriculum has meant that it promotes work related learning very well. The school's commitment to the ethos and practice of vocational and work related learning is excellent. This is underlined by the creation of a Vocational Studies department which offers a wide range of vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form. The courses are delivered by a large team of staff who have appropriate specialist knowledge of the vocational areas and whose expertise is updated by regular secondments to a variety of related business organisations.

76. Where students undertook these courses in 2004, results show very good achievement overall. Students have successfully progressed to higher education to continue their studies in work related courses of study such as nursing, occupational therapy, tourism management and business information systems.

77. A vocational course has been established for lower attaining Year 10 pupils, and many Year 12 and Year 13 students attend a specialist Vocational Centre for a series of taster courses in vocational subjects. Links with local Further Education colleges are strengthening. All the courses undertaken at the Vocational Centre and the Further Education colleges are aimed at students who

may not otherwise consider further education courses and are proving successful in raising the self-esteem and aspirations of those taking part.

78. The school's programme for WRL is well structured although some elements are more developed than others. Work experience at the end of Year 10 is particularly oriented towards supporting the vocational education programme, and effective emphasis is placed on securing placements in enriching and enhancing locations such as nurseries and residential care homes for the elderly. Opportunities for post -16 progression to further courses are clearly identified in planning and provision

79. The leadership of WRL is very good. The school's commitment to the programme is shown by the appointment of a senior member of the management team to head the development in this area. She has already had much success. Under her leadership, the school has forged a close co-operation with the local business education consortium. The school ensures that its curriculum provides a wide range of opportunities in vocational areas that match the changing patterns of work in the local area. It is constantly striving to enhance its provision, for example, with the development of enterprise learning. A thorough audit of WRL provision has been completed but provision for WRL is uneven across the curriculum. Some subjects make a significant contribution to the programme, and these include subjects which are not immediately associated with vocational education, such as English. However, there are still some subjects, where the policy and strategy are not yet interpreted into action. Monitoring and evaluating whole-school provision and student progress are current areas for development.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Test and examination results were well above average in 2003, and were maintained or improved on in 2004.
- Standards are well above average and achievement is very good.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to the personal development of pupils.

Commentary

80. Results in the national tests for Year 9 pupils were well above the national average in 2003. Provisional results for 2004 indicate that an even higher proportion of pupils reached the expected level than in 2003. Results in GCSE examination results in English and English literature were well above the national average in 2003 for pupils gaining the higher grades, A*-C. Provisional results for 2004 show a further improvement in the results in English literature, although the percentage gaining the higher grades declined slightly in English.

81. The overall standard of work seen, across the year groups, is well above average. Evidence indicates that pupils join the school with average standards of English overall, but the standards they have reached by Year 9 indicate very good achievement. Achievement is also very good in Years 10 and 11: pupils maintain the standards reached by Year 9. The quality of the written work in every year group is impressive, with pupils showing a very good command of the language, writing for a variety of purposes. They read very well, and their oral communication skills are very good indeed. The emphasis given to public speaking in the school, including in the classroom context, inspires a level of confidence that is rarely seen. The small number of pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as the others, as do those for whom English is an additional language. Those identified as gifted or talented are given every opportunity to excel: the challenging work that they are given in the upper sets, even in Year 7, ensures they make the progress of which they are capable. The contribution the subject makes to the personal development of all pupils is very significant, and can be set alongside their academic achievements.

82. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. There is a strong team of specialist teachers, covering a wide range of age and experience, who know their subject very well and plan lessons very thoroughly. The methods employed are often drawn from recent initiatives, with a strong emphasis on learning objectives and activities with a literacy focus at the start of lessons. Teachers have very high expectations of their pupils, and the work pupils do – including homework – is demanding. The quality of the relationships enhances learning: classes are managed very well, with good humour and a real sense of purpose. Misbehaviour is rare and is effectively dealt with. The quality of the teaching promotes the high standard of behaviour that teachers expect and get from pupils. Pupils are given many opportunities to work in pairs or groups, and can be trusted to organise themselves, for instance in reading or interrogating a text. Appropriate resources are used, although the use of ICT is relatively limited. The recently acquired interactive whiteboards, once fully operational, will give teachers even more scope for imaginative work. As it is, pupils are able to display the work they have done in groups, and talk through their findings to the rest of the

class with much confidence – as a lower attaining Year 11 class did in connection with the poems from other cultures they were studying. Written work is marked very thoroughly, and pupils are given every encouragement to improve on their work. They have clear targets, and are made very aware of what level they are working at or what grade they have achieved and what they need to do next.

83. The subject is very well led and managed by an experienced head of department, who has deployed his strong team of teachers to very good effect. The monitoring of teaching and learning is very thorough as is the organisation and monitoring of pupil assessment. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. There is now much better accommodation for the subject, although not all teachers are able to have rooms in the English suite. Teaching and learning have continued to improve and standards have risen particularly in Years 7 to 9: test results for 14-year-olds have improved from average to well above average since the previous inspection. This means that the high standards achieved at GCSE in the past are now being realised earlier.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

84. Standards of literacy by Year 9 are well above average, as test results show. This represents very good achievement, because pupils join the school with literacy standards that are average overall. Progress is maintained in Years 10 and 11, where literacy standards – as reflected in examination results – are well above average. In no subjects is there any indication that limitations in literacy or language skills are a barrier to learning.

85. This achievement is due in no small part to the thorough implementation of national strategies. The co-ordinator has overseen an effective cross-curricular literacy policy, with all departments incorporating the teaching of literacy skills into their planning. Pupils joining the school benefit from very good transition arrangements. There is an effective intervention scheme for those who need it, and a literacy element in tutorial times. Optional tests and booster classes have been used to good effect. A teaching assistant has been deployed to support the intervention work. Reading is given a high profile, and includes a scheme in which younger pupils are paired with older members of the school for support. Photographs in corridors of teachers recommending their favourite books send a clear message, and cross-curricular book weeks are held: “putting literature back into literacy” is an avowed aim. Writing is stimulated by visiting writers and by trips to hear poets read and talk about their work. Speaking and listening skills are greatly enhanced by the many opportunities for public speaking, at both formal and informal levels. The literacy skills of pupils at this school are thus very impressive.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Coombe Girls’ School was awarded designated Specialist Language College status in 2002. French, German and Spanish are taught equally throughout the school. Pupils have the opportunity to study a second foreign language with a slightly reduced time allocation in Years 7 to 9.

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good overall.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- The department is very well staffed and resourced.
- Information and communication technology is fully integrated into the department’s planning and work.
- Marking of pupils’ written work in Years 10 and 11 does not always give clear guidance on how to improve the next similar piece of work.
- Occasionally opportunities are missed in lessons for pupils to assess their own and each other’s work.

Commentary

86. Standards reached by pupils at the end of Year 9 in 2004 were well above average in both first and second foreign languages. Standards of work seen during the inspection were broadly average overall but given their starting point they achieved very well. Pupils can refer to one time frame other than the present; they can link sentences together to make their writing more complex. They speak quite confidently, although their pronunciation is sometimes approximate. Their command of a variety of tenses is not fully secure. Given that pupils do not begin to study languages until Year 7, this represents very good achievement.

Spanish

87. In 2003 results obtained at GCSE were well above average. They dropped in 2004 to below average because the prior attainment of this group of pupils was lower. Standards of work seen during the inspection were above average. Pupils can use a variety of vocabulary and structure. Any inaccuracy occurs when more complex language is attempted. This represents good achievement.

French

88. Results in French at GCSE were well above average in 2003. In 2004 they were also well above the average. Standards of work seen during the inspection were above average. Pupils can link sentences together and use subordinate clauses, offering and justifying opinions. They speak confidently and accurately, and although pronunciation is sometimes approximate, meaning is usually clear. Above average standards are maintained from Year 9, which represents very good achievement.

German

89. In 2003 results in German at GCSE were below average. In 2004 results were still below average, but they improved faster than the rate of improvement nationally, and were broadly average. Standards seen during the inspection were broadly average. Again, this difference is explained by the different experience of pupils when they start at the school. Pupils can use vocabulary and structures appropriate to the task, and there are some successful attempts to link structures together. Verb forms and tense formations are not always secure. The improvement in results indicates good achievement given the later start to the study of German.

90. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. They plan their lessons well, they provide pupils with good models of the foreign language to imitate, there is a good variety of task which means that lessons proceed at a strong pace. Teachers use ICT as an integral part of many lessons. Pupils respond well to the brisk teaching they receive, and as a result, learning is good. Occasionally, opportunities are missed for pupils to assess their own and each other's work. In Years 10 and 11, marking does not always give pupils clear guidance on how to improve the next similar piece of work.

91. Leadership and management are very good. The subject leader has a clear vision for the development of the department's work. He was instrumental in bringing the school through a successful bid for Specialist Language College status, which is having a real impact on the department's work. The department has embraced the new National Strategy for modern languages, and this is beginning to transform the work of teachers in the classroom. The subject leader has brought the staff along with him in this major area of the department's work. Consequently, there is a strong sense of teamwork among the staff. Monitoring of teaching and takes place formally and informally; the department analyses its data; reviews patterns and takes appropriate action, documentation is thorough and supports teaching well; schemes of work are appropriately pitched and sequenced and fully reflect the new Framework for modern languages in Years 7 to 9.

92. The curriculum for modern languages is very good. In addition to sustaining the three main European languages (French, Spanish and German) throughout the school, pupils have

opportunities to study Italian, Korean, Chinese and Latin through an extensive programme of out of hours teaching.

93. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. The proportion of good and better teaching has improved significantly, and the main issue concerning ICT has been thoroughly addressed through the installation of interactive whiteboards in a number of classrooms and the setting up of a 32-station computer suite in the languages area.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils learn very well when they are asked to work collaboratively.
- Pupils achieve very well when teachers set challenging work which is well matched to their needs.
- The impact of assessment on raising standards is reduced because it is not linked to individual targets for improvement.
- Pupils develop a very good understanding of the subject which enables pupils of all abilities to gain very good results.
- Good relationships between teachers and pupils enhance learning by making the lessons pleasant places in which to work.

