

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **FARINGDON COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Faringdon

LEA area: Oxfordshire

Unique reference number: 123262

Headteacher: Mr David Wilson

Lead inspector: Dr David Lewis

Dates of inspection: 14<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> March 2005

Inspection number: 268804

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11 to 18 years
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll;	896
School address:	Fernham Road Faringdon Oxfordshire
Postcode:	SN7 7LB
Telephone number:	01367 240375
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Bob Wintringham
Date of previous inspection:	19 April 1999

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Faringdon Community College is a specialist engineering college on the outskirts of the small market town of Faringdon in Oxfordshire. It has increased substantially in size since the last inspection and now has nearly nine hundred students, of whom about 60 are in the Sixth Form. The proportion of students who stay on into the Sixth Form is increasing. Students' socio-economic background is generally favourable and attainment on entry is close to the national average.

The number of students who have special educational needs is below the national average and the number of students with statements is close to the national average. Their particular needs are mostly moderate learning difficulties, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and specific learning difficulties (dyslexia).

Most students are of white British background. However, there is a military training establishment nearby and about 30 students from all over the world, whose parents study there, are at an early stage of English acquisition. They stay in the school for one academic year, and are supported for some of the time by specialist staff.

The school became a specialist engineering college in 2003 and is an Investor in People. Achievements are also recognised by the award of Charter Mark (2001), a Schools Achievement Award (2001), Sportsmark (2003), and the International School Award (2003). Apart from students mentioned above whose parents study at the military establishment, very few students enter or leave the school other than at the normal times.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
19043	David Lewis	<i>Lead inspector</i>	
9189	John Horwood	<i>Lay inspector</i>	
20729	James Berry	<i>Team inspector</i>	Science; Chemistry (Post 16)
27058	Kathleen Cannon	<i>Team inspector</i>	History
1547	Graeme Clarke	<i>Team inspector</i>	Information and communication technology
2141	John Oxley	<i>Team inspector</i>	Physical education
2971	Kathy Hooper	<i>Team inspector</i>	Design and technology; Design and technology (Post 16)
23031	Ian Knight	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics; Mathematics (Post 16)
15576	David Nebesnuick	<i>Team inspector</i>	Geography
30281	Dorcas O'Dell	<i>Team inspector</i>	Art and design
3731	Bill Robson	<i>Team inspector</i>	English; English (Post 16)
2626	Marion Thompson	<i>Team inspector</i>	Modern foreign languages; English as an additional language
31838	Martin Williams	<i>Team inspector</i>	Religious education; Citizenship
31660	Marianne Young	<i>Team inspector</i>	Music

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**Faringdon Community College is a good school.** Its recently acquired engineering college status has had a major impact on the curriculum and has led to improvements in the quality of education provided. The school has invested considerable efforts into developing its approach to teaching and learning, treating all students as individuals and helping them to do their best. Students' learning has improved as a result, though the full benefit of these developments is still to be seen in test and examination results. Overall provision is good in most subjects, and is very good in English, science, history and information and communication technology (ICT). It is satisfactory in art, and in citizenship. Students have, in the main, responded very well to these developments: their attendance is excellent, and they participate well in the many activities that the school provides. The school gives good value for money.

#### The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The chair of governors and headteacher work together to provide outstanding leadership.
- Students achieve well in nearly all subjects, and very well in English, history and ICT.
- Teaching is good overall, with some excellent lessons, but too many lessons are satisfactory rather than good or very good.
- As at the time of the last inspection, a few students fail to respond to the school's procedures to ensure good behaviour. This affects learning in the classes in which it occurs.
- Links with parents are very good; and links with the community are excellent.
- Resources in music do not allow teachers to cover all aspects of the National Curriculum fully.
- Although spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, the school does not fully meet the requirements for a daily act of collective worship.

The school has made good progress since the last inspection in 1999. Provision in ICT is now very good, and management of provision for students with special educational needs (SEN) is good. A new behaviour management policy has the potential to improve behaviour in areas where it is a barrier to learning. Inspectors noted that for the most part behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. However, the new policy is not always applied consistently, and poor behaviour prevents students learning as well as they could in just a few lessons. The school still does not fully meet requirements for a daily act of collective worship. There have been considerable improvements in many areas of the curriculum as a result of the acquisition of engineering school status, and excellent links with the community make a real difference to students' personal and academic development.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

**Students' achievement is good throughout the school.** Standards in the Year 9 national tests in 2003 were above the national average, and GCSE results were above average in 2004. GCSE standards are rising and achievement throughout Years 7 to 11 is good. Girls generally achieve better than boys, but the differences are only slightly greater than those found nationally. Work seen in lessons reflects above average standards and good achievement. Students with SEN

achieve well, as do those who are gifted and talented. Those who are at an early stage of learning English do well when they are withdrawn for specialist English tuition, but a few have such limited English language skills that they find it difficult to cope in some mainstream lessons. For these very few students achievement is unsatisfactory.

**Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.** Students' relationships with others are generally good or very good, and their attitudes to the school are good overall. Attendance is excellent, and students' punctuality is very good.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching is good** throughout the school, and supports good learning. The number of excellent lessons is above average, but too many lessons are satisfactory, rather than good or better, and the efforts of the school to share good practice have not yet had the impact they should. In just a few lessons observed, the behaviour by a minority proved a barrier to learning. A newly introduced behaviour management policy is already showing benefits, but is not yet applied consistently. The school's engineering college status has led to significant and imaginative improvements in the curriculum in nearly all subjects, and links with the community are excellent. Both have had a major impact on learning.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are good.** Governance is very good, leadership of senior staff and middle managers is good, and the school is well managed. The governing body is generally meticulous in ensuring that statutory requirements are met, though there remain issues to address in relation to the daily act of collective worship, and to music. The school owes its distinctive ethos largely to the outstanding vision of the chair of governors and headteacher, who work closely together with the governors for the benefit of the school and its students.

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

Parents are generally pleased with the work of the school, though a few have yet to recognise the considerable advantages that engineering school status has brought to the wider school curriculum. More seriously, like inspectors, they are concerned that a small minority of students can seriously disrupt learning. In the main they welcome the way in which the school deals with any concerns they may have, for instance in relation to bullying. Students are loyal to their school, and are confident that their views matter. They too have concerns about behaviour, and have used the vehicle of the school council to discuss them with the senior management of the school. Inspectors found that the school does take the views of students very seriously and acts upon them.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- continue to work to improve the behaviour of students who, for whatever reason, choose to prevent others from learning as well as they could;
- work to raise the quality of teaching further, and to increase the number of very good and excellent lessons;
- ensure that students who are in the very early stages of learning English are suitably supported in all mainstream lessons.

**and, to meet statutory requirements:**

- ensure that National Curriculum requirements in music are fully met;
- ensure that the school provides a daily act of collective worship for all students.



## THE SIXTH FORM AT FARINGDON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The Sixth Form is very small but the number on roll is rising. Almost all the 61 students follow A Level courses.

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**The school has a good Sixth Form.** When students join the Sixth Form, their GCSE results are similar to those of many Sixth Form students elsewhere. They quickly settle into effective ways of working and attend exceptionally well. In turn they attain above average standards in A Level examinations at the end of Year 13. The school provides GCE courses at AS and A Level which complement a full range of vocational courses offered by further education colleges in the locality. The range is very wide; hence, many teaching groups are small and teachers know their students very well. The Sixth Form is well led and managed by the head of Sixth Form. The headteacher and governors offer a very clear vision for the growth of the Sixth Form, linked to further development of the school's engineering school status. Students learn very well. Very good teaching draws upon effective assessment and, together with very good support and guidance, leads to good achievement. The Sixth Form gives good value for money.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The proportion of students attaining higher grades A and B at A Level improved from 2003 to 2004 and is above average, although the number of candidates has been small.
- Students benefit from very good arrangements for giving them support and advice, and in turn they achieve well.
- Students are very satisfied with the school and value the opportunities they have to continue their education in the Sixth Form.
- Students' excellent behaviour and very good attitudes to school ensure that the Sixth Form is well respected by staff and by younger students alike.

### 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>Very good in English literature</b> Teachers' excellent subject knowledge and students' very positive attitudes enable them to achieve very well,
Mathematics	<b>Satisfactory</b> Students learn and achieve satisfactorily because teaching is satisfactory. Leadership is satisfactory and the department is well managed.
Science	<b>Good in chemistry.</b> Very good teaching and good support and guidance help students to realise their potential in examinations.
Design and technology	<b>Satisfactory</b> An increasing number of students take the subject. Teaching is consistently good. The department is well led and managed. Standards are improving and achievement is satisfactory.

*The curriculum areas are broadly common across all Post 16 education and training. They do not necessarily correspond with subjects and courses taught by the 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 school reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to 'very weak'.*

## **ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

Students now benefit substantially from very good support and advice, although Year 13 students did not feel well served by the limited careers advice on university entrance which they received last year. Thorough arrangements prepare Year 11 students to make informed choices for education or training after they are 16. The head of Sixth Form and tutors emphasise the importance of students following an appropriate course. Good advice from tutors and subject teachers leads students to embark upon AS Level courses for which their previous work predicts success. Teachers assess students' coursework frequently. Following rigorous analysis, form tutors review students' performance and give effective help with their targets for improvement. All students are personally mentored by their tutor every few weeks, and clearly value the benefit they gain from their tutor's close knowledge of their development.

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

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and governors value the contribution which the Sixth Form makes to the school. Together with the relatively recently appointed head of Sixth Form, they have a clear vision for enhancing the part it plays within the locality in the education of Year 12 and 13 students. The head of Sixth Form leads an effective team of tutors well, and they successfully contribute to students' well-being. Curriculum development and management to extend the benefits of the school's engineering school status are good. The extensive range of GCE courses at AS and A Level broadens opportunities for study. However, it leads to some small teaching groups where learning through interactions with other students is inevitably more limited than where groups are larger. All students follow a general studies course in Year 12, and this, together with participation by all in further work experience, extra-curricular and community activities and the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme, broadens their Sixth Form education and prepares them well for their life after school. Good aspects of management focus upon monitoring and reviewing students' work. Information is used to counsel and advise students, and to foster improvements indicated in the development plan. Students' good achievement and secure financial administration ensure that the Sixth Form is cost effective.

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

The great majority of students feel that they are taught well by teachers who are expert in their subjects and are accessible and helpful. Many students, particularly in Year 13, feel that careers advice has not been as helpful as it could be. However, those in Year 12 recognise that this is now much improved. Most find that staff treat them fairly and with respect, and they agree that relationships are good. Almost all feel that the school is well run. Surprisingly, half of those responding to the questionnaire about their views felt that no-one in the school knew them well and that they were not well enough advised on what to study. In both formal and informal discussion, students confirm the positive views but not the concerns expressed. For example, they overwhelmingly felt they had been well advised, and that they would be well supported in the Sixth Form. Inspectors found that arrangements for knowing students well, and for giving advice on their work, were very good.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

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

Students' achievement is good throughout the school. Students who have special needs achieve well, as do those who are gifted and talented. Girls do better than boys, reflecting the national picture. Achievement for students for whom English is an additional language is satisfactory. Standards seen in lessons are above average.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is very good in English, history and ICT, and good in nearly all the other subjects.
- Students' performance in national tests at the end of Year 9 has varied from year to year, but shows an overall upward trend. Students did better than expected, based on prior attainment, in 2003.
- Results in GCSE have risen steadily over the last four years, and were above average in 2004.
- The number of students gaining the highest grades A\* and A is above average in English, mathematics, science and history.
- Although students for whom English is an additional language learn well when they are withdrawn for specialist support, not all cope well with learning in mainstream lessons.

#### Commentary

1. The school maintains detailed records of the attainment of its students on entry in Year 7, and tracks their progress carefully throughout the school. Comparison with national data shows that GCSE grades have improved more quickly than nationally over the last four years, and the proportion of students gaining five or more grades A\* to C increased from 53 per cent in 2003 to 62 per cent in 2004. Based on students' attainment when they entered the school, this represents good achievement in Years 7 to 11, and reflects the school's commitment to raising standards and helping all students to reach their potential.

2. No national comparisons are available for attainment in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2004, but in 2003 they were above the national average in English, mathematics and science. In 2002, overall results were also above average, and several students gained the highest level, Level 8, in one or more subjects. Work seen in lessons reflects these above average standards, and achievement in two-thirds of lessons was good or better. The school recognises the need to continue to raise standards of attainment, and these results show that their efforts have been effective.

#### **Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2004**

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	n/a (34.3)	n/a (33.4)
mathematics	n/a (37.2)	n/a (35.4)
science	n/a (34.9)	n/a (33.6)

*There were 155 pupils in the year group. Validated data for 2004 is unavailable. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

3. In Years 10 and 11, students also achieve well in lessons. The work seen in more than half of lessons is of above average standard, showing that the trend of rising standards continues. In their GCSE examinations in 2004, the proportion of students gaining five or more grades A\* to C was above the national average, continuing the upward trend noted in 2001 to 2003. In terms of average point scores, GCSE results were also above the national average, even though a few

students follow an alternative curriculum in which they do not enter for the full range of GCSE examinations. Overall GCSE results are above average in science double award, design and technology, English, geography, history, mathematics and statistics.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	62 (50)	52 (52)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	91 (93)	89 (88)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (96)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	36.1 (35.5)	34.9 (34.7)

*There were 123 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

4. In comparison with schools whose students performed similarly to those at Faringdon in their Year 9 National Curriculum tests in 2002, GCSE results are well above the national average, but these results are also depressed by a few students who, for good reasons, do not take a full range of GCSE examinations.

