

INSPECTION REPORT

HITCHIN BOYS' SCHOOL

Hitchin

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117502

Headteacher: Mr K S Wadsworth

Lead inspector: Mrs M J Kerry

Dates of inspection: 27th - 30th September 2004

Inspection number: 268829

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Male
Number on roll:	994
School address:	Grammar School Walk Hitchin Hertfordshire
Postcode:	SG5 1JB
Telephone number:	(01462) 432181
Fax number:	(01462) 440172
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr N Shearer

Date of previous 24th May 1999 inspection:

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Hitchin Boys' School is a single sex 11-18 community school which became a Specialist Technology College at the start of this term. The school and the sixth form are of average size. The sixth form is part of a consortium of three schools, and significant numbers of students study part or all of their programme away from the home school. The majority of students from Year 11 progress into the sixth form, but those wanting vocational provision are guided to a partner College. The school has a fully comprehensive intake. When they enter the school, students' attainment is above average overall, but the full range of prior attainment is present, with a significant proportion of lower attaining students. The proportion of students with special educational needs is average, and the proportion with statements of special educational need is low. The proportion of students for whom English is not their first language is higher than found in most schools. Four of these students are at the early stages of English language acquisition. Students come from a diversity of ethnic backgrounds. The majority (79 per cent) are white. The largest groups within the school are students of Asian heritage (11 per cent), and Black heritage (three per cent). There are also a small number of students from Chinese, Turkish and mixed backgrounds. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. The school has recently been awarded Sportsmark. Students participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
9931	Mrs M J Kerry	Lead inspector	
9052	Mrs H Barter	Lay inspector	
2739	Mr I Benson	Team inspector	History Psychology
22590	Mr R Castle	Team inspector	Geography
12475	Mr S Johnson	Team inspector	Music
12721	Mr D Riddle	Team inspector	Design and technology
12844	Mr M Saunders	Team inspector	English
15075	Mr B Goodman-Stephens	Team inspector	Modern Foreign Languages
15590	Mrs S Slocombe	Team inspector	Physical education Special educational needs
30937	Mr M Clay Dove	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
4451	Mr R Howarth	Team inspector	Religious education Citizenship
23268	Dr K Corrigan	Team inspector	Business education; economics
31685	Mrs V Girling	Team inspector	Art and design
6044	Mr R Perkins	Team inspector	Mathematics
21866	Dr D Tracey	Team inspector	Science Physics post-16

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is an effective school which gives its students a good quality of education. Standards in the main school are well above average by the end of Year 11 and students achieve well. Teaching and learning are good. Leadership is good and focused on achievement for all. Management is effective. In the sixth form, students achieve well and reach above average standards. **The school gives good value for money.**

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The quality of leadership is good and promotes a high quality ethos where all students are respected and valued.
- Teaching is good and students achieve well throughout the school, supported by very good quality care and guidance.
- Students of ethnic heritage, those who have English as an additional language and those with special educational needs achieve as well as their peers.
- Students are very actively involved in their learning.
- Management is good but there is variability in the effectiveness of support for heads of department.
- Sometimes the pace of change has been slow because strategy for the implementation of change develops too slowly: recently the pace has quickened.
- The sixth form offers a good quality of education, but procedures for monitoring quality and tracking students' progress in consortium partner schools are not rigorous enough.
- Standards are too low and achievement is unsatisfactory in business studies in the main school and post-16 economics.

Since the last inspection the school has made good progress. A system of performance management has been successfully introduced, and good improvements made to the accommodation. High standards with well above average results in the main school have been maintained. There has been excellent improvement in the way in which students are taught information communication technology (ICT) and in the standards they reach. Many subject areas have made good improvement, including science which was a weakness in the last inspection. Provision for students' spiritual development has improved and is now satisfactory.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Students reach well above average standards and achievement is good. At the end of Year 9, overall results in English, mathematics and science are well above average. Students are achieving in line with those from similar schools. Since this is a boys' school, and national comparators are based on both girls and boys, this demonstrates good achievement as girls achieve more highly nationally than boys do. At the end of Year 11, results in GCSE examinations are well above average. Again students are achieving in line with those from similar (mixed) schools. Standards at the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11 are rising convincingly, following a dip in results in 2001 caused by staffing difficulties. Inspection evidence showed that achievement is good in nearly all subjects. In geography achievement is

very good, in German it is satisfactory, and in business studies it is unsatisfactory. All groups of students achieve well.

In the sixth form, students make good progress from a relatively wide range of starting points. In 2003, results were in line with national average, and above average for boys. There has been a significant improvement in results in 2004 with an increased proportion of the higher A/B grades. In the subjects inspected in detail, students achieve well in mathematics, physics, design and technology, ICT, psychology and art. Achievement is satisfactory in English and in business studies. In economics, achievement is unsatisfactory and standards are too low, because of teaching which does not challenge and engage students.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Personal development is very well supported by the extensive range of extra-curricular activities. Students have very positive attitudes, are actively involved in their learning and contribute willingly to the life of the school. Attendance is very good. Sixth form students are very good role models for younger students. The school has a very good ethos.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided is good. Teachers have very good command of their subjects; students are willing, articulate and questioning learners. **The quality of teaching is good in the main school and in the sixth form.** A significant amount of teaching is of very good or excellent quality. The quality of the curriculum is very good and in the sixth form there is wide choice within the local consortium. There is very good provision for extra-curricular and enrichment activities. Accommodation is satisfactory, although that for the sixth form is unsatisfactory, and in some respects poor. Students are supported by very good quality care and guidance. They receive very good careers guidance. The monitoring and tracking of students' progress is good, but there is confusion about the use and meaning of target minimum grades. There are very good community links that support students' learning, particularly in sport and work experience. Links with parents are good, but last year's annual reports to parents were unsatisfactory.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher gives strong and principled leadership in promoting an ethos where all students are respected and valued and all can achieve. The school's practice is very inclusive. The senior leadership team gives good leadership in improving teaching and learning. Heads of department are effective at managing change and bringing about improvement within their departments, although some do not get sufficient support for their role. Sometimes the pace of change has been slow, although the eventual outcome is successful. The governing body works well through its committees, acts as a discerning critical friend and has well-focused areas for improvement. Statutory requirements to provide a daily act of collective worship for all students and RE in the sixth form are not met. There are also some omissions from the reporting of students' results to parents.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents and students are mostly well satisfied with the school. Sixth form students in particular show a strong commitment to their school and a recognition of what it has done for them. Students throughout the school are willing to participate in the student forum and play their part in school life.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Raise standards and achievement in economics and business studies.
- Improve the quality and timing of reports to parents.
- Ensure that strategic planning defines sufficiently what is to be achieved and how success will be measured.
- Ensure that all heads of department receive the support which they need to undertake their role successfully.
- Improve procedures for monitoring the quality of provision and the tracking of students' progress in consortium partner schools;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- provide a daily act of collective worship for all students;
- provide religious education in the sixth form; and
- include national averages for each subject when reporting GCSE, AS and A2 results to parents.