Commentary

94. On entry to the school pupils' attainment in mathematics is in line with the national average. Results at the end of Year 9 are well above the national average. Results have consistently been well above national averages for the last four years. The number of pupils obtaining the higher grades at the end of Year 9 is above the average for similar schools. Results at the end of Year 11 in 2003 were well above average. The 2004 results are well above average.

95. Standards seen during the inspection reflect the examination results. Pupils achieve very well in all areas of mathematics. In both written and oral work pupils recall facts and apply skills confidently. Achievement is highest when the teacher sets work which is challenging but within the pupils' grasp. For instance good investigational skills were seen in a Year 9 lesson. In this lesson pupils established a complex relationship between the factors of a number, demonstrating a depth of understanding of mathematics. Teaching in all sets ensures pupils of different abilities do well. In response to teachers' high expectations pupils work hard and behave very well. High attaining pupils have the opportunity to enter the GCSE examination early. Those doing so this year are studying to take the GCSE statistics examination as an additional qualification.

96. The quality of teaching is very good overall. Teachers' expertise and subject knowledge are significant strengths that ensure thorough preparation and well-organised lessons. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good with pupils feeling confident to tackle difficult questions without fear of ridicule if they make mistakes. This enhances learning and results in the lessons becoming interesting and stimulating environments.

97. The department's assessment system is good providing each pupil with knowledge of the level at which they are working. Pupils have the opportunity to evaluate their own performance and to highlight areas which need strengthening. This is good as it makes pupils think about their mathematics and gives them some responsibility for their own learning. Pupils' targets for improving their work in mathematics are not always linked clearly to national curriculum levels or GCSE grades. This means that assessment does not have quite as much impact on raising standards as it might.

98. A common feature of the better lessons was the wide range of different teaching strategies being used, including having the pupils discuss their mathematics. The pupils learn well when they

are asked to work in pairs and small groups. For instance in a Year 11 lesson pupils solved problems at the whiteboard and discussed in pairs how to rearrange the formula for the area of a circle. They then worked in small groups to discover how to develop the formula to calculate the area of a sector. By the end of the lesson pupils could solve questions required to gain the higher GCSE grades.

99. Leadership and management are very good providing clear vision and guidance. This has resulted in well above average standards and good improvement since the last inspection. The focus of the department is clearly on raising standards and improving the provision. The teachers work well as a team, share good practice and are mutually supportive. The department is an interesting and exciting environment for learning.

Mathematics across the curriculum

100. All pupils receive experience of mathematics across the curriculum through units covered during their tutorial periods. These units include research work on topics such as the annual cost of smoking. At the conclusion of the unit each class has to produce a presentation. The better of these are displayed in assemblies. A previous unit involved pupils analysing questionnaires about traffic in the local area. Pupils investigated patterns of behaviour to see, for example, if the proportion walking to school changed with age. Results were presented to local dignitaries as a part of the Healthy Schools submission. The pupils' research contributed to the decision to re-site a pedestrian crossing.

101. Every year the school holds a numeracy week. During this period all departments contribute to the delivery of the subject and pupils participate in visits to venues where they can explore mathematics. During the inspection good examples of numeracy were seen in Year 8 drama where pupils judged status on a 1 to 10 scale and in Year 9 PE where pupils calculated maximum heart rate.

102. Developments in this area are planned, co-ordinated and monitored well. The provision for mathematics across the curriculum is very good.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' attainment in tests and examinations in Year 9 and in Year 11 is well above average.
- Pupils' achievements are very good.
- Teaching and pupils' learning are very good.
- The subject is led and managed very well.
- Overall the curriculum is good and offers good opportunities for the majority of pupils.
- The accreditation available to the highest achieving pupils does not offer the opportunity to study separate sciences.
- The department makes very good use of data to focus planning for improvement in the grades which pupils attain in public examinations.

103. Attainment of pupils in science when they enter the school is broadly average, but there are fewer pupils who have attained Level 5 or above in the end of Year 6 tests than would be expected. Over the last four years the results that pupils attain in the end of Year 9 tests and at GCSE have improved year on year. For the last three years, including 2004, these results have been well above the national average and compared favourably with those in similar schools. Comparison of pupils' attainment in GCSE with their attainment on entry shows that pupils' achievement is very good. This picture is confirmed by the inspection findings. From Year 7 to Year 11, pupils make very good progress and the work of all pupils, regardless of gender, ethnicity or ability, shows year on year improvement.

104. The quality of teaching and pupils' learning is very good. A significant factor in this high quality teaching was the enthusiasm with which teachers approached the lesson and the way in which they used their very good subject knowledge to enthuse and challenge the pupils. This resulted in very good learning and enabled pupils to enjoy their science lessons. Teachers used a very wide range of teaching strategies and they matched their teaching very well to the needs of their pupils because they know them so well. Day-to-day assessment is used very well to ensure that pupils know the level they have achieved in the National Curriculum and what they need to do to improve and achieve the next level. The less experienced staff in the department are well supported by their more experienced colleagues in making these judgements and further training in this area is planned. All lessons are well planned and all teachers make particularly good use of tight timescales for tasks within the lessons to ensure that pupils' learning is moved forward at a good pace. The impact of this very good teaching is that pupils are very actively engaged in their learning. They work very well in groups and individually and they are very keen to ask searching questions of their teachers so setting a very high quality learning environment in the majority of lessons. Pupils with SEN and those whose mother tongue is not English are very well supported and are enabled to achieve as well as their peers.

105. The leadership and the management of the science department are both very good overall. The vision of the head of department is outstanding and she has established and developed a very effective team. The high quality documentation ensures that the department runs very smoothly on a day-to-day basis; all staff and especially the less experienced teachers are very well supported. They are highly valued by the head of department and consequently respond extremely well to her challenge and encouragement. Seven of the ten laboratories have been re-furnished and provide good accommodation which is well-equipped with interactive whiteboards which are very well used by both staff and students. The other three laboratories are satisfactory, but do not provide such a pleasant working environment. Since the last inspection the quality of the provision in science has improved considerably: very good progress has been made.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good as a result of good teaching and organisation.
- Some pupils do not do as well as they should because their ICT experiences are not consistent or checked carefully enough.

Commentary

106. Standards are average overall but given their starting point pupils achieve well between Year 7 and Year 11. However, this broad sketch masks a more complex picture. The way the school plans and organises the subject, particularly its commitment to teaching ICT through other subjects, the provision of after school lessons and some pupils taking GCSE early are all factors that make up this complexity. Some have more influence than others.

107. The first aspect of this complex picture is the end of Year 9 assessments which suggest that standards are high. This is not borne out fully by the work seen during the inspection where standards are broadly average, although a significant minority achieves some good results. There are two reasons for the difference. First, about a quarter of pupils do not attend the additional ICT lessons available after school. While they gain some proficiency in ICT in subjects such as science and design and technology, their overall level of skill and breadth of experience is less than others. Second, some of the assessments are not accurate and tend to over-state pupils' achievements. Nevertheless, achievement is good overall with pupils making good progress from the start of Year 7 to the end of Year 9.

108. The school's approach to entering pupils early for GCSE is another example of the complex picture. In 2004, for example, 59 Year 10 pupils were entered early for the GCSE examination and achieved above average standards. This represents good achievement. Over the past three years similar proportions of Year 10 pupils have taken the GCSE examination early and results have remained broadly above average. A smaller number of pupils take GCSE at the end of Year 11: overall these pupils achieve average results. The remaining pupils, who do not take an examination, gain their ICT skills through other subjects: this is the third part of the complex picture. The difficulty here is that the school does not check pupils' experiences rigorously enough and the evidence from the inspection shows that ICT is relatively weak in a number of subjects. In English and art, for example, the use of computers is limited. While this is not so in, for example science or in modern languages where ICT is built into every lesson, it still means that pupils' experiences vary. As a result some pupils are not doing as well as they ought.

109. Significantly, however, pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language make good progress as they move through the school. This is because of the high quality of support they receive and because the teachers have a thorough knowledge of their needs. The teaching is targeted well to these needs so that they are able to tackle work successfully.

110. Teaching and learning are good. This is as a result of very good planning and organisation that ensures good learning opportunities. Lessons start promptly with students seated at their computers and objectives are made clear. This helps to ensure that the pace lessons is brisk. Teachers have a good understanding of the subject and the examination requirements. They use this knowledge well in the preparation and presentation of lessons. The accommodation, resources and support from technicians are good but as a result of system problems lessons are often interrupted because of computers not working. The recording and marking of work is good and this helps pupils to improve further their work.

111. Leadership and management are good although there is not enough time for the subject in Years 8 and 9. The head of department has a good understanding of the demands of subject and what needs doing and there is an effective monitoring system that is contributing to an improvement in teaching and learning. Staff have had good access to professional development and this is beginning to result in an improvement in standards. Issues raised in the previous inspection have been addressed well.

Information and Communication Technology across the curriculum

112. Opportunities for pupils to enhance their learning of ICT are good in a number of subjects. There is very good use in modern languages, design and technology, history and physical education. It is weaker in English and geography. It is this variation in the opportunities for using ICT in subjects that leads to inconsistencies in pupils' experiences: some have a good diet but for others the picture is limited. On the other hand, the integration of ICT in subjects and staff expertise are much improved since the previous inspection. For example, staff are beginning to make use of interactive whiteboards to improve pupils' learning, clear evidence of the school's effective strategy to improve achievement by raising the quality of teaching.

HUMANITIES

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership is very good and there is a clear vision for development of the subject.
- Teaching is good and there is strong emphasis on collaborative learning. There is not enough emphasis on helping lower-attaining pupils gain skills in using source material in the first three years.
- Standards are above average and pupils achieve well in understanding how historians work.
- History is a popular subject and pupils value the support and guidance of their teachers and the opportunities they have to evaluate their own work.