5. The achievement of students who have English as an additional language (EAL) is satisfactory overall. In lessons where students are withdrawn for additional support in literacy, they make good progress and achieve well. However, not enough time is allocated to those at the earliest stages of learning English to prepare them all to cope in mainstream lessons. In lessons across the curriculum, most EAL students make progress in line with their peers. They achieve well, particularly in practical subjects such as physical education and art and design. Achievement is also good in science, history, modern foreign languages and mathematics in Years 10 and 11.

6. In a small minority of lessons, for example in English, geography, design and technology and religious education, students at the earliest stages of English acquisition are not able to participate fully in lessons and their achievement is unsatisfactory. This is because their needs are not identified or planned for and they have no adult support to help them to understand what is going on. In some lessons students work with friends at more advanced stages of learning English, who provide support by translating work. In other lessons, however, students with limited English skills try to work together, with very limited success.

7. Students with a wide range of SEN achieve very well in history, and well in most subjects, including mathematics and science. Achievement is satisfactory in English lessons. Students have made good progress throughout Years 7 to 9. All students with SEN in Years 10 and 11 are aiming for GCSE entry.

8. In the main, students' literacy skills are good, and improve throughout the school, though there are a few students for whom early intervention in Year 7 would be beneficial. Numeracy skills are satisfactory. Lack of numeracy skills is rarely a barrier to learning, because appropriate support is given in subjects where these skills are important. However, there is no consistent approach to developing the skills across all subjects. Students are competent in using ICT in most areas of the curriculum.

## Sixth Form

Students achieve well and attain above average standards in A Level examinations at the end of Year 13.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good advice leads students to take A Level courses which are appropriate to their abilities.
- Students achieve well, and some very well. Standards in examinations and current work are mostly above those expected and are above average.
- Students' competencies to use higher order skills such as analysis and evaluation in their studies are better developed in some subjects than in others.

### Commentary

9. The school strongly advises Year 11 students to follow an appropriate course if they wish to continue in Post 16 education. In order to seek AS or A Level qualifications, students are normally expected to have gained an average of grade C in five or more subjects, and a grade B in the subjects they wish to study. This threshold is usually met when GCSE results are published. However, examination criteria are not the only ones used for entry to the Sixth Form, and students begin AS courses for which their teachers believe previous work predicts success. Overall, the pattern of students' GCSE results is about the same as that of many Sixth Form students elsewhere.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	90.2 (85.1)	92.3 (92.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	37.4 (22.1)	36.2 (35.6)
Average point score per pupil	290.8 (311.5)	265.2 (258.2)

*There were 13 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

10. In 2003, Year 13 students gained A Level results which were well above the national average, and in 2004 results were above average. Boys' results were well above average, and girls' above average. The school helps higher attaining students to gain the highest grades. The number of students gaining grades A or B was close to the national average in 2004, a marked increase over 2003. Almost all attain a pass grade in subjects entered: only one subject entry did not meet the required level. Given their average standards when students commence Sixth Form courses, they achieve well.

11. An analysis which tracks the progress and attainment of individual students through from Year 12 into Year 13 shows that virtually all gain at least the grades expected from their GCSE results. Twice as many students did better than expected as those who did less well. Many students did better than predicted in English literature, history and, notably, in general studies. Conversely, some results did not come up to expectation in mathematics, physics, art and design, French, and government and politics. Elsewhere, students' achievement was as expected.

12. In 2004, standards at AS Level, normally taken at the end of Year 12, fell markedly from 2003 in subjects which students decided not to continue for A Level, and overall are a little below the national average. Results at higher grades A and B improved. The school's own AS Level results, for all candidates including those who went on to take A Level, indicate that almost a third of entries led to A and B grades, but that almost a tenth did not meet the pass criteria.

13. Observations of lessons, examination of students' current work, and discussions with them confirm these judgements. Above average work was seen in mathematics, physics, history, and art and design. Students achieve very well in English, and satisfactorily in mathematics, chemistry, and design and technology.

14. Advanced Level study requires students to use the language of the subject accurately, to weigh evidence, to evaluate statements or products, and to substantiate arguments. Students show these attributes in some subjects, such as in English, where they offer their views willingly and back them up, and in the general studies, geography and history lessons which were sampled, where the teacher's leadership fosters all students' involvement in high level discussion. Conversely some students' skills are underdeveloped and they show a noticeable lack of confidence. In chemistry, for example, students are reluctant to ask questions of their own; and in food technology, issues are not analysed with enough rigour and students are insufficiently critical when evaluating their own and others' work.

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

Attendance is excellent and punctuality is very good. Behaviour is good throughout the school. Students' attitudes to learning and their relationships with each other and with adults are good. The number of fixed term exclusions is about average for this type of school. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very high levels of attendance have been achieved through the school's efforts and the support of parents.
- Relationships are very good throughout the school, resulting in a harmonious learning environment.
- The school has very high expectations of standards of behaviour, and works very hard to achieve them.
- Students like the school and participate fully in the activities available to them.
- Students' personal development is good. Their moral and social education is very good. Their spiritual and cultural development is well provided for.
- Inconsistent approaches to classroom management and the poor behaviour of a small number of students result in a minority of lessons being adversely affected.

### **Commentary**

15. Students enjoy being at the school and this is reflected by their high levels of attendance, their punctual arrival, and their participation in activities throughout the day. Attendance is well above the national average and is still improving. Monitoring of attendance and punctuality is efficiently carried out. In addition to formal systems to improve attendance, such as stressing the importance of good attendance, and rewards systems for students, the school aims to make students want to come to school as a place where they enjoy being. Monitoring and analysis of attendance records is very good, and systems are in place for parents of students who do not arrive at school to be contacted on the first day of absence if a reason is not received. Through the pastoral system, students who are a cause for concern are identified and the appropriate external agencies involved. This is achieved through very good internal systems supported by a very good partnership with external agencies.

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

<b>Authorised absence</b>		<b>Unauthorised absence</b>	
School data	5.6	School data	0.3
National data	6.9	National data	1.1

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

16. Behaviour around the school and in most lessons is good. In a few lessons, mainly in Years 8 and 9, a minority of students have poor behaviour; this is usually low-level disturbance that is not adequately dealt with. The school has recently introduced a *Behaviour For Learning* policy where consequences of lapses in attitudes and behaviour are clearly shared with students. The effectiveness of this policy is limited at present as not all staff apply it consistently and from the start

of the lesson. Students and parents are very clear that there is some bullying in the school. It is not common, however. The school educates students about its undesirability and makes it clear that bullying is not acceptable. Good records are kept of any incidents that occur. Students say that bullying is not a big problem in the school and that it is usually well dealt with. They do, however, think it is a sometimes a problem on the buses after school.

### Ethnic background of students

### Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	761	76	0
White – any other White background	29	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	2	0	0
Mixed – Any other mixed background	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	7	0	0
Black or Black British – African	5	0	0
Chinese	4	0	0
Any other ethnic group	18	0	0
Parent/student preferred not to say	18	0	0
Information not obtained	6	0	0

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

17. Relationships within the school are very good. Students have good attitudes, which result in a good learning environment where they participate and achieve well. The provision of late buses several times each week enables students to attend a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Students have good opportunities to take on responsibilities during the day, such as helping in lessons, and acting as *Happy to Help* monitors or as Environmental Health Officers. Members from each year group are elected to the school council or to student focus groups.

18. Students with SEN display good attitudes to learning. They respond well to the extra help given by teaching assistants. Students with behavioural difficulties often respond positively to the school's strategies, which the staff use well.

19. Students' personal development is good. In religious education lessons, many issues of faith and morality are explored in depth and students reflect seriously on them. Opportunities are unplanned in other subjects but are taken as they arise. The school does not fully meet the statutory requirement of providing a daily act of collective worship. However, students attend two assemblies a week. These are of good quality, contain acts of worship and provide a positive start to the day. Clear behaviour codes, and studies in citizenship and PSHE, help students to take a well-informed stance on neighbourhood, national and global issues, to respect fairness, and to show concern for others. This is evident in their very good community involvement and charity initiatives. They recognise that they have a responsibility both to their school and to the wider community at home and abroad. In recognition of this, the school has held the International School award for the last five years. Links with schools in many countries, and especially with those relatively less fortunate in India and Uganda, have considerably broadened students' horizons. In consequence, their understanding and respect for the different cultures across the globe and within British society are good. Although opportunities for personal development are still largely unplanned in all subjects, the many positive features combine to demonstrate a good improvement since the last inspection, when students' personal development was satisfactory.

## **Sixth Form**

Very good attendance and excellent behaviour, linked to very good punctuality and attitudes, set the tone for the Sixth Form.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students' attendance is very good and is monitored very well.
- Behaviour in lessons is excellent and is supported by very good attitudes to learning.
- The absence of any bullying ensures a totally harmonious environment.
- Students have very good opportunities to take responsibility.

### **Commentary**

20. Attendance is currently very good at over 95 per cent, and students are very punctual to school and lessons. Effective procedures monitor attendance and lead to prompt action should there be a need.

21. Students conduct themselves very well as they move about the school, and in lessons their behaviour is exemplary. For example, in a Year 12 general studies lesson they carefully listened to each other's points in a very well managed discussion and made counter arguments showing great respect for the views of their classmates. When interviewed, and in their questionnaire returns, students commented favourably that they feel treated with respect and that there is no bullying or harassment within their Sixth Form community.

22. Students' personal development is good. They provide good role models for younger students as prefects and lunchtime supervisors. They also take responsibilities in a wider context, becoming involved with the Community Action Scheme. Those taking physical education also take the Community Sports Leader award, where they take responsibility in instructing others. Strong links with a school in Uganda have helped increase students' social and cultural awareness. Consequently they engage the whole school in charitable work.

23. Students enjoy being in the Sixth Form and take on responsibilities willingly. As well as having their own committee to manage domestic matters in the Sixth Form they take a leading role in the School Council. They contribute to the school very well by supporting younger students, for example those with English as an additional language. Each year a head boy and girl, together with deputies and a number of prefects, are elected. They carry out many responsibilities which help with the day-to-day running of the school, and represent it as very good ambassadors.



## QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is good. The school takes great care to help each student, including a considerable number whose English language skills are very limited, to do as well as possible. Teaching is good overall; the school has worked hard to improve the standard of teaching and learning, and the number of excellent lessons is above average. Learning is good as a result. The curriculum is good, and takes good account of students' individual needs. The school's specialist engineering college status is reflected very well in its work throughout the curriculum.

### Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good overall. In Years 7 to 9 they are satisfactory, but they are good in Years 10 and 11, and very good in the Sixth Form. Assessment is well used to support students' learning.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school's efforts to improve the quality of teaching have had a good effect and the number of excellent lessons observed was above average.
- Too many lessons are satisfactory, rather than good or better.
- Teaching is less good in Years 7 to 9 because teachers do not deal consistently with misbehaviour by a relatively small number of students, and the learning of the whole class suffers as a result.
- Teaching is very good in science and history; and good in all other subjects.

### Commentary

24. Teaching and learning are good overall, and two thirds of lessons are good or better. However, the number of unsatisfactory lessons in Years 7 to 9 is close to 10 per cent, mainly but not entirely as a result of poor behaviour in Years 8 and 9. In the rest of the school there was no unsatisfactory teaching, but the number of lessons that were satisfactory rather than good or better was relatively high at 37 per cent. Teaching overall is very good in science and history, and excellent teaching was seen in mathematics, history, art, physical education, ICT, chemistry, English and Sixth Form general studies.

25. Sixth Form teaching is very good. The table below sets out the number of lessons in each category, including the Sixth Form.

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 126 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
11 (8.7 %)	30 (23.8 %)	44 (34.9 %)	35 (27.8 %)	6 (4.7 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)

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

26. Excellent teaching was characterised by planning in which all students knew what they were trying to achieve, activities that were well matched to students' needs, and good support. Enjoyment was a feature of nearly all excellent lessons, where students worked well with their teachers to reach the highest standards they could. Where behaviour was a problem, which was rarely, it was promptly and skilfully dealt with without confrontation. Excellent lessons were seen in most areas of the curriculum and, notably, with students of all abilities, from the highest attainers to those with SEN and those who found the work very difficult. Teachers' skills in such lessons are of a high order, and offer the potential to act as a catalyst for improving the quality of teaching throughout the school.

27. In lessons that were good or satisfactory, activities were generally well planned to increase students' understanding, but they did not always match the needs of particular groups: those of very high or very low ability, those with particular special needs, or those whose English language skills were limited. In unsatisfactory lessons, the failure to engage all students often led to misbehaviour by just a few students, and this had a disproportionate effect on the learning of the remainder. That it is possible to capture the interest of even reluctant learners was amply demonstrated in more than one of the excellent lessons seen, and points to the need to share good practice more widely.

28. Students with SEN are taught well. The small number withdrawn from normal classes for additional literacy support make very clear progress, and show clear gains in, for example, reading and spelling. The practice of linking teaching assistants to specific departments enables them to work together with teachers in many subjects where they use their combined experience and skills to help students with SEN to learn well. Individual education plans (IEPs) are made available to all teachers, and where they are effectively used, such as in science, teachers take the specific learning objectives into account when planning activities in lessons. However, this practice is not as extensive as the school would like and is seen as an area for development. Thorough and regular assessments are used to monitor students' progress and to set their personal targets. They then work towards attaining them with the help of well-informed teaching assistants.

29. The school devotes significant resources to the teaching of students who attend the school for just a year, and whose English language skills are, in many cases, very limited indeed. When they arrive in the school they are withdrawn to follow their own curriculum in which their language skills are developed to the point at which they can join mainstream lessons. In many areas they form friendships and can learn as well as others in the group because, with the support of the teacher and their classmates, they are helped to understand what is going on. Sometimes, however, and especially in subjects such as English and geography, where high-level language skills are needed, they learn less well than they should. The school is aware of this problem, and is working with teachers and support assistants to help them to give such students the support they need.