THE SIXTH FORM AT HITCHIN BOYS' SCHOOL

The sixth form is of average size and provides a wide range of GCE AS and A-level courses as part of a three-school consortium.

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is an effective sixth form. Students have access to a very good quality curriculum and a rich and varied programme of enrichment activities. Their learning benefits from good quality teaching that enables them to achieve well. Standards are above average for boys nationally, but in line with the average for all maintained schools. Students have great pride in their school, are committed to their studies and to working with and supporting those younger than themselves. Levels of retention and attendance are high. Leadership and management of this cost-effective sixth form are good.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Students have very good attitudes to school and to learning; very good support is provided for their personal development.
- The broad curriculum, provided in partnership with the local consortium, is of very good quality.
- Students benefit from good teaching and a wide range of learning experiences.
- Leadership and management are good: at form and subject teacher levels, students have access to good levels of support and guidance and an effective progress review programme.
- Unsatisfactory provision for economics and some aspects of business studies lead to some students seriously underachieving in these subjects.
- The procedures for monitoring student progress within the consortium do not always ensure that the home school is aware at an early stage of the need for help, support and guidance.
- Procedures for monitoring the quality of courses across the consortium are not rigorous enough.

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 (English)	Good. Good teaching, learning and achievement result in above average standards. Leadership is very good; management is satisfactory as there is insufficient time given to monitor and improve the department's work.
Mathematics	Good. Current standards are above average. Good teaching and learning enable students to achieve well. Leadership is very good and management is good.
Science (Physics)	Good. Standards are above average as a result of good teaching, learning and achievement. Leadership and management are very good.
Information and communication technology	Good. Standards are above average as a result of very good teaching, learning and achievement. Leadership is very good and management good.
Humanities (Psychology)	Satisfactory. Standards are average, but improving as a result of good teaching, learning and achievement. Leadership and management are good.
Engineering, technology and	Very good. Standards are above average as a result of high achievement that

manufacturing (Design and technology)	is supported by very good teaching and learning. Leadership and management are very good.
Visual and performing arts and media (Art and design)	Good . The good teaching, learning and achievement result in standards that are about average. Leadership and management are good.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	No courses were inspected in detail in this area.
Business (Business studies; economics)	Provision in business studies is satisfactory . The teaching, learning and students' achievement are good and result in average standards. Provision is unsatisfactory in economics. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory and students' achievement is inadequate: standards are too low. Leadership and management in both economic and business studies are unsatisfactory.
Health and social care	No courses were inspected in detail in this area.
General education	No provision is made in this area.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

The students have access to a good range of advice and guidance, at the time of application to the sixth form, through induction and during Years 12 and 13. Form tutors provide a regular review of each student's progress and their academic and personal development. Tutors and subject teachers are very accessible and give freely of their time to help and support those who need it. Consortium procedures mean that the school is not always well enough informed about the progress, or lack of it, of some students who are taught in a partner school. As a result, the school is unable to provide adequate support or guidance early enough.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The governing body have a clear vision about the contribution of the sixth form to the life and work of the school. This provides a clear framework within which this aspect of the school's work can be effective. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The head of sixth form and the head of Year 12 have a close working relationship with their teams of tutors. Strong links with partner schools ensure that the wide provision across the consortium meets the learning needs of all students, in the town and the surrounding area. Currently there is no transparent process for quality assurance regarding the effectiveness of the range of subjects and courses provided.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students have very good attitudes to school and to their work. They enjoy being a student at this school; value the subject expertise of their teachers whom they find accessible and helpful; have had well-informed careers advice; feel that students are treated fairly and with respect, and recognise that the school is well run. The majority of students would certainly recommend the sixth form to others. The greatest concern that students have is organising and managing a fluctuating workload. For some, this creates a difficulty in making a regular commitment to extra-curricular activities.

Inspection evidence shows that students' views are sought by their tutors and by members of the senior leadership team. The headteacher meets senior students weekly for coffee to hear their concerns and share information.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Standards of attainment are above average at the end of Year 9 and well above average at the end of Year 11. Students achieve well in Years 7 to 11. Standards are above average in the sixth form and this represents good achievement from students' starting points.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11 were well above average in 2003.
- Following a dip in 2001, results in the main school now show a convincing upward trend.
- Students achieve well throughout the school.
- The achievement of students who have English as an additional language, have special educational needs, come from an ethnic minority background or are gifted and talented is good.
- There was significant improvement in post-16 results in 2004.
- Students underachieve in economics post-16 and in business studies at GCSE.