Commentary

113. At the end of Year 9, standards are above average and pupils talk convincingly about historical controversies, the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, for example. Most pupils are fully aware of the nature of evidence but those who find the work difficult are not yet confident in handling source material. GCSE results in 2003 were above average. Standards in work seen mirror this performance and pupils gauge the reliability and usefulness of sources accurately. Results in 2004 were similar to the 2003 figures.

114. From average levels of prior attainment, pupils achieve well in Years 7-9 and are beginning to understand the nature of evidence and the pitfalls in evaluating different kinds of sources. A minority are still not fully aware of the different ways in which historians work. Achievement is good in the GCSE years also. Pupils are becoming more adept at seeing the past in shades of grey and are already considering the views of a range of historians.

115. Teaching is good overall. Pupils enjoy learning from and with each other and benefit from using their classmates as a resource. This is because teachers place emphasis on pair and group work in lessons. In an excellent lesson on the peace treaties at the end of the First World War, for example, pupils worked collaboratively to consider whether Versailles was just and they gained a very secure understanding of the demands of each victorious country as a result. Pupils engage very well with the subject matter, speak highly of their teachers and opt for examination study in large numbers. Teachers know their subject well, assess their pupils' work in detail and encourage pupils to evaluate their own progress and set targets for future performance. A weakness in Years 7 to 9 is that teaching does not do enough to help lower attaining pupils gain a really good grasp of the necessary skills in using source material. This means, for example, that some pupils find it difficult to draw conclusions from the full range of source material and explains why teaching and achievement are good and not very good.

116. The department is very well led and ensures that plans for development are based on an accurate analysis of progress in all aspects of its work. Moreover, teachers work closely as a team and support each other very effectively. Management is good and teachers are now looking at strategies to reinforce the learning of historical skills in Years 7-9.

117. Improvement since the last inspection has been good; standards have been maintained and teaching is better. Furthermore, because teachers have a passion for history, a real commitment to their pupils and plan a wide range of field work activities and after-school revision clubs, the department is well placed for further success.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at the end of Year 11 are above average.
- Teaching and learning are good but pupils are not always helped to become independent learners.
- Assessment and tracking of pupils progress are effective.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are good.
- There is limited use of information and communication technology to help student learning.
- Development of local fieldwork and other opportunities for geographical enquiries are rather limited, especially in lower years.

Commentary

118. Achievement is good and by the end of Year 9 standards are above average. The 2004 GCSE results are well above average and more pupils achieve a grade A or above than in the past. This directly reflects the efforts made by the department to raise examination results. The evidence from the inspection confirms this picture and although standards in lessons are above average overall pupils achieve well.

119. Teaching and learning are good. Teaching is most effective in Years 10 and 11 where there is sufficient time to develop the curriculum in depth. Teachers have good subject knowledge and an enthusiasm for the subject but there is a lack of variety of teaching styles and so pupils get a very uniform diet with a high input of subject content. The most effective teaching has a level of pace and challenge appropriate for the ability of the pupils which combine to engage the pupils' interest. Lessons are well planned, structured and the national strategy for teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 has a clear impact on classroom practices with a stress on raising the pupil use of complex subject vocabulary. There are some weaknesses in teaching. In some lessons teachers tend to dominate and pupils have limited opportunity to work independently. Sometimes this is because teachers rely too much on worksheets. Marking is good but varies: some teachers give more detailed feedback on how pupils can improve their work than others. Regular homework is used effectively to support and reinforce classroom learning.

120. Learning is good because teachers carefully plan lessons to structure the work into short sections that can be easily absorbed and then use these as foundations for further learning experiences. Pupils increase their knowledge and understanding of complex concepts such as plate tectonics in Year 9 and develop an appreciation of geographical issues such as urban redevelopment in Year 10. There is a good range of fieldwork activities, for example a day visit to the river Cuckmere to study coasts and river development in Year 8, and a residential trip to the Dorset coast in Year 10. But local fieldwork is not developed as well as it might be: as a result pupils' research and enquiry skills tend not to be as strong as expected, especially in Years 7 to 9. Map work is well developed in Year 7. Little use is made of computers to support learning although a recently installed interactive whiteboard is beginning to make a real difference to the way teachers use information and communication technology. There are well-founded plans to ensure that staff gain experience of using the whiteboard for their teaching.

121. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons is good in all years and pupils are interested in the subject and are keen to learn. This is reinforced by the teachers' enthusiasm and use of praise which contribute to very positive classroom relationships.

122. The leadership and management of the subject are good. This is beginning to improve standards and the quality of learning in lessons especially in Years 10 and 11. The department is located in one area and this has helped to develop a mutually supportive teaching and learning culture. The department tracks pupil's progress effectively and this is used to set individual pupil

targets and to help plan lessons. Since the last inspection results have risen and the level and variety of resources used in teaching have been sustained. However the use of computers is not as good as it was. Overall, progress since the last inspection is good.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good, with some that is very good.
- Teachers provide good activities, and opportunities for pupils' independent learning.
- Examination results are very good.
- The time available for religious education in years 10 and 11 limits the depth of pupils' study and their achievement.

Commentary

123. By the end of Year 9, standards broadly match the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. When pupils arrive in Year 7, some are below average in their knowledge and understanding of the subject. However, by Year 9, pupils of all abilities achieve well and make good progress. They study several world religions, and learn some of the factual details connected with them. They also understand some of the symbolism and outcomes of these faiths.

124. By the end of Year 11 standards are also in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. Overall, pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve satisfactorily. However, there are variations between courses. In Years 10 and 11 results for the full course in 2004 were excellent. All 32 entrants gained the higher grades A* - C. The results for the short course examinations in 2004 were good. All of the 66 pupils entered gained at least a pass grade.

125. Pupils not studying the GCSE course receive their religious education through the personal and social education programme. They also gain other related experiences through the school's extended curriculum programme where they study ethics. Discussions with pupils in Years 10 and 11 show that one topic studied was crime and punishment. They talked well about their research and debates, discussed some of the essays written, and the facts they found. For example, pupils had learnt about prisoners on "death row," and discussed a news item of a woman convicted of adultery and condemned to death because of religious beliefs. However, some pupils do not study the background to the topics in as much depth as those following the GCSE course because they get less time than others. This in turn means that the achievement and progress of some of the non-examination pupils are satisfactory rather than good.

126. The quality of teaching and learning is good, with some that is very good. A strong feature of teaching is the imaginative activities planned by teachers. Very often this gives pupils a good measure of independence and maintains their interest well. For example, in a very good Year 8 lesson about Christmas, the teacher gave pupils some used Christmas cards. They listed the things shown on them such as snow, robins, reindeer, angels and stars. Then they produced a diagram having removed all non-religious items. They were left with very few directly related to the Biblical story. Pupils learnt very well by this full involvement and personal activity.

127. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department leads a strong team and has produced good schemes of work. She has done much careful work on the religious education programmes for Years 10 and 11.

128. Improvement since the last inspection is good. In particular, the subject now meets statutory requirements, the very good examination results have been maintained and the leadership and management have improved.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching leads to pupils achieving very well.
- The quality of assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress and attainment are very good.
- The quality of pupils' work is of a very high standard.
- There is limited use of computers for manufacturing or control.

129. By the end of Year 9, pupils' overall standards are well above the national average. In the 2004 GCSE examinations for design and technology, results were well above the national average overall.

130. Work seen during the inspection confirms that standards are very high. Between the start of Year 7 and the end of Year 9 pupils make very good progress and standards are well above average. Pupils produce articles of very good quality and develop good designing skills: they express their ideas and designs very clearly. The high standards and very good achievement are due to the very high expectations of teaching staff and the pupils' response as seen for example in the Year 8 lesson where pupils were learning about different types of pastry and manufactured products to a very high standard. Pupils make good use of computers and there was good evidence of computer aided design seen in a Year 8 lesson where pupils were designing and making a desktop clock. There is very little evidence of computer aided manufacturing or the use of computer control systems. By the end of Year 11 standards are well above average. Pupils make very good progress. Higher attaining pupils produce work of exceptionally high quality, for example, in the detailed and very well presented project folders, and the very good quality practical project work in the all the design and technology subjects. Pupils are challenged to focus clearly on the requirements of the GCSE examination. As a result, they understand what they need to do and are helped to reach higher grades. The high standards seen are a result of very good planning of lessons, the excellent quality of marking and high quality assessment.

131. Teaching and learning are very good. In four lessons observed the teaching was excellent. Teachers' use their very good subject knowledge, enthusiasm and high expectations to engage pupils. Effective classroom management is based on very good relationships. The very good range of activities ensures that all pupils are actively involved in their learning. Lessons are sharply focused and the objectives are shared with the pupils. Key learning points are systematically reinforced and new knowledge is introduced as and when it is needed, so that pupils use it immediately to develop understanding. There is a very good level of support for pupils with special educational needs, which helps these pupils to progress very well. Pupils' work is marked regularly and teachers provide encouraging, motivating comments that show pupils how to improve. These assessment outcomes are used consistently and effectively to adapt future planning and teaching. Use of the national strategy for teaching and learning has helped to improve planning and teaching.

132. The subject is led and managed very well. The focus on lesson planning has improved teaching. The curriculum interests pupils well and meets the needs of all. A particular strength is the way pupils' progress is assessed and monitored: the systems are very good. Information from assessment is used effectively to set challenging targets. Technician support is very good and makes a significant contribution to the smooth running of the department. The department has sound access to computers but the provision for computer-aided manufacture and control systems is limited. This limits access to modern production methods, particularly for older pupils. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils make very good progress from the start of Year 7 to Year 9.
- Results in the 2003 GCSE examination were well above the national average.
- There was a significant increase in the number of pupils attaining GCSE grades A* and A in 2004.
- Teaching is very good with many excellent features.
- Teachers are highly successful in communicating their enthusiasm for the subject to pupils.
- Opportunities for producing images employing ICT are limited at present.

