

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **FAIRFAX SCHOOL**

Sutton Coldfield

LEA area: Birmingham

Unique reference number: 103557

Headteacher: Richard Metcalfe

Lead inspector: R Peter J McGregor

Dates of inspection: 15<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> November 2004

Inspection number: 268803

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

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## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1382
School address:	Fairfax Road Sutton Coldfield West Midlands
Postcode:	B75 7JT
Telephone number:	0121 378 1288
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Audrey Higginson
Date of previous inspection:	February 1999

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

Fairfax is a mixed comprehensive school for students aged 11 to 18, with specialist school status for business and enterprise, gained in September 2004. It also has Sportsmark and Artsmark awards, and Investors in People status. It is larger than most secondary schools, with 1382 students, including 261 in the sixth form. The sixth form is shared with another, very near 11-18 comprehensive school. Teachers from both schools teach the students from both schools in several subjects. Students of a wide range of ability attend the school, including some of the very highest ability and others who find learning difficult. Overall standards are average at the start of Year 7, although there are lower proportions of the highest and lowest attaining students compared with a normal comprehensive school entry. The school has no pupils at an early stage of acquiring English. About one in every twelve students, a below average proportion, has special educational needs, mainly physical disability (the school has a unit for physically impaired pupils), dyslexia, moderate learning, and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties; a few students have speech or hearing impairments or autism. The school has 24 Statemented pupils, a below average number considering the size of the school. About one in every thirteen students is entitled to a free school meal, a below average proportion. Almost all students come from the area immediately surrounding the school, which is socially mixed but advantaged overall. Parents did not provide information for the school to enable it to indicate accurately the proportions of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. The community is making increased use of school facilities, particularly the sports facilities including the swimming pool. The business and enterprise centre under construction has planned community use. Very few pupils enter or leave the school other than at the usual ages of transfer.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
3525	R Peter J McGregor	Lead inspector	
9708	Sylvia Daintrey	Lay inspector	
28199	Peter Lawley	Team inspector	6 <sup>th</sup> form sociology; 6 <sup>th</sup> form psychology; English as an additional language
22423	Jon Lovgreen	Team inspector	6 <sup>th</sup> form English
31238	Gordon Clubb	Team inspector	Mathematics; 6 <sup>th</sup> form mathematics
4922	Mike Driver	Team inspector	Science; 6 <sup>th</sup> form biology
18072	Joan Stephens	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT); 6 <sup>th</sup> form ICT
32329	Andrew Stafford	Team inspector	Art
33135	Kim Ropek	Team inspector	6 <sup>th</sup> form art
33368	Valerie Greatrex	Team inspector	Design and technology
31192	John Stewart	Team inspector	Physical education; 6 <sup>th</sup> form physical education
10817	George Rayner	Team inspector	Geography; 6 <sup>th</sup> form geography
33242	Stephen Wall	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages; 6 <sup>th</sup> form French
23307	Neil McDonough	Team inspector	History
31372	Bob Hardwick	Team inspector	Religious education
32887	Ros Goudie	Team inspector	English; Special educational needs
32208	Derek Aitken	Team inspector	Citizenship
34084	Mary Davis	Team inspector	Music
32231	Adrian Lyons	Team inspector	Business studies; 6 <sup>th</sup> form business studies

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**Fairfax is a good school with a number of very good and excellent features.** The outstanding leadership of the headteacher provides a very strong base for continuing improvement. Students work hard, behave very well and enjoy taking part in the excellent range of extra-curricular activities. Teaching is good overall with significant strengths, particularly in Years 7, 10 and 11. As a result, students achieve well overall and very well at GCSE. The leadership of the senior team is very effective and management is good. Parents are exceptionally pleased with the education provided. The quality of care is very good. Students of all abilities and backgrounds are fully involved in all aspects of school life and feel valued. Fairfax provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are

- Students achieve well above average results at GCSE
- Senior managers, very well supported by governors and all the staff, have established a very good school ethos where the learning and individual efforts of every student are valued
- Teachers have expert subject knowledge and relate very well to the students
- Students' attendance is very good; they are very good learners, polite and considerate, and all but a few strive for the best examination results that they can attain
- Virtually all students are involved in the extensive number and wide range of activities provided; students have gained nearly 600 Duke of Edinburgh Gold awards over the past thirty years
- Not all heads of department are monitoring the work in their areas sufficiently rigorously and senior managers are not as involved in the process as they should be
- Requirements for religious education and citizenship are not fully met in all years

Students' achievements and attendance are better than reported five years ago; their attitudes and behaviour are just as good. Teaching is more effective and assessment information is used much more to plan what is taught. The curriculum is as broad, but a few areas need further improvement. The quality of care remains very good. Partnerships with parents and the community have improved and are now very good. **Overall improvement has been good**, and in several areas very good.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

**Students' achievements are good overall, good in Years 7 to 9 and the sixth form and very good in Years 10 and 11.** In the end of Year 9 national tests in 2003, students' achievements were very good. They attained well above average standards in English and above average in maths and science. In 2004, results were broadly similar. Results at GCSE were well above average in 2003, representing very good achievement, and results were higher in 2004, with 71 per cent of students gaining five or more A\*-C grades. Boys and girls do equally well in examinations. Current standards in Years 7 to 9 are above average, with well above average work in mathematics. Standards are above average in English and most other subjects. They are average in a few, including ICT, and below average only in citizenship. Students' achievements in subjects correspond roughly with these standards judgements, with very good achievement in mathematics and unsatisfactory achievement in citizenship. Overall standards in Years 10 and 11 are above average. Very good achievement was seen in mathematics, art, history, physical education, GCSE religious education and on vocational courses. Achievement is unsatisfactory in citizenship and in general provision for religious education. Students of all abilities and backgrounds do well in main school classes. Students' skills in language,

and in using mathematics and ICT are above average. A-level results in 2003 were broadly average, with some students attaining very highly and others who struggled to pass. 2004 results were a little lower. Current standards in the subjects inspected are a little below average. An increasingly wide range of students stay on to take A levels which has resulted in what appears to be a fall in standards; in practice, students are achieving well for their capability.

**Students' personal qualities, including their personal development, are very good.** Students' attitudes to learning are very good; they value their education. Behaviour and attendance are very good overall. The students' conduct around the school is very good indeed, although a small minority are silly at times in lessons. The promotion of students' social, moral and cultural development is very good and satisfactory for their spiritual development.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The school provides a good quality of education. The overall quality of teaching is good.**

Teaching and learning are good for students aged eleven to fourteen and very good on GCSE courses. Teachers have expert subject knowledge and assess work well; most students are very well motivated and keen to learn. Teaching is very good in several areas. Key weaknesses in a small proportion of teaching result from planning which does not meet the needs of all students being taught and ineffective behaviour management. Teaching is good in the sixth form. Very good relationships between teachers and students lead to high motivation for learning for most students, though the encouragement of independent learning skills is underdeveloped. Some students underachieve because they have negative attitudes to their work or teaching is insufficiently effective. All students are provided with a good, broad and reasonably balanced curriculum. Insufficient time is available for teaching religious education and citizenship. A daily act of collective worship is not provided. Extra-curricular opportunities, including many inter-house sports fixtures and the annual eisteddfod, are excellent and involve all students. The unit for students with physical disabilities is very effective. The school is very well staffed with knowledgeable and successful teachers and support staff. Accommodation is good, including the sixth form's own good facilities. Resources are good overall and the current shortfall in the number of computers is about to be resolved with two suites of machines in the new business and enterprise centre. Arrangements for the care, guidance and support of students are very good. Very strong links with parents and the community make a significant contribution to students' achievements. Links with the partner sixth form provider are not as effective as they could be, but links with primary schools are very good.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are good overall.** The headteacher's understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and vision for future development are exceptionally clear and appropriate. The leadership of senior managers, heads of year and heads of house is very effective. Management is good. Monitoring is very effective for students' performance but not consistent enough for teaching and learning. The recruitment, deployment and training of staff are very efficient. Financial management is very effective, Governors are very supportive and knowledgeable but have not ensured compliance with all statutory requirements; governance overall is good.

## **PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

Parents are extremely satisfied, which comes from seeing their children's achievements and enjoyment. The students are very involved in school life, know that each is valued for their own contribution and feel that their views are listened to. Inspectors agree with these positive views.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

The most important things the school should do to improve are

- Monitor the quality of teaching and learning more effectively and consistently and by so doing further improve students' achievements throughout the school and sixth form
- Encourage more positive attitudes in the small group of students the school has identified

and in the sixth form

- Resolve inconsistencies between Fairfax and the partner sixth form school
- Promote students' independent learning skills and minimise the passive approach of some



and, to meet statutory requirements

- Allow sufficient time for teaching and learning citizenship and religious education in all years
- Provide a daily act of collective worship for all

## THE SIXTH FORM

Students in the sixth form are provided with high quality support and guidance. They work hard, are well taught and take their responsibilities very seriously. Leadership and management are effective. Students of a full range of ability enter the sixth form, but with a higher proportion of lower attainers than normally enter for AS and A-level courses. Students of all abilities achieve well and take full part in what the sixth form has to offer. **The sixth form is good** and cost effective and has improved well since the last inspection. Strengths that stem from the shared provision of sixth form courses with a neighbouring school far outweigh the few issues that need to be resolved.

The main strengths and weaknesses are

- Students' achievements are good in most subjects
- Teachers and support staff know the students very well, monitor their performance very effectively, and provide them with very good pastoral care
- Good teaching results in good learning overall; some teaching does not show high enough expectation of what students can achieve and misses opportunities to promote independent learning skills
- Weaknesses in liaison between Fairfax and the neighbouring school result in some inconsistencies, such as timetabling and systems for monitoring
- Peer mentoring, tasks as prefects and extra-curricular activities provide students with very good opportunities to become involved in the school, and to take significant responsibilities

## 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	<b>Satisfactory in English language and literature combined.</b> Standards are rising because of knowledgeable teaching, though the quality is still too variable. Students work hard and are keen to succeed but show little independence; too few read widely enough. <b>Good in French.</b> Teachers use good subject knowledge well in lessons to promote good listening skills and a needed improvement in students' oral skills. Students enjoy French and participate readily, with increasing confidence.
Mathematics	<b>Good.</b> A high proportion of students pass the examination and teaching is good. However not enough opportunities are provided to develop students' independence when learning.
Science	<b>Satisfactory in biology.</b> An increasing proportion of good teaching is promoting higher achievement. Effective mechanisms are not in place to share good practice across the department to raise the quality of all teaching. <b>Good in psychology.</b> Teaching uses a range of stimulating activities which help students to link theory to everyday experience. Advice given to students on how to improve written work is not detailed enough.
Information and communication technology	<b>Good.</b> Teachers' expert subject and examination knowledge, combined with students' very good attitudes to learning, ensures good achievement. Lower attainers struggle with some aspects of the work.
Humanities	<b>Good in geography.</b> Well-selected and effectively organised activities help students to achieve well. Teachers occasionally do too much for students, reducing their independence. <b>Good in sociology.</b> Teaching uses expert subject knowledge to draw out student understanding, and promote independent thinking. Good achievement follows high teacher expectations. Some opportunities to extend understanding

	through discussion are missed.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	There were no focus subjects in this area.
Visual and performing arts and media	<b>Good in art and design.</b> Teachers have good subject knowledge and students work well independently. Students are very good at critical analysis and work very hard.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	<b>Satisfactory in physical education.</b> Students benefit from committed staff who provide a substantial range of extra-curricular activities. Teaching is good but students' casual attitudes restrict their achievements to sound.
Business	<b>Good in business studies A-level.</b> Experienced specialist staff use their knowledge well to support students' learning. Real-world projects and ICT are not yet used sufficiently.
Health and social care	There were no focus subjects in this area.
General education	There were no focus subjects in this area.

*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'.*

*The quality of teaching and learning and the students' achievements were similarly good, overall, in the sampled sixth form subjects where one lesson was observed in each. The quality ranged between excellent and unsatisfactory. Satisfactory lessons were seen in English literature, religious education, music, drama and chemistry. These lessons had strengths but also weaknesses that restricted achievement. The overall outcome was unsatisfactory in a leisure and recreation lesson, where expectations were too low. Physics, business, leisure and tourism and food technology lessons were good. Law, economics and accounts lessons seen were very good, where students were highly motivated and learnt to work independently. In an excellent history lesson, expert tuition and a focus on examination requirements led to excellent student involvement.*

## **ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

Induction is comprehensive and very successful; students find the move from GCSE to AS courses relatively straightforward, even where work is much more academically demanding. Assessment is regular and helpful with specialist staff support provided when students are identified as having difficulties, socially or academically. Careers advice is very helpful, as is guidance on further and higher education. Students take their responsibilities very seriously and through these activities gain in confidence and maturity.

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

The sixth form is well led and managed. Students benefit from very effective monitoring of their performance. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning do not consistently lead to improvement and so teaching in some subjects is not as effective as it could be. The partnership arrangement results in a very good range of courses being available to the students and helps to provide cost-effective education. Differences between the two schools, in areas such as timetabling, detract from the considerable potential of the shared provision. Governors are very supportive of the shared sixth form and governance is good overall.

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

Students are very positive about the sixth form, particularly the quality of facilities in their building, extra-curricular activities, and the relationships they have with staff. Their attendance record is very good. Those involved with courses split between the two schools find some movement problems difficult. Generally, sixth formers appreciate the increased range of courses resulting from shared provision but see themselves very much as Fairfax students. They find the care they receive from their subject teachers, sixth form managers and well-trained support staff to be of the highest quality. Expert staff are always available to whom they can turn for support. Inspectors endorse the positive views and their concerns over practical difficulties in shared provision.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

#### Standards achieved in subjects and courses

The attainment of the students on entry to the school is broadly average, with fewer of the highest and lowest attaining students than is usually the case in comprehensive schools. Results in the end of Year 9 national assessments in 2003 and in GCSE examinations were well above average representing very good achievement. National tests in 2004 were a little lower for Year 9 students, but GCSE results were higher. Current standards are above average in Years 9 and 11.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at GCSE were well above average in 2003, representing very good achievement, and results were higher in 2004
- Students' achievements in the school's core programmes of citizenship and religious education are too low because insufficient time is allocated to these subjects
- Students of all abilities and backgrounds do well because all are valued and supported
- Where achievement in some classes is not as good as in others it is a consequence of variations in the quality of teaching and therefore learning
- Students with special educational needs do very well, because work is carefully matched to their needs, particularly those in the physical disability unit

#### Commentary

1. In the end of Year 9 national tests taken in 2003, students' achievements were very good. This is the last year for which there is a full set of validated data on results for schools in England with which Fairfax's can be compared. The students attained well above average standards in English and above average standards in mathematics and science. In 2004, results were a little lower (the school is in dispute with the examination group concerning the students' English results, as they are at odds with the school's own assessments). Boys and girls did equally well, with differences similar to national differences. The trend of improvement in these results over the five years up to 2003 is upwards and the rate of improvement is greater than that found nationally.
2. Students' achievements in teacher assessments at the age of fourteen in most other subjects in 2003 and 2004 indicate that the students are judged to be attaining above or well above average standards.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	36.6 (34.9)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	37.1 (36.3)	35.4 (34.7)
science	34.9 (34.3)	33.6 (33.3)

*There were 226 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

3. Students' results at GCSE in 2003, were well above national averages and results were higher in 2004 - 71 per cent achieved five or more A\*-C grades in 2004. Almost all students attain five or more A\*-G grades. This represents very good achievement considering the average standard of the students on entry into Year 7. These standards have been maintained for a number of years. Boys' results have not been as high as girls', but when compared with national averages for their genders, boys do better than girls. The trend in the average total GCSE points achieved by students is in line with the national trend of improvement over the five years up to 2003, maintaining standards that are well above those of an average school.
4. At GCSE in 2003 standards were best in business studies, history, geography, ICT, and mathematics, and not as good in science, English and French. For 2004, data is not yet available to determine the

most successful subjects, but the highest results were in business studies, art and drama, with relatively lower outcomes in modern languages, music and electronics.

5. The proportion of the highest grades achieved at GCSE, A\* and A, is appropriate and reflects the very good quality of teaching seen of students of all abilities in Years 10 and 11. This proportion is lower than might be expected for a school attaining such a high number of A\*-C grades, but reflects the range of the students' abilities on entry to the school. Although some pupils of the very highest ability come to Fairfax, the proportion is lower than usual because of the existence of selective schools in the immediate area.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	67 (65)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	96 (97)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	98 (99)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	38.8 (39.1)	34.7 (34.8)

*There were 220 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. Students have exceeded the school's targets for Year 9 national tests and GCSE examination results for several years, with the exception of the disputed English tests results for fourteen-year-olds in 2004.
7. Current standards in Years 7 to 9 are above average and the students' achievements are good overall, with very good work - well above average standards and very good achievement - in mathematics. Standards are above average in English and many other subjects. They are average in ICT, music, French and German and below average only in citizenship. Students' achievements correspond roughly with these standards judgements with very good achievement in history and physical education and unsatisfactory achievement in citizenship. The latter results from rather skimpy coverage because of a shortfall in time.
8. In Years 10 and 11, students are achieving very well overall because teaching is very effective and the students have very positive attitudes to learning. Students achieve very well in mathematics, art, history, physical education, GCSE religious education and on vocational courses. The only areas where work is unsatisfactory are citizenship and the general provision for religious education; in both cases because time is insufficient. Standards are above average overall.
9. The students' competence in using language, mathematics and ICT in other subjects is above average. Teachers ensure that spoken and written English is accurate and technical language is explained well. Students draw graphs, tabulate results and reinforce accurate use of numbers in a range of subjects. Most, but not all, subjects use ICT effectively and, through this, students have good skills in areas such as the use of the Internet, word-processing and the use of various software packages.
10. Groups of students of all abilities and backgrounds do well. The school has very few pupils for whom English is an additional language and they receive appropriate support from all their teachers. Those students with special educational needs progress very well because of the very good specialist support they receive and the attention given to their needs by subject teachers. High and low attainers mostly achieve well because work is matched to their needs. Examination outcomes show that boys and girls both achieve well or very well and evidence from lessons where students of both genders are equally involved gives clear reasons for their successes. In a small number of classes, mainly lower attainers in Year 9, less motivated students occasionally reduced the effectiveness of lessons.