30. The school understands the role that assessment can play in raising standards. Students' progress is assessed at regular intervals, and good use is made of data in setting realistic targets for students. Day-to-day assessment is less effective, however, in helping teachers to adapt their lessons to the needs of all students. Homework is, for the most part, diligently set and marked, but does not yet play the part it could in giving teachers the information they need to plan their lessons for the maximum effect, and students the information they need to progress to the next level or grade. Assessment overall is therefore satisfactory.

## **Sixth Form**

Teaching and learning are very good overall. Assessment is good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very good teaching in many subjects stimulates very good learning and good achievement.
- Teachers seek to develop students' independence in learning, but they are not always as successful as they could be.
- Generally, but not always, good use is made of assessment to help students know the standard of their work and where to make improvement to reach the highest levels.

### **Commentary**

31. Three quarters of lessons seen were good or better, and four out of ten were very good or excellent. Of particular note is that students learn well, and more often very well, in eight out of ten lessons. All teaching is satisfactory or better.

32. Teachers invariably have a high degree of subject knowledge, and of the requirements of examination boards. They plan all lessons well, with activities that stimulate discussion and

learning. Teachers carefully explain what they expect students to achieve, and this focuses attention on the activities. Students respond with interest, endeavour and enthusiasm.

33. The most effective lessons are characterised by a scholarly approach in which discussion and evaluation are important elements. The wide variety of activities caters for the different ways in which students learn. Carefully chosen video resources in general studies evoke thoughtful analysis and cogent argument. Challenging questioning in engineering leads students to think critically about their work and strive for improvement. In English, teachers encourage students to present their work to the class, which helps them to learn actively and independently. Conversely, however, mathematics teachers direct learning to such an extent that students do not develop independence nor develop a sufficiently deep understanding of the subject to achieve really well.

34. Students value their teachers' subject expertise and feel they are well taught. They also value the good relationships many teachers foster with them. These encourage students to develop very positive attitudes to learning, which in turn lead to good achievement and results that are above average.

35. Throughout the Sixth Form, assessment is well used to monitor and support students' progress. Students receive good advice in mathematics and develop their technique and accuracy in turn. Chemistry students know exactly their level of work, and what they need to do to improve. However, feedback on assessed work in design and technology does not have the detail to help students to reach the highest standards. Tutors keep good records to track students' progress and use these to help them achieve well. Students acknowledge the value of the targets teachers set on their marked work, and the support they get during personal interviews with them.

### **The curriculum**

Provision for the curriculum is good. It is enhanced by the school's specialist engineering college status. Statutory requirements are met except for a daily act of collective worship and one element of the music curriculum.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- National Curriculum requirements are fully met except in music, and provision for a daily act of worship does not meet requirements.
- The specialist engineering school status makes a very good contribution to the richness and variety of the curriculum in nearly all subjects.
- The curriculum benefits from the large number of residential and weekly activities.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory for history and geography.

### **Commentary**

36. The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements in Years 10 and 11 for religious education, PSHE, citizenship, sex education and drugs awareness. The curriculum is very good in science and geography, and good in physical education, design and technology, belief systems, history, and modern foreign languages. It is unsatisfactory in music, where a lack of computer and technological equipment limits students' opportunities to develop composition skills. This is unchanged since the last inspection. The school's engineering status has a positive impact on English, science, humanities, and design and technology, which offers a double GCSE. Innovative cross-curricular links result from this engineering perspective. For example, a joint history and English visit to Ypres deepened students' understanding of war poetry and made links to their experiences in engineering.

37. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is good, and the school has improved access to ICT and history since the last inspection. In science and geography it is very good, and it is good in history and English. National strategies are in place for English and mathematics, and have had a positive effect on the way other lessons are structured across the curriculum. All students study at least one modern foreign language and able linguists can study two. Religious education is good. Satisfactory links have been established with the local church, but there are few opportunities for students to visit non-Christian places of worship. The curriculum in music is unsatisfactory because students do not have access to the specialist computer technology they need.

38. Students with SEN have good access to the curriculum. A number of strategies ensure they receive relevant focused support. The school's policy for full inclusion ensures that students with SEN are almost always taught within mainstream classes and have access to the curriculum along with their classmates. Provision is monitored diligently and individual education plans are reviewed regularly.

39. Provision for students for whom English is an additional language is satisfactory overall. Support provided in withdrawal lessons is well planned and matches students' needs. Students are quickly integrated into mainstream classes, where most of them learn well along with other students. However, for a very few students whose English is very limited indeed, provision is unsatisfactory when they attend lessons without experienced support. Such students understandably tend to form friendships with students who have similar problems, and such groups may become isolated as a result. The school is aware that, for these few students, a lack of relevant inclusive planning and support prevents successful access to the curriculum, and it is actively seeking ways to provide teachers with the information, support and training they need to help them to make adequate provision for these students. Curriculum provision for students who are at the later stages of learning English is good.

40. The curriculum for PSHE is satisfactory and students enjoy discussing relevant issues. They find the subject less stimulating, however, when they are asked to write about what they have been discussing. Learning about citizenship benefits from Internet debates between school students and their peers in Tennessee.

41. After a full consultation process in Year 9, students in Years 10 and 11 follow their choice of three or four options as GCSE courses and a core curriculum of eight subjects. The vocational double award in engineering establishes a good partnership with a school in Abingdon, but girls are underrepresented. All subjects offer students support clinics and out-of-school activities to supplement the curriculum. Students benefit from the input of a regional sports co-ordinator, and a varied number of weekly and residential programmes enrich the school day. In science, Year 7 students were thrilled by *The adventurous science trip*, and Year 9 students examined the unique structure of the Globe theatre, linking English, drama and engineering. A well-established partnership recently enabled 37 students to visit Finland and, working with Finnish students, to give a performance of African dance and music to the local community.

42. The match of teachers to the curriculum is good. Nearly all teachers are well qualified in the subjects they teach. The school provides good opportunities for professional development. Support staff are generally effective, and make a real difference to the achievement of the students they support. Specialist staff support well the students for whom English is an additional language. However, appropriate support is not always available when students with very limited English language skills are first integrated into mainstream lessons.

43. Accommodation is satisfactory overall. The leisure centre, music suite and new art rooms offer good learning environments and, although English is taught in temporary accommodation at present, the rooms are well appointed and improved by high quality displays. Accommodation for history and geography is unsatisfactory. Teachers have to move over the school site, which makes

organisation, transport of resources and access to ICT difficult. Curriculum resources overall are good and the library has a varied range of fiction and reference books. There is a computer suite in the library available for research during lessons, and a homework club gives consistent support on four evenings a week.

## Sixth Form

Curriculum opportunities are good overall. Accommodation and resources are good.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Well-planned courses for all students broaden their education and contribute to their personal development.
- Although the number of students joining the Sixth Form is low, it is increasing year on year, and a very high proportion of those who start courses in Year 12 continue their studies to A Level in Year 13.
- Good accommodation includes rooms that help to produce high quality teaching and learning.

### Commentary

44. The school provides GCE advanced Level and AVCE courses which complement vocational courses available at local colleges of further education. An already good range of subjects is further extended by the school's engineering college status and provides for most students who choose to remain in the Sixth Form. Students make sensible choices of subjects to study, on the basis of very good advice. Nearly all are pleased with the courses they are studying and this is reflected by the high proportion of students who stay at school to study at A Level in Year 13. The Sixth Form is becoming an increasingly popular option for students to continue in education. Twenty-two students entered Year 12 in 2003, and this increased to 42 in 2004.

45. All students follow additional courses in addition to their main subject choices. General studies at AS Level, with the option to follow the course through to A Level, broadens students' knowledge and makes an important contribution to their skills of analysis, evaluation and presentation. Because the course includes religious education, it meets the requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus in the Sixth Form. All students follow the European Computer Driving Licence course to boost their ICT skills. The PSHE programme promotes study skills, provides guidance on higher education and career paths, widens work related learning, and enhances students' knowledge of current affairs as well as their personal development.

46. Students also take part in a range of activities collectively called the *Community Action Scheme*. Some activities contribute to school life, for example through Young Enterprise and the Newsletter; some promote personal fitness and social development. Others make a clear contribution to the education of younger students, such as helping those at an early stage of learning English, and to the community, such as working with the elderly. Students' Sixth Form experience is widened further by opportunities to take part in activities they themselves help organise, such as charitable fundraising and social events, for example a team-building residential weekend, skiing, and dances.

47. Sixth Form students benefit from good accommodation. Classes which need specialist facilities, such as for science, are mostly taught in the same rooms as lessons in the main school. Useful, well-resourced seminar rooms, some with interactive whiteboards, allow teachers to exploit group work and discussion to help students learn effectively. The Sixth Form common room is a good social facility which students value. The library is situated in the Sixth Form centre and is readily accessible. Resources are good, and students comment that computers are usually available for independent study.

## Care, guidance and support

Arrangements to ensure students' care, welfare, health and safety are very good. The school provides students with good support, advice and guidance and involves them well in its work and development. In the Sixth Form the support, advice and guidance are very good.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school has very good induction arrangements to help students to settle quickly into the routines.
- The pastoral system ensures that all students are well known to staff and have very good relationships with at least one adult in the school.
- Students have very good access to information about how well they are doing and how to improve.
- Impartial guidance on careers or further education is very good.

### Commentary

48. The good care of students is underpinned by a sound approach to health and safety. The school has a well-structured health and safety policy and governors ensure that health and safety is given a high priority. The school buys in expertise through the local authority to carry out regular audits and responds quickly to its findings. The risk assessment policy is currently being reviewed and is at present in draft form, but it is scheduled for issue following the approval of governors. Child protection procedures and the arrangements to support students in the care of the local authority are all in place, and the omissions identified in the last inspection have been rectified.

49. Welfare and care systems are good and are provided by a very dedicated pastoral team and administrative staff. The year co-ordinators are a well-managed group who share an office which enables them to work very well as a team, and to provide ongoing support as students progress through the school. Apart from the Year 7 co-ordinator, who stays with Year 7 to maintain close links with the primary schools, year co-ordinators and tutors will stay with students throughout their time at school. Welfare of students is well supported by supervision throughout the day and by first aid staff who keep good records and have access to a 'quiet room' where students can be looked after if necessary. If students fail to arrive at school, contact is made with parents on the first day to confirm their safety.

50. Support, advice and guidance are good. Teachers and other staff know students well, and keep very good records to enable them to provide appropriate support and to detect any problems at an early stage. The recently introduced review days and target-setting process ensure that students have very good opportunities for receiving advice and guidance. Academic data available to tutors is based on assessment systems which are good overall but variable within departments. Where students need additional support and guidance the school works very well with external agencies.

51. The induction procedures for Year 7 students are very good, as a result of very good links with the partnership primary schools. A well-established transition programme includes transition projects within departments and a very good range of visits and interaction between Years 6 and 7. Students and parents all find the process very helpful. Very well planned arrangements also exist for students who join the school at other times.

52. Students in Years 7 to 9 receive very good guidance on future options, both from school staff and through visitors and the citizenship course. In Year 9, students are advised of possible course options early, to enable the school to review requirements before identifying the probable options. The Connexions and careers centre provides an excellent facility for students to visit and discuss or investigate the various options open to them. The very good guidance is continued throughout Years

10 and 11, and for those continuing into the Sixth Form there is the opportunity to attend taster lessons. The only Sixth Form options available lead to advanced qualifications, and Year 11 students are provided with information about vocational courses available at other local educational establishments.

53. Students with SEN receive very good care. An extended induction process with a suitably modified day helps students as they move from their primary school into Year 7. Students' attainments and progress are carefully tracked to identify any under-achievement. Tutors make sure students know their targets for improvement. In turn, teaching assistants focus on helping students improve their work in specific subjects. Teaching assistants now also undertake a learning mentor role in which they give individual support to students to help them deal with personal issues. The value and benefit of this initiative is clearly recognised, with plans being considered to make the support more systematic. Students also benefit from good relationships with a wide range of external agencies, including very good help from the Connexions service about making choices for their future.

54. The school provides good opportunities for students to express their views through questionnaires, a School Council, which meets regularly, and student focus groups. Year 7 students are surveyed each year about the induction process and changes are considered, based on any concerns. A recent general school survey was carried out, and issues raised were discussed with the school council. The involvement of students in the review process gives them all a very good opportunity to influence the education they receive.

### **Sixth Form**

Sixth Form students benefit from a very good standard of support and advice. The school makes very good arrangements to canvas their views, and to act upon them.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students are very satisfied with the very good advice about courses and their induction into the Sixth Form.
- Very good procedures for monitoring academic progress ensure that all students are aware of their targets and how they can improve.
- Arrangements to prepare students for when they leave the Sixth Form led to dissatisfaction in Year 13 but are now much improved for Year 12.
- The school seeks students' views and has very high regard for them.

### **Commentary**

55. Year 12 students speak favourably about their preparation for life in the Sixth Form, more so than those in Year 13, because of relatively recent improvements in this aspect of provision. The head of Sixth Form and the tutors emphasise the reasons for taking an appropriate course: one for which GCSE performance predicts success. Students felt that their advice and guidance about opportunities and courses for their Post 16 education or training was fair and impartial. Students embark on Sixth Form courses having had a first hand 'taster' experience of Sixth Form teaching and making a learning agreement with the school. Personal counselling after GCSE results are known, and the opportunity to change courses, enhances the quality of this advice. This good support is reflected in the good results students attain at Advanced Level.