133. Attainment on entry to Year 7 is below national expectations. Pupils' drawing, painting and craft skills are under-developed and they have little understanding of how to arrange shapes on a flat surface. However, they work well in this first year to develop these basic skills. Pupils in Year 8 continue to make very good progress and by Year 9 the majority are producing work of a standard that is above the national average. Achievement is very good from the start of Year 7 to the end of Year 9.

134. In the 2003 GCSE examination, attainment was well above the national average with 98 per cent of pupils achieving the highest grades A*-C, by comparison with the national figure for similar schools of 73 per cent. Their attainment in art and design was much higher than in their other school subjects. In the 2004 GCSE examination, there was a significant improvement in the number of pupils achieving the highest grades A* and A, which was well above the national average. Pupils with special educational needs are very well assimilated into teaching groups and are very well supported. Gifted and Talented pupils are encouraged to develop their potential to the full. Achievement from the start of Year 10 to the end of Year 11 is very good.

135. Teaching is very good with some excellent features. Teachers are extremely well informed and in possession of very good subject knowledge, which they share freely with the pupils. Planning is carried out with great thoroughness before lessons and very good use is made of exemplar material when introducing pupils to new subject matter. Teachers employ a variety of different teaching strategies and make highly effective use of questioning as a means of determining pupils' depth of knowledge and understanding. Homework is set on a regular basis, marked and returned to pupils with suitable comments.

136. Pupils enjoy this subject. They settle very readily to their work and are very keen to acquire new knowledge and understanding about art and design and also to develop and refine their skills in drawing, painting and manipulation of craft materials. Pupils in Year 9 are developing their capacity for carrying out research and for experimenting with a range of new materials. In Years 10 and 11, pupils work with increased independence and are producing work of a standard that is well above national expectations.

137. Leadership is excellent and management very good. The acting head of department has a very clear vision of how he would like to see the department develop. He is keen to extend the range of activities on offer to incorporate greater use of photography and ICT within a design context. Relationships within the department are excellent. All members of staff feel fully involved in the decision-making process. However, at the end of Year 9 assessment is not always consistent between teachers.

138. Accommodation is very good. Pupils are taught in four large, multi-purpose studios, which are very well equipped. Resources are very good, but the provision of information and communication technology within the department is such that pupils have restricted access to

computers and digital cameras as means of generating images. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good.

Drama

Provision in drama is **excellent**.

Main strengths

- Standards are well above average and pupils achieve very well.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- The department is exceptionally well staffed.

Commentary

139. With 100 per cent success rate of achieving A*-C grades, examination results for GCSE drama are well above the national average for the subject. This represents a good improvement on last year's results which were above average. In lessons pupils have a secure understanding of key dramatic terms; have good performance skills and show sensitivity and awareness of place, occasion and audience. When responding to given stimuli (e.g. a photograph), pupils' dramatic interpretations show a good command of language, gesture and movement. Pupils' written coursework is of an exceptional quality: it demonstrates their ability to evaluate successfully the skills involved in their practical drama work and translate in writing.

140. By the end of Year 9, pupils can use dramatic conventions such as still image, to portray abstract concepts within the drama with confidence. They make thoughtful connections with real-life experience and reflect on their drama work well.

141. Teaching and learning are very good with outstanding features. Consistently throughout each age range from Years 7 to 11, lesson planning is strengthened because it is a shared activity. Lessons are subsequently adapted and refined to match the individual needs of different classes. The provision of clear lesson objectives means that pupils know what is expected of them. Everyone is enabled to participate and reflect in the lesson and pupils evaluate their contributions orally. Very good use of paired and group work has a strong impact on pupils' learning. Teachers' subject knowledge is very strong and pupils benefit from being taught by teachers who are excellent role models in this respect.

Example of outstanding practice

A Year 8 drama lesson on what it feels like to have the power and high status of a corrupt leader, in this case, the witch who controls Narnia in CS Lewis's "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe". Excellent use was made of the drama convention of teacher-in-role.

Pupils showed an excellent level of engagement that was subsequently reflected in the quality of their own drama work. The teacher-in-role as the witch scolded her class, now in role as newcomers to Narnia. She spoke fiercely, "Is this how you greet a queen? Stand up." At once their attention was secured and the queen changed her tone: "I didn't realise you were human beings? I am so sorry. You are most welcome." As the class discussed the teacher's portrayal of the witch's manipulative skills, their participation was exceptional: "You tricked us. You bribed us with chocolate." As a consequence of their deepened involvement, the pupils were supported to perform one of the witch's lines sequentially and feel her power. In the analytical evaluation that followed, pupils and their teacher made connections with tyrannical rulers, historically to the present day. The pupils demonstrated an outstanding level of excitement and enthusiasm for learning in this class.

142. Leadership and management of the subject are both very good. The availability of shared schemes of work means that every teacher is clear about what to teach and how to teach it. Assessment procedures based on school policy are adapted to suit departmental ways of working. The head of department leads by example and gives a clear steer on her expectations for teaching

and learning. The department benefits from good organisation and there are clear systems in place for monitoring and evaluating its work, including opportunities for lesson observation. The status of the subject is improving with regard to its resources and the new building programme will enhance its status even more.

Music

Provision in music is **excellent**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching across the department leads to very good pupil achievement.
- There is a strong team of highly qualified musicians.
- Standards are above average.
- There are excellent opportunities for curriculum enrichment.
- Accommodation, although temporary, is very poor hindering development of use of information and communication technology.

Commentary

143. Pupils achieve very well. Standards at the end Year 9 and Year 11 are above the national average. Pupils show very good musicianship and many play more than one instrument. Given that pupils' standards of attainment in music are below average when they start the school their progress is very good.

144. Teaching and learning are very good. During the inspection some of the teaching and learning seen was excellent. For example, Year 11 GCSE composition and performance work shows a high level of musicianship and aural awareness. Pupils use their singing voices confidently, and imaginative use is made of a variety of vocal and instrumental music in the many choirs and orchestras the department supports. The impact of highly qualified teachers and musical experts on the development of individual pupil skills is one of the department's strengths. Time is used well to provide oral feedback to pupils who learn well because of very good quality teaching. High level planning is matched by appropriate resources and practical sessions are always well planned and organised. As a result of a wide variety of teaching strategies all pupils, regardless of ability, achieve very well. There is no difference in the rate of progress made by pupils who have special educational needs who also achieve very well.

145. Pupils respond enthusiastically to making music demonstrating a growing confidence in performance and composing skill. They are very well motivated and take full advantage of the open house policy of the department using resources during break times and after school. The dynamic range of extra-curricular provision, including instrumental tuition, orchestra, choirs, production and performance both nationally and abroad, makes a significant contribution to the ethos of the school. There is a high level of enjoyment, enthusiasm and a willingness to improve skills and musicianship.

146. The department has recently moved to temporary accommodation and has reviewed provision and curriculum coverage to match the limitations of space. However, sounds from adjoining rooms and lack of practice rooms are affecting the development of creativity. The lack of access to computer resources is limiting opportunities to build up pupils' skills in music technology. However, these weaknesses will be resolved as the subject moves into purpose built accommodation.

147. Leadership and management are very good. There is a very strong will to see the subject improve. There is a clear vision for the department and a consistent approach by all teachers to implement school objectives. Assessment procedures are good with regular feedback and guidance given to pupils. Extra-curricular activities are a particular strength providing a rich and varied range of musical experiences for all pupils in the school. The acting heads of department have demonstrated skilful handling of a difficult situation. The commitment of the staff in the

department provides a secure foundation to raise standards and broaden provision, including the development of ICT provision for music.

148. The high standards evident at the time of the previous inspection have been maintained and built upon. Music has a high profile in the life of the school and is one of the many strengths of the school.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is very good: lessons are planned very thoroughly.
- Pupils make good progress despite the limited time for physical education in Years 7 to 9.
- Leadership and management are excellent.

149. Standards overall are above average. By the end of Year 9 standards are broadly average but by the end of Year 11 they have improved and are above average overall. Those pupils who take the GCSE course achieve high standards: this is confirmed by both the GCSE results and the inspection. The reason that standards are not better in Years 7 to 9 is because of the time constraints imposed by the way the curriculum is organised. However, with the new sports hall, the school is on track to revise the time allocated to physical education from next September. These plans are clear and well founded. Literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology are supported well through physical education teaching. The national strategy for teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 is used well to plan lessons: this is one of the reasons why pupils' learning is very good.

150. Achievement overall is good. Again, the limited time in Years 7 to 9 explains why achievement is not better than this. However, pupils do make significant progress as their experience of physical education increases. All types of learners benefit from the very good subject knowledge of staff and the way they plan their lessons. As a result, teaching ensures that all pupils gain good access to learning and achieve well.

151. Teaching and learning are very good with areas of excellence. Strengths include: exemplary planning; very good knowledge of students and their needs; very good use of sixth form students to support learning in Years 7 to 9; high expectations; teachers' excellent enthusiasm and commitment; and very good subject knowledge which provides students with good modelling of techniques. There is little doubt that teaching has a significant impact on the progress pupils make. This is evidenced by rising standards as the pupils progress through the years.

152. Overall leadership and management are excellent. Leadership is dynamic and dedicated to securing higher standards. Documentation, including self-evaluation, is exemplary. There is a clear vision for the subject and it is the effective teamwork that is really significant because it ensures that all staff hold the same aspirations and have the same expectations. One of the things that makes leadership so good is the contribution the subject makes to out of school activities despite the limitations imposed by the unsatisfactory facilities.

153. Accommodation is limited but adequate: the new building will improve this significantly. Very good use is made of the community to provide an additional resource in Year 11. Improvement since the last inspection is very good: examination results continue to rise, teaching has improved significantly and out of school activities are still very good.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at age 16 are well above national expectations.
- Pupils achieve very well and their work improves very well.
- There is very good teaching from a dedicated team.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Weak literacy skills for some pupils restrict their progress.