11. Compared with standards at the time of the last inspection in 1999, students' attainment is just as high at the age of fourteen, with test results indicating better achievement considering the abilities of the students. GCSE results are much higher now, the proportion gaining five A\*-C increasing from 58 percent to 71 percent. Compared with similar schools, GCSE results are much better, moving up to a category of very good achievement. The overall improvement in standards in the main school is good.

#### **Sixth form**

Students of a full range of ability enter the sixth form, but with a higher proportion of lower attainers than normally enter for AS and A-level courses. A-level results in 2003 were broadly average, with some very high attaining students and others who struggled to pass. Current standards in the subjects inspected are a little below average overall and students' achievements are good.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	84.6 (95.8)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	20.6 (24.1)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per pupil	265.6 (276.1)	258.2 (263.3)

*There were 105 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

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

- Students' achievements are good overall
- Students with B and occasionally C grades at GCSE are supported in taking A-level subjects and they do well, attaining pass grades or higher
- Some students underachieve because they have negative attitudes to their work or teaching is insufficiently effective

#### **Commentary**

12. Students achieve well in most of their sixth form subjects. In the eleven subjects focused on during the inspection, achievement was good in eight and satisfactory in three. In most subjects, good teaching and positive attitudes of the students were the prime causes of the good achievement. Where achievement was not as good, the reasons were usually ineffective teaching and, occasionally, negative attitudes of the students.
13. Results in 2003 were broadly average and similar to those of other schools. In 2004 the average examination outcomes of the students were a little lower. Results, overall, have fallen over recent years but data indicates that this has been as a result of increased numbers of students staying on into the sixth form and moving on from Year 12 AS courses to take A2 full A-level examinations at the end of Year 13. The proportion staying on increased from 83 percent in 2001 to 90 percent in 2004. The school's student tracking data shows clearly that high attainers at GCSE make effective progress and attain the expected higher grades at A-level. The data also shows an increasing proportion of sixth form students with relatively low GCSE and AS grades who stay on into the second year and are successful in attaining lower grades at A-level. This increasing number of lower grades over recent years results in the 'apparent' overall fall in standards. Very few of the students opt for vocational courses in the sixth form, finding that their career prospects are best served by A-level success at whatever grade of pass.
14. In 2003, the last year for which there is validated data, male students' results were slightly higher than those of female. Results ranged from well above average for the small group taking physics in 2003, to well below average in sports studies. Outcomes fluctuate greatly from year to year depending upon the pupils' entry standards and capabilities. For example, the physics results were below average in 2002. In 2003, the results were above or well above average in ICT, physics and in a range of social and vocational subjects where, in several cases, small numbers took individual

courses. Results were well below average in geography and general studies in addition to sports studies. In 2004, the students attained higher results than other subjects in the very popular psychology, and other high attaining subjects with more than ten students were mathematics, sociology and religious studies.

15. When account is taken of the students' attainment in the other A-level courses they take, almost all the results in 2003 indicate the students did similarly well in each; their achievements were generally consistent. The exceptions were social studies subjects where students' achievements were much better than in other subjects and in business studies and general studies where achievement was not as good as in other subjects.
16. Students' literacy skills are above average and average in numeracy and ICT. They enter the sixth form with above average standards in English and make satisfactory progress. In several lessons observed, students were not expected to explain or justify their answers. Written work was generally good with effective marking although spellings were not always commented upon. The students' mathematical competences are average on entry but through good teaching of important skills they improve, which enables students to use mathematical concepts with confidence in subjects such as biology, geography and accounts. ICT entry standards are broadly average and they make satisfactory improvements during their time in the sixth form, although not all subjects use computers as much as they could or should.
17. Students of a great range of backgrounds are welcomed into the sixth form and are equally successful. The few students with special educational needs do as well as their peers, and any differences between male and female achievements in different subjects is dependent upon the approaches of different students or their capabilities, which do fluctuate greatly from year to year.
18. Standards are higher than at the time of the last inspection, with a significant improvement in the overall pass rate. In 1999, one or two subjects were judged to be poor whereas today all inspected were found to be satisfactory or better. Good progress has been made over the past five years.

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

Attitudes are very good overall: they are very good in the main school and good in the sixth form. Behaviour and attendance are very good throughout the school. Students' personal development is very good. Their social, moral and cultural development is very good and their spiritual development is satisfactory.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students throughout the school are highly enthusiastic and involved in the many opportunities for their personal development which the school provides
- The very good attendance of most students and their very good relationships are significant factors in their good achievement and learning
- Attitudes and behaviour are very good around the school but in lessons the behaviour of a very small number of students in Year 9 and the attitudes of some in the sixth form are not always as good as they could be
- Provision for students to appreciate a wider range of cultures is much improved, but there are now fewer opportunities for students to reflect on spiritual matters

### **Commentary**

19. Most students are very positive about their experiences at the school. They strongly appreciate the House system and the very wide range of extra-curricular activities, which enable them to play an extremely full part in school life from Year 7 onwards. By participating in sports competitions, drama and music performances, community service and adventure schemes, they make rapid progress in developing high levels of confidence and self-esteem, respect and care for others, and willingness to take responsibility. These personal qualities prepare them very well for life after school and make a significant contribution to their social development.

**Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%) 2002/2003**

Authorised absence	
School data	6.1
National data	7.2

Unauthorised absence	
School data	0.3
National data	1.1

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

20. Attendance has been consistently well above the national average and has been maintained at a similar rate in 2003/4. Attendance during the inspection was over 91 per cent in each year group, which means that students experience good continuity in their learning. The school has very good monitoring procedures so that it can very quickly identify when the attendance of individuals or groups dips below the high standards expected. The school leadership is not complacent and is determined to improve attendance still further. Punctuality is good which results in a purposeful atmosphere throughout the school day.
21. Students' very good relationships with each other enable them to work very effectively in pairs and small groups. Students of all ages are very confident that the occasional incident of bullying is swiftly and successfully tackled. Racist incidents are rare. Their awareness of the needs of others is very considerably enhanced by the inclusion in the day-to-day life of the school of students with physical and other disabilities.
22. Attitudes and behaviour were at least good in the vast majority of lessons seen, and they were frequently very good. Year 7 students are particularly keen and motivated in their lessons. Students in Years 10 and 11 are highly committed to the courses they have chosen. Those with special educational needs greatly value the support they are given. Students' behaviour in assemblies in all years is excellent and they behave very well at breaks and lunch times, but there are some slightly casual attitudes to wearing school uniform and dealing properly with litter. In a very few lessons in Year 9, and to a lesser extent in Year 8, a minority of students, mainly but not exclusively lower-attaining boys, were noisy and engaged in low-level disruption. The leadership had already identified this issue and has put in place a new 'behaviour for learning' policy which started to be implemented this term. The benefits so far are a clear system of sanctions and a very good monitoring tool for the senior management team. Early signs are that the rate of fixed term exclusions is falling. There were no permanent exclusions last year, but there has been one this term, with the student concerned now receiving college education elsewhere.

**Ethnic background of pupils**

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British – Indian
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background

**Exclusions in the last school year**

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1060	41	
10		
19		
28	1	
2		
8		
5		
18		
4		
1		
10		
4		
2		

Chinese
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

5
6
200

2	

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

23. Students are very effectively taught to appreciate a wide range of British, European and world cultures and traditions through, for example, the annual Eisteddfod when they run their own cultural events within themes such as ‘The Harmonious Society’. Moral issues and examples of role models are explored very successfully in assemblies and in subjects such as art and design, history, geography and physical education. Provision for cultural and moral development has improved since the last inspection, and the strengths in students’ social development have been maintained. However, provision for spiritual development is no longer as good as it was in the last report. Religious education and assemblies do not make a strong contribution to the exploration of non-secular values and beliefs, partly because statutory requirements in these areas are not being met. Opportunities to reflect on deeper issues arise from time to time in subjects such as English and music, but they are too often missed and they are not planned for in tutorial periods.

#### **Sixth form**

24. Students are proud of their role in the school and wear their striking uniform with pride. Their personal development is greatly enhanced by the opportunities to be prefects and peer mentors, to undertake community service, and to go on expeditions under the Duke of Edinburgh Award and World Challenge schemes. For example, a small group of sixth-formers spent two years fund-raising for a school in Namibia and are organising a trip to visit the country.
25. Attendance in the sixth form is very good because students are strongly committed to completing their courses successfully. The sixth form staff set high expectations of regular attendance and monitor it carefully, providing support where necessary. Attitudes and behaviour are very good in many lessons and subjects, for example psychology and sociology, and students work very well with the students from the other consortium school. However, there was a surprising lack of motivation in some lessons, especially in Year 13. This slows down the progress of students on some A-level courses.

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

A good quality of education is provided throughout the school, with a number of very good aspects. Effective teaching results in students learning well and a good curriculum is enriched with an excellent activities programme. Students receive very good guidance and support, and are made to feel that they play an important part in the life of the school. Links with parents, the community and other schools are very strong in the main school and good overall in the sixth form.

#### **Teaching and learning**

The overall quality of teaching is good in the main school. Teaching and learning are good for students aged eleven to fourteen and very good in GCSE courses. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and most students are very well motivated and keen to learn. Assessment systems and practices are good overall, but with some inconsistencies.

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

- The best teaching results in very effective learning, where students develop a keen interest in the subject being taught
- Teaching of maths, history, art, physical education, religious education and of vocational courses is very good
- Key weaknesses in a small proportion of teaching, which restrict learning, are inadequate planning to meet the needs of all students being taught and ineffective behaviour management



- The quality of teaching in modern foreign languages and music is inconsistent and unsatisfactory for citizenship
- Some departments are not as good as others in setting targets for students and helping them to see what needs to be done to improve

### Commentary

#### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 175 lessons*

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
11 (6%)	48 (27%)	67 (38%)	41 (23%)	7 (4%)	1 (1%)	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.*

26. The quality of teaching in the main school is good overall. In Years 7, 10 and 11 the quality is very good, in Year 8 it is good, and in Year 9 satisfactory. Individual lessons varied in quality between excellent and poor, with more than seven in every ten observed good or better.
27. Particular strengths in teaching are teachers' subject knowledge, which often results in challenging, interesting work, particularly in Years 7, 10 and 11, and the high quality of teacher:student relationships. As teachers and students get on so well together, students are keen to respond to questions and they confidently question points they find difficult to comprehend. Teachers' behaviour management skills are usually very good. The very high expectations of the students' conduct in the school, in general, results in a very positive ethos that transfers into the classroom. Students are well motivated and keen to learn.
28. Good use is being made of the school's interactive whiteboards and computer networks. Students are competent confident users of ICT because teachers try to use the available facilities to enhance their subject teaching. The quality of teaching in a few subjects is restricted by a shortfall in the number of computers available but this situation is being resolved currently, through the installation of two additional computer suites in the business and enterprise centre being built.
29. Effective use is made of the recommendations in the national strategy for teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9. Most, but not all, lessons start with objectives clearly explained to the students, followed by a good starter activity to motivate and involve them. Lessons usually have a good range of activities in which students are involved and end with a summarising session where teachers find out what has and has not been learnt and understood. Lessons that had this structure were invariably good or better and resulted in students who concentrated hard and made good progress.
30. Homework is set regularly and marked effectively. Students see the value in these tasks and many have a positive approach to them, aware that such work increases the likelihood of examination success.
31. The school has introduced lessons on 'learning to learn', which are proving to be very effective. A session, for example, on how a minority of students could sabotage a lesson led to very good appreciation of how all knew what was going on, and the pointlessness of the disruption. Students gained a genuine understanding of the importance of self-control, for the benefit of all in the class. These lessons are taught using a three-part structure, interactive whiteboards and group work. They are demanding, matched to students' learning needs and interesting.
32. An excellent history lesson for Year 10 showed several of the teaching strengths identified. The students, looking at the reasons for the failure of the League of Nations, used whiteboards to communicate their answers as they interrogated sources that had been carefully prepared for them. The teacher's high expectations and the use of video clips and other activities resulted in very well motivated students. The analysis and interpretation carried out were of a high order. In an excellent drama lesson for Year 10, the resources - including lap-top images - were very effective in interesting and assisting the students as they learnt to respond emotionally and sensitively to images. The focus

on skills proved to be very effective in this very well-structured lesson where a very good balance was struck between teaching specific skills and the students' own independent development. The most capable students were given 'director' roles, which ensured that they were challenged by the work. The students' rate of progress and achievements were excellent.

33. There were significant weaknesses in the teaching observed in a few lessons, and in some others, although strengths outweighed points for improvement, weaknesses restricted what could be achieved. For example, in Year 10 citizenship lessons, learning objectives were not clear enough and students' achievements were unsatisfactory. Occasionally teachers' expectations of the students were too low and so insufficient work was completed in the available time. In Year 9, where teaching and learning were weakest, a small minority of students who were not well motivated or interested in learning, disrupted the work of others in their classes. In these few lessons, teachers did not have the behaviour management skills needed to resolve the problems.
34. Boys and girls of all abilities and backgrounds are valued and taught effectively. The needs of the very small number of students for whom English is an additional language and those students with special educational needs are known well by staff and work is matched to their requirements. Specialist support provided is very good. This was particularly apparent for students with physical disabilities when integrated into main stream classes and when supported in the unit.
35. The school has developed good systems to monitor students' progress and establish targets for future improvement. All students are given a target grade in each subject, which is related to National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades. The target grades of individual students are monitored and underachievement is identified. Overall this system is good in ensuring that students and parents know current progress and have a future target. A weakness in the current practice is a lack of consistency in the way departments inform students of what level they are at and what they need to do to improve. Departments that have good systems for doing this include mathematics and art. English and science have less effective processes.
36. Since the time of the last inspection, the proportion of good and better teaching has improved, with the result that students' learning and achievement are better. Students with special educational needs are much more effectively taught than five years ago. Assessment had been a weakness in 1999, as it had been five years earlier, but it is much better and good today. Overall, good improvement has been made in the quality of teaching and learning.

#### **Sixth form**

The quality of teaching in the sixth form is good overall. Most teachers have good subject knowledge, understand the needs of the students and generate a good working atmosphere in classrooms. Staff are committed to the students but a few inconsistencies in teaching result in unnecessary weaknesses that restrict what the students can achieve.

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

- Almost three-quarters of observed lessons were judged to be good or better
- A few lessons seen were unsatisfactory and in some others although teaching was satisfactory, learning was less effective than it could have been
- Timetabling differences between the two schools sharing the sixth form teaching result in teaching and learning problems
- Relationships between teachers and students are usually very good
- Teaching techniques are not as effective as they should be in promoting the students independent learning skills

#### **Commentary**

37. Many of the strengths observed in the main school lessons were apparent in the sixth form, but not all students displayed the maturity and independent learning skills expected of young people of their ages. Teachers were usually confident and secure in their knowledge of the subject matter, but this

was not invariably the case. Students were usually expected to work hard and succeed, and staff focused appropriately on examination requirements. Explanations were often clear and appropriate which resulted in well-motivated and interested students, who related well to their teachers.

38. In all eleven A-level/AVCE focus subjects, the quality of teaching and learning was judged to be satisfactory or good.
39. In a Year 13 business lesson, for example, the session started very well with a recap of earlier work on marketing. The relationships between the teacher and students were very good. Discussions focused on exactly what could appear in the A-level examination. The teacher showed very useful knowledge and understanding, which was appreciated by the students. Question and answer sessions showed that the teacher had an excellent knowledge of the subject. The interactive whiteboard was used very helpfully in summarising the discussions that took place. The most capable, as well as those struggling with A-level made significant gains in their knowledge in the lesson; the students' achievements were apparent in the plenary session.
40. Where teaching was unsatisfactory, or satisfactory with some weaknesses apparent, the students' learning reflected this quality. In an English lesson, for example, a teacher did not create a stimulating learning environment, expectations were low and explanations weak, which resulted in unsatisfactory learning and achievement. The students did not respond with challenging questions, but became rather passive. In an ill-prepared sixth form science lesson, where insufficient account was taken of the range of capabilities of the students and work did not match the needs of the extremes of ability, here too the students became passive and lost interest. In a number of sessions, teachers gave too much direction to the students on what to do, without sufficient involvement of or discussion with the students.
41. The small number of students with special educational needs are supported as well as their peers, as is the very small minority of students for whom English is an additional language. Male and female students receive equal attention.
42. The two schools which share a number of sixth form subjects have different times for lessons. This results in a small minority of students arriving late or leaving early. Both situations disrupt learning, reducing the effective teaching time. This is an unhelpful situation.
43. The system of monitoring and target setting which exists in years 7 to 11 is extended into the post-16 phase. On joining Year 12, individual students are set overall target grades based on their GCSE points score. After a term, these are refined to identify in which subjects the respective grades will be achieved. Assessment in Years 12 and 13 is generally good and in some subject areas, such as in mathematics, sociology and art, it is very good.
44. Overall, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is broadly similar to the quality seen at the time of the last inspection. The progress made in the intervening five years has been broadly satisfactory.