Commentary

1. Standards of attainment are good in the main school. Results at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are well above average, and are improving. The rate of improvement over five years is below that achieved nationally for the end of Year 9, and broadly in line with the national rate at the end of Year 11. However, these longer term trends mask the fact that results took a downturn in 2001 as a result of staffing difficulties in two core subjects. This downturn has been reversed, and for the past three years both sets of results have shown a convincing upward trend. In 2004, GCSE results improved, meeting the school's target. Results at the end of Year 9 also improved overall: there was particular improvement in information and communication technology (ICT), although there was a slight fallback in science. The school performs satisfactorily against its targets, which are challenging.
2. Work seen during the inspection in classes and during work scrutiny gave a picture of above average attainment across the curriculum. In Years 7 to 9, students were generally working at levels above national expectations. In mathematics, science and ICT, students' work was well above expectations. In Years 10 and 11, students' work was overall well above expectations, although it was only in line with expectations in business studies and German. Standards were well above expectations in English, mathematics, science, art, geography and music.
3. Students achieve well in Years 7 to 11 because of good quality teaching that encourages them to engage actively with their learning. This high level of engagement, together with a strong focus by subject teachers on the achievement of all groups of pupils, leads to good achievement in nearly all subjects. In geography achievement is very good: in German it is satisfactory and in business studies it is unsatisfactory.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	34.1 (35.5)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	40.4 (39.6)	35.4 (34.7)
science	37.1 (36.8)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 156 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	66 (68)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	95 (94)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	97 (96)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	40.1 (40.6)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 157 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. Students have good levels of competence in basic skills. At the last inspection students' levels of competency in ICT were very low. Their skills are now good and this represents significant improvement since the last inspection. There is a lack of co-ordination of mathematics across the curriculum but, despite this, students still have good levels of competence, which support their learning well in, for example, science. There is similar lack of co-ordination in literacy but nonetheless students' levels of competence are good.
5. Students who have special educational needs make good progress and achieve as well as their peers. Close liaison with the partner schools before transfer ensures that students' special educational needs are well known and documented. A profile of each student is produced and shared with all subject departments so that teachers are aware of students' abilities, interests and learning needs. Revised individual education plans containing specific measurable targets have been written, but have not yet been shared with staff or students' parents, so they do not currently provide a central focus for improvement, or assist in the measuring of progress. However, test data is analysed thoroughly, allowing progress to be identified and recorded. Achievement in the 2004 GCSE examinations was good. All students, whatever their needs, are fully involved in the life of the school. Access to the wide range of extra-curricular activities is beneficial in promoting their self-esteem and confidence.
6. The special needs co-ordinator, who has been in post for just over a year, provides satisfactory leadership to the department. The complete review of the special needs register has been a major task during that time. Very good relationships have been established with subject departments and an action plan written identifying areas for improvement, some of which are yet to be implemented. The monitoring of the special needs provision is not yet systematic or co-ordinated. There are no documented criteria against which the success of the department can be measured accurately. However, this should not detract from recognition of the good progress and achievement made by special needs students in the school.
7. Those who are gifted and talented make good progress and achieve well. Their needs and abilities are generally well known to the teachers and they are allocated tasks and

activities that are appropriate to their aptitudes and interests, and which extend them fully. A teacher has recently taken over the role of co-ordinating, developing, and documenting provision for gifted and talented students. At present there is not a sufficiently rigorous whole-school approach to meeting the needs of such students, and the good practice that exists in subject departments is not widely shared.

8. There are very good arrangements to support the induction of students who have English as an additional language. As a result, students at an early stage of English language acquisition rapidly gain the confidence and communication skills required to enable them to participate with support in the curriculum. The monitoring and support offered to these students are very good, and they generally achieve at least as well as and sometimes better than their peers.
9. Good standards have been maintained since the last inspection, and the strong focus on inclusion ensures that all students achieve well.

Sixth form

10. The school aims to be as inclusive as possible in its sixth form entry policy. Where students show a particular aptitude, in a practical subject for example, the school will strive to admit them if realistically possible. There are therefore some lower attaining students in the sixth form who may excel at some particular subject but struggle with others. There is a broader range of attainment on entry to the sixth form than the entry requirements suggest.
11. In 2003, results for students in Year 13 were in line with the average for all students (as seen in the table below), but above average for boys. Work seen during the inspection, in class and during work scrutiny, showed that students are working at levels above course expectations, except in English, economics and business studies where work is in line with expectations. Overall sixth form students are reaching standards which are above expectations. There was a significant improvement in results in 2004, with a rise in the proportion of A/B grades at A2 to 48 per cent, and an accompanying increase in average points score.
12. Value added work undertaken by the head of sixth form indicates that, in 2004, achievement taken across the whole range of sixth form subjects was good. This represents an improvement from 2003. This work gives a good overall picture of sixth form performance, although it is not sufficiently developed at subject level. Direct observation of the degree of challenge in teaching, and scrutiny of students' work shows that achievement is good in most of the subjects inspected in detail. Students achieve well in mathematics, physics, design and technology, ICT, psychology and art. Achievement is satisfactory in English and in business studies. In economics, achievement is unsatisfactory and standards are too low, because of teaching which does not challenge and engage students.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	86.0 (92.8)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	26.3 (33.1)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per pupil	244.2 (263.2)	258.2 (263.3)

There were 74 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

13. The key issue at the last inspection to raise standards in ICT through providing the full programme of study has been very successfully addressed. Good standards of attainment, with well above average results at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE have been maintained. The very inclusive learning ethos has been maintained and improved resulting in good achievement for all students. Above average standards have been maintained in the sixth form. Progress since the last inspection is good.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good. The development of students' personal qualities including spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects is good. Attendance is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Behaviour in and out of lessons is very good and has a positive effect on the quality of learning.
- Students have very good attitudes to school and to their work.
- The students support a wide range of extra-curricular activities and this contributes well to their social and cultural development.
- Very good relationships provide a firm foundation for learning and for social development.
- Support for students' spiritual development is satisfactory, but opportunities for personal reflection are not sufficiently well promoted.