56. The school takes the view that tutors are best placed to check upon students' well-being and to act as learning mentors in the Sixth Form. Assessed work from subject teachers provides form tutors with useful information, alongside predictions based upon GCSE performance, to help them to set students' targets for improvement. Tutors monitor students' performance, and give them effective help using a systematic programme of frequent personal mentoring sessions. Students

say they know how well they are working, and what they have to do to improve, from discussions with their subject teachers and tutor. Students' self-assessments of their work contribute usefully, along with their teachers' perspectives, in periodic progress reviews during their time in the Sixth Form.

57. The school holds true to the principle that students' views are of importance. Opinions recently canvassed through questionnaires and from focus groups provide a valued perspective which has been shared amongst the tutorial team. The school acted promptly upon the concerns students expressed. Year 13 students were justifiably critical of the careers education and advice on entry to higher education which they received when in Year 12, largely because they felt frustrated by delays during the various steps in their applications. Current Year 12 students feel much more at ease with the improvements to the guidance the school has implemented. The *Connexions* service has enhanced opportunities for 'drop-in' support. The Sixth Form has an important leading role in running the affairs of the school council, which also gives opportunities for students' views to be aired. Older Sixth Formers interviewed during the inspection confirmed that they are treated as responsible young adults by their teachers and by senior school management. Inspectors' judgements confirm students' view that now they are very well prepared for life in the world of higher education and work in a multicultural society.

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

The school has very good links with parents and other educational establishments. Links with the community are excellent.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Through the specialist engineering status and very strong sport developments, the school has established excellent links with the community.
- As part of the Faringdon Partnership, the school has established very strong links with the feeder primary schools. These links benefit all students and facilitate smooth transfers.
- Information provided through the new review process has increased parental satisfaction.

### **Commentary**

58. Parents are pleased with the school, and there are only a few areas in which there is some concern. Parents are pleased that students are helped to settle in quickly and to benefit from good teaching which helps them make good progress. They also like the fact that students are expected to work hard and are encouraged to become mature. There were some concerns about the behaviour and bullying within the school, which they think is generally dealt with well, and parents would like more opportunities to be consulted and to be given more information about the homework their children are expected to do. A number of parents made individual comments which were considered during the inspection and contribute to the findings in the report.

59. Parents receive very good information about the school and about their child's progress. Information on the school is provided through a very good prospectus, an excellent governors' annual report, regular high quality newsletters and an easy-to-use and up-to-date web site. Information on progress is provided by an informative annual report and an annual meeting with teachers, as well as a progress report and review meeting with tutors.

60. The school consults parents about their views through questionnaires. A number of parents are actively involved with the school either as governors or as members of the active parent teacher association. Year co-ordinators are well known to parents and are their normal point of contact. It is a priority within the school to involve parents with any concerns at an early stage. A student planner enables parents to monitor what homework is set, but although there is the opportunity for parents to communicate with tutors through the planner, it is little used. Parents are actively involved with their child's learning by attending the review meetings. Procedures for expressing concerns or complaining are very clearly explained to parents in the prospectus.



61. The school ensures that parents are well informed about the progress of their children and is pleased with the high degree of support from parents. Almost all parents take up opportunities to be involved in discussion about their children's progress, both at parents' meetings and at those arranged for annual reviews.

62. There is a very good partnership with local schools through the cluster partnership, which ensures smooth transition at the age of 11. The school works in co-operation with other secondary schools rather than competing with them, for example by providing only advanced courses in the Sixth Form, and informing Year 11 students of what is offered at other establishments in the area. A significant number of students attend school placements as part of a broader curriculum and there are very good links between the Sixth Form and higher education establishments. There are close links with Cranfield University, based at the local military college. Each year, all Year 7 students visit the University for a study day with an engineering focus.

63. Very good links with parents are sustained in the Sixth Form. Year 11 students and their parents receive information about Sixth Form courses and have opportunities to discuss alternatives at meetings arranged during the autumn. Parents get good information about A Level provision and are fully informed about students' choices. The school sees the importance of keeping in touch with all parents. A social evening early in the year helps parents of Year 12 students to know how well they are settling in. In addition, an open day and a meeting to discuss academic and personal progress is followed by an annual written report which complements this information. Parents are invited to a higher education meeting later in Year 12 to prepare them for choices they will later make.

64. The school highly values parents' contributions to the development of the Sixth Form. A focus group, established just over a year ago, confirmed parental support for strategies to continue this development. Importantly, parents also gave very useful insights into tactics to improve recruitment, and shared their expectations of what they would like the Sixth Form to be and to do.

65. The partnership with the community is excellent. The premises are well used by the community for adult education, and there are many occasions when members of the community come into school or students go out into the community to support and broaden the curriculum. As part of the engineering status many links have been built up which support the work experience and the work-related learning aspects. The school, as one of the largest employers in the area, is a member of the local chamber of commerce, and most local businesses are actively involved with the school. A significant contribution to the overall excellent partnership is provided by the very strong sporting links with the community, and also by the Local Learning Forum, which involves business, commercial, voluntary and community groups.

66. All Sixth Form students undertake work experience, which is most helpfully arranged through the excellent links the school has with the business community. Students value the opportunities to widen their perspective in an area of work closely related to their career aspirations. Liaison with the *Bodyzone* organisation and the *Connexions* service make a very important contribution to students' welfare, as well as helping them plan for their future.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership and management of the school are good. Governance and the leadership of the headteacher are very good. Together, the chair of governors and the headteacher give an outstanding sense of direction to the leadership of the school. Leadership of other key staff is good, and the school is well managed.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The governors understand the school well, and shape its vision and sense of direction very well.
- The chair of governors and headteacher have outstanding vision for the future of the school and work closely with governors and staff to realise it.
- The leadership of the headteacher is very good, and that of other senior staff is good.
- Management of the school is very good, by the headteacher, senior staff and heads of department.
- Leadership is excellent in ICT, and very good in English, science, history, geography and religious education.

### **Commentary**

67. The chair of governors and the headteacher provide together an outstanding vision for the school. Governors have a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, bring a wide range of professional and managerial expertise to their work, and have a very good capacity to direct and secure further improvement. Strategic planning is very good, and governors work very closely with the school to ensure that their intentions are realised. The governor with particular responsibility for implementation of engineering college status brings an outstanding level of expertise and commitment to his work.

68. Strategic planning fully reflects the school's ambitions and goals, and the range of expertise within the governing body helps to achieve them. There is a very high level of commitment to inclusion, and the understanding needed to help the school to improve further. Governors and senior staff are an excellent role model to staff and students alike.

69. The headteacher is ably supported by his senior leadership team, pastoral staff and heads of department. Leadership is excellent in ICT, and very good in English, science, history, geography and religious education. There are clear lines of responsibility between senior managers, heads of department and pastoral managers, and other staff. Performance management procedures are fully in place and play an important part in the school's efforts to secure further improvement. Self-evaluation plays an important part in the work both of the school and its departments. The governors and the school attach considerable importance to the views of parents and students about their work, and have good procedures which involve questionnaires, one-to-one discussions and meetings, to make sure that the school knows clearly the views of those it serves.

70. Day-to-day management of the school is good. Staff with responsibility for areas of the school's work form effective teams and work with them to support students and help them to get the most out of their time in school.

71. The joint special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCO), in partnership with a senior teaching assistant, provide very good leadership for learning support. The committed teaching assistants, some of whom are recently appointed, work well together as a team. They value and feel well supported by a comprehensive training programme. The school also, and importantly, helps teachers improve their skills to support students with SEN. Rigorous assessment arrangements allow teachers to track students' progress carefully. Furthermore, training of

teachers to improve the achievement of students who present behavioural difficulties draws upon very good management practice, linked to monitoring and evaluating the effect of intervention and support. The very good provision made for students with SEN reflects a very well led and managed section of the school.

72. Financial management and control are good. Procedures are meticulously set up and implemented so that full monetary control is maintained. It is some time since the last financial audit, but the issues identified in it, all of which were minor, have been dealt with. The school monitors closely the balance of expenditure between the main school and Sixth Form to ensure that neither subsidises the other. Principles of best value are fully adopted in terms of expenditure, but the school does not do as much as it could to evaluate the value for money arising from expenditure on, for example, curriculum development.

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

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	3,002,177.00
Total expenditure	3,211,408.00
Expenditure per pupil	3,743.00

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	810.00
Balance carried forward to the next	- 169,610.00

73. The current deficit budget arises from increases in the size of the school, which do not attract funding until the following year. It is fully licensed by the local education authority, and there is a robust plan to bring the budget back into balance in the near future.

**Sixth Form**

Leadership and management of the Sixth Form are good. Governance is very good.

**Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The governors and headteacher value the contribution the Sixth Form makes, and give very effective strategic leadership to promote its development.
- The head of Sixth Form and his team of tutors rigorously evaluate the Sixth Form's effectiveness in their planning for improvement.
- Thorough financial management, students' good achievement, and the contribution the students make to the whole school, ensure that the Sixth Form is cost effective and gives good value for money.

**Commentary**

74. Recent analysis and review of the Sixth Form, involving the local education authority, parents and students, with the governors and headteacher, show that the sixth form is an important and valued part of the school. Together with the relatively recently appointed head of Sixth Form, they have a clear vision for its improvement, and strong intentions to enhance the contribution it makes to the education of Year 12 and 13 students within Faringdon and the locality.

75. The tutorial team, which is well led and managed by the head of Sixth Form, effectively promotes students' well-being and academic development. Planning to develop the Sixth Form is appropriately aimed at raising standards. A comprehensive range of activities indicates the responsibilities of staff involved, and usefully suggests time scales and indicators of success. A well-presented and relevant handbook gives tutors information about procedures and, importantly, shares the development plan with them. The head of Sixth Form also makes good use of parents' and students' views and opinions, gathered, for example, from focus groups and questionnaires. These, together with an overall analysis of examination results, and subject departmental reviews of the value they add to students' achievement, make an important contribution to his evaluation of many aspects of Sixth Form provision.

76. Tutors make good use of test and examination data to review students' performance, and work with subject staff and students to identify how best they can support them during their courses and beyond. All work with dedication to build a Sixth Form which is very inclusive and which gives its students the best possible support.

77. Careful financial management and diligent administration provide governors with detailed analyses of income and spending. This essential information enables them to make judgements about the cost-effectiveness of their decisions relating to the Sixth Form. Income to the Sixth Form is broadly in line with spending, even though some teaching groups are small. The benefits students accrue from interactions with each other are inevitably more limited than where class sizes are larger, but students achieve well in the Sixth Form, and attain above average standards in A Level examinations. Furthermore, they make a vital contribution to the main school. They set a good example to younger students by their behaviour and conduct, they play a leading role in the school council, and they give valued support to students who come to the school speaking limited English. The head boy and girl are very good ambassadors for the school. When all these factors are taken into account, the Sixth Form gives good value for money.

## **WORK RELATED LEARNING**

The provision in work related learning (WRL) is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students in all years benefit from the school's excellent links with industry and the community.
- The school's engineering status strongly supports the very well planned programme of study.
- Sixth Form students manage their Young Enterprise projects very well.

### **Commentary**

78. In all years students enjoy a widely varied programme of very good quality WRL. In Year 7, students visit Cranfield University to learn the basics of robot construction and the importance of robots in today's world, whilst Year 8 students liaise with local nurseries and the National Trust to develop their project on gardening and conservation. In both cases students extend their learning through after-school clubs. Students in Year 9 consider their future careers, researching various occupations for conditions of work, the qualifications needed and opportunities for advancement. They work with a local firm using plasma cutters as part of their school-based design and technology course.

79. By Year 10, students work at a more mature level, using market research to ascertain the qualities of mobile telephones. Their findings have been taken seriously by local firms looking to improve their products and service. All Year 10 students receive in-depth interviews and advice before taking part in a two week work placement. They present their experiences to their peers as part of their GCSE English coursework. Year 11 students liaise with representatives from an extensive range of occupations, organising speakers to address groups of students who sign up for these seminars. These are very efficiently advertised and attended by all age groups. Additionally, students in Years 10 and 11 have the option to take a double GCSE course in Engineering or a GNVQ in ICT. NVQ links with local schools add a further dimension to their curriculum. Lower achieving students successfully achieve bronze and silver awards in the Youth Award Scheme and speak enthusiastically about how this has improved their attendance record.

80. Post 16 students engage in Young Enterprise, financing their projects through imaginative fund-raising ideas. They manage their own bank account, and projects are well planned with predicted costs and outcomes. The Chair of Governors oversees their work on a weekly basis.

81. The management of WRL is very good and is closely linked to careers education. Aspects of engineering and work related learning are very well promoted in most subjects and form an integral part of the programmes of study in history, English and health education. All tutor groups have a resources box which provides a wealth of support material and contact advice relevant to their topic. The school's excellent links with local businesses and industry offer a very wide range of opportunities and experiences to all students.

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

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

#### ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

##### English

Provision in English is **very good**.

##### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well in Years 10 and 11 and reach well above average standards.
- Teachers' very good knowledge and challenging questions enable students to learn very well.
- Teachers do not take enough account of the needs of students with English as an additional language.
- GCSE students have very positive attitudes to their work.

##### Commentary

82. Students enter Year 7 with standards in English slightly above those usually found on entry to secondary school. Boys and girls achieve well in Years 7 to 9. However, a few students with English as an additional language, most of whom study at the school for only one year, do not achieve as well as they should in lessons because teachers are unsure about how to meet their needs. Students with SEN make good progress overall, although extra help with basic literacy skills is not currently available until Year 8. This slows their progress during Year 7. Results in National Curriculum tests in 2003 were above the national average and better than those in similar schools. Students gained similar results in 2004. Current standards in Year 9 are also above average. Students have very good speaking and listening skills. By Year 9, some are very articulate and nearly all listen very attentively during class and in small group discussions. They develop a good awareness of literary techniques, and high attaining students understand how writers use them for effect. Most read aloud fluently. They have a good understanding of the plot of *Macbeth* and can suggest different interpretations of characters' actions, making close reference to the text. They write effectively in a range of styles and use vocabulary imaginatively, although some lower attaining students have difficulty in structuring their writing.