### **The curriculum**

Students follow a good, broad and balanced curriculum that provides good opportunities for all, with an outstanding range of activities outside the academic curriculum. The provision of religious education in Year 10 and citizenship in Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory. Very good staffing, and good accommodation and resources generally support the curriculum well. The curriculum has gained, and continues to gain, from the business and enterprise college status.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school provides a broad curriculum that enables standards to be maintained and improved throughout the school
- The continuity of the curriculum ensures constant and steady progress in students' learning
- Regular reviews of the curriculum increase opportunities for improved learning

- Extra-curricular activities are extensive and richly varied
- Resources for ICT, although restricted at present, are due to be greatly extended in the new business and enterprise centre
- Statutory requirements are not fully met in the provision for religious education and citizenship

### Commentary

45. Curricular provision for all students is good because of the range of courses in place. It allows all students to achieve well, including those with special educational needs. It is reviewed regularly. Recent improvements include increasing the teaching time each week to maximise the impact of teaching on learning. Time to teach ICT in Years 7 to 9 meets that recommended and is an improvement since the previous inspection. The introduction of the innovative ‘learning to learn’ initiative in Years 7 and 10 gives students an understanding of the best ways that they can learn. Most subjects are introducing aspects of the commercial world into their teaching as a result of the business and enterprise status of the school. The curriculum is enhanced by the expert skills and abilities of the highly committed staff who teach it. All students in Year 9 are interviewed to ascertain which pathway in Years 10 and 11 best suits their aspirations and capabilities.
46. The school provides a vocational course in leisure and tourism for a small number of students in Years 10 and 11, which provides a way forward to vocational courses in Years 12 and 13. The school also offers the ‘priority programme’, a course in Years 10 and 11 that develops students’ self-esteem, literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. This good scheme maximises opportunities for the students who participate in it. A small number of students are following an appropriate alternative education programme that is work related.
47. A very wide range of extra-curricular activities is provided by the school and participation rates are high. The school has been awarded the Sportsmark award and over two thirds of students of all ages and abilities participate in additional sporting activities both before and after school and at weekends. Zone hockey for students with disabilities is very popular. Art clubs are well attended at lunchtimes, and visits to galleries and use of artists-in-residence enrich work in class. A highlight of the year is the school Eisteddfod weekend involving every student in competitions ranging from music, art, cookery, choir, plays, creative writing to flower arranging. A full range of musical activities throughout the year takes place on a seasonal basis to provide maximum opportunities for all students; the Christmas choir was rehearsing at lunchtimes during the inspection. The school has a lively atmosphere, generated by the number and frequency of drama and musical practices and performances. Homework clubs are well attended and many subjects offer after-school drop-in clubs for extra help with coursework. Annual trips to Europe for the history and modern foreign language departments widen students’ experiences. The Fairfax award provides an introduction to worthwhile leisure activities for younger students, with a challenge to the individual to achieve personal goals. The Duke of Edinburgh Award, which follows on naturally from the Fairfax Award, has thrived ever since its introduction when the school opened and students have achieved nearly 600 gold awards in that time. Every year, nearly 400 students are involved in these activities and are very proud of their achievements.
48. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) assumes its place in the curriculum like any other subject. It is provided for all students and is delivered by form tutors in a weekly lesson lasting thirty minutes. Because religious education and citizenship are also taught in this lesson, the time allocation is inadequate for effective delivery of the full curriculum of all three areas. The scheme of work for PHSE, however, is appropriate. Careers education is provided at the stages in the students’ school lives when they most need it, guiding their choices effectively.
49. The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship. Assemblies do not occur every day for all students and there is no “thought for the day” in tutorial time.
50. The curriculum for students with special educational needs is very good. They have a very wide range of curricular opportunities and are fully included throughout the school. The school has

specialist facilities for students with Statements of special educational needs relating to their immobility. These are good and include a physiotherapy room, a wheelchair store and excellent lifts to which access is restricted by code. Teaching assistants organise a range of extra-curricular activities, such as the zone hockey, which includes all students with a range of physical disabilities. The success of the school's work in this area means that facilities are already insufficient and some students have physiotherapy in the school hall. The school finds that it receives fewer resources for these students than are needed to respond to the requirements of their Statements, which has an impact on the overall resources available for students with special educational needs. Very effectively deployed teaching assistants are a strength; they help these students to develop maximum independence in mobility and learning.

51. The school is very well staffed with knowledgeable and successful teachers and support staff. Teachers are well qualified and are timetabled appropriately to make best use of their expertise. Timetabling is generally effective in the main school, except that some classes have more than one teacher for the same subject, which can cause difficulties over continuity in learning from lesson to lesson. The large number of teaching assistants liaise very well with teachers to provide very good support in shared responsibility for students. Teaching assistants working with particular students with special educational needs know them well. They take great care to establish good relationships with students. They are involved in training workshops, planning individual education plans and liaising closely between departments and the special educational needs department.
52. The school has a very good curriculum strategy for identifying, providing for and monitoring the achievement of students who are gifted and talented. The strategy is beginning to have a positive impact on the provision for the more able. For example, the English department run a lunchtime activity for Year 9 students.
53. The school's accommodation is good and continuing to improve. Most departments have specialist rooms suited together. Physical education has the use of a very good sports hall. Half of the students are doing a business studies course and they will benefit from the new business centre. The library is well stocked and offers a very wide range of up-to-date learning resources. A good number of computers are available in a very pleasant learning environment. Not all departments have access to sufficient ICT facilities, but this situation is in transition as the new business and enterprise building is under construction, which will provide access to a further 60 computers. Resources overall are good, with a number of very good aspects.
54. Since the last inspection, strengths have been maintained and improvements made in several areas. In particular, curriculum time has been increased in most areas, the excellent extra-curricular provision remains a great strength of the school, and curriculum breadth has been improved. Accommodation and resources have also improved. Overall, good improvement has been made.

#### **Sixth form**

The curriculum provided is good. Access is provided for all Year 11 students who identify courses they wish to take, with good progression from Years 10 to 13. Retention on courses is very good.

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

- The range of subjects through the shared sixth, and the activities available, are extensive and meet the needs of the students very well
- General studies contributes significantly to students' personal development
- Timetabling inconsistencies between the two schools sharing the sixth form are unhelpful

#### **Commentary**

55. The range of GCE AS- and A2- level courses is very good. Students have a choice of subjects learned lower down the school together with economics, media, politics, psychology and sociology. Other options are available at GCSE, GNVQ and AVCE level, such as leisure and recreation and English language re-take. Liaison with the neighbouring comprehensive school enables less popular subjects

to continue with viable class sizes. A few students study minority subjects through the opportunities provided by a local consortium of five partner schools. The curriculum meets the wishes of the large number that stay on from Year 11 as well as those that join them from other schools in the area.

56. Most students that start courses complete them. The curriculum is enriched, and students' personal development is promoted strongly, through the inclusion of compulsory general studies. This provides good coverage of personal, social and health education topics, including careers education, religious education (meeting statutory requirements), and guidance on university entrance. There are high expectations that all students are involved in the care and support of younger students or become involved in community programmes that add to their understanding of citizenship.
57. Staff have very good subject expertise and are sufficient in number to meet the needs of the sixth-form curriculum. Students benefit from the main school's good accommodation and, in addition, they have use of the very good dedicated sixth-form centre. The slowly rising numbers of students are putting pressure on resources, but these are good currently.
58. The period length and starts and ends of lessons do not match between the two schools sharing their sixth forms, which causes difficulties. Curriculum time is lost because students arrive after the start of lessons or leave early for other periods when lesson times do not coincide. This causes a reduction in the available curriculum time.
59. The school is involved with World Challenge, where students spend two years training and raising money by fund raising or part-time work in preparation to travel abroad for a month. They take part in a project to help the local community and then have a trekking expedition. This year, students went to Namibia. This is an excellent curriculum opportunity for sixth formers.
60. Issues of entry requirements into the sixth form at the time of the last inspection have been largely, though not entirely, resolved, as has the need to provide an appropriate range of courses that meets the needs and aspirations of the students. Good progress has been made in making curriculum improvements since 1999.

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

The school is committed to enabling every student to feel valued and to achieve their potential. To that end very good care, guidance and support is provided throughout the school.

## **Main strengths**

- The pastoral care and house systems combine to provide very good care for every student
- Care, guidance and support for pupils with special educational needs is very good; for those with physical disabilities it is outstanding
- Very good opportunities are given to students to have a say in the life of the school
- Learning mentors make a very significant contribution to students' successes and enjoyment
- As a result of the support, guidance and care they receive, students are happy, secure and confident members of the school community

## **Commentary**

61. Thorough procedures exist for making sure that students feel safe and secure at school. As a result, students are able to concentrate on their learning and make effective progress. Staff at all levels, from the headteacher to the form tutor, know the needs and problems of individual students very well and take a very caring approach to helping them as best they can. A school nurse oversees first aid and medical matters very effectively and students are taught about first aid and personal safety. Members of the senior management team are very competent in carrying out their responsibilities for child protection, looked after children and health and safety.
62. The school makes very good use of an external expert firm to guide it on health and safety matters. It also benefits from the expertise of key governors and knowledgeable senior managers in ensuring that systems and procedures are as good as they can be.
63. Students are confident that they have an adult to turn to if they have a difficulty. In the majority of cases, this is the form tutor who is at the heart of pastoral care for the students. Form tutors stay with their forms as they move through the school and, over time, get to know their students very well. Some form tutors will stay with their forms from Year 7 through to Year 13.
64. Heads of year and heads of house work closely together to ensure regular monitoring and evaluation of each student's progress. Underachievement is identified by regular, formal assessment and swift action is taken to tackle it, including the use of learning mentors, whose work is focused on individuals to offer support to get them back on track. The effective use of learning mentors is a real strength of the pastoral care system of the school. Very good procedures for rewarding both extra-curricular and academic achievements are in place and students of all ages are keen to receive such recognition.
65. The school also has very good and effective systems in place to identify and support students with attendance problems. Early detection of problems is passed on from the form tutor to the attendance mentor, who then investigates the nature of the problem, including visits to home if necessary. A plan for individual students is then drawn up, implemented and monitored, to re-integrate students after absence. The effectiveness of the system is evaluated by the school in detail.
66. Students with special educational needs receive very good support and care and are well integrated into the life of the school. The care and guidance for students with disabilities is outstanding. They are fully integrated into the life of the school, moving carefully around the building, proud of their independence. They receive care and guidance from fellow students as well as staff and play a full role in house activities.
67. Very good arrangements ensure that the transition of pupils from primary schools into Year 7 is smooth. Members of staff, including the headteacher, visit the main primary schools from which the pupils transfer and the pupils visit the school before they arrive in September. Senior students are used as mentors to assist in the smooth transition and provide a point of contact and source of care and advice in the early days. Pupils and parents appreciate the effectiveness of the procedures.
68. The school also has very comprehensive arrangements for the Year 9 students' transition to Year 10. New subjects are explained to the students in information talks during assemblies, and form tutors, who know their students well, offer impartial guidance on options choices. Students express their

satisfaction and appreciation of the support and guidance they receive in preparation for the transition to Year 10. Similarly, students in Years 10 and 11 receive very comprehensive advice about options open to them after compulsory education ends at age 16. Information is given in careers lessons, by outside speakers, from older students in the sixth form and advice is available from the Connexions service.

69. The school council is a very effective forum where students can air their views and feel that they are valued. Each tutor group democratically elects two representatives for the year council. At present, these are chaired by heads of year, but the intention is to give that responsibility to students. Issues that are relevant to the year, as discussed in PSHE and tutor time, are listened to and taken seriously. For example, Year 9 options have been discussed and a new document has been produced as a result of feedback from students. Representatives from the year council are then elected to the school council, which, again, is very effective. For example, students have been heavily involved in drawing up school policies on behaviour, drugs and sex education, which are reviewed regularly. Students' lack of understanding on how effort grades are given by teachers has been acted upon as teachers now explain the system to them. The school council is involved in charity work such as the use of a theatre in education group to raise money and awareness of breast and testicular cancer. Students' views on uniform have been acted upon and benches and basketball nets have now been provided in playgrounds.
70. The very good provision at the time of the last inspection has been maintained, with updated procedures and systems, which enable the students to enjoy their education. This represents good progress and improvement over time.

### **Sixth form**

The very good arrangements for care, guidance and support in the main school are carried on into the sixth form.

### **Main strengths**

- Students are listened to and have a strong say in the education they receive
- Pastoral support is a great strength
- Tutors and subject teaching staff know the students well and monitor their academic performance effectively
- Very good information is provided for students to help prepare them for the choices they have to make about the next steps in their lives

### **Commentary**

71. Induction of new students into the sixth form is comprehensive and effective. Peer mentoring is used effectively to ease the transition from Year 11. Students' progress is regularly assessed in Years 12 and 13 and, where problems are identified, a learning mentor is quickly involved to offer support and guidance. Students know their targets and know what they need to do to achieve them.
72. Very good and impartial advice is given on choices available to students on leaving the sixth form. Careers advice is readily available and, for those going on to university, very comprehensive advice is given on the application process. Lecturers from universities in the area also come into school to offer support and guidance. Students are happy and appreciate the support and advice they receive.
73. Tutors and counsellors support individual students, responding very effectively to requests for their help as well as initiating action. Several students referred to feeling able to go to subject staff if they needed pastoral guidance. Students are very pleased with the quality of pastoral support they receive.
74. Students have the opportunity to take on responsibilities and assist in the care, guidance and support of younger students. There is a very rigorous selection and training process for prefects and students in the sixth form are encouraged to become mentors to younger students in the school.



75. Students in the sixth form are involved in the school council and feel that it provides a very good opportunity for them to express their views. They are involved in decision making, along with students from the main school, and feel that their opinions are valued. A very good example of their involvement is that sixth-form students were part of the interview panel for the choice of head of sixth form.
76. Insufficient evidence is available in the previous inspection report to enable a judgement to be made about the extent of improvement over the past five years.

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

The partnership with parents, links with other schools and colleges, and links with the community are very good.

#### **Main strengths**

- Parents are extremely satisfied with the school and support it and their children's learning very well
- The school provides good information to parents and deals with any difficulties that arise in a prompt and caring manner
- The school has very close and productive links with a wide range of businesses and organisations and students are very involved in helping in the community
- Links with primary and other secondary schools are extensive

#### **Commentary**

77. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school, as was seen in the pre-inspection meeting and from the school's own surveys conducted at consultation evenings. Any queries or concerns are dealt with very effectively because the school has an open ethos in which everyone is treated as important in the school community. Parents not only support their children's education and extra-curricular activities very well, they also contribute funds through the gift aid scheme and the work of the small but active parents' association. They feel very well informed about the things they want to know, such as when their child has done particularly well or when the school has identified a problem. Overall, the information they receive is good. There is some excellent practice, such as in the music department, where parents of the small number of GCSE students are e-mailed with information about coursework deadlines. Much useful detail is provided for all parents in newsletters, progress reports, and the option evenings, but parents have few opportunities to find out more about the curriculum. Although they are very happy with the information provided in their children's annual reports, these are not as precise and informative as they could be about students' achievements and targets.
78. The school has maintained its strong links with the community and is developing them further, very effectively, under its new specialist status as a business and enterprise college. A good number of businesses and public organisations supported the bid and an effective start has been made in setting up projects that will benefit the local community, such as ICT training for residents in sheltered housing schemes. Students' involvement in community service, such as fund-raising for a local hospice or helping in local schools, continues to be a major strength of the school and makes a significant contribution to their personal development. The school's facilities are extensively used by the local community, with a particularly strong emphasis on sport and health-related activities. There are some good examples of community links enriching the curriculum experiences for students, for instance in art and design, music and physical education, but this is not as strong in all subject areas.
79. Links with primary schools are very effective, so that teachers have a good knowledge of individual pupils before they arrive at the school. Some teachers visit primary feeder schools to teach lessons, which contributes to good curriculum continuity between phases. The school is successfully supporting, under its specialist school remit, a group of primary schools in numeracy, ICT and Young Enterprise schemes. Similarly high levels of support and collaboration take place within the local Excellence in Cities group of 12 secondary schools. Very good links with a local college enable a

group of potentially disaffected students in Years 10 and 11 to undertake a *Young Apprentice scheme/work-related programme*. Fairfax also works closely with a special school to ensure that the students with physical disabilities are very successfully integrated into mainstream education. Students' understanding of European cultures is greatly enhanced by the school's very well-established involvement in a partnership between schools in countries including Germany, Lithuania, Estonia, Spain, Cyprus and Hungary. Current projects include drama and music presentations in Cyprus, and a planned football tournament in Germany.

80. The good and very good quality links reported five years ago are as good today, following careful adaptation of older procedures; this constitutes good improvement over time.

### **Sixth form**

Links are generally good, with some excellent aspects, but with some areas for improvement. These concern liaison with the neighbouring school in the sixth-form consortium.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students benefit from their involvement in very high quality community service opportunities
- Liaison with the neighbouring school over sixth form courses is effective in some areas, but not all

### **Commentary**

81. Parents are kept well informed about and involved in their children's progress in the sixth form. Sixth formers have excellent opportunities to undertake community service on both a local and international scale. They benefit from a very good range of speakers and close links with two local universities which help prepare them for life after the sixth form and very effectively guide them in their university applications. As in the main school, the school's extensive links with businesses and other organisations are not exploited as well as they could be within individual subjects.
82. The only concern expressed by some parents at the pre-inspection meeting was about how the links with the neighbouring school work in the shared provision for sixth-form education. The two schools are part of a larger consortium of sixth form providers, which means that Fairfax students have access to a wide range of subject choices and valuable opportunities to work with students from other schools. In addition, the provision for them is more cost-effective and the consortium has been able to develop an exciting project to support underachieving students in Year 12. However, considering the substantial shared nature of the provision with the nearest neighbour school there are weaknesses in liaison concerning, for example, common room facilities not being shared. Although agreement has been reached over entry standards into the sixth form in almost all subjects, this is not the case in mathematics.
83. The extent of the partnership with parents, schools and the community is similar to that reported at the time of the last inspection. The progress made has been sound.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership and management are good overall, with some excellent aspects. Governors are very effective in much that they do but have not ensured that all statutory requirements are met. The vision for the school as one constantly striving for improvement is put into practice through the efforts of a very strong staff team. One or two inconsistencies remain, in particular differences in the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding
- The leadership of key staff is very good
- Monitoring of student performance is very effective and is used very well to help students improve

- Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are not consistently carried out across all departments
- Staff recruitment, deployment and training are very well managed
- Financial management is very good

### **Commentary**

84. Governance of the school is good. Governors take an active part in shaping the direction of the school including involvement with the good school improvement plan, overseeing partnership arrangements with other schools and promoting the school's specialist status for business and enterprise. The finance committee, in particular, contains much professional expertise and has been very astute in directing the school's budget.
85. All governors, particularly the chair, support the school very well, value it highly, and are justly proud of the contribution they make to its continuing progress. Four governors have received local authority recognition awards for their service. Governors are well deployed to the relevant committees where they exercise clearly defined roles. Some of these are whole-school responsibilities, for example special educational needs, as governors are not linked directly to subject departments. Governors share the headteacher's vision for continuous improvement and have, for the most part, a good understanding of the many strengths (and few weaknesses) of the school. Several are used to posing challenging questions to the headteacher and his leadership team. Statutory requirements are met, with the exception of providing a daily act of collective worship and ensuring sufficient time for religious education in Year 10 and citizenship in Years 10 and 11.
86. The headteacher's understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and vision for its future development, are exceptionally clear. His capability in deploying and motivating staff in a way that maximises use of their skills and expertise is high. Under his leadership, the school is very successful, securing good achievement and well above average and improving GCSE results, is very well liked by students and staff, and highly popular with parents. It is not complacent with its current success and is moving confidently forwards towards developing its recently acquired status as a specialist college.
87. The senior leadership team has been very well selected to provide a range of experience and skills. Roles are very clear and the team works coherently, all members contributing with commitment and capability in the areas in which they work. Consequently, the school benefits from imaginative forward thinking, and efficient organisation of its activities. Heads of year and heads of house fulfil their pastoral role very effectively to provide very good support and guidance for the students in their care. The overall level of subject leadership and management is good. Both are very good in mathematics, design and technology, art, physical education and special educational needs. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory in religious education and citizenship.
88. Students benefit from very efficient tracking of their progress. The effective use of this to guide and support students towards improvement is an important ingredient in their good achievement. Since the last inspection, the school has improved its procedures for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning. All subjects now benefit from systematic departmental reviews, although the period between these is currently too long at almost three years. There remains a need to improve the consistency with which the departments monitor the teaching within their subjects, in a way that leads to sharing and improvement, and the role of senior managers in supervising this.
89. The school is very successful in attracting good quality staff and has a very good blend of experienced and recently qualified teachers. Staff at all levels benefit from very good induction. The school's philosophy of welcoming ideas and contributions from staff at all levels, whether in teaching or support roles, is an important factor in its cohesion and the high staff morale. Opportunities for training and development are very well organised and the school is highly committed to developing its role as a leading teacher-training establishment, in partnership with a university. Performance management is carried out rigorously and is valued in the school. Finances

are very well managed to provide effectively for the needs of the curriculum and the school applies the principles of best value very well.