Commentary

14. Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good. In lessons and around the school students are courteous and very well behaved. In many lessons behaviour is very good or excellent and this enhances the quality of learning. Students are very ready to ask questions, to put forward points of view and to clarify what they do not understand. They are confident and articulate speakers. A small number of students in Year 8 do not conform to the high standards of behaviour of other students.
15. The policy and practice of the school has a strong focus on students taking personal responsibility, and they respond to this readily. Students of all ages are very willing to take responsibility. They are well involved in shaping the life of the school through the Student Forum, which was recently closely involved in drawing-up a revised code of conduct for behaviour. Very good relationships provide the bedrock on which a racially and socially harmonious community is built. Students from different ethnic backgrounds readily work together and socialise together as a matter of course. Incidents of bullying and racism are few and dealt with effectively. Extra-curricular activities are enthusiastically supported.
16. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good. The spiritual development of students has improved since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. There are some good opportunities for explicit reflection and consideration of beliefs and values in religious education (RE) and music lessons. Most other subjects are not providing the same level of opportunities to promote the spiritual dimension of human life

and thought. There are also missed opportunities within the presentation of assemblies where students might have been provided with guidance and time for reflection on, for example, the wider achievements and powerful experiences of fellow humans in the face of adversity.

17. The students' moral and social development is very good. Moral and social issues are well promoted in most subjects, for example, RE, personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE), Citizenship and physical education (PE). Students respond well to the exploration of such issues in these lessons and in those assemblies where the focus is upon ethical action and social responsibility. The wide range of extra-curricular activity provides many very good opportunities for students to take responsibility and leadership roles. A paired reading scheme is very effective in enabling older students to support younger ones in developing their reading.
18. The cultural development of students is very good. Worthwhile opportunities are provided by exchange visits to other countries. Students participate in cultural activities organised by subject departments, including music, art and English. There is a high level of involvement in elite sports. The school community embraces students from many different religious and ethnic backgrounds and, although not extensive, there is a very good focus on exploring cultural traditions and practices other than one's own in many subjects.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	4.5	School data	1.1
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

19. Students' attendance is very good in both the main school and sixth form. It is consistently well above the national average and is an indication of the value that students and their parents place on education. The systems for monitoring students' attendance are good and have improved since the last inspection. Although a few students are late each morning, overall punctuality is good.

Exclusions

Exclusions are appropriately used and carefully monitored. The number of permanent exclusions is below average, and fixed period exclusions are average for a school of this size. Examination of the school's records during inspection showed that there is no disproportionate exclusion of students of Black Caribbean heritage.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No. of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
---------------------------------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------------------	--------------------------------

White – British	739	37	0
White – Irish	6	0	0
White – any other White background	27	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	16	8	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	6	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	15	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	82	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	8	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	16	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	1	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	20	10	0
Black or Black British – African	4	1	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1	0	0
Chinese	9	0	0
Any other ethnic group	16	1	0
No ethnic group recorded	27	0	0

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

Sixth form

20. Students have very positive attitudes to school as shown by their high levels of attendance. They respond to the challenges provided within the learning, and increasingly become effective both as learners and people. They manage conscientiously the competing priorities and demands presented by their workload and role as senior students within the school.
21. Students in both Years 12 and 13 show great maturity in their readiness to accept responsibility. They become role models in their work in support of those younger than themselves. The majority feel that they want to put something back into the school, as a recognition of the quality of education they have received thus far. As a result, they willingly take leadership roles, for example on open days, in leading the student forum and in working closely with subject departments and year groups.
22. These young men are courteous, self-disciplined and well motivated; they have great pride in their school. They contribute to its success – not because they are asked to do so, but out of the high commitment they have to its work.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided is good. Teaching is of good quality and students learn well, supported by very good quality care. Assessment is good. The curriculum provides very good opportunities and is enriched with a very good range of extra-curricular activities. The school has a very good ethos and is very inclusive. All students are valued, listened to and have their views respected and, where appropriate, acted upon.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good throughout the school. Assessment is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are active participants in their learning.
- The strong emphasis on inclusion means that all groups of pupils learn effectively.
- There is a clear impact of the Key Stage 3 strategy in Years 7 to 9; there is more variability in the quality of teaching in Years 10 and 11 although it is still good overall.
- Very good relationships and a high quality classroom ethos support learning.
- Teachers have very good levels of subject knowledge.
- Some teaching does not promote good achievement, mainly in economics and business studies.
- There is weaker teaching and learning in Year 8 due to the challenging nature of some pupils.

Commentary

23. The good quality of teaching noted at the last inspection has been maintained, despite staffing difficulties which led to a dip in results in 2001. Students learn well.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 169 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
8 (4%)	46 (27%)	76 (45%)	28 (17%)	10 (6%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)

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

24. The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11. Three quarters of the teaching observed in the main school was good or better. Teaching and learning are slightly weaker in Year 8 where the challenging behaviour of a small number of students make demands on teachers which some find difficult to manage effectively.
25. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 is more consistent than that found in Years 10 and 11. There is a clear impact of the Key Stage 3 strategy in lesson planning and structure, including the effective use of plenaries to consolidate and check learning during the lesson. In Years 10 and 11, teaching and learning seen ranged from excellent to poor. There was a greater proportion of excellent teaching than in Years 7 to 9, but also a greater proportion of less than satisfactory. The evidence of students' work over time showed that, despite some variation, teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 are good.
26. The quality of teaching is good in most subjects. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in citizenship and business studies, very good in geography and good in all other subjects inspected. Five examples of excellent teaching were seen in English, art, PSHCE, drama and French. Teaching and learning were sampled in Latin and PSHCE where the quality of teaching was good, and in drama and careers where teaching was very good. Weaker

teaching in business studies does not engage students sufficiently or enable them to progress through the sharing of well-formulated learning objectives.

Example of outstanding practice

A highly individual style which was none the less rigorous made lower attaining Year 10 boys think deeply about a very emotional subject in a PSHCE lesson.

A brisk but thorough recap of previous learning on the effects of smoking led on to sharing the learning objectives for this week – the effects of alcohol abuse. The very good recall that students had of the previous lesson gave a hint that something memorable must be going on in PSHCE. The well-presented and substantial coursework that students had done, and the serious way in which they recorded what they were learning through mind maps showed that PSHCE was seen to be a serious and worthwhile study. Use of ICT and promotion of good standards of literacy were integral to the lesson planning.