83. Students from different social and ethnic backgrounds achieve very well in Years 10 and 11. In 2004, GCSE examination results in English language were well above the national average; results in English literature were very high, although a smaller proportion of students entered the subject than is typical nationally. Boys and girls achieved very well overall, but considerably more girls than boys gained the highest grades. Students with SEN make good progress, and in 2004 all achieved a pass in English language. Current standards are well above those expected nationally. Many students are very articulate and make confident, mature presentations of their work to the whole class. Some, for example, put forward sophisticated interpretations of complex images from Gillian Clarke's poetry. Low attaining students also have a firm understanding of set texts, although they tend to describe the plot rather than analyse themes. Students take pride in the presentation of their work. They plan and draft their writing carefully, so that their essays are usually structured well. Students' very positive attitudes make a significant contribution to their very good achievement at GCSE.

84. **The quality of teaching and learning is good overall.** It is very good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers use a very good variety of teaching methods to involve and motivate students. Students respond particularly well to opportunities to prepare and present work to the rest of the class; older students willingly take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers' very good knowledge of texts enables them to ask searching questions that help students to develop their ideas further. Teachers

use starter activities well to ensure a brisk start to lessons and they explain their objectives clearly, though they rarely help students to evaluate how well they have achieved them at the end of the lesson. Similarly, their setting of targets is inconsistent. The best marking identifies precise targets for students to achieve, but some targets are insufficiently specific, and not all are linked to National Curriculum criteria. In Years 7 to 9, teachers do not plan enough to meet the needs of lower attaining students and those at an early stage of learning English as an additional language.

85. The department is very well led and managed. The head of department monitors students' performance closely and data is used very well to identify appropriate areas for development. The recent change to temporary accommodation has been very well managed and teachers work well as a team.

86. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. GCSE results have greatly improved and good teaching has been maintained. However, provision for lower attaining students in Years 7 to 9 is still in need of improvement.

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

87. Standards of literacy are good and improve as students progress through the school. Students have good speaking and listening skills and many contribute fluently and confidently during class discussions. They use subject-specific vocabulary with confidence and understanding. Students cope well with the reading and writing they are asked to do in other subjects. They write effectively in a range of styles and present their work accurately and neatly.

88. Teachers in all subjects help students to develop their language and literacy skills well. They provide regular opportunities for class and small group discussions and insist on the accurate use of subject-specific vocabulary. In English, weekly library sessions encourage students in Year 7 to develop an interest in wider reading. In art, poetry is used as a stimulus for art work, and in science students carry out library projects that develop their ability to read for information. Most subjects help students to structure pieces of extended writing well. In French, for example, teachers help students to draft and re-draft their writing to a high standard, and in religious education teachers provide useful frameworks to help students to organise their response to essay questions. Most teachers insist on accurate spelling and punctuation when marking students' work. This good work in subjects exists despite the lack of regular monitoring and the need to update the school's literacy policy. However, literacy progress units are not currently taught until Year 8, and several Year 7 students would benefit from earlier intervention to improve their basic literacy skills.

### **Drama**

89. All students study drama in Years 7, 8 and 9. Since the last inspection, a GCSE course has been introduced for students in Years 10 and 11. A Year 11 drama lesson was sampled, in which standards were above average. Students have a good understanding of drama techniques and conventions and apply these well in their performance of scenes from Willy Russell's *Our Day Out*. Very good teaching and students' very positive attitudes ensure that they work hard and develop good skills of self-evaluation.

## Modern foreign languages

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average as a result of good teaching.
- Achievement is good because of students' positive attitudes. Girls achieve better than boys.
- Difficulties in managing students' behaviour slow the pace of learning in a minority of middle and lower attaining groups in Years 8 and 9.
- As there has been no head of department for a considerable time, it has been difficult to ensure consistency in key areas of work such as teaching and assessment, and to lead developments forward.

### Commentary

90. Results in teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2004 were above average. GCSE results were average in French and slightly below average in German. In both languages few students reached the highest grades. Girls' results were higher than those of boys.

91. Standards are above average in Years 7 to 11 in both languages, and students, particularly girls, achieve well. Students with SEN and gifted and talented students achieve well because teaching is well matched to their needs. Students who have English as an additional language achieve well in oral work, but progress in writing is more varied. Standards in Years 10 and 11 have risen, as languages are now an option chosen mainly by higher and middle attaining students who are highly motivated and have good attitudes to their work.

92. Students have a good grasp of grammar, which improves the quality of all their work, and literacy skills are above average. They read fluently and use a range of strategies to understand difficult texts. Listening and speaking skills are weaker and pronunciation is often approximate. This is because teachers often do not provide sufficient opportunity to develop these skills. By Year 11, students produce good quality writing, using a range of tenses and making complex sentences. Not enough use is made of ICT, because access to computers is limited.

93. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, but is inconsistent. In Years 7 to 9, difficulties with class management slow the pace of learning in a few middle and lower attaining groups. These groups often contain a large number of lively boys who do not particularly enjoy language learning. In top sets, and in large groups in Years 10 and 11, many of which have more girls than boys, challenging teaching and a brisk pace enable students to reach high standards. Most students take their work seriously and learn industriously.

94. Lessons and homework are well planned to meet students' needs and provide opportunities to consolidate learning. Teachers use their expertise to explain grammatical points clearly so that students have sound understanding. Good relationships and well-produced resources, especially where an interactive whiteboard is available, are used to engage students. However, classrooms are too small to allow for activities such as role-play. Learning support assistants are managed well and ensure that students who have SEN benefit fully from lessons. Assessment and marking are satisfactory, but the department recognises that practice is too varied. Guidance on how to improve work is often insufficient.

95. Leadership and management are satisfactory. For the past year there have been severe staffing difficulties and the department does not have a head of department or anyone responsible for French. The head of German has successfully supported the day-to-day running of the department, but it has been difficult to lead the department forward or to ensure consistency in key areas of work, such as teaching and assessment. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory, as strengths have been maintained in difficult circumstances.



## MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students in Years 7 to 9 achieve well as a result of good teaching based on the national strategy.
- As students progress through the school, their attitudes and behaviour improve and enhance their learning.
- Long-term assessments are used effectively to track individuals' performance and to monitor the department's work.
- Short-term assessment is not used effectively in all lessons to ensure that tasks are closely matched to students' needs; marking does not always offer useful guidance to students.
- Schemes of work do not give enough guidance on methods to be used, and some lessons lack pace and vigour.

### Commentary

96. No national comparisons are available for the National Curriculum tests for students in Year 9 in 2004. However, results were above the national average in 2003 and well above average when compared to those of schools with a similar intake. Standards in GCSE in 2004 were significantly better than average, with the proportion of students gaining at least a grade C well above the national average.

97. Students currently in Year 9 are attaining standards above national expectations in lessons and over time. Students in Years 7 to 9 develop their mathematical skills well as a result of high expectations from teachers and because they are challenged to think hard and raise their standards in lessons. Their achievement is good. Students in Year 11 attain above average standards. In Years 10 and 11, students make satisfactory progress because they receive satisfactory teaching based closely on the awarding body's requirements. They are appropriately challenged in lessons and achieve satisfactorily.

98. Teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 are good. The school has introduced the national strategy effectively and lessons generally proceed at a brisk pace, aided by students' good attitudes and behaviour. Some good use is made of computer-linked whiteboards to illustrate points and motivate students. However, students themselves make relatively little use of ICT in their own learning. Long-term assessments are used effectively to track students' progress and to allocate them to classes, based on their prior attainment. On the other hand, shorter-term assessment is not always used well enough in lessons to ensure that all students are challenged at *exactly* the right level, and this limits the achievement of some students in some lessons. Marking varies in quality: the best helps students to know how well they are doing and to understand how they can improve. However, students are not always sure of their own strengths and weaknesses, despite the use in some classes of a system of self-assessment in which they identify their own levels of competence. The methods of the national strategy have not yet extended into Years 10 and 11, and teaching and learning here are satisfactory. Lessons can lack the brisk pace that is characteristic in Years 7 to 9, as they focus closely on the requirements of the examinations. Schemes of work throughout the school provide only an outline of the course, and do not give guidance on methodology. This is a factor which limits achievement. Some lessons are still based too heavily on textbooks, and there is little evidence of practical or investigative mathematics being used routinely.

99. The department is led and managed satisfactorily. A sound view of the department's future development is evident in its self-reviews and action planning. However, it is unclear how the weaknesses identified in them are to be dealt with. Whilst the work of the department is satisfactorily monitored, the outcomes are not routinely used to identify and share best practice.

100. Since the previous inspection, standards have improved overall and achievement is better in Years 7 to 9. Teaching has been maintained at an overall good level. The department has made satisfactory progress.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

101. The school has invited departments to consider how they can contribute to the development of students' general numeracy skills. A school policy has been devised, and some whole staff training has taken place. The use of numeracy to support learning in other subjects is satisfactory overall. Data is collected particularly well in geography, for example when students in Year 8 engage in traffic surveys, but the analysis they can carry out is limited because they do not have enough access to ICT to complete the large amount of calculations needed. Accurate measurement is a feature of work in resistant materials in design and technology, and graphs are used effectively in science. The use of distance and angle is well promoted in physical education when students carry out orienteering.

## **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- A well-balanced, committed team of strong teachers delivers interesting courses which successfully promote the good achievement of the students.
- A very good and varied curriculum allows students to realise their potential on different courses enhanced by a variety of extra-curricular activities.
- The quality of marking is inconsistent and sometimes does not give students sufficient knowledge of how they should improve their work.

### **Commentary**

102. The standards in the 2004 national tests taken at the end of Year 9 were above the national average overall and well above for the higher levels, when compared to those of all schools. They were also above when compared with those of similar schools. The results indicated good achievement from the levels obtained in Year 6. Girls performed better than boys. Standards have remained much the same compared to national ones in recent years. Examination of students' work and observations of lessons show that the present Year 9 is working at much the same standard as last year.

103. At GCSE in 2004, in double award science, standards were well above average when compared to those of all schools and very high against similar schools: there has been an upward trend in the last few years. Girls did better than boys. The students' overall achievement was good, with a greater number of higher grades than might have been expected from their Year 9 tests. Achievement for the more able was therefore very good. The present Year 11 is maintaining these high standards. Standards in the single award course were below average, but students achieved as expected from their Year 9 tests. Present standards on this course are much the same as last year. The school has initiated GCSE courses in the three separate sciences so that the most able students can realise their potential. Standards seen in these lessons were impressive.

104. In all years, students with SEN make good progress. They have good support and have effective IEPs, whose strategies are put into practice well by the teachers. Students from ethnic minorities progress well when supported, but sometimes support is not available. More able students receive more demanding work, because of the setting system, but they are not always stretched with more challenging work within sets.

105. The quality of teaching is very good and leads to very good learning. Teachers are very well informed and enthusiastic, and students find the lessons interesting and often enjoyable. They respond by working hard and listening well. In most lessons questions are used well, not only to check understanding but also to enable students to develop topics and practical plans for themselves; this involvement leads to deeper understanding and interest, so that students readily volunteer answers to questions. Teaching exhibits many different strategies within a lesson, including demonstrations to illustrate points and intelligent use of the interactive whiteboard; this leads to well-motivated students and often to very good learning. Although most work is marked, the quality of marking is inconsistent, and more could be done to correct errors and to advise students on how to improve. Very good use is made of information technology to deliver lessons, and by the students themselves in areas such as research and data-logging. Teachers develop literacy well by actively promoting it in everyday work and projects, such as holiday brochures for planets. Mathematical skills are taught sufficiently for the requirements of each course, but not fully exploited.

106. The department has very good leadership and management, and the head of department leads a highly effective and committed team. The curriculum is very good indeed and is enhanced by a programme of visits and activities which bring science to life. In addition to the three kinds of GCSE courses, to match students' different requirements, there is also an after-school GCSE in astronomy. This is given by an enthusiastic teacher and well attended by keen students. Assessment, apart from the day-to-day marking, is very good and is well used to track students' progress, set targets and modify schemes of work. The library is very good for science, and the librarian is actively involved with promoting independent learning in science. Accommodation is a bit cramped, but a new block is due to be built soon. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. This is a very good, go ahead and effective department.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

Provision in ICT is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Information and communication technology (ICT) is excellently led and very well managed.
- Students learn well because much of the teaching is either excellent or very good.
- Very well organised lessons, with timely individual support, lead to very good achievement.
- Students successfully improve their capability in ICT through developing and applying skills learned in lessons and in many other subjects throughout the curriculum.

### **Commentary**

107. Standards in Year 9 have improved consistently well over the past two years since a new head of department and staff team took over. In the 2004 statutory teachers' assessments, over 80 per cent of Year 9 students gained Level 5 or higher, which is well above the national average. As students come from primary schools with average competencies in ICT, this represents very good achievement. Many more boys than girls attain these higher grades. Following voluntary study, two Year 11 students submitted work and gained distinctions in the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) at intermediate Level in 2004. A third student gained a distinction for work entered early in 2005.

108. Standards in work seen are well above average by the end of Year 9. Year 11 students are helped to attain standards well above those normally expected in relation to course criteria, even though they have not had the extensive grounding in ICT now available in Years 7 to 9. This is very good achievement. Students in all years have a very good grasp of facilities in Microsoft Office

applications and are adept at searching the Internet and incorporating information into their products. However, Year 10 and 11 students with average to below average ability lack the organisational and evaluation skills needed for higher levels of technological attainment. Good support helps students with SEN to achieve well.