90. Several features of the school are very significant in raising students' achievement. The school has developed a tradition for high standards and expectations, which are valued very much by parents, who are very positive and supportive of the school. In order to ensure that all students, including those with special educational needs, achieve well, the school has provided very good training for teaching assistants and learning mentors so that they can provide very effective support for students in difficult situations. The school is concerned, however, about the attendance of a very small number of students and of the support given to these students, from parents, to ensure that they achieve well.
91. The impact of the very recent business and enterprise specialist status is in its infancy. All students in years 8 and 9 receive a good grounding in business theory and all departments have identified how they already do, and how they plan to, contribute to enterprise education. For example, the art department uses competitions in all years and in the sixth form they are piloting the sale of art work. The English department runs an 'enterprise challenge' in year 10 based on marketing, while the history department focuses on 'enterprising history' and the British industrial revolution. The school is a regional training centre to spread good practice to other business and enterprise schools.
92. The great strength of the leadership of the headteacher is as strong as five years ago at the time of the last inspection. Strengths in the clarity of vision and ethos of the school remain. Improvements have been made on several fronts, indicating good progress over time.

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

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	5477811	Balance from previous year	(27485)
Total expenditure	5328764	Balance carried forward to the next	121562
Expenditure per pupil	3850		

**Sixth form**

Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The management strengths that stem from the sharing of the sixth form with a neighbouring school far outweigh the few issues that need to be resolved. The sixth form is cost effective and has the potential to improve further.

**Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good leadership and management are provided by a strongly committed team
- The monitoring of students' performance is used very well to guide and support them
- The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are not systematic enough
- While liaison with the partner school is very cost effective, some elements are not fully effective

**Commentary**

93. The sixth-form leadership team works as a cohesive unit with clear roles and strong commitment to these. It provides very good monitoring of students' progress, which is used very effectively to give individual guidance and identify and support those at risk of underachieving. The team has a very high commitment to a sixth form that welcomes all, whatever their prior attainment and aspirations and celebrates all students' achievements, whatever the level.
94. Governors have a good understanding of the sixth form quality and appreciate the importance of the shared sixth form. They provide effective leadership. Insufficient emphasis has been given, however, to clarifying the management links between Fairfax and the other main school involved in the liaison.
95. The leadership team does not have a specific strategy for monitoring teaching and learning in sixth form subjects. This results in the school's programme of departmental monitoring and review not always focusing sufficiently upon the sixth form and not ensuring that teaching and learning improve

wherever necessary. A consequence is that less teaching is very good and more is satisfactory or even unsatisfactory, than is normal in a sixth form.

96. The partnership to share sixth-form teaching with a neighbouring school is very cost effective. There are procedures that promote regular liaison between the schools, both on a whole-school level and in each subject department. The procedures do not always ensure, however, that the quality of liaison is consistently high in all subjects, or that information on students' prior attainment is passed between the two schools. They have not yet addressed the impact of the imbalance between the timetables of the two schools upon the achievement of students whose lessons are interrupted.
97. The sixth form has improved since the last inspection, and has the strength of its shared provision with a neighbouring school. Good progress has been made since 1999.

## **OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES**

### **Work-related learning**

Provision for work-related learning is good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- A whole-school approach to work-related learning is linked to the school's specialist business and enterprise status
- Work experience and visits from employers offer a wide and helpful variety of opportunities to students
- Careers education is well taught and effective

### **Commentary**

98. The school's programme for work-related learning has been carefully planned in accordance with national guidance. All departments have identified where work-related learning is embedded in their curriculum and this enables students to understand the links between learning in school and the world of work. For example in food technology, students experience an interview and work with a 'client' to develop a product for their coursework. Work-related learning is introduced to all students in Years 7, 8 and 9 as a business studies course, where they learn about how business works and the applications of ICT in a business environment.
99. In Years 9 and 11, a weekly period referred to as 'guidance' has been introduced, which covers elements of careers education. This effective programme is to be extended to other years. An alternative education is provided for a small number of students, where a mix of attending school and work is proving very successful. A few vocational courses are also offered that help to meet the needs of students. These too are successful and the students achieve well. The school plans to introduce shadowing and work experience in Europe once the detailed procedures have been sorted out. In Year 10, an industry day provides a good introduction to career paths, leading to many relevant and interesting work experience placements in Year 11. All Year 10 and 11 students are offered individual careers interviews by the Connexions service. In the sixth form additional work-related learning opportunities are provided, including visiting speakers, evening events such as 'choices for the future' and information on how to apply to universities and higher education colleges.
100. A good careers library is available within the main school library. The school works closely with Connexions so that students are aware of all services available to them. Students are given good guidance to enable them to research independently possible occupations and opportunities for further training, using a variety of sources of information.

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

### **SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4**

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

English, French and German were inspected in detail.

#### **English**

Provision in English is good.

	Years 7,8 and 9	Years 10 and 11
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good
Leadership	Good	
Management	Good	
Progress since last inspection	Good	

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

- Students achieve very well in national assessments in Year 9 and at GCSE, particularly boys
- Most students have very positive attitudes to learning
- Good and very good questioning by teachers helps to probe students' understanding and leads to a deeper understanding of texts
- A small proportion of teaching does not engage and challenge students enough
- Good assessment systems have been introduced recently but students are not always given enough guidance on what they need to do next to improve

#### **Commentary**

##### **Examination results**

101. Results in national tests for fourteen-year-olds taken at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were well above average when compared with all schools and similar schools, with 84 per cent of students achieving level 5 or higher. Over the three years to 2003, results have been similarly good. Boys' results are particularly strong. In GCSE English, in 2003, all students were entered and 70 per cent achieved the higher grades (A\* - C). In English literature, a similar proportion achieved these grades. Year 9 results for 2004 have not yet been agreed. GCSE results for 2004 are similar to those of earlier years.

##### **Standards and achievement**

102. Standards on entry are broadly average. The above average standards seen during the inspection indicate that students achieve well overall. Good achievement by the end of Year 9 results from well-structured teaching, which follows national guidelines, and thorough implementation of the national strategy. Most students make good, and in several classes very good, progress because their attitude to learning is very positive and teaching is effective. Achievement in the GCSE years is also good. High teacher expectations and a focus on examination techniques help students to do very well in external examinations. By Year 11, students have developed good analytical skills and their critical writing on set texts reveals a good understanding of form and content. The achievement of boys in English literature, at the end of Year 11, is very good and they out-perform girls, which is against the national trend.

##### **Teaching and learning**

103. The quality of teaching and learning overall is good, ranging from unsatisfactory to excellent. Expectations are generally high and planning usually meets individual needs. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and detailed knowledge of examination requirements, which helps to focus

teaching. In the best lessons, teaching is stimulating, consistently challenging, and maximises the full length of the lesson time. Teachers use a wide variety of tasks, including effective questioning techniques, and carefully deploy teaching assistants. Students respond very positively and make very good progress in these lessons. The department makes a good contribution to developing students' understanding of social, moral and cultural issues. This is achieved through studying novels, poetry from other cultures, war poems and through discussions. In a Year 10 lesson about poetry from other cultures, students were discussing the poem "Nothing's Changed" by Tatamkhulu Africa. The use of a DVD to stimulate discussion about the background to apartheid and cultural changes in South Africa made a substantial contribution to wider cultural understanding. During the study of "The Charge of The Light Brigade" a Year 10 group were made aware that the number of casualties was approximately the same as the number of students in their year group and half of the Year 11 group. The students were stunned into silence.

104. Where teaching is occasionally less successful, lessons lack variety and pace and students are not given opportunities to develop the required range of skills. In these lessons, students' achievements are significantly lower. Students' work is generally marked constructively, following new department guidance, though comments are not always focused on what could be done better the next time.

### Leadership and management

105. Leadership and management are good. The leadership of the department is currently temporary. An enthusiastic team is developing. Departmental documentation is detailed and useful. The wide range of good data held in the department is not yet used consistently or effectively enough. Staffing changes have been managed sensitively over the past year. These have had an impact on current students' achievements. Although some monitoring of teaching and learning is carried out effectively, this is not consistent across the department. Good progress has been made overall since the last inspection. The department is well resourced and the use of the extensive learning resources centre is helpful to the students' learning.

### Language and literacy across the curriculum

106. Overall, the standard of students' language and literacy skills is above average. When students join the school, their literacy skills are average. Most teachers have good language awareness which results from the literacy policy being implemented over the past two years and recent initiatives. Access to a wide range of relevant data assists teachers in their understanding of individual students' language needs. Most class teachers pay careful attention to subject-specific technical vocabulary and develop its use well, which helps students to achieve so well in their GCSE courses.

### French and German

Provision in French and German is satisfactory.

	Years 7,8 and 9	Years 10 and 11
Standards	Average	Above average in French Average in German
Achievement	Satisfactory	Good
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory	Good

Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since last inspection	Satisfactory

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- In Years 10 and 11, higher attaining students are prepared well for GCSE examinations in French and German
- Teaching is of an inconsistent quality and not always sufficiently effective



- Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are not rigorous enough
- Lessons are often well prepared, which is helping to improve the overall quality of teaching and learning

## **Commentary**

### **Examination results**

107. In 2003, GCSE results were average. In French, a large percentage of the Year 11 cohort, much higher than the national average, was entered for the examination. Girls performed significantly better than boys but the difference was in line with the national picture. Students did not do as well in French or German as they did in their other subjects. In 2004 results were similar. Staffing difficulties in recent years have had an adverse effect on results. These difficulties have now been resolved and more stable staffing is in place.
108. Teacher assessments of students' levels at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were below average in French and well below average in German, and lower than teacher assessments in other subjects. The picture was similar in 2004. These do not reflect the standards observed during the inspection. The languages department is aware of the lack of accuracy in their assessments and is making improvements in the procedures used.

### **Standards and achievement**

109. Standards observed in lessons and students' work were average by the age of fourteen, representing satisfactory achievement. By Year 9, students have a reasonable range of vocabulary in both languages, their listening comprehension skills are well developed and their pronunciation and understanding are good when they read French or German aloud. Overall speaking skills are weak, however, and students rely too heavily on written prompts, reluctant to try the language out for themselves. Students' written work shows that they are starting to use a variety of tenses but many are struggling for accuracy.
110. By Year 11, standards observed in French were above average and achievement is good for students who embark on the GCSE course with broadly average levels of attainment. Students have a good range of vocabulary and the higher attaining students have a sure grasp of a variety of tenses and more complex sentence structure. Listening comprehension skills are well developed but too many students are hesitant speakers of French unless they have a written stimulus in front of them.
111. Standards seen in German were average by Year 11. This represents good achievement as the majority of students choosing the GCSE course start it with below average standards of attainment. The higher attaining students are very well prepared for the GCSE and have a broad vocabulary, good grasp of tense and complex sentence structure and are confident and proficient speakers. This is the minority of students, however. Overall, speaking skills are weak and students are reluctant to speak without written prompts to help and guide them. Their listening, reading and writing skills are better developed and they have a good range of vocabulary at their disposal.

### **Teaching and learning**

112. Teaching and learning vary greatly in quality, from very good to poor. In Years 7, 8 and 9 teaching is satisfactory and promotes satisfactory learning. In Years 10 and 11, however, it is good and is encouraging good learning.
113. In French, where teaching is well planned and contains a good variety of activity for the long 75-minute lessons, students' attitudes and behaviour are good and this promotes good learning. Where this is not the case and work is neither well structured nor interesting, students' attention wanders and behaviour deteriorates. In these situations, students' achievements are unsatisfactory. Lessons are conducted in French to encourage good listening skills and to act as a good role model to the students, which is good practice. The majority of lessons, especially in Years 10 and 11, are conducted with good pace and are well planned. In these years, teaching is focused on the demands of

the GCSE examination and students know clearly what they have to do to achieve to their potential. This, coupled with high expectations and well-planned lessons, is helping to overcome a legacy of weak oral skills inherited from Years 7, 8 and 9.

114. German teaching is most effective and promotes good learning when it is well prepared, varied and delivered with pace. When this is not the case, students soon become bored and their lack of concentration adversely affects their learning. Teaching is conducted in German, which promotes good listening skills, but teachers' proficiency in German is variable and too many basic speaking and pronunciation errors are made for it always to be a good role model for the students. Students are well prepared for the GCSE examinations and the higher attaining students in particular know what they need to do to achieve the highest grades. Overall, in Years 7, 8 and 9 especially, teaching has not offered sufficient opportunities for students to use German spontaneously and independently without written prompts, and this is having an adverse effect on their confidence and ability to speak German.

### **Leadership and management**

115. Leadership is satisfactory. A good role model is provided for colleagues but the organisation of the modern languages department is in a state of flux and the vision for its future is uncertain, particularly in relation to provision for students to study two foreign languages. Management is also satisfactory. The department handbook is detailed and useful but the improvement plan, although identifying priorities for improvement is sketchy on actions to be taken. Monitoring of teaching and learning is not sufficiently rigorous in identifying strengths and weaknesses, sharing good practice and thereby improving consistency. Resources are well managed and staff are starting to use their lap-top computers effectively to support teaching and learning. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory overall, with the majority of issues identified having been addressed. Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning remain, however, as an area for improvement.

### **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is very good.

	Years 7, 8 and 9	Years 10 and 11
Standards	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good

  

Leadership	Excellent
Management	Very good
Progress since last inspection	Very good

### **Main strengths**

- Students are achieving very well because of very good teaching from staff highly secure in their subject knowledge
- Very strong leadership of the department has brought about a consistent approach and a very good atmosphere for participation and learning
- Students have positive attitudes and work hard in response to teachers' high expectations, encouragement and support; relationships are very good
- Students develop a very good understanding of the subject which goes beyond answering questions and passing examinations; this enables students of all abilities to gain very good results

### **Commentary**

#### **Examination results**

116. Results in the Year 9 tests, in 2003, were above the national average and the average of similar schools. They maintained the strong upward trend in results. GCSE results in 2003 were well above

the national average. Students' results in mathematics are better than in most of their other subjects. Indications are that the 2004 results, at both Years 9 and 11, will demonstrate further improvement.

### **Standards and achievement**

117. Students join the school with standards in line with national expectations. Standards seen during the inspection were well above national expectations in Year 9 and Year 11. This represents very good achievement. In both written and oral work, students recall facts and apply skills confidently. Well-structured exercises and very good question and answer sessions at the start of lessons sharpen students' mental mathematics. Good investigational skills were seen in well-presented coursework. These demonstrated an underlying depth of understanding of mathematics. Teaching in all sets ensures students of different abilities do well, with no evidence of differences in the achievement of boys and girls. Regular after-school revision and support sessions help to increase the achievement of students in Year 11. In response to the supportive teaching, students behave very well, concentrate and work hard.

### **Teaching and learning**

118. The experience and expertise of the teachers are significant strengths that ensure rigour in the teaching, interesting lessons and thorough preparation of students for examinations. Teaching is characterised by high expectations, a brisk pace and good use of time, together with very good support and encouragement for individual students. Good teacher:student relationships promote very good learning by creating a pleasant ambience in lessons. This allows teachers to deal with petty misdemeanours without interrupting the learning process and encourages students to attempt difficult concepts without fear of making mistakes. In a well-prepared Year 11 lesson for example, students learnt to find the area of a triangle using trigonometric ratios and then extended their learning by investigating ways to calculate the area of a segment. Routine setting of homework, which extends the classwork task, successfully reinforces learning. An assessment system which includes individual student targets, linked to National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades, and includes regular self-assessment, is a very good feature of the department. This work helps in tracking students' progress and checking on the effectiveness of teaching. Students know what level they are working at, what their targets are and what to do to reach them.