The teacher's approach was very individual, and his role-play of the effects of alcohol abuse was uninhibited and highly animated. However, the outstanding relationships with the students allowed this degree of excitement without any loss of control or focus. Even as they laughed at the antics, the group were concentrating and learning. The topic of alcohol-related infertility was especially well handled. Through sensitive but probing questions these adolescent boys were helped to think deeply about the effects of infertility on themselves and on future relationships. "What effect do you think this would have on your wife?" was a question that could be explicitly asked and answered. Several boys returned to the topic as the lesson progressed, and wanted to continue talking about it after the lesson had finished.

27. Teachers display high levels of subject expertise. Many are very skilled at bringing this knowledge to bear on students' learning through effective methodology. The high level of engagement which students have with their learning is a particularly strong feature. Students are very willing to question, to seek clarification and to work hard. They are articulate in putting forward their ideas and confident to do so. There is a high quality classroom ethos of learning and respect, and the leadership of the senior leadership team actively fosters this. Relationships between students and with teachers are very good, showing mutual respect and a high level of courtesy. The achievement of all is a high priority and teaching caters well for the needs of all students.
28. There are very good resources to support the induction of students who have English as an additional language (EAL). Teachers use a range of strategies to support such students in lessons. There is very good in-class support (especially in science and mathematics) plus withdrawal for absolute beginners who cannot yet access the full curriculum. Learning support assistants also offer in-class support when required. Reference to students with EAL is not included in lesson plans, but when questioned, teachers knew who these students were and understood their needs. Very good resources are produced within the school in many subject areas, especially in science and English. Training in the teaching of students who have EAL is offered to all new staff.
29. The teaching of students with special educational needs is good. Staff from the learning support department provides effective support for individual students where appropriate. Students with special educational needs are seldom withdrawn from subject lessons for individual targeted help. They learn effectively alongside their peers as lessons are well planned, and work is appropriate and accessible to them. Subject teachers monitor and assess the students' work and contact the learning support department if there are problems. The special needs co-ordinator meets regularly with a member of the senior management team to discuss the students' work and progress. This enables issues to be identified quickly and support provided where necessary. Members of staff have purposeful and constructive relationships with the students so that the latter are confident

in discussing problems and seeking help. Targeted support is available in some lessons for students who have a high level of special educational needs. In most instances, this support is well organised and provides effective help, enabling students to be fully involved in the lesson. Occasionally, the deployment of support staff is inadequately considered and their roles and intervention within lessons insufficiently monitored. Support staff keep records of individual students' work, providing a basis on which to judge their progress and identify areas for improvement.

30. Subject departments make effective use of assessment and have good procedures in place. Assessment is well used to inform teachers' planning, as is particularly evident from the provision made for students with EAL or special educational needs. The recent introduction of assessment manager has made the accessing of data easier.

Sixth form

31. The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form are good. Four-fifths of the teaching seen was good or better, and much was very good. Three examples of excellent teaching were seen in ICT, geography and design and technology (DT). In the subjects inspected in detail, teaching and learning are very good in ICT and DT, and good in English, mathematics, physics, art, psychology and business studies. In economics, teaching and learning are unsatisfactory with insufficient engagement and challenge of students. The quality of sixth form teaching is monitored within each partner school department, but there is insufficient rigour in dealing with monitoring the quality of teaching across the consortium.
32. Teaching and learning were sampled across a range of other subjects. In one lesson each of Latin, biology and music, good teaching was seen. In chemistry, teaching in the one lesson seen was very good, in German teaching was satisfactory (one lesson), and in French, it was very good (one lesson). In geography, two lessons were seen (teaching very good in one and excellent in the other), whilst in history, teaching that was good and very good was seen. In two lessons sampled in PE, teaching was satisfactory in one and very good in the other. The sampled teaching confirmed a picture of good teaching and learning across the curriculum.
33. The strengths of post-16 teaching and learning are the teachers' command of their subjects, which help students engage with their studies at a deep level; high expectations of diligence and studious work, and students who have a good measure of independence in their learning. Sixth form teachers make good use of assessment to monitor progress, plan future learning and help students to improve. Assessment is good in mathematics, English and science, and very good in ICT, art, DT and psychology. In business studies, assessment is satisfactory and in economics it is unsatisfactory.

The curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is very good and in the sixth form, benefits from provision made within the local consortium. There is very good provision for extra-curricular and enrichment activities. Accommodation is satisfactory, although that for the sixth form is unsatisfactory. Resources are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum is well conceived and enhanced in the sixth form by provision made by other members of the local consortium.
- The curriculum is of very good quality; it is complemented by an extensive programme of extra-curricular and enrichment activities that have a high level of student take-up.
- Students with diverse needs all have very good access to the curriculum.
- Accommodation in the sixth form block is poor: a new building has been planned to replace that currently in use.
- The statutory requirements to provide a daily act of collective worship for all students and RE in the sixth form are not fully met.

Commentary

34. The curriculum is broad, very well conceived and provision is of very good quality. A well-planned programme of extra-curricular activities complements the taught curriculum, and contributes significantly to students' learning and personal development. All students have very good access to the taught curriculum and extra-curricular programme.
35. In Years 7 to 9, in addition to the National Curriculum and RE, provision is made for drama and PSHCE. As they move through this stage of the school, students learn a second modern language or Latin. Students' access to ICT is through its integration into subject provision.
36. There is a smooth transition for all students into the core and optional courses in Years 10 and 11. The range of courses provides good preparation for progression into post-16 education, training and employment. In addition to English, mathematics and science every student chooses a technology, humanities and modern language course. As part of their entitlement provision students follow a programme in careers education, PSHCE, the RE GCSE short course and PE and games.
37. This wide range of provision takes account of the learning needs of all pupils, including those who have special educational needs, English as an additional language and those identified as gifted and talented. Where setting is used, considerable benefits accrue to the effectiveness of teaching and the quality of students' learning.
38. The coherent curriculum experience for all students is enriched by a number of cross-curricular themes including, for example, the application of ICT, work-related learning and citizenship. Good provision is made for learning within PSHCE.
39. All students have access to an extensive programme of extra-curricular activities - before and after school, as well as in the lunch break. There is a very good range of curriculum-related and leisure activities; all make a contribution to students' learning as well as to their personal development. The take-up is very high, but especially in sport, music and the arts. Some take place at weekend as well as in the school holidays and include field and theatre trips, exchanges with partner schools in France and Germany as well as other overseas opportunities.
40. There is a very good match of teaching and support staff for the current curriculum. Overall, accommodation is satisfactory. A regular maintenance and refurbishment programme ensures that a satisfactory learning environment is provided. PE facilities are very good and refurbishment of science, DT and modern languages rooms has enhanced teaching and learning in these subjects. Since the last inspection, most subject rooms have been grouped in suites but not all subjects have dedicated specialist rooms. Consistent levels of investment in learning ensure that departments have adequate resources. The library is of very good quality and recently there has been extensive investment in computers across the school. Overall resources in the main school are satisfactory.