109. Students learn well as a result of good teaching, much of which is very good and excellent. Teachers have a very high level of expert knowledge, and their effective planning and the care they to consolidate students' learning mean that the purpose of each lesson is fully realised. Good questioning challenges students and leads them to use their knowledge in new situations. Most students engage well in activities, and teachers' timely intervention and support sustain students' involvement and make a noticeable contribution to their learning. Less effective aspects of teaching include questioning that does not sufficiently involve students in the lesson, and allowing too many opportunities for students to be distracted, such as accessing the Internet, when they should be paying attention to the teacher.

110. Students benefit from rigorous assessment of their work and effective feedback and guidance, in the form of written comments and in formal discussion with their teacher. The school has implemented the national strategy for improving ICT in Years 7 to 9, and the GNVQ option in Years 10 and 11 is increasing markedly in popularity. All other Year 10 and 11 students now follow the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) course, which will not be assessed until later in 2005. No-one follows a GCSE course.

111. Leadership of the department is excellent and management is very good. A perceptive management strategy for raising standards and achievement is backed by dedicated support for students and measures to strengthen the work of the relatively new teaching team. The department is much more effective than at the time of the previous inspection, with a clear capability for further improvement.

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

112. The school manages students' learning in ICT throughout the curriculum very effectively in three main ways. A substantial investment in facilities and equipment provides interactive whiteboards and accessible computers for use in most subjects. Further investment is clearly planned to redress shortfalls when funding becomes available, for example to provide much needed specialist facilities in music. Secondly, expertise within the ICT department is well used to train and support teachers so that they can exploit the potential of interactive whiteboards in promoting students' learning in their lessons. Thirdly, all students follow an ICT course which implements the national strategy in Years 7 to 9, assesses their competencies, and provides an accreditation in Year 11.

113. The good work seen includes effective use of interactive whiteboard technology in many subjects, including English, mathematics, science, history, religious education, art and music. This facility clearly enhances the quality of whole class work to review and consolidate learning. Specialist equipment is used in design and technology to develop students' understanding of computer-aided design and manufacturing, although this aspect is exploited more in engineering than in textiles work. Opportunities to gather and handle data are taken in science, but limited access to suitable equipment restricts the scope of this aspect in geographical fieldwork. Good use of video technology helps students in physical education to record and analyse their performance. Of particular note is some innovative work taking place in science where, for example, a lower attaining group in Year 10 used it to help develop their knowledge of heart anatomy and the editing of video clips to make a record of their work. English, history and religious education lessons, for example, give students good opportunities to improve their competencies in using word processing, publishing and presentational software to enhance their work. Students have open access to facilities outside lessons and make extensive use of them to develop their computer skills and to research from the Internet. Collectively, these approaches lead students to have good competencies in ICT throughout Years 7 to 11.

## HUMANITIES

### Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good lesson planning supports a wide variety of learning activities, especially effective group work.
- Students respond very well to the high expectations of the teachers.
- The department is very well led and well managed.
- The research skills developed by the very wide range of fieldwork cannot be fully utilised and extended because of the insufficient opportunities to use ICT.
- Not enough use is made of performance data in Years 10 and 11 to raise the achievement of individual students.
- Students with English as an additional language do not have sufficient support in lessons.

#### Commentary

114. Students begin their geographical studies with standards close to the national expectation. They quickly make rapid progress because of good lesson planning, very good relationships, and the emphasis upon specific geographical skills. By Year 9, standards are above average and students achieve well. In the first three years interest is very high and the take up in Year 10 is the highest of all optional subjects. By Year 11, standards are above average: this indicates satisfactory achievement. Over the five years most students achieve well, including those who are gifted and talented and those with SEN. Students who are in the early stages of English language acquisition make slower progress in lessons because there is not enough specialist support for them. Their overall achievement, however, is satisfactory because the teachers, although untrained in English as an additional language support, give considerable individual guidance.

115. GCSE results in 2004 were above average and most students secured a grade C or above pass. This represents satisfactory achievement. Over the past few years the examination results have shown a steady improvement, with the best results for some years in 2004. Students have very positive attitudes to the subject, and in almost all lessons they work with enthusiasm and good focus.

116. Teaching and learning are good. All full time teachers are specialists with a very good knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, the subject. They plan their lessons well, with high expectations of the students. Students respond very well to this encouragement. A wide variety of learning methods is used in the lessons, including photographs, videos and maps. The use of the whiteboard is imaginative and develops students' interest early in the lessons. Students are encouraged to work together in small groups and these activities work well. Decision-making activities effectively develop the students' skills: Year 10 students showed good understanding of the food web in Antarctica and of micro world climates. The teaching assistants make a very good contribution, particularly in the earlier years. There is a comprehensive range of very good field work experiences in the first three years. Students collect considerable data about traffic density, river flows and commercial property usage. However, they are unable to analyse this data as thoroughly or as extensively as they should because of the limited opportunities to use ICT. This adversely affects the rate and success of their learning.

117. Leadership is very good. The department has an excellent vision for the place of the subject in the curriculum, underpinned by a very comprehensive development plan; its one omission is any significant reference to raising achievement in Year 11. The head of department is an excellent role model because of her very thorough knowledge of the curriculum and very good teaching skills. Management is good because the department runs smoothly and with a good team spirit. New staff are well supported. The curriculum in Years 8 and 9 is very innovative and includes several

engineering modules. Considerable assessment data is collected on students' progress, but it is not analysed as effectively as it could be or used to identify and develop suitable strategies for improving the achievement of all students, especially those in Year 11. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

## **History**

Provision in history is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The very high quality of teaching is reflected in students' very good achievement.
- Leadership is very good and the department is efficiently managed.
- The department has pioneered the teaching of engineering in history.
- Unsatisfactory accommodation prevents the effective deployment and use of resources.

## **Commentary**

118. Students make good progress in Years 7 to 9, where their standards of work are broadly in line with the national average. Over the least three years the number of students gaining A\* to C grades has been above the national average, with a significant increase in 2004. Achievement is good overall, and boys do as well as girls.

119. Students in Year 7 develop a good knowledge of primary and secondary sources, using it well in their work on the North American Indians. They reinforce their learning by replicating Indian artefacts such as moccasins and sand paintings. This links well with other subjects and broadens their cultural awareness. By Year 9, students have a good understanding of the causes of World War I and discuss aspects of this with sensitivity and maturity. They show respect when handling materials such as original photographs and letters from the trenches, and they look at how engineering techniques have led to developments in weaponry and armaments. In Years 10 and 11, students make very good progress. Their examination of the causes of World War II indicates a clear understanding of the failings of the Weimar Republic. Written work is well presented, with evidence of text and Internet research.

120. Teaching and learning are very good, and sometimes excellent. Teachers' expertise and enthusiasm brings history to life with well balanced and varied lessons, and students respond with genuine interest. The needs of higher and lower attaining students are well met in lessons and through homework tasks. Where present, teaching assistants provide effective individual support. However, there is inadequate classroom support for students whose second language is English. Relationships are very good, and students respond by behaving very well. Mathematical and literacy skills are well promoted in all years. Use of historical terminology introduces new vocabulary, and teachers encourage accuracy and paragraphing in students' essays. Work is consistently marked with encouraging comments, and extremely attractive displays of students' work in all rooms further promote their self-esteem.

121. The department is very well led and managed. The curriculum is broad and balanced, incorporating engineering aspects for all years. There are off-site visits to a range of historical establishments, including the European battlefields. Assessment is used well to develop the curriculum and to track students' progress. There are good links to citizenship and the world of work, particularly through study of the industrial revolution and the Bolshevik Revolution. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. The faculty spreads across the site in three areas, one of which does not have access to computers. This restricts the effective deployment and use of resources and restricts learning opportunities for some students. Resources are satisfactory and the school library has a good range of reference and historical books and videos.

122. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. The appointment of full-time specialist teachers has created greater stability and improved the quality of teaching and learning. All curriculum issues are resolved and statutory requirements are fully met.

### **Religious Education**

Provision in religious education is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students achieve well throughout the school as a result of good teaching and learning.
- Standards in both statutory and optional courses are rising.
- The department has a clear understanding of how to raise standards further.

### **Commentary**

123. When students come to the school, their knowledge, skills and understanding are, on balance, below the expectations of the Oxfordshire Agreed Syllabus for religious education. By Year 9 all groups of students achieve well and standards are broadly in line with expectations defined by the syllabus. Good teaching ensures that most students make good use of their knowledge of the religions they have studied to explain how beliefs make a difference to people's lives. A small minority describe differences but find it harder to suggest reasons for them, whereas a similar proportion of abler students begin to weigh up evidence and relate findings clearly to relevant contexts.

124. All students now take at least a short course GCSE to meet the Agreed Syllabus requirements in Years 10 and 11. In 2003 and 2004 results were above average, and they were better in 2004 than in 2003. Girls and boys generally achieve equally well. Current work reflects these results and all groups of students achieve well. This is a good improvement on the average standards found at the last inspection. Students use their knowledge well to make reasoned judgements, trying hard to be unprejudiced and objective. A small number of enthusiastic, able boys and girls have 'top-up' lessons outside the normal timetable to follow a full GCSE course. They apply their detailed knowledge consistently well in topics ranging from the attitude of Jesus to women to the ethics of producing genetically modified foods. Many are well placed to gain A or B grades.

125. Teachers' wide subject knowledge means that tasks are challenging and relevant to life. This engages students and makes them think hard. Students work things out for themselves because teachers encourage them to think independently, make balanced evaluations, and present their findings fairly. The match of tasks to ability is better in some lessons than in others and occasional slips in pace slow down otherwise brisk learning. Not all written feedback is equally effective in helping students see how to improve but, on balance, assessment is good. Outcomes are carefully studied so that teaching and learning are refocused as necessary.

126. Very good leadership by the head of department has identified the benefits of closer links with feeder schools to improve the foundation for Year 7, and also the exploration of different learning styles to lead to faster progress through Years 7 to 9. Resources are good. There are strong links with Christian places of worship but those for other faiths are limited. Since the last inspection *Engineering and Belief Systems* has provided an innovative addition to the curriculum. Students in Year 9 look at the impact of faith on civil engineering in building places of worship, and older students consider aspects of genetic engineering. Rising standards overall indicate that improvement has been good.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **Design and technology**

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

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

- Students' achievement is good.
- The wide curriculum in Year 10 and 11 reflects the school's engineering college status.
- Assessments of students' learning and achievement do not support teachers' lesson planning.

#### **Commentary**

127. By the end of Year 9, students reach standards that are similar to those expected nationally. Standards are better in resistant materials and graphics than in food and textiles. By the end of Year 11, standards are above average because there is a greater emphasis on solving design problems. In external examinations, results in 2004 were above average in relation to those of schools nationally. Last year they were similar to those at other schools.

128. By the end of Year 9, students' achievement is good, and they work very confidently within the workshops. Their understanding of design is less well developed in some lessons taken by part-time teachers. The levels that students reach in some lessons are low because lesson planning is not sufficiently well matched to the target National Curriculum Levels. By the end of Year 11, students' achievement is good. In engineering, students make good use of knowledge from other parts of the curriculum, including science, to frame questions which show a good level of understanding. In resistant materials, students use models to help them to develop their designs. As a result, the outcomes are of a high standard. In electronics and graphics, students make good use of computer-aided design (CAD) and manufacture (CAM) to develop their work. Across the department, higher attaining students are well supported in school and at home to achieve well. However, the research of some of the lower attaining students is superficial and their products are unimaginative. Students with special needs achieve well in practical contexts. Girls achieve better than boys. The achievement of students whose first language is not English is satisfactory and they are well supported by their peers.

129. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and an understanding of industrial practice. In the best lessons, teachers match activities well to students' needs and interests. For example, Year 9 students visited a local business to find out how new technology is used. Students learn to investigate, for example by devising tests to discover the properties of materials. Teachers make sure that students build new learning on previous experiences, through the use of probing questions and frequent opportunities to check and reinforce learning. They ensure that every student is successful. However, when teachers talk for too long or do not provide opportunities for students to find things out for themselves, or try things out, students become inattentive and do not learn so well. Across the department, teachers' planning does not identify desired learning outcomes for all students, and this limits the pace in some lessons. Although assessment is satisfactory, ongoing feedback to students is limited. As a result, students' predicted levels and grades are not always accurate and lower attaining students are sometimes unsure about how to proceed.

130. Leadership is very good. The director of engineering has provided very good leadership and support to the head of department. The school's specialist status is very well reflected throughout the school. Management is good. However, this is a complex department with a wide range of courses, and the need for many part-time and temporary staff and the lack of a deputy head of department limits the opportunities for curriculum development. The curriculum meets statutory requirements. However, the timetable arrangements for Years 7 to 9 do not support progressive



development of students' design skills. Short term planning is not firmly linked to the schemes of work, National Curriculum Levels and assessments. There is a very wide curriculum for Years 10 and 11. Insufficient use is made of ICT in food and textiles. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

### **Art and design**

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

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

- Teaching for students in Years 7 to 9 is good.
- The curriculum lacks breadth.
- The critical review and evaluation of art and design is undeveloped.
- Learning is enhanced by good accommodation.

#### **Commentary**

131. Students enter the school with average drawing and painting skills. Their development of observation techniques ranges from well-realised drawings and paintings to more immature compositions. They make satisfactory progress in Years 7 and 8 and, as at the time of the last inspection, standards in Year 9 are broadly in line with national expectations. Achievement is satisfactory.