### **Leadership and management**

119. Outstanding leadership importantly focuses on the raising of standards, and results over the last four years indicate improved provision since the last inspection. The development and management of schemes of work, testing and self-assessment for students, use of ICT in lessons and the adoption of the national strategy have all been successful. Teachers act as a mutually supportive team, sharing expertise and good practice. The department is now a vibrant area for learning. All of the weaknesses mentioned in the last report have been addressed.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

120. The provision for mathematics across the curriculum is good. All departments have numeracy statements. These include which numeracy skills they will reinforce, to which year group, and at what time of year. For instance, students studying GCSE religious education will use percentages whilst learning about the plight of Jews during the holocaust. During the inspection, very good examples were seen in art where students use proportion to consider the features of a face, and in physical education where graphical representations are used to evaluate the effect of exercise on heart rate. Students' mathematical skills are above average.

## **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is satisfactory.

	Years 7, 8 and 9	Years 10 and 11
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Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Leadership	Satisfactory	
Management	Satisfactory	
Progress since last inspection	Satisfactory	

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Some teaching is effective in helping students to achieve well
- There is insufficient emphasis upon monitoring and evaluation of teaching and sharing of good practice across the department
- The range of teaching and learning activities is too restricted, in part because of ICT resource issues
- Assessment procedures are satisfactory, but are not fully developed to maximise the benefit for the students

## **Commentary**

### **Examination results**

121. Standards in Year 9 in science in the national tests were above average in 2003, and above those in similar schools, indicating good achievement. Results dropped slightly in 2004. The GCSE results in 2003 were above average and above those in similar schools. Results were higher in 2004.

### **Standards and achievement**

122. Standards in Year 9 are above average, for example in terms of students' understanding of the reactions of acids with metals, their ability to write word equations and their understanding of photosynthesis. Standards in Year 11 are also above average, for example in students' understanding of selective breeding and cloning, in their ability to write balanced chemical equations and in their ability to use quantitative relationships such as those between voltage, energy and charge. Students' achievements in terms of understanding of ICT in science and of investigative work are not as high as their recall and understanding of factual science. Achievement is therefore satisfactory overall, though students were seen making good progress in a number of lessons. Very positive student attitudes and a significant proportion of good teaching results in standards at GCSE that are a little above average, but rather lower than in many other subjects taken by the students. The achievement of students with special educational needs and those that are gifted and talented is satisfactory.

### **Teaching and learning**

123. Teaching is satisfactory in Years 7 to 11, resulting in students learning satisfactorily overall. A significant core of good, and occasionally excellent, teaching is leading to better achievement and higher standards, mainly due to high expectations and work well matched to the needs of students, including those with special educational needs. Students respond well to the challenges presented to them. Generally, teachers have good relationships with students. A variety of activities is often used in lessons to engage and sustain students' interest. The national strategy for science is having a positive impact upon the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers regularly make learning objectives clear to students at the start of lessons, and use a structured approach with a starter, main activities and a concluding activity (plenary). In an excellent lesson with a lower Year 9 set, an imaginative pictorial starter activity engaged the students, consolidated earlier learning about differences in reactivity of metals, and led to students successfully writing word equations.
124. Relative weaknesses in teaching and learning include too little investigative work carried out, not enough open questioning to extend students' scientific thinking and plenaries which are too rushed, so learning objectives are not revisited and reinforced sufficiently. Some good use of ICT by teachers was seen during the inspection but use by students is insufficient.

### **Leadership and management**

125. This is an improving department where leadership and management are satisfactory. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching are not rigorous enough nor yet effective in sharing good practice. Access to sufficient ICT resources is restricted. Tracking of students' achievements has improved and work is marked regularly, following the department's policy. In the best cases, detailed feedback is given to students on how to improve but this is not consistent. Some good practice regularly informs students

of their performance levels and involves them in target-setting, but this is not in place across the department. Science makes a contribution to promoting literacy, with some good emphasis on appropriate technical language. Several teachers provide lists of key words and some encourage extended writing for students to explore and express their ideas. Inconsistencies in this and several other aspects across the department are restricting the progress being made and what the students can achieve.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

	Years 7, 8 and 9	Years 10 and 11
Standards	Average	Above average
Achievement	Satisfactory	Good
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory	Good

Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since last inspection	Very good

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at the end of Year 11 are above average and achievement is good
- Teachers have good subject knowledge which enables them to plan thoroughly
- Teaching does not cater sufficiently for the extremes of ability range in Years 7 to 9
- Accommodation and resources are insufficient for students in Years 7 to 9

### Commentary

#### Examination results

126. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 indicated that students' performances were average. The proportion of students reaching level 5 or higher was above average, but the proportion reaching higher levels than 5 was well below average. Assessments followed a similar pattern in 2004. GCSE results were above average in 2003, but the number of entries was small. A similar number of students successfully obtained a GNVQ qualification. GCSE results in 2004 were similar to those in 2003, again with a small entry. The number of GNVQ successes doubled in 2004. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection.

#### Standards and achievement

127. Achievement of students up to Year 9, although satisfactory overall, is not as good for the higher and lower attaining students. This is as a result of teaching directed towards students of average ability in the mixed ability classes. Students have sound skills across the areas expected at age fourteen, such as the use of word-processing, spreadsheets and databases. Students following GCSE and GNVQ courses in Years 10 and 11 achieve well. They make good progress when working individually on coursework projects. For example, Year 11 students realised that they needed to identify their own problems precisely before attempting to design their data structures, and consequently reached an above average standard.

#### Teaching and learning

128. Teachers have a thorough knowledge of their subject and GCSE assessment expectations. They plan carefully, providing good activities in appropriate contexts which encourage learning. For example, Year 7 students learning to use search engines were keen to discover the cost of a particular computer game. Working relationships between teachers and students are good. Marking is thorough and includes helpful advice on improvement. Teaching and learning are good in Years 10 and 11 where project work encourages students to become independent learners. Students in Years 7 to 9 work in

crowded accommodation where computers have to be shared; resources have not kept pace with the expansion of ICT teaching in the school. Teachers in these mixed ability classes of Years 7 to 9 have difficulty in challenging higher ability students and supporting those needing help. For example, the standards of higher ability students were constrained in a Year 9 lesson on questionnaires because all students were required to investigate a prescribed hypothesis rather than devise their own.

### **Leadership and management**

129. Very good improvement has been made from the unsatisfactory provision at the time of the last inspection. The school has recruited a capable team of teachers who work well together. Teaching time has been increased. Evaluation and support for new teachers, however, is not as rigorous as it should be - no written guidance on how to improve teaching and learning is provided following lesson observations. Monitoring of student performance data is at an early stage of development. Many students are unaware of their current levels of performance and their targets for the future. ICT department documentation is satisfactory, with clearly defined policies, but schemes of work vary in quality. Students benefit from the use of the computer rooms and the availability of staff during lunchtimes and after school.

### **ICT across the curriculum**

130. The overall competence of students in the use of ICT is above average. Teachers have begun to use laptops and interactive whiteboards effectively, and the use of ICT has been written into some schemes of work. A range of ICT resources enhances students' learning in areas including drama (where students use laptops and video clips in GCSE display work), physical education, design and technology and geography. A shortfall, currently, in ICT resources, means teachers find it difficult to book computer rooms to support teaching sufficiently in a few subjects, particularly mathematics and science. In business studies, although data projectors are used, students are given insufficient ICT experience and insufficient use is made of ICT in music.

## **HUMANITIES**

Geography, history and religious education were inspected.

### **Geography**

Provision in geography is good.

	Years 7, 8 and 9	Years 10 and 11
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since last inspection	Good

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Most lessons are well planned and organised to ensure that all students achieve well
- Students usually respond well in lessons and have positive attitudes to learning
- The shared enthusiasm of the leadership and teaching team contributes well to learning and achievement
- Students have too few opportunities to use computers

### **Commentary**

#### **Examination results**

131. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were below average in 2003. The department correctly identified that these underestimated standards. Those for 2004 show a much higher proportion

gaining level 5, which overestimates actual standards. The department is aware of the need to continue to evaluate and improve its assessment procedures. The 2003 GCSE results were above average. Results are improving and, in 2004, an increased proportion of students gained A\*-C grades.



### Standards and achievement

132. Most students enter the school with average standards in geography. By Year 9, the great majority achieves well, improving to a level that is a little above the expected standard. Most students have a good knowledge of geographical processes and an understanding of how physical and human ones are interconnected. For example, they know that major earthquakes occur in certain areas, can explain why and understand the impact upon people who live there. Achievement continues to be good in Years 10 and 11, as standards are consolidated at an above average level for a very substantial proportion of students. Achievement is less good in a few lessons, due to unchallenging activities. In coursework, in which students analyse the way in which the local town centre operates, most show good investigative standards, presenting clear, relevant hypotheses and testing these in a well-organised way through first-hand research.

### Teaching and learning

133. Teaching is good overall and sometimes very good. Most lessons are very well planned. For this reason, they start briskly and are well organised, so that learning develops coherently and students work at a good pace. Good questioning ensures that all students pay attention and take part in discussions. Although teachers do not always plan work specifically for those with special educational needs, or higher attainers, they have a good awareness of their needs. They effectively support and challenge where needed by directing questions at an appropriate level, giving individual help and managing group work well. Teachers show great enthusiasm for the subject. They endeavour to plan imaginative, interesting and enjoyable tasks. These are not always as successful as intended, but usually secure the aim of enthusing and involving students, so that their responses make a good contribution to their achievement. In a small number of lessons, activities are not challenging enough, because they do not build well on what students already know. Teachers occasionally tolerate too much talking as students work, so that they do not fully concentrate on their work. This causes their achievement to be lower than it could be.

### Leadership and management

134. There have recently been very significant changes to the teaching team, including arrangements for leading and managing the subject. Because of this, while there are many clear strengths in the department and it is showing considerable promise as it reshapes, the impact upon achievement has still to be fully felt. Leadership is characterised by great enthusiasm for geography and this is shared by the teaching team, with good sharing of ideas for improvement. Management is effective, with well worked out procedures for monitoring and improving teaching and learning. In reorganising GCSE fieldwork to ensure it was fully accessible to students in wheelchairs, the department has shown high commitment to the school's determination to welcome and fully involve all. The department also makes a very good contribution to the school's commitment to training new teachers. Student teachers are very well supported and respond very well to the good opportunities they are given to make a contribution to the work of the department. Improvement since the last inspection has been good, with most strengths being maintained, in spite of the changes in the department. Although there is a commitment to the use of ICT, plans are often not implemented, due to difficulty in gaining access to computers.

### History

Provision in history is very good.

	Years 7, 8 and 9	Years 10 and 11
Standards	Above average	Well above average
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good
Leadership	Very Good	

Management	Good
Progress since last inspection	Very Good

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students' knowledge and understanding of history rapidly increases as they move through the school, helped by their very good attitudes to learning
- The very good quality of teaching results in very good achievement, raising standards
- Strong leadership is providing the vision and platform for sustained improvement
- Assessment for learning is not fully implemented and not all classrooms have full use of ICT

## **Commentary**

### **Examination results**

135. The proportion of students achieving A\*-C GCSE grades in 2003 was well above average. A high proportion of students achieved A\*-A grades compared with most other subjects – 29 percent of girls and 22 percent of boys. Results for 2004 are higher than in 2003. Teacher assessments in Year 9 in 2003 were above average and similar in 2004.

### **Standards and achievement**

136. On entry, students have a broadly average knowledge of history. They quickly improve because teaching focuses on key skills and the focus is on individual needs. By Year 9, standards are above average. In Years 7 and 8, students develop questioning skills and understand about evaluation and analysis of historical sources. In Year 9 they have begun to use empathy in their explanations of a personal view of the railways. By Year 11, the range of approaches to teaching and learning leads to even higher standards. In Year 10, students understand how to compare and contrast historical evidence and make conclusions about the relationship of Britain and France to Italy during the Abyssinian issue. By Year 11, students are able to carry out theoretical analyses and are adept at interpreting historical events and using notes effectively to plan essays. Through their very good understanding of empathy they are able to argue rationally and use this to very good effect in discussions, debate and in written work.

### **Teaching and learning**

137. Lessons are well structured and learning develops through a range of activities which focus on students' individual learning styles. Teachers have very high expectations, set challenges and use a variety of activities to make history lessons interesting. Students respond with very good attitudes to work. Assessment is a positive feature of teaching. Teachers continually check progress through well-selected questions and these are carefully directed to make sure all students respond. The use of individual whiteboards is a good innovation. Students often work in pairs to assess and comment on answers to questions. Teachers mark books regularly, but comments are not always sufficiently focused on the development of historical skills. The use of visiting speakers helps students learn, for example about the Battle of the Atlantic and life in Poland during World War 2; visits to museums enhance students' learning of industrial development. Careful planning and very good use of teaching assistants enable students with special educational needs and the gifted and talented to achieve at the same rate as their peers.

### **Leadership and management**

138. A clear vision is shared by all teachers and support staff. Leadership is motivating and enthusiastic and this gives confidence to teachers and students to be imaginative. The curriculum is designed to enhance students' historical experience of people and the contribution individuals have made to shape our history. The development plan focuses on raising standards and achievements. The curriculum is also planned so that students learn about enterprise. The department carries out a review each year, seeking students' views about the curriculum and teaching styles. All teachers share good practice through a series of lesson observations. The department is developing ICT within the curriculum but the use of computers is not yet fully incorporated into the department. Very good improvement has been made since the last inspection, with higher standards and better teaching.

## Religious education

Provision in religious education is unsatisfactory.

	Years 7, 8 and 9	Years 10 and 11
Standards	Above average	GCSE above average Statutory RE low
Achievement	Good	GCSE very good Statutory RE unsatisfactory
Teaching and learning	Good	GCSE very good Statutory RE n/a

Leadership	Unsatisfactory
Management	Unsatisfactory
Progress since last inspection	Satisfactory

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The time available for religious education in Year 10 is insufficient to fulfil statutory requirements
- Leadership and management of the subject are currently unsatisfactory
- GCSE results are generally above average because of very good teaching
- Students in Years 7 to 9 respond well to good teaching, taking a pride in their work and achieve well
- Lack of ICT in the departmental rooms is restricting students' achievements

### Commentary

#### Examination results

139. In 2003, about a quarter of the year group took GCSE and 69 per cent gained A\*-C results, with a high proportion of A\*-A grades. In 2004 the results were lower at the higher grades but, in both years, all students passed. The teacher-assessed levels at the end of Year 9 in 2003 placed 77 per cent of the intake at level 5 or above, which is an above average performance. Assessments were similar in 2004.

#### Standards and achievement

140. In Year 7, some good work on symbolism was seen, including a moving piece on the symbolism of a piece of jewellery. In Year 9, students' work was very good in a challenging module on suffering. Students achieve well overall in Years 7 to 9 and take care and pride in their presentation of work. As no discrete statutory religious education is taught in Year 10, no evidence is available to make a judgement on the core provision. In Year 11, there is also little evidence of standards to make a clear judgement. Students' standards are therefore low because time is not spent teaching a core religious education course, responding to the requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus. In GCSE work, standards are above average and students achieve very well because of very good, well-structured and targeted teaching. Students can compare and contrast different denominational views on the sanctity of life. For example, they co-operated well to produce a comprehensive synthesis of relevant points on poverty in the third world. Students of all abilities achieve well and apply religious concepts to contemporary issues, one of the most challenging parts of the course.

#### Teaching and learning

141. Both teaching and learning are good overall in Years 7 to 9 and very good in GCSE classes in Years 10 and 11. The work set for the students in Year 9 has many good features, such as good opportunities for personal and reflective responses. Students produced perceptive responses to questions such as "life is like a ....". Teachers use good questioning skills to challenge students to expand their thinking and so students of all levels of ability make good progress. In the GCSE

religious studies course, very good planning matches the pace and challenge of the work closely to the particular students and takes account of their differing needs and learning strengths. The restricted access to ICT inhibits the development of a greater variety in teaching, for example in gaining virtual access to world faiths and to the impact of belief on life and practice.

### Leadership and management

142. Recent changes in staffing and the responsibilities of key staff have contributed to challenging circumstances for the subject, which have not yet been sufficiently addressed. The departmental handbook is not up to date. The use of levels in routine marking is underdeveloped. There is some confusion in the marking scheme between achievement and attainment, and scrutiny of the marked work shows variation in practice within the department. The fusion of religious education into citizenship in Year 10 is unsatisfactory since there is insufficient coverage of the Agreed Syllabus. The specialist teachers in the department are however maintaining the good standards of work seen in the previous inspection. Resources are adequate but dependent on copied materials. The accommodation is also adequate but, in mobile classrooms detached from the main buildings, access to ICT facilities is difficult.

### TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology consists of food, resistant materials, textiles and graphics taught throughout Years 7 to 9. GCSE courses in resistant materials, graphic products, food and child development are offered.

### Design and technology

Provision in design and technology is good.

	Years 7, 8 and 9	Years 10 and 11
Standards	Above average	Above average
Achievement	Good	Good
Teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since last inspection	Very good

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieved well above average standards at GCSE as a result of effective preparation, teaching and learning
- The leadership of the department is very good
- Very good lesson planning, including the use of ICT across the department, leads to good learning
- Specialist teachers motivate students through their enthusiasm for the subject
- Some inconsistencies in teachers' expectations restrict students' achievements at times

### Commentary

#### Examination results

143. Students' end of Year 9 assessments in 2003 indicated that they attained above average standards across the full range of competences tested. GCSE results in design and technology subjects were above average in 2003. Results were higher in 2004, substantially so in child development.

#### Standards and achievement

144. The number of students opting for the range of technology subjects is increasing. Students enter the school with average standards and by the end of Year 9 they reach above average levels and a substantial proportion reach well above average in Year 11. This represents good achievement

overall, with some that is very good. Girls and boys progress at a similar rate. Students with special educational needs and the most capable achieve at the same rate as other students. In all classes students' achievement is sound or better, but there is variation depending to a great extent upon the quality of teaching. Students in Year 9 can make lap joints successfully, working to the realisation of designed wooden boxes. Health and safety aspects are clearly understood. In their GCSE course, students designed and made trophies using two materials, working to a good standard. Year 9 students appreciate the importance of food advertising and the quality of packaging of foodstuffs as well as the importance of a healthy diet.