Commentary

154. Standards in Year 11 are well above average. The results of the GCSE course are well above national averages. Work seen in class and in pupils' files is well above national levels. Pupils' achievement is very good, particularly in their understanding of business concepts. The strength of the pupils' class work is their basic understanding of the subject matter and their steady accumulation of knowledge which is well organised in their files. Pupils confidently deal with business concepts and apply them effectively. For example, in a case study on the establishment of a fitness centre in Kingston, Year 11 pupils successfully and appropriately drew up a break even analysis to help them give more beneficial advice to the business partners who intended to embark on the venture. The weak literacy skills for some pupils restrict their progress.

155. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers form a committed team and they know their subject well. The best lessons are characterised by pace and challenge. Very good use is made of both formal and informal assessment and pupils are encouraged to evaluate their own work, thus providing a firm basis for learning. Learning is very good and reflects the very good teaching, which takes pupils' knowledge and understanding to a deep level. Pupils' response is nearly always very good,

156. Leadership and management are very good. The recently appointed head of department has overseen the production of appropriate documents which deal effectively with most aspects of the work of the department. In all his work, he is very well supported by his colleagues, particularly by his senior line manager. They provide very good role models for a department committed to high standards.

157. Since the previous report, standards in business education have continued to be well above average. There has been particularly good improvement in incorporating lessons into the full school day timetable.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Provision in personal social and health education and citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Personal social and health education is well planned across the school.
- Teaching in both personal social and health education and citizenship is good overall.
- There are good opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and contribute to the work of the school.
- Pupils' very positive attitudes contribute effectively to their understanding of citizenship.

Commentary

158. Overall achievement is good. In Years 7 to 9, where citizenship is taught as part of the personal, social and health education course (PSHE), pupils' achievement is good. Pupils also achieve well in Years 10 and 11. This is because teaching is good so that pupils learn well in most lessons. However, other aspects of school life, such as the school council, contribute strongly to pupils' achievements in citizenship: this is one of the main reasons why provision is good overall.

159. In Years 7 to 9 pupils are taught citizenship as a topic within the personal, social and health education programme. In Year 7, three PSHE lessons were seen, each of which was part of a unit of work on citizenship. This evidence shows that pupils make good progress in developing an understanding of what it means to be a citizen and the responsibilities of good citizens in the community. They are particularly good at discussing ideas and at respecting different views. In other PSHE lessons, and in tutorials at the start of the day, pupils' achievement is broadly good. In Year 8, for example, pupils were looking at drugs and alcohol awareness and in Year 9 at what makes a good role model. Pupils make progress in their understanding and are able to express their ideas and views clearly.

160. In Year 10, where some opt to take a GCSE course in citizenship, pupils have a good understanding of the main concepts of citizenship. In one lesson in Year 10 pupils gained a good understanding of the concept of globalisation and the link between profit and low wage economies. In PSHE in Year 11, pupils have a good understanding of what it was like to be a refugee. In one lesson, pupils' knowledge of the work of charities was particularly good. One of the features of pupils' achievements is that they are often very articulate and contribute maturely to discussions.

161. What really stands out is the learning that takes place outside of lessons. There are many opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for others and for running the school. These range from acting as prefects in Year 11, the work of the school council, reading mentors, older pupils acting as buddies for those new to the school to guiding new parents around the school. The council has, for example, been effective in improving aspects of the school. Other parts of school life that contribute to pupils' awareness of citizenship are the current affairs, geography and language weeks.

162. Broadly, teaching and learning are good. One of the strong features of teaching is the opportunity for pupils to work in groups and discuss and debate important issues. In Year 10, for example, the teaching enabled pupils to develop their arguments and express their own views. In the best lessons, skilled teaching motivated pupils and captured their interest. Good presentations, using the electronic whiteboards and good subject knowledge all contributed effectively to pupils' learning. Not all teaching is as good. Sometimes, there are not enough different activities to keep all pupils engaged in their work for the full lesson and they lose interest towards the end.

163. Overall the subject is led and managed well. There is a well-planned PSHE and citizenship programme. Good teamwork helps to ensure that staff have the confidence and teaching materials needed to teach the subject effectively. Priorities for development are understood, particularly the need to develop firmer links with a wider range of subjects. Progress since the last inspection is good.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 15 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 2004 by Year 13 and Year 14 students. It does not show the results of Year 12 students.

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
English Literature	4	75.0	85.3	25.0	16.1	25.0	29.0
Drama	2	100.0	86.6	0.0	19.8	35.0	30.9
French	2	50.0	79.8	0.0	19.4	15.0	28.2
German	2	50.0	81.6	50.0	18.8	25.0	28.8
Mathematics	21	52.4	59.9	19.0	14.1	19.5	20.5
Biology	16	56.3	63.5	6.3	10.4	19.4	19.8
Chemistry	15	80.0	70.3	20.0	13.2	28.7	23.0
Information and communication technology	16	25.0	66.6	0.0	8.8	6.3	20.6
History	9	77.8	82.2	11.1	20.8	24.4	29.2
Religious education	3	100.0	82.2	33.3	26.1	40.0	31.2
Design and technology	11	45.5	72.6	0.0	13.9	13.6	24.3
Art and design	13	92.3	78.3	61.5	21.6	44.6	28.5
Business education	15	73.3	75.3	6.7	15.4	21.3	25.7

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
English Literature	38	100.0	99.4	36.8	44.9	81.6	85.5
Drama	23	100.0	99.6	60.9	42.8	99.1	85.1
French	3	100.0	99.0	66.7	53.1	93.3	88.9
German	3	100.0	98.6	66.7	49.6	86.7	86.3
Mathematics	29	93.1	96.8	44.8	56.6	80.0	89.5
Biology	24	100.0	96.6	50.0	40.0	86.7	79.3
Chemistry	11	100.0	97.7	36.4	50.0	90.9	85.7
Information and communication technology	15	100.0	96.3	20.0	25.7	68.0	71.1
History	25	96.0	99.0	56.0	45.6	88.8	85.1
Religious education	10	100.0	99.1	40.0	49.5	74.0	87.4
Design and technology	5	100.0	97.8	20.0	35.0	72.0	77.9
Art and design	15	100.0	98.3	73.3	50.2	102.7	87.1
Business education	22	100.0	98.9	0.0	39.4	57.3	81.8

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was English literature. The school also offers a popular combined A-level course in English language and literature, in which 2003 results were above the national average, both for male and female students; results improved further in 2004, showing that students on this course are achieving very well. Two lessons were seen in which the teaching and learning were very good. The course proves a suitable alternative to English literature, particularly for male students who feel intimidated by longer literary texts. There are currently 88 students taking this course across the sixth form.

English literature

Provision in English literature is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results were above the national average in 2003, although slightly down in 2004.
- Standards are currently average but achievement is good overall.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Leadership and management are good.

Commentary

164. The department has a reasonably open policy towards students choosing the subject at A-level, and attainment levels at the start of Year 12 vary considerably but are below average overall. Many students begin the course with C grades at GCSE. This is turned into at least average by the time students leave Year 13. Achievement is therefore good. Results in 2003 at A-level were above the national average: all students passed the examination, with 42 percent achieving grades A or B. Boys and girls achieved better overall than is found on average across the country. The 2004 results, with a significantly larger entry, were not quite as good, although about a third of the candidates reached at least grade B. The current Year 13 reflect a range of abilities, but most performed well in their AS modules last year. These successes have added to the popularity of the subject, so that there are now 134 students on A-level English literature courses across Years 12 and 13.

165. Students benefit from good, often very good, teaching. Each class is split between two teachers, allowing most of the English staff to teach at this level. The teachers represent a good range of experience and all are well qualified and knowledgeable. Relationships are very good and teachers engage their students very well. Lessons are very well planned; the best are very imaginative, such as the Year 13 lesson on *A Passage to India* that involved teacher and students in role as they investigated the reasons for rioting at Chandrapore. Potential lawyers were able to exercise their skills of oratory, and students from various ethnic backgrounds showed themselves capable of empathising with people of other races as they argued for and against the behaviour of the British Raj. In the better lessons, students are allowed to take more responsibility for their own learning, and more able students are put in groups with those who can benefit from their support. The minority of male students are well integrated in the classes. Some of the students, however, boys and girls, are a little diffident and their achievement is hindered because they are not yet all good independent learners. Some teachers at least expect their students to use ICT in class presentations, and the increasing use of new technology has the potential to enhance future learning.

166. The head of English exercises good leadership and management of the subject, not only in the deployment of staff, but also in monitoring student learning through a rigorous assessment system. The provision for English literature continues to be good. The intake on the A-level courses has changed in recent years, and the numbers choosing the courses have increased. The department is adjusting well to this challenge and the subject's popularity with students is justified.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

167. Most students in the sixth form have language skills that are adequate for them to access their chosen courses of study. However, there are a few students, including those joining from other schools, many of the male students and those for whom English is an additional language, who face problems, particularly in business and science subjects. The school has some strategies for supporting these students – it offers courses for the retaking of English GCSE, for example, and new sixth formers have a brief induction course – but there are currently no key skills courses, and the needs of a minority of sixth formers are thus not being fully addressed.

Modern foreign languages

French and German were the focus for the inspection but one lesson of **Spanish** was sampled. In this lesson, very good teaching and the excellent response and attitudes of the students led to very good learning which contributed to above average standards.

Provision in French and German is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Students are keen to learn and achieve well.
- Results at AS and A-level have been variable, but achievement is consistently good and students are helped to reach their potential.

Commentary

168. In Year 13, standards are above average. This is in line with performance in past years, though comparisons are difficult because numbers vary considerably from year to year. The number of students taking the A-level examination in 2004 was small so comparisons with the national picture are not possible. Students are able to express opinions about controversial topics and justify their reasons. Some higher achieving students can also construct counter-arguments and, in doing so, use a wide range of vocabulary and structures. Most written coursework in its final draft form is of high quality. At AS level in Year 12, standards are broadly similar to those found nationally, with some students performing very well. Students can sustain a discussion for a reasonable time and are able to self-correct when prompted by teachers. Most speak with confidence and respond well to high levels of challenge.