Work-related learning (WRL)

41. Students demonstrate a good breadth of understanding of WRL concepts and skills in most subjects. They are articulate and adept at discussing, problem-solving and working collaboratively with others. In many subjects they are required to make presentations, write reports and analyse data. Progress files for students to undertake self-evaluation and record learning outcomes have been introduced, although there is some inconsistency in the way in which their use is encouraged and monitored by tutors. The work experience programme is well established and provides students with very good opportunities to experience the world of work outside school. The school has very good links with local businesses and organisations. Students are well prepared beforehand and monitored carefully by staff. The quality of leadership by the co-ordinator of WRL is good and he is well supported by a member of the school's senior leadership team. The school improvement plan clearly identifies the need to develop a policy and whole-school approach to WRL and to identify the learning opportunities and outcomes across all subjects. However, an audit of the existing provision has not yet taken place. The quality of provision for WRL is good, and has a positive effect on students' achievement and personal development.

Sixth form

42. The quality of the post-16 curriculum is very good. In addition to a wide range of over 20 GCE AS and A2 courses and three vocational courses, students also have access to provision within the local consortium. The curriculum offered ensures that a wide range of learning needs can be met and students are able to follow courses relevant to their future aspirations. The three schools involved in the consortium work together closely to ensure that these objectives are met.
43. The school does not meet the statutory requirements to provide RE or a daily act of collective worship for all sixth form students. Some one-day conferences are being planned to help them to meet the requirement for RE. Although there are some sixth form assemblies, primarily attended by students in Year 12, they do not fully meet the requirement for collective worship. The lack of provision for both RE and collective worship were key issues for action identified at the time of the last inspection.
44. The sixth form students' curriculum is enriched through the school's programme of extra-curricular activities as well through other opportunities. Sixth form students provide support to younger pupils in a number of activities as well as being participants. Although the enrichment programme is well supported, many feel that time pressures and work deadlines prevent their consistent attendance.
45. The match of staff to specialist post-16 provision is very good and contributes to the good quality teaching that students experience. Current sixth form accommodation is poor. As a result, students use facilities in the main school, such as the library, for private study and access to ICT. A projected building programme is planned to replace the present block. The current specialist areas for teaching business education, economics and psychology are poor and present a negative learning environment. Learning resources for the sixth form are satisfactory. In psychology, the level of resources is inadequate to support the increasing numbers studying this subject in both Year 12 and 13.

Care, guidance and support

Provision for students' care, welfare, health and safety is very good. They are provided with very good support, advice and guidance. The involvement of students through seeking, valuing and acting on their views is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The pastoral support for students is very good.
- Health and safety procedures are satisfactory but some areas of the school are not clean enough.
- The very good feedback that students receive from teachers means that they know what they need to do to improve their work, but there is confusion about the meaning of target grades.
- Students have very good relationships with staff and are confident that they will help them and listen to their views.
- Students receive very good careers advice and guidance.

Commentary

46. The school cares very well for all its students. The established pastoral support teams are very well led and managed by members of the senior leadership team and have a very good understanding of the needs of students as they grow and develop. Year 7 students settle quickly into school life because transition procedures are good and care is taken to get to know each of them individually. The emotional support available to students from a pastoral mentor from the Hitchin Christian Centre is very good. Child protection procedures and those for students who are in public care are correctly followed and well documented. Health and safety procedures are satisfactory although the cleanliness of some areas of the school compromises acceptable hygiene standards.
47. Through discussions with subject teachers and the marking of their work, students gain a very good understanding of how well they are achieving and the steps that they need to take to achieve a higher grade. There is some confusion in students' minds about the meaning of target grades and levels however. The processes and guidance for choosing options at the end of Years 9 and 11 are very good and few students change their mind once they have started their courses.
48. The revised procedures for the identification and assessment of students with special educational needs now more closely reflect the number of students concerned and their learning or behavioural needs. The revision of the register has been a major part of the first year's work of the special educational needs co-ordinator. There remain a few students, mainly those for whom English is an additional language, who are inappropriately identified as having special educational needs. Students' record folders are comprehensive and accessible but would benefit from a list of contents and documents filed in a more orderly way. There is a degree of confusion as to the roles and responsibilities of the special needs co-ordinator, the teacher responsible for supporting students for whom English is an additional language, and the staff responsible for students who have behavioural problems or who are disaffected. Nonetheless, the support which students receive in class is effective and their progress is well monitored.
49. Students have very good relationships with staff. They feel valued and are sure that the school listens to their concerns, either individually or through the Student Forum. The youngest students are already confident enough to approach their tutors, heads of year and teachers if they have any worries and they know that they will be listened to. Students say that there is a great deal of trust and respect between themselves and with adults which makes them feel safe and secure at school.
50. Students are provided with very good careers advice and guidance and are well prepared for the next stages of their education, either in the sixth form, at local colleges or in employment. There is a very good working partnership with Connexions which means that the school is able to give appropriate levels of advice to students whatever their aspirations.

Sixth form

51. From the time of their application and induction into the sixth form, every student has access to both careers and personal advice. The form tutor is a constant reference point for members of the sixth form. Tutors readily provide help, support and guidance when

required as well as conducting a regular review of the progress each student is making in their academic and personal development. Students appreciate the accessibility of their tutors, head of year and subject teachers and value the time that is offered to sort out issues about which they are concerned.