### Teaching and learning

145. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Particular strengths were the pace of lessons and a good variety of activities, both of which helped to retain students' attention and interest. Detailed schemes of work are followed which help students to progress through the various skills and knowledge required in all the areas. Students' learning benefits from the small class sizes, which enable teachers to spend more time with individuals during practical lessons. Students work hard and their behaviour is good which reflects the good teaching. They work well on their own and in groups when required, and respect each other and teachers. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. They are well trained in the use of ICT and students benefit from the good ICT resources used. In a few lessons, explanations and expectations were not clear to lower attainers and insufficient exemplar material was available. In some graphics and resistant materials lessons, work was too prescriptive, preventing students from having the opportunity to be creative and show individual flair. Teachers offer 'drop in' sessions after school to support GCSE coursework, which shows their commitment to the students and raising standards further.

### Leadership and management

146. The department is very well led, with a good team of supportive specialist teachers. There is a clear vision for the department, and the energy and enthusiasm to work towards making improvements. Curriculum planning is thorough and assessment, which is good, is seen as being key to raising standards further. Self-evaluation takes place effectively and staff training is ongoing. Support staff are managed well and their contribution is valued. Accommodation and resources are very good and meet all the requirements of the curriculum and the courses offered in the department. There is full access for students with physical disabilities. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. Standards and achievement are higher and better, ICT is used more successfully and assessment is more effective.

## VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design and music were inspected in full and drama was sampled.

### Art and design

Provision in art and design is very good.

	Years 7, 8 and 9	Years 10 and 11
Standards	Above average	Well above average
Achievement	Good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Good	Very good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since last inspection	Very good

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are some of the highest in the school
- Teachers challenge the students who achieve very well

- The assessment and academic monitoring of students is excellent
- Very good leadership shows a clear vision for the development of the subject
- Students do not have sufficient opportunity to use ICT as an aid to learning

## **Commentary**

### **Examination results**

147. The results of the 2003 teachers' assessments in Year 9 were well above average; all students attained a level 5 or better with a large proportion getting level 6. The GCSE results in 2003 were well above average. Results in 2004 maintained the trend in teacher assessments and GCSE results. Nearly all the students gained the higher grades A\* to C at GCSE but few attained the highest grades A\* and A. Although the course is more popular with girls, boys do just as well as girls.

### **Standards and achievement**

148. Standards in the current Year 9 are above expectations. Students' attainment on entry is average. The good progress made in Years 7 to 9 is due to the challenging tasks set by teachers and their expectations that high standards will be achieved. All students reach a high technical standard of handling the formal elements of art in most strands of the subject. They also have a good knowledge of the work of artists and sound understanding of how other cultures use imagery for different purposes. The most able students are helped to make very good progress by the many opportunities to learn through independent enquiry. Students on the GCSE course are achieving standards that are well above average. Students make very good progress. This is because they develop very effective understanding of a working method that starts with researching topics in sketchbooks. Students then select the best ideas and, through a careful process of refinement, produce very high quality coursework. All students are helped to achieve very high standards by the extremely rich sets of examples that line the walls in all the studios.

### **Teaching and learning**

149. Teaching and learning are good. They are very good on the GCSE course. In the lessons observed, varied and ambitious tasks were explained in ways that students understood and this allowed them to learn in clearly defined, incremental steps. When teaching was less than good it was either because introductions were too long-winded or that class management lacked sufficient firmness. All teachers know their students very well and support them very well with individual attention. This is constrained by the high number of students in Year 9 groups. All students get help or advice that is based on teachers' very good subject knowledge. Students respond very well to the teachers' high expectations and consequently, attitudes are very positive. Talented students are taught a specially devised course in a lunchtime club. Students enjoy both visits to art galleries and tuition from artists-in-residence. Their subsequent outcomes show that they have learnt how to evaluate the work of artists and then use these influences effectively. Opportunities to use computers for teaching and learning are insufficient. Assessment is thorough and rigorous. All students have their progress checked by regularly updated records. They are set challenging targets. In Years 10 and 11, the work of all students is reviewed to indicate how well they are doing. The teacher and student agree ways of pursuing further improvement.

### **Leadership and management**

150. The department is very well led and managed. An excellent team has been established. The views of all teachers are sought and valued, particularly when the departmental self-evaluation takes place or when work is moderated. Consequently, there is an accurate picture of what needs to be done to move the department forward in the future. The management of the department is very good. The way that it intends to improve is expressed clearly in the development plan. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. GCSE results are significantly better. The curriculum now has continuity and progression as a result of the perceptive reviews of what has been taught and what has had the most success. The department is one of the most successful in the school.



## Music

Provision in music is satisfactory.

	Years 7, 8 and 9	Years 10 and 11
Standards	Average	Average
Achievement	Satisfactory	Good
Teaching and Learning	Satisfactory	Good

  

Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Unsatisfactory
Progress since last inspection	Satisfactory

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The excellent range of extra-curricular music activities are very well supported and a large number of performance opportunities are offered
- Good and very good teaching results in good achievement, although some teaching and learning are unsatisfactory
- Composition and music literacy skills are not being developed sufficiently

### Commentary

#### Examination results

151. Year 9 National Curriculum teacher assessments in 2003 were well above the national average, and 2004 assessments were similar. These assessments do not reflect the standards seen during the inspection. Results at GCSE in 2003 were just above the national average but in 2004 much lower.

#### Standards and achievement

152. Performing skills are particularly well developed in Years 7 to 9 but compositional skills are less so and musical literacy is weak. As a result of having no books in which to record their work, students are unable to build sufficiently on their prior knowledge. Some groups of students achieve well in Years 7 to 9 as a result of good or very good teaching. In keyboard playing, students develop from playing simple five-note melodies to those with a wider range accompanied by simple left hand chords. In some Year 7 to 9 classes however, where teaching is ineffective, achievement is unsatisfactory and students with special educational needs lack sufficient support. At GCSE, standards of performing are above average and students demonstrate a high level of aural skill in identifying difficult concepts such as the instrumental techniques used in 20th century music. Students are challenged to progress at a fast pace. Throughout the school, the short amount of time allowed for some activities, particularly composition, combined with the lack of music literacy, is unhelpful in improving achievement.

#### Teaching and learning

153. In Years 7 to 9, the quality of teaching and learning varied from unsatisfactory to very good. The better teaching was characterised by well-planned tasks that both challenged and reinforced what was already known. Students in these lessons identified how they could improve their performances. They understood and used musical language to describe what they were studying. Singing, listening and performing tasks were integrated and clearly linked to National Curriculum levels. Good relationships resulted in good behaviour and student attitudes. Unsatisfactory teaching focused on lesson activities, rather than on learning, with no clear progression of tasks. Here classroom management was weak and more time was spent managing behaviour than promoting learning, resulting in lessons that had a slow pace with a choice of repertoire that was too easy. In some lessons, students were not able to achieve tasks either because they did not understand what to do, or because they lacked the skills. For example, a lack of music reading skills prevented progress in performing, as students were unable to apply performing skills learnt in one piece to new repertoire.

This, together with the lack of access to ICT in Years 7 to 9, also means that students are unable to refine and develop extended compositions. In GCSE classes, teachers had high expectations, presenting difficult listening tasks in a dynamic manner and providing support and encouragement according to individual need. Students were anxious to learn and were challenged by the high expectations. Performance is assessed regularly and students frequently appraise each other's work, making positive comments and identifying ways of improving. Other skills, particularly the marking and assessment of listening work, indicate that assessment is satisfactory overall.

### **Leadership and management**

154. The department makes good use of and supports several trainee teachers who help to maximise the musical expertise available in the classroom. The dynamic leadership results in an excellent range of extra-curricular opportunities, some involving very large numbers of students from across the school. The curriculum, which is very good in many ways, does not fully meet National Curriculum requirements. Monitoring and support for improving the quality of teaching within the department is insufficiently effective. This task, as well as management of the curriculum, extra-curricular work and the large numbers of instrumental staff, is not currently supported by sufficient management time. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory, with sufficient curriculum time now provided for Years 7 to 9, and higher standards. There are areas of weakness, however, which need to be tackled.

### **Drama**

155. Provision for drama was sampled. GCSE results in 2003 were above average and all students gained a pass grade. There was a further improvement in 2004 results, most notably in the relatively high proportion of students gaining the highest A\*/A grades. Standards in lessons seen were above average in Year 9 and well above average on the GCSE course. Teaching observed was good, and very good at GCSE. Lessons are well planned and taught with enthusiasm and very good class management. As a result, even younger students learn how to work maturely, cooperate, and support one another whether as performers or audience. All students are aware of how drama skills develop and where they are in terms of achieving those skills, because teachers make clear what constitutes success and how progress can be made. Students become confident performers and make sensible and helpful comments to others because teachers model the value of doing these things well.
156. Older students are allowed, and use, independence and responsibility. Whilst some remain reluctant to propose ideas, all take part in group work. This helped a Year 10 class quickly produce a range of well thought out ideas on the theme of hostages, to which they then applied an imaginative variety of performance techniques.
157. This is a well-organised and successful department. There has been good improvement since the last inspection: GCSE results have risen substantially, the scheme of work for younger students is much better, and issues related to drama management have been addressed. The school puts on two major productions each year, and theatre visits and workshops provide other chances for students to follow their interest in drama.

### **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

All students follow a course of physical education in Years 7 to 9 covering games, gymnastics, swimming and athletics. In Years 10 and 11, all students follow a non-examinable course covering a range of activities. Two groups of students, with approximately 20 in each group, follow a GCSE physical education course. All these courses were inspected.

Provision in physical education is very good.

	Years 7, 8 and 9	Years 10 and 11
Standards	Above average	Well above average
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good
<b>Leadership</b>		
Leadership	Very good	
<b>Management</b>		
Management	Very good	
<b>Progress since last inspection</b>		
Progress since last inspection	Very good	

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students achieve very well to gain GCSE results well above the national average
- Staff are very committed and provide all students with an excellent range of extra-curricular activities that are very well attended
- Teachers' very good knowledge is a key factor in students' achievement by the end of Year 11
- There is a very clear focus on improvement in order to raise standards and achievement

### **Commentary**

#### **Examination results**

158. Students enter the school with average standards, though experiences are varied. Assessments made by teachers show that standards of performance, especially amongst boys, are above average by the end of Year 9 and are improving. In the 2003 GCSE examination, the proportion of students gaining A\*-C grades was 71 per cent, significantly above the national average. However, the proportion of students attaining A\* and A grades was below average, reflecting the entry capabilities of students on the course. In 2004, the results fell slightly.

#### **Standards and achievement**

159. Students make very good progress through the school and achieve very well by the end of Year 11, especially in the GCSE course. Standards are above average by the end of Year 9, representing very good achievement by students, considering their capabilities. Students acquire new skills and knowledge and apply them in suitable activities. In gymnastics, higher attaining girls display above average skills when performing partner balance sequences and make very good progress in their compositional skills. Swimming standards in Year 9 are in line with the expectation, but students achieve well, overall, especially those with physical disability. When given opportunity, students can evaluate the performance of others and suggest improvements. GCSE students in Year 11 have above average knowledge of anatomy and physiology and of training principles and they use specific vocabulary confidently. They have good knowledge of the principles of treating sports injuries and have very well-developed ICT skills when preparing presentations. In practical activities, students achieve very well. They have above average skills and knowledge of the principles of defensive roles in soccer. Students with special educational needs, including those in wheelchairs, achieve as well as their peers.

#### **Teaching and learning**

160. The quality of teaching is varied but very good overall. In one Year 11 GCSE lesson, excellent, challenging teaching and very high expectations enabled students to gain knowledge of sports injuries and their treatment. Teachers have very good knowledge and plan well-structured, progressive lessons for students to acquire new skills and apply them in suitable activities. In the most effective lessons, students are given very good opportunities to analyse the skills of others and suggest improvements, thus deepening their own technical knowledge. Students are very well managed and relationships between teachers and students are very good. As a result, the learning environment, in almost all lessons, is very positive. Very occasionally in lessons, boys' behaviour was not well managed and this led to some unsatisfactory learning.

### **Leadership and management**

161. Both leadership and management are very good. There is a clear vision for improving students' achievement, based on good knowledge of strengths and weaknesses. Monitoring is regular but, at present, is too informal. Accommodation and resources are very good and there is a very good match of teachers to the curriculum. Provision for extra-curricular activities is excellent. Almost three-quarters of students, including those with physical disabilities, participate in the wide range of activities. As a result, students gain success in local, regional and national competitions. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. The quality of teaching, students' achievements and extra-curricular activities are better than in 1999.

### **BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES**

The focus of the inspection was GCSE business studies but GCSE in leisure and tourism was also sampled. In the Year 10 leisure and tourism lesson observed, marketing theory was applied to a regional theme park and learning was good. The business department offers a wide range of courses at GCSE in accounting, business communications and business studies. Business studies is also taught to Years 8 and 9 and the course developed provides a very good grounding for further study.

#### **Business studies**

Provision in business studies is very good.

	Years 10 and 11
Standards	Very high
Achievement	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since last inspection	Good

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

- Examination results are outstanding and students achieve very well
- A well-qualified team of specialist teachers teach very effective lessons
- Good teamwork creates well-planned lessons
- Innovative practice is disseminated to other schools
- There are insufficient opportunities to use ICT to support learning

#### **Commentary**

##### **Examination results**

162. In 2003, results in GCSE were well above the national average and in 2004 results were higher with 90 per cent of students gaining grades A\*-C. In the business communication course, 95 per cent of students gained grades A\*-C.

##### **Standards and achievement**

163. Standards are far above expectations for students at this stage. By Year 11, students can complete trading accounts and draw conclusions from these. They can perform a break-even analysis by creating the relevant diagram and understand the advantages and disadvantages of different forms of credit. Students achieve high marks by successfully applying the theories learned to business case studies and have well-developed skills of analysis and evaluation. In Year 10 lessons, students drew on knowledge and concepts from different parts of the course, such as customer service and marketing, to analyse a business in a sophisticated way.

### Teaching and learning

164. Teachers plan lessons very well, building the understanding of new ideas by relating them to what students already know. For example, Year 10 lessons were observed where students learned about the management tool of SWOT analysis by identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the school, a particularly brave approach during an inspection! Once the concept was understood, students watched a clip from the television comedy *'Fawlty Towers'* and showed the speed and effectiveness of their new learning by analysing the Fawlty hotel business. The feedback from students was rapid and enthusiastic. The very good learning resulted from expert teaching coupled with the excellent attitudes and behaviour of the students. In Year 11, attitudes to learning are not quite as good as in Year 10. Work is marked very well with specific targets and students are clear about what they need to do to improve.

### Leadership and management

165. The department is well led and managed. The school is a regional centre for the training of teachers in specialist business and enterprise schools. The department has grown, drawing on its very good support for trainee teachers. The very experienced leadership of the department has mentored less experienced staff so that they can deliver very good lessons. In return, fresh approaches such as the use of data projectors have informed the practice of more established staff. Teachers work together to share the planning of units of work and the delivery of lessons, which help towards a consistency of approach. A well-planned business course has been successfully introduced into Years 8 and 9 and innovative work has been done to develop level descriptors to compensate for the lack of National Curriculum levels. Plans are in progress to build on this successful provision for students in Years 10 and 11. Monitoring of the department's work is not fully in place. There have been very significant improvements in provision since the last inspection but the use of ICT to support student learning is still underdeveloped. Accommodation is currently unsatisfactory and this militates against the use of ICT but new accommodation with good ICT facilities is under construction.

### PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Students follow a mixed programme of personal, social and health education and citizenship during 'guidance' periods. A number of short PSHE sessions were sampled. A good range of topics is taught, suitably planned but with insufficient time to do justice to the work in some lessons. The quality of teaching seen was generally good with some very good aspects. Teachers were well prepared for sessions, for example on bullying in Year 7, the value of education in Year 8 and human rights in Year 10. Students listened well, generally taking topics seriously and making good progress in their learning. When work became insufficiently challenging or follow-up points did not capture the interest of the students, motivation and involvement fell away.

### Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is unsatisfactory.

	Years 7, 8 and 9	Years 10 and 11
Standards	Below average	Well below average
Achievement	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Teaching and learning	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory

  

Leadership	Unsatisfactory
Management	Unsatisfactory
Progress since last inspection	Not applicable

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Active citizenship is promoted by numerous successful initiatives
- Students underachieve because there is not enough time for teaching citizenship

- The curriculum and teaching are not sufficiently monitored
- Assessment and recording systems are not reliable enough to assess students' achievements

### **Commentary**

#### **Examination results**

166. The results of teacher assessments for Year 9 students in 2003 were above average. No students follow a GCSE course in citizenship.

#### **Standards and achievement**

167. The combined programme, especially in Years 10 and 11 where the emphasis is on careers education, does not allow sufficient time to deal with citizenship topics in any detail or to revisit them in subsequent years to deepen students' learning. Statutory requirements are not fully met. This results in unsatisfactory achievement and standards that are not high enough. Students acquire some familiarity with citizenship concepts in the 30-minute lessons. They can identify problems, for example racism and discrimination, but their thinking is not refined or deepened sufficiently for them to be in a position to make informed choices or judgements. This is reflected in the limited amount of written work they undertake. Opportunities to develop oral skills are similarly constricted. Numerous cross- and extra-curricular activities reflect the outward-looking ethos of the school and help to promote skills of participation and responsible action. These include the well-established annual Eisteddfod, the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, the Fairfax Award scheme, alternative curriculum weeks and charity fundraising, all of which involve large numbers of students. Smaller groups are working on Comenius and Namibia projects and are involved in the school council.

#### **Teaching and learning**

168. Schemes of work exist at three levels of detail to assist lesson planning. They are not fully coherent as some of the knowledge and understanding strands scheduled for development do not apply to the lesson topic specified. This was reflected in two Year 10 lessons observed, where lesson objectives were too generalised to guide students' thinking. Not all teachers observe the calendar sequence of topics and follow-up sessions in tutor periods do not consistently address citizenship issues. Teachers have some difficulty adapting the material to the 30-minute time slot. In the better lessons, some creative planning and very co-operative student attitudes generated useful short debates, for example on key party political election pledges. Overall, students have a superficial understanding and recall of the topics covered. Their files are too skimpy to enable them to consolidate work or demonstrate progress over time. Marking is not undertaken, so they have no guidance on how they can improve. The updated audit annexe does not identify what contribution other subjects make to citizenship and opportunities to make useful links are missed.