169. Achievement is good overall: sometimes achievement is very good. There is no significant difference in the progress made by boys and girls, some of whom begin their advanced level studies with only modest grades at GCSE. Students are mature, attentive, very well motivated to learn and take part enthusiastically in lessons. They respond very well to the stimulating discussion scenarios created by teachers and many are prepared to take risks when using the language. In an excellent Year 12 French lesson, students were challenged to respond in role to “accusations” of being responsible for a fatal fire. They found the language level demanding but very stimulating.

170. The quality of teaching is very good and some has features of excellence. All language teachers have expert knowledge of their subject and are multi-lingual. They have very high expectations of students and use simple but very effective teaching techniques, for example, in a very good Year 13 French lesson in which students were asked to recount what others had said using an appropriate past tense. Teachers make very good use of quality resources, including foreign language assistants, which helps bring the lessons to life. In a very good Year 12 lesson, large prints of famous paintings were used to represent an art gallery which students used to discuss in German the relative merits of different art genres.

171. Languages are very well led and managed by an able linguist who also directs the work of the language college. Teaching has improved since the previous inspection and ICT is now used much more widely as part of language learning. Assessment is a strong feature and marking of

written work often includes key areas to revise and improve. Some students study two languages in the sixth form and there are indications that numbers overall are increasing. The prospects for continued development are good.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teachers are experienced subject specialists who encourage the students and deliver difficult concepts clearly and with accuracy.
- The students work hard in lessons and take a pride in the presentation of their work.
- The students are quiet in lessons but learn very well when they discuss their mathematics and share ideas.

Commentary

172. Students have the opportunity to study modules covering pure mathematics, applied mathematics and statistics. They take examinations in either pure and applied mathematics, or pure and statistics. Results in the 2003 A-level examinations were in line with the national average. Thirty-two students sat the examination with 15 of them achieving the higher grades of A or B.

173. Students start the course with a wide range of abilities, many joining with standards which are below average. In response to supportive teaching the students work hard and with accuracy. They achieve well. Standards seen during the inspection were in line with national averages. Work seen shows that the students take a genuine interest in the subject and a pride in the presentation of their work.

174. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers are knowledgeable and this allows them to deliver complex ideas with clarity. They build well on prior learning, systematically developing topics until reaching the level required for the examination. For instance in one lesson the teacher got the students to consider the forces acting on a car driving along a flat road before forming a comparison with one ascending a hill. The teachers' enthusiasm for the subject is recognised by the students who become keen and willing learners. Lessons are well planned and organised. Students are quiet in lessons. They answer questions when they are directed towards them and are happy to discuss their work on an individual basis. When students do engage in group discussion the learning is very good. A good example was seen in a Year 12 lesson during which students investigated the differences between qualitative and quantitative information. By the end of the lesson they were able to successfully categorise data and determine whether it was continuous or discrete.

175. Leadership and management are very good. Syllabuses have been reviewed to maximise attainment and pupil performance analysed to monitor the effectiveness of the changes. Lessons, rooms and equipment are well organised including the availability of interactive whiteboards to enhance learning. There is a strong sense of teamwork among the teachers. This has resulted in a corporate approach and consistently high expectations with respect to both work and behaviour.

Mathematics across the curriculum

176. The provision for mathematics across the curriculum is satisfactory. Students in Years 12 and 13 say that their mathematical knowledge is sufficient for them to cope in other areas of study. In ICT they confidently use formulas when compiling spreadsheets and apply appropriate validation tests. In science they perform most tasks well but need more practice in the use of trigonometric functions.

SCIENCE

Biology

Provision in biology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are very good
- Very good teaching means that students have positive attitudes to their work.
- Leadership and management are very effective.

Commentary

177. AS level examination results for Year 12 have been consistently above average for the last three years and students achieve well compared to similar schools and their prior attainment. In 2004 more than a third of the students attained an A or a B grade. This is an improvement on 2003. A-level results for 2004 are well above average and students' performance has steadily improved over the last three years. In both 2003 and 2004 half of the students attained A or B grades and they do well in biology when compared to most other subjects.

178. The achievement of Year 12 students is good and that of the Year 13 students is very good. This is because students commence the course with a range of grades at GCSE and make good progress in Year 12 and even better progress in Year 13. Students are beginning to understand the complexity of the transmission of a nerve impulse and they are confident in naming and understanding the processes of the human digestive system. Over the last three years there has been little difference in the achievements boys and girls students.

179. Teaching and learning are very good. Lessons are well organised and the bright new accommodation makes a significant contribution to learning. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of biology and make good use of resources to help explain ideas. However, the use of information and communication technology to help students understand some of the more difficult concepts tends to be limited. At the end of each lesson there is a useful summary by the teacher and a check on students' understanding. On some occasions lessons are not structured as well as they might be: this can mean that when more difficult concepts are being taught, students find it difficult to concentrate. Students show willingness to answer questions even though they sometimes get them wrong and the feedback they get from teachers helps them to understand. Comments by teachers in students' books are supportive and provide very good advice on how to improve.

180. The good teaching and learning result from work in biology being very well led and managed and very good progress has been made since the last inspection. There is a clear vision, courses are well planned and organised and there is monitoring of teaching which is helping to further improve standards. Staff are well qualified and there are enough of them to meet the needs of post-16 biology. The staff work well together and have a strong commitment to improving standards.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in public examinations are above average and students' achievements are good overall.
- The quality of teaching and students' learning is good with many aspects which are very good.
- The subject is very well managed.

- Students' literacy and numeracy skills do not always support the development of their scientific skills.
- The numbers opting for chemistry post-16 has increased significantly in contrast to a decline nationally.

181. When they enter the course in Year 12, standards are broadly average. In AS and A-level examinations students attain standards which are better than the national average. Set against their attainment when they start in Year 12, students' achievements are good: for those whose mother tongue is not English, achievement is very good. A significant minority of students come from other schools and many do not have the same learning ethos of the Coombe students and take time to settle. The impact of this means that students' achievements in Year 12 are not as good as in Year 13 when they have become much more settled. There are wide variations in students' basic literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills: for many students these skills are relatively weak and do not always support the development of their scientific skills. Teachers are mostly successful in helping students to develop their literacy and numeracy skills but the weaknesses for some students adversely affect their overall achievement.

182. The quality of teaching in chemistry is good overall. Features of the teaching which have the greatest impact on students' learning are the enthusiasm and drive of the teachers. This is linked with their very good subject knowledge this means that students are continually challenged and consequently give of their best at all times. All teachers know the students well and they use assessment on a day-to-day basis and through end of module tests very well. This ensures that students are clear about what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve. Teachers understand the demands and requirements of the examination syllabuses very well. They use this understanding effectively to prepare their students for both practical and theory papers. Teachers give freely of their time to help students with weaker basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT and often the achievements of these students are very good even though the grades they attain in GCE examinations do not always match their aspirations.

183. The leadership and management of the chemistry department are very good. Very comprehensive schemes of work have been developed and achievement information is used very well to help students understand what they need to do to improve. The laboratory accommodation is good and resources are well organised and used effectively to develop learning. Since the last inspection the provision has improved significantly. The success rate is above the national average, teaching and learning have improved and all students achieve well. A significant indicator of the effectiveness of the provision in chemistry is that the post-16 programme is oversubscribed even though there are two groups in Year 12. This substantial increase in the number of students studying the subject post-16 is in contrast to the decline nationally.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good as a result of the good teaching and organisation that enables students to make significant gains in their knowledge and understanding.
- The very good management and leadership make a strong contribution to learning.

Commentary

184. The 2004 AS level results for students in Year 12 and the A-level results for students in Year 13 are both average when compared to similar schools. Results for Year 12 students were well below average in 2003 but were average two years previously. For Year 13 there has been a steady improvement from being well below average two years ago. Girls in particular do not do as well in information and communication technology as in most other subjects.

185. The prior attainment of students taking this subject is relatively low and some male students also have English as an additional language. However, the examination outcomes show that achievement is good. This is because the teachers respond well to the needs of the students. In one lesson students showed that they had a good grasp of issues associated with information systems malpractices and crimes. There are good opportunities for developing numeracy skills. Students' positive attitudes to their work and application contribute well to their achievement.

186. Teaching and learning are good with some very good features. The lessons are very well prepared and teachers mostly have very good knowledge of the subject and the examination requirements. This enables them to present lessons in a way that best facilitates learning. The accommodation, resources and support from technicians are good but as a result of system problems there are too many breakdowns. Both oral and written feedback from teachers are very good and students are clear about what they need to do to improve.

187. The management and leadership of the department are very good. There is useful documentation that ensures good organisation and planning and there is sufficient time for the subject. The detailed analysis of examination results contributes to the students' good achievement. Regular minuted meetings of the department, the monitoring of teaching and staff training all contribute well to student outcomes.

Information and communications technology across the curriculum

188. Overall this is satisfactory. The use of interactive whiteboards by teachers to improve learning in many subjects is at an early stage. Opportunities for students to enhance their learning through the use of ICT are very good in history, mathematics and media studies but are underdeveloped in other subjects. Work produced by a significant number of students demonstrates a lower skill level than would be expected. Access to computers outside lesson times is satisfactory.

HUMANITIES

189. History was inspected in detail but sociology, religious education, politics and psychology were also sampled. In **sociology** teaching was very good in the sample lessons seen. As a result, achievement was very good and students progressed very well. Attainment was above average. A key feature of this success was the measure of students' independent learning encouraged by the teacher. Having researched thoroughly, they either reported back in depth to the class as a whole, or taught others in their group what they had learned. Excellent, mature relationships and attitudes in both Year 12 and Year 13 that students make very good progress.