132. In 2004, GCSE results were close to the national average, but attainment was significantly lower than in other subjects across the school. The department has made a careful analysis of the reasons for the discrepancy in results, and has strategies for improvement in place. Very good use is made of the study of other artists and the application of their techniques. Students in Year 10 are studying Salvador Dali and surrealism. Annotations in sketchbooks are descriptive but depth of thought and questioning is less well developed. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. The standards of work seen are in line with national expectations. Three-dimensional work is limited to construction and pottery; sculpture and printmaking are not fully introduced. The use of computers, digital cameras, scanners and information technology paint programmes is undeveloped, but money is now available to overcome this difficulty.

133. Teaching is good overall, and is better in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11. Lessons are very well planned and include tasks that are both practical and achievable: this encourages students, who become fully absorbed in what they are doing. Teachers make good use of examples of work by other students and by established artists as inspiration in their lessons. In Year 7, students are inspired by the works of Marc Chagall to make illustrations of fairground activities. Year 8 students are delighted to demonstrate to their peers how they identify specific objects in a Picasso cubist collage, and in Year 9 all students are fully involved, examining and reproducing the work of subway artist Keith Haring. Students with SEN are well integrated and are given sensitive support by teaching assistants.

Teachers are aware of students' capabilities and set their demands to match them, so that all students are challenged to produce their best work. Lessons are well structured and end with lively discussions on what has been learned and which students have produced attractive compositions. The practice of critical self-review and evaluation is less well developed. Homework is central to all lessons, and consistent reference is made to the spiritual, moral and social aspects of art and design. For example, students think about why dreams were so important to Marc Chagall and they make positive comments about the qualities they see in each other's work. Accommodation is good, offering a pleasant working environment. The new rooms have raised expectations, and teachers make very good use of interactive white boards in explaining to students what they are

expected to achieve during the lesson. Students are also encouraged to demonstrate electronic drawing techniques to each other. Resources for drawing, painting and pottery are good; they are satisfactory for printmaking, photography and information technology. Reference is made to the art of other cultures, but trips to galleries are not undertaken regularly at present.

134. Leadership and management are satisfactory, and are improving. The head of department is working to raise the profile of art in the school, and staffing has stabilised after a period of difficulty. There are good procedures for assessment and its analysis, but note of what students achieve in art when they start in Year 7 is informal. It is weaker than the systematic review and evaluation of standards and achievement in Years 9 and 11. The curriculum lacks breadth, and displays are limited to the two art rooms. The range of three-dimensional work is barely satisfactory but the new accommodation and pottery room promise exciting future developments. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

## **Music**

Provision in music is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good teaching leads to good achievement for students in Years 10 and 11.
- Lack of computers and up-to-date keyboards restricts what can be taught in lessons.
- Energetic leadership provides a diverse range of good musical experiences for all students.
- Issues identified at the previous inspection have not been addressed.

### **Commentary**

135. Standards in 2004, according to teachers' assessments of students' work at the end of Year 9, were average, with girls' attainment higher than that of boys. Work seen during the inspection confirms this judgement, but with boys and girls now attaining similar standards. Students' musical ability is broadly average on entry to the school. Achievement is satisfactory for most students, including those with SEN and those for whom English is an additional language. Achievement by students who learn instruments is good. In class they use their musical knowledge from their instrumental lessons to attain standards that are above those expected nationally. The standard of work seen in the current Years 10 and 11 is above average and a small number of students took the GCSE examination in music in 2004. All attained A\* or A grades, maintaining the standards noted at the previous inspection. It is not possible to make statistical comparisons with national data, however, because only a small number of students studied music. These students are competent performers who work very well together in ensembles, rehearsing and preparing their coursework. Compositions are secure but lack complex rhythms and harmonies and development of melodic ideas.

136. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Strong features are teachers' good encouragement of students, good working relationships, and students' generally positive attitudes when working in pairs or groups. Questioning is rigorous and students use musical language in their answers. Lesson planning sets high challenges for all students, but less competent students sometimes need simpler tasks so that they do not become daunted by complex activities. Endings of lessons are not always used effectively to give students time to think about and describe what they have learned. All students are learning, through regular performances, how to listen properly and how to evaluate their own and others' work. However, many students in Years 7 to 9 are reluctant to perform in front of their peers. Students' learning is enriched by the variety of workshops and visits arranged for them. This develops their understanding and awareness of music from other cultures. Very good accommodation supports learning because students can rehearse and practise away from the main teaching room. Resources are unsatisfactory. The department does not have any computers, recording equipment or up-to-date keyboards. The absence of this equipment means that students do not fulfil the statutory requirements in order to store, refine and record their compositions.

137. Leadership is good. The head of department works very hard to raise the profile of music throughout the school and provide stimulating and culturally diverse musical events for all students. Many students use the music rooms regularly at lunchtimes and value the unstinting support given by all teachers. Management is satisfactory. The department runs smoothly and has clear priorities for development. The monitoring of students' performance, and relating this clearly to National Curriculum Levels, is a weakness. Although students record their progress and set themselves targets, they do not know how well they are doing in relation to national expectations.

138. Since the previous inspection, improvement has been satisfactory. Standards have been maintained and the achievement of students in Years 10 and 11 is now good. However, no progress has been made in terms of the provision for ICT in the music rooms and, despite music being one of the option choices for GCSE examination, it is still taught entirely outside the normal school day.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

Provision in physical education is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very good teaching in the GCSE groups promotes high standards.
- Very good links with the school sports co-ordinator are raising the physical education standard on entry.
- A very good extra-curricular programme, involving over 35 per cent of the students, is raising achievement in the subject.
- More monitoring of teaching is needed so that excellent and very good teaching may be shared more effectively.

### **Commentary**

139. Standards on entry have been below average for the subject until this year, when they have improved to average. Standards by the end of Year 9 are above average in most activities, and teachers' assessments show that 85 per cent of students were working at Level 5 or above in 2004. GCSE results are also well above average. Students' achievement is good throughout the school.

140. The work of the sports co-ordinator has raised the standards on entry because of the sporting links with the local primary schools. By the end of Year 9, boys have reached a very high standard of gymnastics, mainly through excellent teaching. Creative and energetic sequences are performed with skill and understanding, stimulated by a challenging approach. Orienteering is providing linking opportunities with numeracy and geography, as well as promoting interesting and healthy activity. An enthusiastic group of girls worked hard to improve their netball skills, and gradually progressed in passing and shooting during a game.

141. By the end of Year 11, the GCSE groups show a commitment to the course in both their written and practical work. A scrutiny of work showed very good presentation skills and an understanding of the requirements of the examination. Practical skills in badminton vary from excellent to satisfactory in singles play, and movement around the court is rapid. The groups present their research work to other members of the class in a confident and informative manner. Overall the GCSE students are progressing quickly, and reaching well above average standards. The core physical education students in basketball reached an average standard because they still lack some basic skills. Students of all abilities achieve well, and students with language difficulties cope well with the practical work. Teaching is good overall, with only one unsatisfactory Year 9 lesson, where poor behaviour disrupted the flow of the lesson. There is excellent teaching in gymnastics, where, in one lesson seen, creative opportunities stimulated the class to perform at the highest level. The teaching of the GCSE classes is very good and full use is made of video and the

interactive white board to promote learning. Collaborative learning is encouraged and students are confident enough to present work to others. The teaching offers different learning styles, which help students to maintain interest and purpose. The preparation and planning of the lessons such as orienteering is very good.

142. Appropriate use of resources helps students in their map work and numeracy skills. The very good facilities encourage students to achieve well, and very good use is made of the accommodation. The curriculum is good overall; and it is very good in Key Stage 4, where the examination courses are flourishing. Equal opportunities for boys to study dance and for girls to do extra games are being debated; it is hoped to reach a decision by next year. Extra-curricular sport attracts about 35 per cent of the student population, and both specialists and non-specialists contribute to the programme. The sports co-ordinator organises a Junior Sports Leadership Award programme for Year 10 and offers a Community Sports Leadership Award programme to older students. The leadership is shared and is good, because relationships are positive. The staff are good role models and the management is good because of the common purpose they set themselves. All the staff in the department make an impact on learning and contribute much to the ethos of the school.

143. Progress since the previous inspection has been good. There are some very good features in the department, such as examination courses, good achievement throughout the school, very good extra-curricular activities, and excellent teaching on occasions,.

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

144. The school's timetabling arrangements made it impossible to observe lessons in personal, social and health education and citizenship. However, students' work was sampled, and discussions were held with both staff and students. School documentation was also scrutinised. The course fully covers the requirements of the National Curriculum, including drugs awareness and sex education. Students confirm that they find the course useful, and that they enjoy their lessons.

### **Citizenship**

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students have good opportunities to develop citizenship skills in active, practical ways.
- Written elements, and assessment overall, are limited.

### **Commentary**

145. There is a satisfactory programme for delivering citizenship through different subjects and activities. A good feature is that students learn through actively participating in a wide variety of projects, events and activities. For example, by Year 9 they have developed an understanding of some public services through effective links with the Fire Service. Students in Year 7 to 9 study community activities and responsibilities through contact with local, national and international charitable organisations, including sponsorship of children in India. Students acquire some grasp of political issues and the role of the media in influencing opinion, which arises from research on homelessness, peace campaigners, and the impact of newspaper and television reporting. This activity in turn helps to develop skills of enquiry and communication. The development of students' skills in participation and responsible action has been helped by the Injury Minimisation Project for Schools, carried out by Year 10 students for the benefit of primary pupils, and by the Junior Sports Leader Award taken in Year 11.

146. Owing to the school's timetabling, it was not possible to observe lessons, and no secure judgements on teaching and learning are possible. The amount of written work available was small

and by itself did not give a clear indication of the extent of students' understanding. Students in Year 8 in their practical roles of school environmental protection officers have written to the local authority concerning sustainable development. In most classes, however, the amount of focused written work is below what might reasonably be expected. Discussions with groups of students representative of all ages and abilities showed that they could talk sensibly about their work and are achieving satisfactorily. There is a sound system of assessment, taking the form of individual records of achievement, reported in detail by Year 9. This allows students' learning both within and outside school to be plotted adequately. The records are not completed rigorously and so are not as useful as they should be to teachers or students to guide future learning.

147. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Currently, the school does not follow a GCSE course for students in Years 10 and 11, although it is contemplating doing so in future. There is a coherent overview of provision both within modules specifically on citizenship and in the subjects of the curriculum, cross-referenced to National Curriculum programmes of study. A range of booklets for staff and students supports individual topics. However, these elements are not developed into a distinct scheme of work with clear indications of time and depth of coverage. One consequence is that students do not always have a clear idea of what citizenship actually is because they do not perceive its distinct features. This is particularly true of Year 11, but less so of younger students as the subject becomes more established.

148. The school's self-evaluation of current provision and how to improve is satisfactory. The introduction since the last inspection of the subject in its present form has been satisfactory.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

149. In the inspection, four 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.

150. The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2004.

151. Note that the AS statistics refer to students who began a course in Year 12 in September 2002, gained an AS qualification in 2003 or 2004, but did not subsequently gain an A Level qualification in the same subject.

### Level 3 GCE AS Level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	5	60	63.5	0	10.4	14	19.8
Drama	2	100	86.6	0	19.8	30	30.9
General studies	8	75	73.6	12.5	16.9	27.5	25.5
History	1	100	82.2	100	20.8	60	29.2
Mathematics	4	0	59.9	0	14.1	0	20.5
Environmental Science	2	50	67.4	50	14.8	25	22.8
Psychology	1	0	67.8	0	15.1	0	23.2
Physics	1	100	66.4	100	14.8	50	22.4
Sociology	1	100	72.1	0	19.6	30	25.9
Total	25	60	73.3	16	16.6	21.6	25.3

### Level 3 GCE A Level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	2	100	98.3	50	50.2	90	87.1
Biology	3	100	96.6	33.3	40	86.7	79.3
English literature	5	100	99.4	60	44.9	96	85.5
French	2	100	99	50	53.1	70	88.9
Design and technology	2	100	97.8	0	35	60	77.9
General studies	8	100	94.9	75	30.5	92.5	72.9
Geography	9	100	98.8	22.2	46.4	80	95.2
German	1	100	98.6	0	49.6	80	86.3
History	4	100	99	100	45.6	110	85.1
Mathematics	5	100	96.8	20	56.6	64	89.5
Psychology	3	100	97.4	33.3	42.5	93.3	81.6
Physics	2	50	96.7	0	45.3	20	82.6
Sociology	3	100	98.5	33.3	45.3	86.7	84.6
Total	49	98	97.8	42.9	42.9	82.9	82.5

## **ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

English was the focus of the inspection in this curriculum area, but one Year 12 lesson in German was sampled. Standards were above average and both students achieved well in relation to their prior attainment and circumstances. The quality of teaching and learning was good and students had mature attitudes to their learning.

### **English**

Provision in English is **very good**.

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

- Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to help students to achieve very well.
- Very good teaching and learning results in increasing numbers of students choosing to study the subject.
- Students have very positive attitudes and are very keen to take responsibility for their own learning.

### **Commentary**

152. In 2004, a small group of five students gained A Level examination results that were well above the national average. Current standards in Year 13 are at a similar level; boys and girls are achieving very well, given the standards they reached in GCSE examinations before they started their advanced courses. Students have a very good awareness of different interpretations of set texts such as *Othello* and take them into account before developing an informed, personal response. Several are very articulate and offer their views willingly, backing them up with close reference to the text. They plan and structure essays very well, ensuring that they respond directly to the essay title.

153. Year 12 students are also building very well on their previous GCSE examination work, and current standards are above those found nationally. Students are developing their understanding of Philip Larkin's poetry very well and make good use of their knowledge of the context in which he wrote his poems. Students' files show that they have very good note-taking skills, take pride in their work, and are keen to extend their knowledge.

154. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers make very good use of homework, encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning by preparing presentations about texts for the rest of the class. Students respond very well to these opportunities and learn very well from each other's work. Teachers' excellent knowledge enables them to challenge students' ideas further. Teachers plan lessons very well and organise a good variety of activities that maintain students' interest and motivation. Students are enthusiastic about the very good teaching and support they receive, and they appreciate the fact that teachers give so willingly of their time.

155. Leadership and management are very good and have resulted in very good improvement since the last inspection. A Level results and standards have improved significantly, and this success is now leading to a big increase in the number of students opting to study English in the Sixth Form.

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

156. Good language and literacy skills enable students to make good progress in the subjects of their choice. Most discuss and debate well, and their reading skills are more than adequate for them to understand texts in different subjects. They have good note-taking skills, and teachers provide good support when necessary to ensure that students structure their writing well.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students' excellent attitudes and exemplary behaviour enable lessons to proceed smoothly in a calm working atmosphere.
- A narrow range of teaching strategies means that students are too often passive learners and do not take an active enough part in their own learning, for example through investigative approaches or independent research.
- Standards are well above expectations, indicating, for these students, satisfactory achievement.

### **Commentary**

157. The results in the 2004 A Level examinations and AS examinations were disappointing. The entries were too small for secure statistical comparisons to be made, but most students did not attain their target grades. The results of module tests taken so far by students in Year 13, together with the work they have completed and that which was seen in lessons, indicates that standards are above expectations. These students had good grades in GCSE and have made satisfactory progress over their time in the Sixth Form because of sound teaching based closely on examination requirements. They are effectively challenged in lessons and consequently they are achieving satisfactorily.

158. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The small team who teach in the Sixth Form are knowledgeable about the subject and about examination requirements. This ensures that the teaching is thorough, rigorous and effective. However, the lessons observed were heavily teacher-led, with students taking little part in them. Whilst this approach ensures that all required topics are covered, it does not foster a genuine understanding: students are given a 'recipe book' of techniques, rather than an in-depth understanding of the underlying concepts. Consequently, there are few opportunities for students to really engage with the subject matter, to investigate, or to learn independently. This limits their achievement and is a factor in students in the past not meeting their projected grades. Nevertheless, the advice that students receive, both in lessons and through the marking of their completed work, is useful in correcting errors in technique and developing accuracy in working. In all the lessons observed, students were extremely attentive, worked very hard and were very supportive of each other, for example when they explained to each other how they had completed set questions. As a result, lessons proceed briskly in an atmosphere of calm industry, enhancing students' learning.

159. The subject is led satisfactorily. The schemes of work are based on textbooks that are published to support the examination requirements. However, they do not give guidance on the range of methods that might be used, and this is a factor in the narrow range observed. Nevertheless, management is good because the small team complement one another well and are consistent in approach and expectations. Together they ensure that all requirements are met and students are able to achieve satisfactorily.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

160. The school has a satisfactory policy for key skills in the Sixth Form, which ensures that students are proficient in using mathematics in the subjects they study. Students make satisfactory use of their mathematical skills within science and design and technology courses in terms of measurement and the use of algebra and graphing skills.



## SCIENCE

161. The focus was on chemistry, but physics and environmental science were also sampled.

162. In a satisfactory physics lesson in Year 13, the teacher made good use of demonstrations to reinforce ideas in particle physics. Students learned how a beam of charged particles is deflected by magnetic and electric fields, and how a combination of them may be used to focus the beam on to a screen. Students' attitudes were excellent, and they gained a good understanding of the principles behind the experiments.

163. In a good Year 13 lesson in environmental science, students learned about the benefits of using alternative energy sources. The teacher explained the advantages and problems associated with using wind power, and related the engineering and technological aspects well to the underlying science. She made excellent use of her interactive whiteboard to present images which helped to bring the subject to life. Students presented the results of some research they had undertaken, showing good literacy and scientific skills.

### Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teachers' very good subject knowledge and enthusiasm are effectively used to produce an interesting course which promotes good learning and standards.
- The warm relationships and readiness of teachers to help students individually with problems improves the performance of those who seek help and advice.
- The taught curriculum is good, but inadequate library facilities and a lack of visits detract from its effectiveness.

### Commentary

164. The standards in the AS examination in 2004 were above the national average and all students passed with grade C or above. Achievement was satisfactory because students attained results in line with those expected from their GCSE results. All who set out on the course completed it. No students sat the A Level examination in 2004. Numbers opting for Sixth Form chemistry have been small and have fluctuated quite widely in recent years. The Sixth Form is growing now, and more students have indicated their wish to study the subject next year. In lessons in Year 13, students show standards that are above average. For example, they show that they can respond to challenges about differences between alkanes and arenes and bring to bear a good level of understanding in their answers. They make good links between theory and investigative work. In Year 12, standards are lower, but most students show that they can use their understanding of GCSE work as a baseline for a deeper appreciation of the way the distribution of molecular energies influences rates of reaction.

165. The quality of teaching is very good, with many strong features. In a very good Year 13 lesson, for example, students investigated the effects of various factors on the action of the enzyme glucose oxidase, using data-logging sensors linked to a computer. This they did very competently, showing a good understanding of their procedures and of the reasoning needed to predict results. A very good level of challenge by the teacher, balanced by clear explanations, led students to learn very well.

166. The teachers' very good subject knowledge and enthusiasm are effectively used to produce an interesting course. Lessons are full of challenge, which encourages students to develop ideas and checks their learning. Effective planning and clear objectives are realised by a wide variety of activities, warm relationships and a good pace. Occasionally, there is a tendency to lecture. Students often respond to the very good teaching with very good learning, manifested by their

obvious interest, hard work and enthusiasm in answering questions. However, they do not often challenge the teacher or ask questions of their own. Good relationships mean that students are not afraid to seek help, and teachers willingly give individual help to improve students' understanding in their own time. However, problems lie and remain with those who do not ask. Assessment is good and students are in no doubt about the grade they are working at, where they should be, and what to do to improve. However, some calculations go unmarked.

167. The taught curriculum is good, though two factors detract from its effectiveness. Library facilities are not adequate to support A Level work, and the current lack of a programme of visits limits opportunities to bring the subject to life.

168. Chemistry is very well led and managed. The head of department has a very clear vision for the subject; high aspirations are the norm, and teachers present excellent role models for their students. Very good use of data and evaluation of the work of the department are helping to raise standards.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

169. None of the subjects in this section was the focus of the inspection, but a Year 12 lesson was sampled in the information technology advanced vocational certificate in education (AVCE) course. Students were embarking on individual case studies about the use of management information systems in small businesses. As a result of good teaching and effective advice on the key criteria, all students focused on their tasks and showed that they were clearly capable of carrying out preliminary research. However, their ability to analyse situations ranged from a detailed grasp to a superficial perception of the management of information. Overall, achievement was satisfactory.

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

170. Students' development of ICT skills throughout the curriculum benefits from the school's substantial investment in facilities and equipment. Interactive whiteboards and computers are used in most subjects. Their use enhances lessons by widening the approaches to teaching which takes place in seminar rooms within the Sixth Form centre. As in main school teaching, expertise within the ICT department provides effective training and support for teachers to help them make good use of the facilities to promote students' learning.

171. Teachers make effective use of interactive whiteboard technology in many subjects, including English, design and technology, and art and design. Physical education students make good use of video equipment to analyse performance. Colour printing facilities are used well in art and design to enhance imaging work. Specialist graphical calculators help students develop mathematical understanding. Students make use of Internet sites for research in all curriculum areas.

172. Most students in Years 12 and 13 did not have a strong foundation of ICT skills when they were younger, and now all follow an ICT course leading to an accreditation. The day-time sessions for Year 12 students make a clear contribution to developing their skills, but Year 13 students feel less well served. Some have to follow the course after school; they feel that they have less easy access to computers and say they have difficulty in preparing for the test. Overall, students have good competencies in ICT.

## HUMANITIES

173. None of the subjects in this area was a focus of the inspection, but geography and history were sampled.

174. Very good teaching took place in a well-planned Year 12 geography lesson about the economic and social consequences of changes in industrial production, and students were encouraged to participate fully. They worked very effectively in small groups, which led them to learn and achieve very well. Their standard of work was above average.

175. Two history lessons were sampled. Students benefit from teachers' expertise and good planning. For example, in a Year 12 lesson about the English reformation, students' interest was sustained and they argued cogently about the part played by religious belief. In Year 13, where students considered factors leading to the Second World War, their oral discussion was of very high quality and their written work reflected high standards of achievement.

## ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

176. Four courses in this curriculum area were inspected: AS Level in product design, engineering, and food, and A Level in product design. Since the last inspection, new AS Level courses have been established in engineering and food.

### Design and technology

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well on the AS Level engineering course.
- A good range of courses reflects the school's specialist status.
- Leadership and management are good.

### Commentary

177. Standards are below average when students begin the course, and in turn performance in examinations and current work is below average. Although the courses are becoming increasingly popular, it is not yet possible to judge standards over an extended time. The number of students has increased from five to seventeen on AS courses and from two to five on the A Level courses. In recent years all students have achieved at least a pass grade. Last year, four of the five students who were entered for AS Level achieved grade C or D, but one did not pass. Both students entered for A Level product design achieved a grade D.

178. Achievement in lessons and in the work seen is satisfactory. All students make sound gains in knowledge through Years 12 and 13. Students on the Year 12 engineering course achieve well because of the high quality of teachers' questioning, support, encouragement and ideas. This generates a creative approach to problem-solving, and students strive for continuous improvement of their products. Students' achievement on the food course is satisfactory, but they are less rigorous and analytical when evaluating their work. Students have a good understanding of current industrial production methods and use CAD and CAM equipment effectively. A Year 13 student working on a project to improve the design and manufacture of yo-yos, drew on production methods in America to support his research. Other students work satisfactorily on projects that relate more to the needs of their own families, for example garden furniture for children.

179. Teaching is consistently good. Teachers work closely with individual students to raise the standard of work during and outside lesson times. Assessment is satisfactory. However, ongoing feedback is not always sufficiently analytical to ensure that students know how to reach the highest possible standards and that there is a close match between predicted and actual grades attained.

180. Leadership and management are good. The head of department leads by example and has been effective in improving the environment for learning. Provision has improved since the last inspection.

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

181. None of the subjects in this section was a focus of the inspection, but art and design was sampled. Students in a joint Year 12 and 13 lesson had a good and clearly established work ethic as they explored ideas and images in their individual projects. Teaching was satisfactory. Students' breadth of understanding was at an early stage of development and they lacked confidence when critically evaluating their own and other's work.

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

182. None of the subjects in this area was a focus of the inspection, but sports studies was sampled. A small Year 13 group is making good progress. Good teaching is leading to high standards of work, and students achieve very well. The course is popular and more students are following it in Year 12.

## **BUSINESS**

183. None of the subjects in this section was the focus of the inspection, but business education was sampled. Students showed excellent attitudes in a good Year 13 lesson on the ways in which governments can generate revenue through taxation, and they achieved well. They participated fully in the discussion, showing that they could articulate their ideas and opinions well. The teacher made good use of ICT to enliven the lesson and illustrate the ideas he was communicating. Some students used laptop computers competently to take notes during the lesson.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

None of the subjects in this section was the focus of the inspection.

## **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES**

No subject was the focus of the inspection in this curriculum area.

184. Students' personal development is good. All Sixth Form students take part in an enrichment programme which includes general studies at AS and A Level, religious education, an accredited ICT course, a PSHE course, and the Community Action scheme.

185. The grades attained in general studies AS Level in 2004 by Year 12 students were above average. Results at A Level in Year 13 were well above average, with three quarters of candidates gaining higher grades A and B. The course provides a broad coverage of important topics, and meets the statutory requirement for religious education in the Sixth Form. In a Year 12 lesson that was excellently led and managed by the teacher, a well-designed sequence of activities evoked a

wide range of emotions and stimulated full participation by a mixed group of students with a range of ethnic backgrounds and interests. They learned really well from each other. Their consideration of the scientific and ethical issues surrounding genetic engineering and designer babies showed a mature and reflective approach to the topic.

186. Students provide good role models for younger students, such as acting as prefects and lunchtime supervisors. Their behaviour and attitudes to school are a real credit to the Sixth Form and deservedly earn Sixth Form students respect both from teachers and from younger students. They also take responsibilities in a wider context, becoming involved with the Community Action scheme. For example, those taking physical education also take the Community Sports Leader award where, in a very well organised set of activities, they take responsibility in instructing others. Strong links with a school in Uganda have helped increase students' social and cultural awareness. Consequently, they engage the whole school in charitable work.

187. The PSHE programme comprises a comprehensive range of activities relevant to Sixth Form students. Attention to study skills is complemented by a session on time management. Life skills such as safety and driving standards, current affairs, and academic review and target setting complete a wide portfolio of appropriate topics. In addition to tutorial time, the school makes good use of assemblies to further its students' personal development. Students say that their tutors know them well and give good support and guidance. After Year 13 students had expressed concerns about a lack of timely information, the school has strengthened its approach to prepare Year 12 students for entry to university or employment.

## 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>3</b>
Attendance	1	1
Attitudes	2	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	1	3
Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		3
<b>The quality of education provided by the school</b>		<b>3</b>
The quality of teaching	2	3
How well students learn	2	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		3
Accommodation and resources	3	4
Students' care, welfare, health and safety		3
Support, advice and guidance for students	2	3
How well the school seeks and acts on students' views	2	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		2
The quality of the school's links with the community	1	1
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	2
<b>The leadership and management of the school</b>		<b>3</b>
The governance of the school	2	2
The leadership of the headteacher		2
The leadership of other key staff	3	3
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).*