#### **Leadership and management**

169. There is insufficient appreciation of the need to embed citizenship fully within the taught curriculum and a lack of rigorous overview of curriculum programmes and teaching and learning. A useful start has been made in devising an assessment scheme for Year 9 students. This scheme, however, is not representative as it only relates to one of the three skill strands in citizenship. Monitoring is too informal and there is no system to moderate teacher judgements. Staff have received little training in the subject.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, eleven 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 focus of the sixth-form inspection was on Fairfax students, taking lessons in their own school.

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

### *Level 3 GCE AS level courses*

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and Design	7	57.1	80.1	0.0	23.7	17.1	29.9
Biology	8	37.5	65.2	12.5	11.1	13.8	20.6
Business Studies	11	54.5	76.4	0.0	16.3	16.4	26.2
Chemistry	2	100.0	72.7	0.0	13.9	30.0	24.1
Drama	2	0.0	86.5	0.0	19.6	0.0	30.6
Economics	2	50.0	73.6	0.0	20.1	20.0	26.4
English Language	7	57.1	82.9	0.0	17.5	15.7	28.7
English Literature	2	100.0	85.9	0.0	19.1	20.0	30.2
French	4	0.0	78.2	0.0	18.9	0.0	27.6
Design and Technology	6	66.7	74.9	0.0	15.1	18.3	25.3
General Studies	46	60.9	73.9	8.7	17.8	17.0	25.7
Geography	10	60.0	74.3	10.0	19.8	16.0	26.5
History	5	60.0	80.7	0.0	19.5	20.0	28.6
Information Technology	15	66.7	67.0	6.7	10.9	18.7	21.4
Mathematics	8	50.9	61.9	0.0	17.1	11.3	22.1
Music	1	100.0	86.5	0.0	21.4	20.0	30.7
Other Social Subjects	26	80.8	69.7	19.2	16.7	30.4	24.1
Physics	2	50.0	68.6	0.0	14.4	20.0	22.7
Religious Studies	4	50.2	80.2	0.0	22.6	17.5	29.8
Sociology	3	100.0	71.8	0.0	18.4	26.7	25.4
Sports Studies	9	44.4	73.2	11.1	11.4	15.6	23.1
Vocational Studies	2	100.0	62.8	0.0	12.3	30.0	20.8

*Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses*

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and Design	21	100.0	98.6	42.9	50.2	79.0	87.5
Biology	13	100.0	96.4	7.7	39.2	63.1	78.6
Business Studies	27	100.0	98.7	22.2	36.8	69.6	80.1
Chemistry	5	100.0	97.6	40.0	49.0	84.0	84.9
Drama	9	100.0	99.5	22.2	40.1	73.3	83.6
Economics	4	100.0	98.9	50.0	52.0	85.0	88.3
English Language	20	100.0	99.4	30.0	36.3	78.0	80.9
English Literature	12	100.0	99.5	33.3	46.5	85.0	86.5
French	2	100.0	98.8	0.0	51.5	50.0	87.6
Design and Technology	5	100.0	97.8	40.0	35.0	76.0	77.9
General Studies	77	92.2	94.7	10.4	31.0	57.4	73.1
Geography	16	93.8	98.7	25.0	44.5	62.5	84.0
History	13	100.0	99.0	38.5	44.6	76.9	84.6
Information Technology	19	100.0	95.6	36.8	24.6	70.5	69.5
Mathematics	12	91.7	96.7	25.0	55.6	71.7	88.8
Other Social Subjects	52	100.0	97.4	46.2	42.7	86.5	81.8
Physics	6	100.0	96.7	66.7	44.6	90.0	81.7
Religious Studies	11	100.0	98.8	36.4	46.7	80.0	85.6
Sociology	10	100.0	98.2	20.0	44.3	70.0	83.6
Sports Studies	14	85.7	98.0	7.1	30.9	50.0	75.2
Vocational Studies	9	88.9	91.4	33.3	25.8	73.3	66.5
Business VCE	4	50.0	65.0	0.0	14.6	30.0	60.1
Leisure and Recreation VCE	2	100.0	62.9	0.0	10.2	40.0	57.9

**ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

The courses in English language and literature combined and in French were inspected in detail and language across the curriculum was judged. GCE AS-level and A2-level courses are also offered in English language and English literature. Many students choose to take an English course and very few leave part way through. One Year 13 English literature lesson was sampled, in which students analysed the ideas in a poem by William Blake. This provided satisfactory achievement, with a balance of strengths and weaknesses. Good relationships, strong encouragement for students and well-organised group work were strengths. The acceptance of too much talking as students worked, which detracted from the quality of their focus, and a lack of rigour in the analysis, reduced achievement. One Year 12 lesson was sampled of a course for students who are re-taking their English GCSE. Sound teaching featuring well-chosen resources stimulated students to a satisfactory rate of learning. As a result they acquired a secure grasp of the basic principles required to analyse and describe advertising media.



## English language and literature combined

Provision in English language and literature combined is satisfactory.

	Years 12 and 13
Standards	Average
Achievement	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory
Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since last inspection	Satisfactory

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students know precisely how well they are doing because marking is good
- Teaching is inconsistent and some is not good enough
- Students show too little initiative and independence

### Commentary

#### Examination results

170. Results at A level in 2003 were at the national average. Male students did much better than female. 2004 results showed a decline but represented satisfactory achievement given the entry standards of the students. AS results were below national average in 2003 and, with a much larger group of students, improved in 2004.

#### Standards and achievement

171. Present standards are at the national average in Year 13 and below it in Year 12. This represents satisfactory achievement since a number of students are allowed to join the course with lower entry standards than those required in many other sixth forms. Higher attaining students structure their well-informed essays effectively and are equally skilled in analysis and creative work. Most lack the precision and nuance in language necessary to gain the highest grade. Average attaining students try hard to create effects with language, and explain issues and ideas clearly. They show limited ability to extend points, and to support them with well-chosen examples. Lower attaining students are aware of technical terminology but do not use it well. They present broad ideas reasonably but do not develop opinions or effects sufficiently. A general weakness in discussion is a limited ability to identify a key point quickly and express it in clear, exact English.

#### Teaching and learning

172. Teaching is satisfactory but too inconsistent. Both the course and lessons are well structured so that students see and understand how work in progress fits into wider learning requirements. Assessment is good, regular and accurate, so that student progress can be tracked and shared. Resources are well chosen. Teachers have good knowledge of the texts and materials they present but do not always set the historical, social and cultural context which would make texts then come alive for students. Students learn to assess their own and others' work accurately, but are often reluctant to query or criticise. Academic debate is too rare. Teachers encourage it, but their own questioning is sometimes too general and not sufficiently demanding. In weaker teaching, expectations are too low and there is an apologetic style if work seems hard rather than a shared joy in rising to the challenge. Many students do not have the sort of wider knowledge and interest in English against which to judge the work they are doing. Too few realise the value of background reading or research to widen their appreciation and understanding.

### Leadership and management

173. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Administration is well organised, and there is some vision about the need to improve standards on the course and how this might be done. Systems for analysing student progress and exam results are good. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory but there is inadequate monitoring of the quality of lessons and no evaluation of the benefit of offering such a wide range of courses in English to students in the sixth form. Students are appreciative of the course, which has instilled in a good number the ambition to take English at university.

### Language and literacy across the curriculum

174. Students have language skills which are above average. Subject specialist language is well taught, teachers using it carefully and expecting students to define and include it in their own work. Most students are articulate and use Standard English well and appropriately, but these skills are underdeveloped in lessons. In discussion, teachers too often accept brief answers so that students do not expect to explain fully or justify a point of view, or critically analyse those of others. Written work is lengthy and neat, often showing good structure, grammar and vocabulary. Weaknesses include a tendency to be content with a close rather than an exact meaning, and a lack of attention to spelling despite accurate spelling of specialist subject words.

### French

At the time of the inspection, French was taught at AS level in Year 12 only. Teaching is shared with another nearby school and the teaching group is made up of students from both schools. The focus was on Fairfax students.

Provision in French is good.

	Year 12
Standards	Average
Achievement	Good
Teaching and learning	Good
Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since last inspection	Insufficient evidence to judge

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' good subject knowledge results in effective use of French in lessons
- Students' oral skills are weak, but improving

### Commentary

#### Examination results

175. Numbers of students entered for the AS and A-level examinations in recent years have been small. In 2003, no students who sat the A-level examination gained A/B, but all achieved at least E. In 2003, half gained grade A in the AS examination. All continued to A level in 2004, where half achieved A/B and all passed.

#### Standards and achievement

176. Students who joined the AS course in Year 12 in 2004 had achieved broadly average levels at GCSE. Standards observed during the inspection were average but this represents good achievement given the much more demanding nature of the work at AS Level. The students' range of vocabulary is developing well and they are using a variety of tenses and complex sentence structure in their writing,

with increasing confidence and competence. Although improving, the students' oral skills are weak and they are not confident unless they have written prompts to help them.

### Teaching and learning

177. Teaching is good and is encouraging good learning. French is used consistently in lessons to promote good listening skills and to present a good role model to the students. A good questioning technique is encouraging the students to speak French with increasing confidence, although there is some way to go in this area. Independent learning is encouraged and students enjoy preparing and delivering presentations to the group; this too is adding to their confidence in speaking French. Teaching is focused on the demands of the examination and students know what they have to do to improve their performance. Lessons are well prepared and delivered at a good pace, but the starter activities can be too long, which prevent lessons from having a 'flying start'.

### Leadership and management

178. Leadership and management are both satisfactory. Curriculum and assessment systems are sound. Shared provision with the nearby school presents logistical difficulties, but effective liaison takes place between the two schools. Teachers regularly discuss and evaluate individual students' progress. Communication between staff about the scheme of work and the materials to be taught by the individual teachers is effective.

## MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is good.

	Years 12 and 13
Standards	Average
Achievement	Good
Teaching and Learning	Good
Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Very good
Progress since last inspection	Good

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- A high proportion of students studying for AS and A2-level mathematics pass the examinations
- Teaching is good overall, but not enough opportunities are provided to develop students' independence when learning
- Inconsistencies in the GCSE grades required for admittance on to the course result in difficulties that restrict students' achievements
- Teachers have good knowledge of the requirements of the examinations and this raises standards

### Commentary

#### Examination results

179. In 2003, almost all students studying the subject passed A2 level mathematics with a grade E or better. A quarter of these passed with the top grades of A or B. These results are below the national average. At the end of Year 12, two-thirds of the students taking AS level examinations gained at least E grade and half of these secured grades A or B. Early indications are that, in 2004, the results are better.

#### Standards and achievement

180. Standards in lessons seen were average overall and the students' achievements are good. A Year 13 group confidently used the substitution method to perform integral calculus. Achievement is good because the teachers plan the work to build upon previous learning. For instance, in a Year 12 lesson

students had to use and apply their GCSE knowledge of statistics to consider complex probability distributions. Students are allowed to start the course once they have achieved a GCSE B grade in the subject. Those from the partnership school are admitted with lower grades. This inconsistency reduces achievement as the teacher has to spend time covering work at a lower level than expected on an A-level course.

### Teaching and learning

181. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers have good subject knowledge which students realise and this motivates them. Lessons are punctuated by the teacher explaining what steps the students have to take in order to do well in the examinations. The students are keen and willing learners and they respond well to tasks which are challenging but within their grasp. Good teacher: student relationships mean that lessons are pleasant places in which to learn with all involved enjoying the experience. Students answer questions confidently but rarely respond with questions to the teacher, which could extend the topic into possible areas of misunderstanding. Even in good lessons, students are presented with few opportunities to discuss their mathematical thinking.

### Leadership and management

182. Leadership and management are focused on raising standards. Good links with parents ensure regular attendance and the completion of work. Schemes of work have been reviewed and revised so that they are best suited to the needs of the students. The subject has made good progress since the last inspection. Unresolved inconsistency over the admissions criteria is a weakness.

### Mathematics across the curriculum

183. The provision for mathematics across the curriculum is good and students' competence in numeracy is average. Students in Years 12 and 13 speak confidently and positively about their mathematical experiences within the school and how these have prepared them for their present courses and for entry into higher education. Although evidence of students using their mathematical knowledge in other subjects was limited, a good example was noted in a biology lesson, where students used significance tests to evaluate the effect of the enzyme lipase on bile.

## SCIENCE

Biology and psychology were inspected and reported in detail. Chemistry and physics lessons were sampled. Physics teaching was enthusiastic, but a number of misunderstandings and misrepresentations needed further clarification. Planning was appropriate with a good emphasis on technical language. Achievement, overall, was good in the lesson seen. In chemistry, achievement was satisfactory. Teacher:student relationships were good, but there was insufficient rigour at times in the lesson and work was not well enough matched to the range of capabilities of the students. Teaching strengths included subject knowledge and effective use of humour to motivate the students.

### Biology

Provision in biology is satisfactory.

	Years 12 and 13
Standards	Average
Achievement	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory
Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since last inspection	Satisfactory

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- A significant amount of good teaching is promoting better achievement and standards

- Insufficient emphasis is given to sharing good practice and raising the standard of all teaching to that of the best
- The range of teaching and learning activities has been increased, but is still too restricted in some lessons

### **Commentary**

#### **Examination results**

184. A-level results were above average in 2002 and decreased to below average in 2003. Results in 2003 were broadly in line with students' achievements in their other subjects. In 2004, the proportion of higher A/B grades increased but the percentage obtaining A to E pass grades fell.

### Standards and achievement

185. Standards in Year 13 are average, for example in terms of a detailed understanding of the working of the kidney, the light dependent stage of photosynthesis and dihybrid genetic crosses. Students' achievement is satisfactory overall, and good or better in some lessons as a result of effective teaching.

### Teaching and learning

186. Teachers have good subject knowledge and relationships with students are good. Concepts are developed through teacher-led explanation, practical work, summary diagrams, past questions, data interpretation activities and some problem-solving activities. Previous work shows that the range of teaching and learning activities has been too restricted, but there is now a variety in some lessons that engages and sustains students' interest. In one excellent session, the teacher applied the principles of the national strategy for science to a Year 12 class. A brisk starter activity reinforced earlier learning by getting students to build a model of the cell membrane. Students then prepared a summary of the functions of each component. Learning of diffusion of particles across the membrane and the factors affecting the rate of diffusion, were effectively developed through a combination of demonstration, video-clips and computer simulation. Teacher questioning was skilful and all students were actively involved through use of whiteboards on which they wrote their responses. There is insufficient use of ICT by students, as a result of resource issues, and too little emphasis is placed upon developing students' skills in working independently and researching and communicating information. Students' work is marked regularly, with good feedback on how to improve.

### Leadership and management

187. Some teaching is good and even excellent, but it is not consistently effective. There is insufficient monitoring and evaluation of teaching to give teachers good feedback for their professional development. Sharing of good practice across the whole department is not carried out consistently enough. More time has been allocated to preparation for the synoptic questions in the final examination and students are benefiting from this.

### Psychology

Provision in psychology is good.

	Years 12 and 13
Standards	Average
Achievement	Good
Teaching and learning	Good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since last inspection	Not applicable

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching uses very good subject knowledge and a variety of stimulating activities
- Students achieve well through high levels of challenge and their own growing self-confidence
- Students link theory to everyday experience well as they work on suitably focused tasks
- Activities in some lessons do not use time well to extend and deepen understanding
- The advice given to students on how to improve written work is not detailed enough

### Commentary

#### Examination results

188. Results at A level in 2003 were above the national average for the subject, both overall and for the proportion gaining the higher grades A/B. They maintained this level from the previous year. Girls

did better than boys, as is the case nationally, but while girls were above the national profile for their gender in the subject, boys were well above. Results fell in 2004.

**Standards and achievement**

189. Standards of work seen in Years 12 and 13 were average. In Year 12, students acquire detailed knowledge of significant studies, relating them clearly to their political and social contexts, and clarifying their aims and methods logically. In response to well-structured prompt sheets, they go on to consider and make mature judgements about the ethical considerations underlying controversial experiments. In Year 13, students explain the implications of theory confidently in succinct but accurate answers, responding to well-focused teacher questioning, based on very good subject knowledge. Appropriate tasks help them make the link between theory and experience. For example, one group created short video advertisements to present health education information, using theoretical knowledge of various means of manipulating emotional reactions in an audience. Students understand how to interrogate and assess research design methodically. They question scrupulously the ethical assumptions and methodological considerations underlying classic psychological studies, because teaching is both systematic and wide-ranging. Good achievement follows from a rising level of challenge in most lessons, well designed to increase work rates at the same time as building student confidence.

**Teaching and learning**

190. Teachers use a variety of methods to consolidate and extend knowledge well in most lessons. Students learn well because the contrast in lesson activities helps them to follow through key ideas and enables them to check their own understanding against well-informed teacher questioning. In some lessons, time is used less productively and students are not extended fully because they are encouraged to copy out material and miss opportunities to question it to deepen their understanding. Written assignments are marked sensitively, but advice given on how to improve is not specific enough.

**Leadership and management**

191. Leadership has enabled staff to work well together as a team, based on a good vision for the subject’s future development, and identification of weaknesses to overcome. Management has generated good systems to check student progress. Coverage of course content is checked carefully, and the range of ideas and material available to support lessons has been improved, so that teaching continues to improve.

**INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

The ICT A-level course was inspected and reported in detail and ICT across the curriculum was judged.

**Information and communication technology**

Provision in ICT is good.

	Years 12 and 13
Standards	Above average
Achievement	Good
Teaching and learning	Good
Leadership	Good
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since last inspection	Good

**Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students are achieving well, attaining above average results at A level

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which enables them to challenge high attaining students well
- Teaching does not cater sufficiently for students at the lower end of the ability range
- Students have very good attitudes to their learning and are appreciative of their teaching



## **Commentary**

### **Examination results**

192. A-level results were above average in 2003, as they were in 2002. Results were similar in 2004. The numbers of students completing the A-level course in 2003 and 2004 were lower than in 2002. In 2003, AS results were above average, although one quarter of students were ungraded. AS results were similar in 2004.