190. The quality of teaching and learning in **religious education** are very good, leading to very good achievement and progress. There is a very well constructed mix of teacher led material followed by independent thought, discussion and reports from students. They show a good grasp of the philosophical arguments for the existence of God and their written work is of a good standard. Overall standards are average. Teachers mark to examination standards so that students always know where they stand in relation to progress and attainment.

191. One lesson was sampled in **politics**, in which teaching and learning were very good and in which students demonstrated a clear understanding of effective examination technique. Standards were above average and students engaged very well with the subject-matter and spoke highly of their teacher's knowledge.

192. Two **psychology** lessons were sampled. In the Year 12 lesson, teaching and learning were good and students made quite perceptive comments on the factors which influence intelligence. Lesson preparation was excellent and the teacher's subject knowledge was very secure. In Year 13, teaching and learning were very good and students developed a good understanding of mental health issues and of various illnesses which could be called upon to

interpret definitions of abnormality. Students enjoyed both lessons and had a high regard for the support of their teachers.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are well above average and students achieve very well.
- Teaching is very good and students are challenged to think for themselves.
- Leadership and management are very good and teachers produce learning resources of high quality.
- The subject is popular and students speak highly of the encouragement of their teachers.

Commentary

193. A large number of students are entered for the examinations and A-level results have been well above average for the past two years. Standards in lessons mirror this performance. Students are articulate, have a very secure background in the topics under consideration and defend their views with relevant evidence. In Year 12, for example, they make perceptive comments on the work of Stolypin in their work on Russia under the Dumas and discuss aspects of Roosevelt's second term with conviction. Furthermore, Year 13 PowerPoint presentations on the Vietnam War would not be out of place in an undergraduate seminar and demonstrate a profound understanding of the problems which faced US forces in the region.

194. Students achieve well in both years and make very good progress in their evaluation of a wide range of evidence available to them. They are becoming more aware of orthodox and revisionist historical writing, for example, on de-Stalinisation and handle complex sources with skill. Moreover, students who find some of the work difficult now have more confidence in their ability and are beginning to expand on their views very effectively.

195. Teachers have expert knowledge of their subjects and their relentless yet realistic questioning requires their students to think profoundly about the subject matter. Students enjoy history and opt for advanced study in increasing numbers. Independent research and collaborative learning are key features in lessons and students thrive on using their peers as a further resource. There are many opportunities for students to learn in their preferred styles and they make very positive comments of the support they receive from their teachers. Teaching and learning are, therefore, very good.

196. The department is led and managed very well. Teamwork is of the essence and teachers work hard to produce materials which motivate and challenge their students and which reinforce examination technique.

197. The department has made very good progress since the last inspection. Standards are significantly higher, achievement and progress are more marked and teaching is better. The department is very well placed for continued success.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

The quality of provision in design and technology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students make very good progress and their achievement is very good.
- The quality of work in lessons is of a high standard.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- The department is very well led and managed.

198. Standards are high. Students make very good progress and their achievement is very good. The A-level results for 2003 were well above average but those for 2004 are not as good. However, the numbers are very small and this makes comparisons between one year and another unreliable.

199. The quality of work of the current students is of a very high standard. Students are achieving very well in relation to predictions based on GCSE results. They do very well as a result of very effective teaching which demanded much of them. Students' recall knowledge well and apply it in a range of contexts; their project work is of a very good standard and shows the same confidence as their class work.

200. Teaching is very good and students learn very well as a result. The principal features of the very good teaching are clear objectives, sharp planning, a brisk pace and a range of teaching strategies to bring about learning. The teachers have very good subject knowledge and used this very well in discussion, questioning and demonstration of the tasks set. There are good opportunities for students to practise what had been discussed and to develop their skills and techniques: as a result these improve well over time.

201. Students learn very well. They are attentive, work productively and respond very well to the very supportive teaching and different learning styles they experience. They rise to the challenge of designing products for a specific purpose. Time is used well and this is one of the reasons why lessons are brisk. Students support and help each other effectively and, in groups, talk and listen to each other in a mature way as part of their learning. Students are always confident when offering ideas in more open discussion and this was seen in the lesson where pupils were evaluating their designs and modelling prototypes prior to manufacture.

202. The very good teaching and learning result from work in the department being very well led and managed. There is a commitment to building on what has already been achieved and to improving standards. Planning effectively reflected the course requirement and determined the level for very good teaching. Recording of progress and target setting based on careful analysis of student performance through review, evaluation and assessment is very well established.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

203. The focus of the inspection was art and design, drama and media studies but music was also sampled. **In music** achievement in Years 12 and 13 is good. The school provides numerous opportunities for participation in extra-curricular activities and these are taken up by many students. Teaching and learning are consistently very good. Teachers who share sixth form classes work very closely with each other to ensure consistency in coverage. Students are highly motivated and are developing well as independent learners. They show a strong commitment to the course and the musical life of the school.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students make very good progress from the start of Year 12 to the end of Year 13.
- Teachers are very well informed and provide very good support for students.
- The acting head of department has created a highly stimulating learning environment.
- Students work in well-lit, spacious studios, which has a positive impact on their artwork.
- At present students have limited opportunity for developing ideas through ICT.

204. In the AS level examination in 2003, the number of students to achieve the highest grades was well above the national average, with 34 per cent achieving the highest grade A. In 2004, there was further improvement in the number of students achieving grade A and performance is higher. Again results were well above the national average. This year, for the first time, photography was offered to AS and A-level students. Sixty-six percent achieved grades A or B and all 12 candidates achieved grades A to C. In the A-level examination in 2003, the number of students to achieve grades A or B was above the national average. Attainment by girls was well above that of boys. In 2004, there was significant improvement in the number of students to achieve grades A to B, which was well above the national average. Once again, attainment by girls was well above that of boys in the school. Achievement from the start of Year 12 to the end of Year 13 is very good.

205. Students in Year 12 make very good progress. They are very keen to develop those skills that enable them to communicate their concepts and ideas more effectively. The work in their visual diaries shows that they have improved their research skills and have built up a substantial collection of images derived from the work of artists such as Henri Matisse and Egon Schiele. Students in Year 13 make very good progress and display the capacity for exploring highly personal concepts, ideas, attitudes and beliefs through their art work. There is ample evidence in the visual diaries of improvement in their ability to carry out independent research into the work of artists such as Georgia O' Keefe and Kandinsky. A significant minority are beginning to make excellent use of photographic references as rich source material for development.

206. Teaching is very good with some excellent features. Teachers make very effective use of questioning to discover the depth of students' knowledge and understanding which leads to very good exchanges when students are required to rationalise their opinions and views. Teachers are very well informed and familiar with the AS and A level examination specifications. Consequently, they are able to provide very good advice and support for their students. Teachers have very high expectations and expect students to carry out independent research, to develop ideas and to resolve problems. They are expected to analyse and evaluate their own work, and that of artists and designers from other cultures and other times. Teachers set challenging tasks for students which results in the high standard of work on display around the school.

207. Leadership is excellent and management very good. The acting head of department has a very clear view of how he would like to see the department develop. Photography has already been introduced into the curriculum as a means of extending the range of activities on offer, to broaden the boundaries beyond drawing, painting and craftwork. Informal assessment during lessons is of a very high standard, but more formal written records lack rigour.

208. Accommodation is very good. Students are taught in four spacious and well-lit studios that enable them to produce large, ambitious paintings and 3D constructions. They have also access to a darkroom and a kiln room. Resources are very good, within a traditional model of the curriculum, but students do not have ready access to computers, digital cameras, scanners and printers within the art studios. Improvement since the last inspection is very good. Student numbers have grown and the art and design curriculum has been extended to incorporate photography as an option for Year 12 and 13 students. Progress since the last inspection is very good.

Drama

Overall provision in drama is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- The department is exceptionally well staffed.
- The standards are well above average.

Commentary

209. Examination results for drama in 2004 at AS and A-levels are both well above average for the subject and represent an improvement on last year's results which were almost as good. Standards of work seen during the inspection are well above average because the department successfully builds on and improves the very good attainment seen in the examination results reached at GCSE. Achievement overall is very good.

210. Inspection evidence broadly confirms the examination results. By Year 13 students can use specialist vocabulary confidently and sustain high quality discussion about challenging dramatic texts. They display a developing knowledge of the role of director and a growing awareness of a range of theatrical traditions, styles and forms. They can perform convincingly, with confidence, and work effectively and responsibly as members of groups. Written work shows good prior knowledge and the ability of the students to write with engagement and a growing confidence about challenging dramatic texts.

211. Teaching and learning are very good with excellent features. Teachers have built up excellent subject expertise and present their students with exceptionally well-planned and challenging tasks and as a result their students learn very well. An evident strength of the teaching lies in the practical application of theoretical knowledge about dramatic texts and theatrical traditions and styles. All students in the lessons observed are encouraged to take risks which serves to heighten the quality of their drama work. The department has established high expectations and students have good relationships both with their teachers and each other, enabling them to progress at a faster rate.

212. Leadership and management are both very good. The head of department encourages her department to work closely as a team and this results in high quality lesson planning and common understandings about student achievement. The department monitors student progress well so teachers can give students pertinent advice about how to improve their work. The department benefits from good organisation and there are clear systems in place for monitoring and evaluating its work including opportunities for lesson observation. The status of the subject is improving with regard to its resources and the new building programme will enhance its status even more.

Media Studies

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Media studies is one of the most popular and successful AS and A-level courses attracting a large number of students each year.
- A-level results were above the national average in 2003 and a similar standard was attained in 2004, though national figures are not yet published.
- Students achieve well: they are highly motivated and enjoy their work.
- Teaching is very good: all lessons are taught by media specialists with impressive subject knowledge and enthusiasm.
- Leadership and management of the subject are excellent.

- Students are not sufficiently independent in their learning: they do not often take the lead in lessons, prepare presentations or initiate discussion.