52. Regular progress reviews of academic progress against target grades helps students set their own targets for improving the standard and quality of their work. Other matters – attendance, attitudes to school, personal organisation, future aims and aspirations – are closely monitored to support each in being an effective and efficient student. However, reviews of standards of work for those being taught for part of their time in a partner school depends, in some cases, on students reporting their own progress, or lack of it. The school is not always aware at the earliest possible moment of a student's poor attitude, motivation or inability to meet assignment deadlines and is therefore unable to provide immediate support.
53. Students are consulted about a number of issues by members of the senior leadership team as well as directly by the headteacher. Their views are heard and, where at all possible, acted upon.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

There are good links with parents, and with other schools and colleges. Links with the community are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most parents are pleased with the school and the education that their children receive.
- Routine communication through, for example, the newsletter, is good.
- Last year's reports were unsatisfactory and the timing of consultations does not allow proper discussion of the report.
- The school works well in partnership with other schools and colleges.
- The school has a strong role in the local community and is very well supported by it.

Commentary

54. The school has good links with parents. Most are pleased with the education provided for their children and feel that this is a happy, well-run school. They are particularly positive about the quality of induction for new students and the expectations that their children will work hard. Whilst some have concerns about some students' behaviour, most parents feel that behaviour is good and their children are free from bullying. The school has significant support from its parental body. There are high levels of attendance at consultation meetings with teachers and active support for the fundraising and social activities of the Parents' Society. The school recognises that it could do more to seek parents' views in a more formal way and is planning to develop forum groups to explore specific whole-school issues.
55. Annual reviews of students with a statement of special educational need are well organised and attended by a very high proportion of parents. Targets on the individual education plans of the rest of the students are discussed with their parents before being distributed to subject departments.

56. There is good information on the school's organisation in the parental handbook, and an informative newsletter. There are regular opportunities for consultation, but the timing of them does not fit well with the issuing of annual reports. This limits the usefulness of the discussion which parents can have with teachers. Last year's reports were unsatisfactory with many errors and missing information, including examination results. The school is currently reviewing its reporting processes. The prospectus requires updating and this is underway. The reporting of subject results does not include national comparative information.
57. The school has good links with its numerous partner primary schools, which means that students make a smooth transition into secondary education. Links with the two other secondary schools in Hitchin are good through the sixth form consortium arrangements.
58. Links with the community are very good and are mutually beneficial to the school and to local people. Very good use is made of the sports centre throughout the week by local sporting groups and for meetings. The school is very well supported by the Hitchin churches project worker and pastoral mentor. Links with local businesses are very strong. These enable students to undertake very good work experience placements and have played a vital role in helping the school to successfully win its bid for specialist school status.

Sixth form

59. There are very strong links with the local community, particularly through the on-site sports centre, and with partner schools and colleges. These links benefit students' learning. Members of the local consortium – of three schools and the local college of further education – work very well together to make a wide range of course provision for the town and its surrounding area.
60. Within the consortium, some highly beneficial procedures are already in place: they work well to the great benefit of students. However, apart from the monitoring of teaching within each establishment, there is currently no agreed transparent quality assurance of the provision, except by expressions of student dissatisfaction or concern.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good. The leadership of the headteacher is good. The effectiveness of the governing body is good.

There is non-compliance with statutory requirements in that a daily act of collective worship is not provided for all students, RE is not provided for all students in the sixth form, and the reporting of results to parents do not include national comparative information for GCSE, AS and A2 results.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Highly principled leadership by the headteacher promotes a high quality ethos and very good relationships with a strong emphasis on inclusion.

- There is very effective leadership by the senior leadership team in improving teaching and learning in subject areas.
- The senior leadership team has successfully created a momentum for change and the pace of change has quickened in the past two years.
- Strategy for the implementation of change evolves slowly and is insufficiently linked to rigorous evaluation.
- The effectiveness of the governing body is good: the recent identification of strategy and communications as areas for improvement is a well-founded decision.
- Management is good with generally effective use of performance management to raise standards: financial management is very good.
- There is variability in the effectiveness of support for heads of department.

Commentary

61. The headteacher and senior leadership team have a shared philosophy in which all students are valued and respected. This inclusive practice is evident throughout the school, and is a significant factor in the good achievement of all groups of students. The school's ethos is of very good quality, and is highly instrumental in supporting students' learning. It has improved since the last inspection.
62. The senior leadership team is very effective in leading improvement in teaching and learning. They are all skilled practitioners who contribute to the good quality of teaching and learning seen in the school. This understanding of what happens in classrooms enables them to focus training where it will have most benefit. The recent staff training on differentiation and on accelerated learning have clearly had an impact on classroom practice. Heads of department are effective, and often very effective, leaders of their subject areas, and have embraced successfully a wider role in monitoring and improving performance. Heads of department make good use of performance management and self-evaluation to bring about improvement. A good system of performance management has been successfully introduced by the leadership team since the last inspection.
63. The school compares its own performance in terms of value added to other local schools, as well as to national averages. Senior managers have a good intuitive grasp of where the school is in terms of effectiveness. This is informed by value-added work, particularly a comprehensive analysis of performance against target grades at GCSE. Value-added analysis is less well established in the lower school, and is a strand in the current school improvement plan.
64. In the past two years the pace of change has quickened. The senior team has been successful in creating a climate where teachers embrace change and are not afraid to innovate. There has been a gathering momentum. Sometimes, in the past, the pace of change has not been sufficiently fast, because strategy tends to evolve slowly. There is not always precise enough definition at an early enough stage of what is involved in implementing a particular change or policy. Sometimes the accompanying evaluation is not sufficiently rigorous and timely. As a programme unfolds, the strategy gradually develops until the eventual outcome is successful. The development of ICT is the most obvious example of this.
65. The current school improvement plan is satisfactory in that it effectively links departmental plans to whole-school issues through five specific areas for improvement. It does not,

however, present a clear whole-school strategy for improvement in, for example, value added, even though this is a stated aim. Because an overarching strategy is not closely defined, and no method of evaluation is provided, except at departmental level, it is difficult for senior managers to know whether the school is progressing as much as it should in major strategic areas. The lack of systematic co-ordination in areas such as literacy, numeracy, provision for students who are gifted and talented or who have special educational needs, reduces the ability of senior management to gain a detailed and rigorous overview of the impact of strategic planning on the quality of provision across the school.