### **Standards and achievement**

193. Students start their sixth form study with a spread of GCSE and GNVQ results which is broadly average. The combination of their very good attitudes to learning and their teachers' expert subject and examination knowledge ensures that they achieve well and attain above average standards. For example, a Year 13 GCE group engaged well with the teacher's challenging questions and answered knowledgeably about data flow diagrams. Students appreciated the differences between high and low level in preparation for their projects.

### **Teaching and learning**

194. Teachers plan their lessons thoroughly, use a wide range of appropriate activities in their teaching, and make effective use of resources. Less able students do not always receive sufficient explanation before they start activities, to be able to engage fully. Some teaching groups are small so that individual guidance can be given throughout the lesson, which is very effective. Students are encouraged to discuss and to support each other in lessons, which they do with enjoyment, resulting in good learning gains. Students are appreciative of helpful marking feedback which tells them how to improve their work.

### **Leadership and management**

195. Good improvement has been made from the satisfactory provision seen at the time of the last inspection. Leadership shows clear vision and purpose. An AVCE course is now being offered in addition to GCE, which permits students to opt for the course that is best suited to their strengths. Schemes of work do not include guidance to teachers on how to provide for the increasing numbers of students whose prior attainment is below average and this is resulting in some weaknesses in teaching lower attainers. Students, particularly in Year 12, lack knowledge of their current levels of performance and not all are certain of their target grades, but assessment overall is satisfactory.

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

196. Overall competence of students in the use of ICT is average. They use the Internet competently in their research. In art, creative editing and scanning allow students to achieve different compositions and colourings. Students use word processing and presentation packages in subjects including psychology, sociology and law. Teachers use interactive whiteboards and laptops in some subjects. Insufficient use is made of ICT in business studies and opportunities for its use are missed in English.

## **HUMANITIES**

In this area, geography and sociology were inspected and reported in detail. History, religious education and law were sampled. Teaching and learning were excellent in the Year 12 history lesson seen. The very able group of students were totally focused on their study of Gladstone and the Irish Question. They worked very well with each other and with students from the partner school. Expert teaching stretched them to their fullest extent, giving them the skills and techniques they needed for writing an essay that would meet the highest level of the examiners' requirements. One Year 12 lesson of law was seen, in which students started a new topic about tribunals. This was very good. Very effective use was made of ICT to focus the students' attention on the topic. Very good questions, based upon strong subject knowledge, engaged students and helped them to achieve very well. One Year 12 A-level religious education lesson was seen, in which students considered whether

there can ever be a true law which will provide us with a complete framework for guiding our lives. The lesson resulted in satisfactory achievement. Questioning gave higher attaining students ample opportunity to work at abstract levels, with which they coped well and achieved highly. The lesson did not provide as many opportunities for middle and lower attainers, whose achievement was satisfactory.

## Geography

Provision in geography is good.

	Years 12 and 13
Standards	Below average
Achievement	Good
Teaching and learning	Good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since last inspection	Good

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well from their starting points
- Teaching is effective in providing for the needs of individual students, although lessons are sometimes too teacher-dominated
- Enthusiastic and capable leadership ensures that the subject contributes well to the school's goals

### Commentary

#### Examination results

197. A-level results were well below average in 2003. Students' results were similar to those that they achieved in their other subjects. The 2004 results show a lower proportion of students gaining A or B grades, but all passed. Because of their starting points, the good achievement of students is shown by the proportion securing A to E grades, rather than A/B.

#### Standards and achievement

198. Standards on entry to the course are well below those normally expected for A-level students. Students achieve well by improving to below average standards and securing a worthwhile A-level qualification. Most students are able to describe the processes that they learn about and understand the causes and effects associated with these, for example when explaining how longshore drift affects coastal shapes in different places. Many students have gaps in their knowledge and understanding, however, and their good achievement is based partly upon teachers being aware of these and providing the right help to fill them.

#### Teaching and learning

199. Teaching and learning are good overall and often very good. Activities are well selected to help students improve their geographical knowledge, understanding and skills and to use these to succeed in the examination. Frequent opportunities are provided to acquire and use specialist vocabulary. Well-managed group work provides effective opportunities for students to work together to improve their capabilities in independent investigation. Achievement in these tasks is enhanced by the provision of a range of useful resources. Although most students respond well, a larger number than is normal in sixth forms needs strong encouragement to maintain concentration and work rate. In the best lessons, teachers very successfully promote high expectations that secure a high level of effort from students. Teachers are aware that many students need considerable support to reach the standards required for A level and effectively provide this. Sometimes this leads them to do too

much, so that learning is too teacher-led for students to improve their skills in independent investigation. Occasionally, well-planned activities are not fully effective because insufficient time is allowed for them. In discussion with inspectors, students were appreciative of the way in which teachers succeed in making the subject interesting. They find the marking very helpful in showing them what they have done well and how to improve.

### **Leadership and management**

200. There is a very strong commitment to students maximising their achievements. Geography makes a strong contribution to the school's vision of being a place where students of all levels of attainment are welcomed and their achievements are celebrated. The subject is efficiently managed and there are good arrangements to ensure effective liaison with the partner school's geography department.

### **Sociology**

Provision in sociology is good.

	Years 12 and 13
Standards	Average
Achievement	Good
Teaching and learning	Good
<hr/>	
Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since last inspection	Not applicable

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers' expert subject knowledge is used well to question students and draw out their understanding
- The students' good achievement follows teachers' high expectations and individual guidance
- Well-designed assignments and classroom activities promote good independent learning
- Opportunities to extend thinking through discussion are missed in some lessons

### **Commentary**

#### **Examination results**

201. Results in sociology at A level in 2003 were below the national average for the subject both overall, and for the proportion gaining higher grades. Results in 2004 were much higher.

#### **Standards and achievement**

202. In Year 12, students explain and define capably the ways in which social institutions, such as the family and the law, are interpreted. They organise and express their own thoughts and reactions to issues clearly. They respond well to informed teacher briefings and questioning, supplemented by stimulating short video illustrations. For example, in a lesson focusing on domestic violence, students grasped well the theory and practice underlying the question of policing. They went on to consider the related question of social influences on the perception of gender roles, as well as the changing nature of the family. By Year 13, students research and summarise accurately key sociological studies. They understand how specialist perspectives illuminate understanding of everyday experience. Lesson assignments are well designed to train them to work independently and co-operatively in teams. Students achieve well as a consequence of teachers' high expectations and good organisation of important resources needed for lessons. In addition, teachers support good achievement by insisting on a high student work rate in lessons.

## Teaching and learning

203. Teachers use expert subject knowledge well to question, prompt and draw out students' understanding. They organise a stimulating variety of activities that develop helpfully the skills of independent reading and research. Well-structured opportunities are provided to debate and discuss issues. Teaching establishes the right mixture of tasks to encourage independent thought and helpful opportunities to check what students know. In a few lessons, teachers under-exploit opportunities to help students expand their thinking through extended answers and structured discussion. Written assignments are marked very conscientiously, and with great sensitivity. Students benefit from highly authoritative and detailed individual guidance on how to improve their work.

## Leadership and management

204. Leadership and management have sustained good quality teaching by expanding the range of materials and resources available in lessons. The activities that enable students to participate in class have been increased. Well-managed liaison with the partner school teaching the subject has also provided a strong foundation to teaching. In addition, good systems to check how well students are doing and advise them on how to improve have all provided the conditions to sustain good achievement over several years.

## ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Much teaching in this area takes place in the partner school, which is a specialist technology college. One lesson of food technology was sampled in Fairfax which was good and students achieved well. Standards were average in coursework seen and in the practical work undertaken in class. Students were working independently on investigations for their final product. A wide variety of dishes were chosen and students used a range of practical skills successfully to complete their work.

## VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

In this area the focus subject was art and design. Courses in drama and music were sampled. One Year 13 drama lesson was seen in which students worked together to develop ideas for a forthcoming performance. Teaching was knowledgeable, but over-directive at times. This helped the students to develop a good performance, but without great depth in their ideas. Teaching was generally satisfactory resulting in achievement that was satisfactory. In the sampled Year 13 music lesson on the topic of sacred vocal music, standards were below average. Although students were able to describe music and identify musical devices aurally using appropriate language, analysis was relatively superficial. The lesson provided a variety of challenge and focus. The small group size and additional staff support for the teacher enhanced guidance for individual students. Students were unsure of the relevance of each task in relation to the examination requirements and opportunities were missed to reinforce knowledge. Although there was some effective questioning and challenge, overall the lesson had limited pace and direction. Teaching and learning and the students' achievements were satisfactory overall.

## Art and design

Provision in art and design is good.

	Years 12 and 13
Standards	Average
Achievement	Good
Teaching and learning	Good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since last inspection	Good

### **Main strengths**

- Teachers show good subject knowledge that challenges and inspires students
- Students' capacity for independent study is strong
- ICT is used well to extend students' learning

### **Commentary**

#### **Examination results**

205. The A-level results in 2003 were below average. In 2004, results fell, with fewer A and B grades achieved. The results for AS-level examinations in 2003 were below average, although higher in 2004.

#### **Standards and achievement**

206. The work of current students shows standards are about average. Students in Years 12 and 13 are offered a wide range of curricular opportunities and achieve well. They experiment freely and confidently, with a range of interesting materials. They make strong connections between their own work and a wide range of artists. Their sketchbooks and resource boards show that they have achieved a capacity for independent study and personal research. Critical analysis is strong as is the development of initial ideas into final pieces.

#### **Teaching and learning**

207. Stimulating teaching, involving the use of a variety of materials and interesting resources, enables students to acquire a wide range of skills. Drawing is a particular strength in the department. In Year 12, students have completed a series of carefully observed studies on different scales in response to the theme of still life. They are able to analyse a variety of artists' work, including Schnabel, Vasarely and Kandinsky. In Year 13, students follow independent, self-directed studies, and write their own projects. Their observational studies, from first hand experience, are developed into exciting and individual final pieces. Digital photography work, for example, was confidently used as the inspiration for a large-scale oil painting. A composition representing spirituality was enhanced with religious imagery researched during a visit to a gallery. Students are actively encouraged to discuss their own work, ideas and the work of other artists in a confident and mature manner. Teachers plan effectively, and display strong organisational skills. Students are clearly aware of the progress they are making, and what is required of them. They show great enthusiasm for the subject, and actively take part in extra-curricular activities and workshops with visiting artists. Students and teachers relate well to each other. ICT is used frequently to develop work in a variety of exciting ways.

#### **Leadership and management**

208. Leadership and management are good. Departmental documentation is up to date and thorough. Courses are well managed, with clear aims and objectives. The art team work well together and meet on a regular basis. Targets are set and monitored. The departmental development plan identifies a variety of ways of raising achievement and improving results. Displays around the school reflect the good provision in art, which has been maintained since the last inspection.

### **HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL**

In this area the physical education course was inspected and reported in detail. The vocational courses in leisure and recreation and leisure and tourism were sampled. In a Year 12 AVCE leisure and recreation lesson, students considered economic aspects of the leisure industry. The lesson was unsatisfactory because teaching had insufficient variety and was not challenging enough. This made achievement unsatisfactory. In the Year 12 lesson observed from the intermediate GNVQ leisure and tourism course, very good, enthusiastic and supportive teaching enabled students to develop a range of material to promote an exercise ball. Students enjoyed the activity and learned several business

ideas well. The attitudes to learning and attendance of some members of the group restrict overall achievement.

### **Physical education**

Provision in physical education is satisfactory.

	Years 12 and 13
Standards	Below average
Achievement	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Good
Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since last inspection	Insufficient evidence to judge

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers have good knowledge and plan lessons well
- Practical standards are above average
- Students benefit from an excellent range of extra-curricular activities
- Achievement in examinations is satisfactory
- Students' casual attitudes hinder learning

## **Commentary**

### **Examination results**

209. Results in the 2003 examination at A level were below the national average, especially at the higher grades. Students' performance in physical education is slightly below that in their other subjects. Results were not as good as in 2002, when they were average. Results in the AS-level course in 2003 were, similarly, below average, though students performed slightly better in physical education than in their other subjects. In 2004, results were substantially higher.

### **Standards and achievement**

210. Students' achievement in Years 12 and 13 is satisfactory for their capabilities. Almost all the students are working towards an A-E grade in A2 and AS-level courses, but the proportion predicted to attain higher grades is below average. Some sixth-form students did not study GCSE physical education and others achieved B and C grades. Students in Year 12 achieve well when learning about the development of sports from tribal cultures and gain good knowledge of the impact of colonisation on society. Higher attaining students have above average knowledge of the characteristics and functions of ethnic and folk games. Practical standards are above average in Year 13, but students' theoretical knowledge is below average. For example when analysing their focus sports, they do not integrate their knowledge of skill development, anatomy and physiology and sports psychology with the depth needed to attain higher grades.

### **Teaching and learning**

211. Teaching is good, overall, and teachers have good subject knowledge. However, students' casual attitudes and a lack of urgency and concentration affect their learning, which is, as a result, satisfactory. Teachers plan lessons well and use a range of styles to engage students and enable them to gain greater understanding. They provide students with good resources and talk through model answers. These should enable students to complete tasks, which are very clearly linked to examination requirements. Teachers work effectively with small groups, such as in a lesson on video analysis of performance in Year 13. However, other students only listen in to the discussion rather than completing the analysis of their own chosen sport. This restricts their learning and achievement. In these circumstances, the expectations of students who are working independently are clear, but they are not sufficiently well enforced at times.

### **Leadership and management**

212. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Monitoring of students' achievement and the quality of teaching and learning are not sufficiently rigorous. Students are fully involved in the excellent range of extra-curricular activities. These enable them to participate in house competitions as well as a wide range of representative sports and team fixtures. As a result, teams and individuals gain success in local and regional competitions.

## **BUSINESS**

A-level business studies was inspected in detail and the AVCE business course was sampled. The A-level courses in accounts and economics were also sampled. In the good Year 12 AVCE business lesson observed, a positive approach resulted in good team building. Students were clear about their roles and how to achieve the highest grades as they worked together to plan a disco for Year 7 students. Standards were above average and students achieved well. One Year 12 economics lesson

was seen in which students analysed the role of government in market failure. The lesson was very good. Work was challenging. Teaching was very effective in encouraging students to form and express their own ideas in a detailed and rigorous manner, an approach the students enjoyed. Their achievements were very good. An accounts lesson seen was very good. Students were highly motivated and learnt to work independently and to express their own ideas. They saw the course outcomes as important qualifications in furthering their education and careers. Very efficient and effective use of ICT, in the form of a digital projector and interactive whiteboard, helped students to make progress. The lesson was very well planned as one in a sequence and the teacher's knowledge and expertise in the subject gave the students confidence to question any points they did not understand.

### **Business studies**

Provision in business studies is good.

	Years 12 and 13
Standards	Average
Achievement	Good
Teaching and learning	Good
Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since last inspection	Good

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- A wide choice of business subjects helps students to achieve well, through choosing courses for which they are best suited
- Experienced specialist staff have very good subject knowledge
- As a result of course review, changes have been introduced which are raising achievement
- A lack of enthusiasm for learning affects the progress some students can make
- The use of ICT and relevant visits to study business in the real world are underdeveloped

### **Commentary**

#### **Examination results**

213. In 2003, results were below the national average and they were similar in 2004. Although the average points score is below the national average, nearly all students pass the course. More students gain the lower than the top grades.

#### **Standards and achievement**

214. Students begin the course with a profile of GCSE grades that is below average for students taking the subject nationally and below the average for students joining the Fairfax sixth form. Standards observed during the inspection and AS results suggest that there has been a recent improvement and that the proportion of students on target for the top grades is around a quarter. By Year 13, students can do the expected range of activities such as draw, label and give relevant examples for the stages of the product life-cycle.

#### **Teaching and learning**

215. During the inspection teaching was never less than good and sometimes very good. Where teaching was most successful, students were actively engaged from the outset. The teacher used a soft ball, which students passed to one another to answer the next revision question, revisiting previous learning. Good recall of marketing concepts was apparent. Good relationships created a positive learning environment where students participated enthusiastically. A good focus on examination techniques and requirements is maintained. In some lessons, the data projector is used well to



demonstrate and illustrate teaching points. In others, students use computers to type up notes, but ICT plays too limited a role in supporting learning; the Internet is used rarely. The success of lessons is very dependent on the different attitudes to learning of the two Year 13 classes. One class is well-motivated and learns at a brisk pace, while the parallel class shows little enthusiasm. Attendance has a negative impact on the progress of some students. The attitudes of some students also militate against the use of a wide range of learning styles as independent learning opportunities meet a negative response.

### **Leadership and management**

216. The department has analysed its performance relative to other subjects and instigated changes that are raising standards. Staffing has been changed to reflect the strengths of teachers and a coursework component has been introduced so that there are greater opportunities for students to demonstrate their achievement. However, there is not enough identification and sharing of good practice because of insufficient monitoring. Students have benefited from a trip to a local car manufacturer to see theoretical concepts in practice but such visits are few. As in the main school, the use of ICT to support learning is still underdeveloped. Accommodation is currently unsatisfactory and this makes the use of ICT more difficult, but new accommodation with good ICT facilities is under construction.

### **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

The sixth-form curriculum does not include courses in this area.

### **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES**

The general studies course was sampled. Lessons in the citizenship and personal development programmes, which take place during a weekly extended form period, were also sampled. In a Year 12 general studies lesson, as a result of good teaching and effective questioning, students showed a good facility in examining data and drawing conclusions. Most students were able to demonstrate understanding of the difference between fact and opinion, and illustrate data using appropriate mathematical processes. Throughout the lesson, teaching focused effectively on examination requirements and examination techniques. In a good Year 13 lesson from the citizenship and personal development course, students worked together to prepare a presentation that they were to give during an assembly. The topic was on whether the introduction of twenty-four hour drinking would be a good thing. Students responded very well and there was some good discussion of advantages and disadvantages. Teaching was effective and achievement good.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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