213. Students starting the course vary in their levels of skill and knowledge. Most have taken GCSE in media studies at the school but students joining the sixth form from other schools do not usually have this background. A few students have low grades in English at GCSE and they do not at first produce written work of a high enough standard. All make good progress and achieve well in response to very good teaching. Overall, girls do very much better than boys, but there was significant improvement in boys' performance at AS level this year.

214. In 2003, A-level grades at A to B were above the national average in contrast to the previous year when there was a sharp drop in attainment. Good standards were maintained in 2004, with A to B grades above the previously recorded figure.

215. Good work was seen during the inspection, indicating that these standards are being maintained and improved. Year 13 students have produced well-planned and crafted pop videos, showing technical competence and some very creative approaches to the assignment. Much of their work is mature and imaginative. In their evaluations they showed understanding of key concepts and terms, and some sound critical judgement. The linked theoretical work on music in pop culture extended students' range and understanding. They commented on the social and cultural contexts with increasing interest, stimulated by lively and expert teaching.

216. Work in Year 12 moves students into new areas with well-chosen material from a variety of sources. In lessons, consideration of media presentations of teenagers provoked some vigorous discussion and in this lesson students showed that they could enjoy the cut and thrust of argument – challenging one another's views in productive interaction. In other lessons students were introduced to editing and other techniques of film making. Clips from cinema classics such as *Battleship Potemkin* and *The Sign of the Cross* introduced not only the techniques but the historical and political factors which have influenced cinema. There was keen concentration as students learned to look at film analytically and to assess qualities and effects using accurate terminology.

217. Teachers' assessments and good formative comments help them to improve, and the data indicate that they make significant progress in Year 12. In their learning generally, students do not yet show enough initiative and independence. They are happy to listen and respond to good teaching but they seldom take a lead and were not seen making presentations or introducing a topic to the whole class themselves.

218. The team work of the three members of the department who share the sixth form teaching is a considerable asset. All are specialist teachers who bring experience in the media outside school to their work. They share ideas, materials and enthusiasms. Their teaching was consistently very good and there were excellent features in all the lessons observed. Work was always very carefully planned and made excellent use of a range of resources including film, television and radio, music, video and the press. Teachers' knowledge of both media and examination requirements is extensive and is appropriately shared with students, who understand what they are learning, why, and how they can develop and improve their knowledge and skills. Enjoyment shown by teachers and students was a mark of all the work seen in media studies. Students say that they find the work challenging and exciting and they appreciate the knowledge and also the accessibility of their teachers. Many intend to go on to media studies courses at university and all agree that the work they are doing is important to their understanding of the world they live in.

219. The leadership and management of the subject are excellent. There is an informative subject handbook and departmental record. Careful analyses of A and AS results will soon include ethnicity factors. A detailed development plan has ideas for extending media education, already a successful GCSE option, into Years 7 to 9. The department has also expanded its AS offer, with a Film Studies course taught after school. In partnership with colleges, it now provides training opportunities in media studies for trainee teachers.

220. Improvement since the last inspection, when media studies was not a separate department, has been very good. The subject now plays an important part in the work of the sixth form and of the school as a whole and it contributes significantly to students' social and cultural development.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

221. The focus of the inspection was leisure and recreation but **physical education** was also sampled. Here, teaching of A-level and AS-level courses is very good. This is supported by excellent subject knowledge, good planning and motivating activities which engage students well. The classroom designated for use by physical education teachers is used well: display materials are good and there is sufficient space for group work and discussion. As a result of the strong teaching, progress is very good. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

Leisure and recreation

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students make good progress from below average starting points to achieve well.
- Students' literacy skills when they start the course are not as well developed as expected and as a result standards are average overall.
- Teaching is good: teachers meet students' needs effectively.
- The course provides a good range of experiences and opportunities and the coursework element promotes learning well.

Commentary

222. From a relatively low starting point students make good progress and achieve well. By the end of Year 13 standards are broadly average with most students gaining a reasonable examination grade. Given the school's high GCSE results a lower proportion than might be expected gain the highest grades. However, many of those who choose to take the course have achieved modest GCSE results and some students transfer from other schools with below average literacy and numeracy skills. Thus, students achieve well to reach average results in the examination.

223. This good achievement is confirmed by the work seen during the inspection. Year 12 students have made a good start to their course and their work shows they are achieving reasonably well. Year 13 students are doing better: their portfolios are well presented and thorough. What really makes the difference, and adds to students' achievements, is the opportunity to carry out coursework. This suits their particular learning needs well and as a result they develop a sound understanding of the fundamental concepts of leisure and recreation. Most are able to manage their learning independently but some, particularly boys, need quite a lot of support.

224. Teaching and learning are good mainly because of thorough lesson planning, good subject knowledge and teachers' enthusiasm for the subject. What makes lesson planning good is the attention to detail: teachers are good at identifying clear objectives and this means that students know what is expected. Relationships are particularly good: these contribute effectively to learning because they help to motivate students and get them involved in their work. Mostly, students have good attitudes to their work but occasionally boys' tendency to dominate discussions tests the skills of teachers. Teachers' good subject knowledge means that they are able to work in school with the real world.

225. Assessment is thorough. Teachers have a good understanding of each student's capability and potential and track their progress well. As a result they give students good advice about how to improve. Marking is clear and helpful.

226. The subject is led and managed well. The course is new so comparisons with the provision at the time of the last inspection are difficult. However, the introduction of this vocational A-level is an improvement in the opportunities for work related learning provided for sixth form students in the past. On the other hand there is also a slight weakness here: for a few students, a vocational A-level is a little too difficult mainly because of their lack of secure literacy skills. Nevertheless, the overall picture is positive and good leadership and management is leading to improved teaching and better results.

BUSINESS

Provision in business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards attained in Year 13 are in line with those obtained by similar students in similar schools.
- Good teaching is given by a dedicated team.
- Achievement from year 12 to year 13 is good.
- Leadership and management of the subject are good.
- A lack of wider and in-depth reading around the subject impacts on students' performance in both class work and examinations.
- Literacy is a general weakness across both years but particularly in Year 12. This has a negative effect on standards.
- Some Year 12 students have not yet embraced the mature learning ethos which underpins academic success.

Commentary

227. Results at A Level are below national averages. The standards reached by current students, as seen in lessons and in their written work, are in line with those seen in similar schools. Students' projects and written work are interesting, well produced and are professionally presented. Higher attaining students effectively evaluate evidence; make reasoned judgements and present appropriate and well-supported conclusions. Lower attaining students demonstrate clear understanding of key business concepts but are not confident with the analysis, interpretation and evaluation of data, and these still remain relative weaknesses.

228. Results at AS Level were well below national standards in 2003. Standards at AS Level in classes seen and in a scrutiny of students' work are below national norms. Higher attaining students apply relevant theory and show a good grasp of business concepts. However, they do not always develop an explanation into a fully substantiated view. Lower attaining students often make assertions which are unsupported and they present evidence which is not always evaluated.

229. Given the levels of prior attainment at entry to the sixth form achievement across the two years is good. It is particularly good in Year 13, where the learning ethos of the school has had time to impact on students, especially those who came to the school for the first time in Year 12. Students' overall progress is hindered by the lack of wider and in-depth reading around the subject.

230. In Year 12, students' progress is satisfactory. Too many students, particularly, but not exclusively, boys, have failed to embrace the mature learning ethos which would underpin their academic success. Whilst they attend class and participate in lessons when directed, they have not mastered the art of independent learning. This, together with their weak literacy skills, militates against their attaining their full potential.

231. Teaching is good. Teachers have good rapport with students and teachers' expert subject knowledge underpins discussion and lends clarity to the explanations provided. Lessons are carefully planned, and effective use is made of case studies and other activities to allow students to apply and extend their learning. Students are very well supported academically. Teachers often

endeavour to ensure that students have enough practice in the kinds of analysis that will enable them to become more independent learners. Some lessons tend to be too teacher-led giving limited opportunities for students to learn independently.

232. Learning reflects teaching. Students respond well in lessons. Higher attaining students maintain intellectual rigour. Their attitudes are mature and they sustain interest. However, some students are happy to be passive recipients rather than active participants in their own learning.

233. Resources are good. The students use computers effectively to undertake research and to prepare reports for coursework. Generally, however, access to them in school is limited. Accommodation is good in terms of size of rooms but inadequate in terms of number and in the nature of appropriate specialist accommodation.

234. Leadership and management are good. Results are checked and analysed carefully to identify areas of courses in which learning can be improved and used to set clear targets for action. There is a clear vision for the future of the department which sensibly encompasses plans to strengthen, even more, the current strong academic and the vocational aspects of the department's provision to meet the wide and differing needs and aspirations of future cohorts of students. In all of this, the teacher in charge is well supported by his colleagues, particularly his senior colleagues in the school. They form a team which is dedicated and committed to raising standards.

235. Business education in the sixth form has had periods of decline since the previous report. However, very recently, the school has established a regime which has already had success in some areas, such as the re-writing of schemes of work and policies for all the major activities of the department. This augurs well for the future development of the subject.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

236. Work was sampled in personal and social education and three lessons were seen, two in Year 12 and one in Year 13. The programme is good and includes work on financial literacy and the role of financial services, ethics and in Year 12 religious education. In the lessons seen teaching was good: lessons were well-planned and prepared and teachers had a good command of the topics being considered. As a result, students made good progress with their learning, developing and extending their understanding well. The very good relationships and the enthusiasm of teachers helped to motivate students and engage them in the work. One of the characteristics of the lessons was that students found the work relevant: they appreciated the opportunities to look at topics such as buying a car.

237. However, as with the main school, the programme is very effectively extended by the wide range of opportunities for students to play a part in the life of the school. The head girl and head boy, for example play a central role in helping to run the school as do the deputy head girl and deputy head boys and other school officials. What is also very effective is the way the head girl and head boy are elected to their positions. The process helps them to gain a good understanding of how democracy works in a very practical way and about government and being a responsible citizen. Again, as in the main school, opportunities for students run the school council, act as reading mentors or buddies to younger pupils all add significantly to students' personal development.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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