66. Senior managers have a very good knowledge of what is happening in the departments which they line manage. They are well aware of the performance of departments and take action where this is needed. Senior management has undertaken a rigorous analysis of the most recent business studies and economics results as a basis for action to secure improvement.
67. There is some variability in the effectiveness of support by senior managers for heads of departments. The complexity of the management task is not always perceived early enough, or the appropriate resources in terms of non-contact time provided. This is particularly noticeable in English. Some more recently appointed heads of department have not had the opportunity to benefit from performance management, even though they are now established within the school. In addition, there are some issues concerning timetabling arrangements (those concerning drama and English remaining from the last inspection), which continue to impact on standards and have not been tackled.
68. The effectiveness of the governing body is good. Governors work well through their committees. The recent re-structuring of committees has had two benefits: there is a well-chosen focus on strategy and communications as areas for improvement and there is increased emphasis on the robust evaluation of attainment and achievement. The governing body has acted as a good critical friend in pointing out, for example, its concerns about the rate of progress in improving ICT. There is a good climate of openness and trust between the governing body and the headteacher and senior leadership group which supports improvement.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	3,806,218
Total expenditure	3,709,222
Expenditure per pupil	3,731

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	120,558
Balance carried forward to the next year	217,553

69. Financial management is very good. There is good consideration of how to obtain best value, and benchmarking information on expenditure is effectively used. Although there is

no transfer of funds between consortium partners, costs and group sizes are monitored. There is some good strategic planning, such as funding workplace reform ahead of national requirements or funding an assistant headteacher for a term in advance of Technology College status to get plans for implementation well advanced. Both these initiatives have worked well. The increase in the balance carried forward is due to monies related to the newly acquired Specialist School Status, and funds held in readiness for the new sixth form block which starts construction this term. In a typical year, the school budgets to operate with a much smaller surplus. There are well-formulated plans for using the additional Technology College funding to raise standards and to promote community partnerships. An evaluation of the effect of major purchases such as ICT equipment is carried out.

Sixth form

70. The governing body has a clear strategic view concerning the role and structure of the sixth form and the contribution that it makes to the school. This provides an effective framework within which this area of the school's work can be led and managed. The collegiate approach of the leadership team ensures that policies provide good guidance for the day-to-day management of the sixth form. As a result, good leadership and management are assured through close co-operative working with tutors, subject teachers and senior colleagues in partner consortium schools. The head of sixth form monitors the overall performance of the sixth form through looking at value added. However there is no agreed way of looking at the quality of provision and its effect on the performance of students at consortium level.
71. The head of sixth form, assisted by the head of Year 12, provide good support for their teams of form tutors. The monitoring role now undertaken at form tutor level provides ready opportunities for tracking students' progress in their academic work and personal development. At subject level, leadership, in those areas inspected in depth, is good: it is very good in English, mathematics, ICT and physics. Management is also good, but is satisfactory in English, as there is insufficient time to monitor the work of the department. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory in economics and business studies.

Statutory requirements

72. The governing body is making a genuine attempt to meet statutory requirements through providing a regular programme of planned assemblies for upper school, lower school and year groups, with involvement of external Christian speakers. The Church Youth Worker and local vicar who is also pastoral mentor both contribute regularly. There is significant content to assemblies. The difficulty lies in the fact that presentation does not promote students' involvement, participation and reflection. For this reason spiritual development is satisfactorily promoted, rather than well promoted. This relates not to the partial breach of requirements, but to the way in which assemblies are conducted, and the fact that, within subject areas, most subjects make only a limited contribution. Conferences for the sixth form are planned which will help in meeting the requirement to provide RE. The headteacher and governing body should continue their efforts to meet in full statutory requirements for the provision of a daily act of collective worship for all students and RE in the sixth form.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' good knowledge of their subject and their high expectations lead to effective learning.
- Relationships are positive and supportive; students' attitudes are consequently very good.
- Very good leadership has an impact on the quality of teaching and students' achievement.
- There is insufficient time allocated for the oversight of the professional development of a diverse department.
- Some teaching is unsatisfactory because it fails to offer sufficient challenge.
- The setting of the drama GCSE option against literature limits student choice in English and has a negative impact on GCSE literature results.

Commentary

73. Students' attainment when they enter the school is above average. Standards in tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were well above the national average, and in line with the average for similar schools. Though few students attained the higher levels in 2003, a substantial number did in 2004. The proportion of students gaining A* to C grades at GCSE was well above average for both language and literature. These results indicate good achievement across Years 7 to 11. The inspection confirmed this picture.
74. Teaching in Years 7 to 9 is good. In Years 10 and 11 it is very good. Most of the teaching, some of which is outstanding, engaged students in enjoyable and productive activity. For example, students studying *An Inspector Calls* using group readings and presentations to the class, were enabled to show what they knew and could do, through a well-judged combination of challenge and support. Teachers are trusted and appreciated by students. Consequently, students are prepared to work hard and often independently because they want to do well for themselves, for the work's sake and for their teachers. It is a virtuous circle, which leads to good achievement and a pleasantly co-operative atmosphere for learning. Some unsatisfactory teaching was seen however. Occasionally lessons were insufficiently demanding so that students marked time instead of extending their knowledge and skills.
75. Leadership is very good. The department evaluates its work and adjusts the curriculum and teaching approaches accordingly. The planning of schemes of work and individual lessons shows the beneficial impact of the national literacy strategy. Analyses of recent results indicate an improvement in the achievement of all students, and particularly those capable of the highest attainment.

76. Despite very good leadership, management of the department can only be said to be satisfactory because insufficient time is allocated for the monitoring and development of the department. This is not a matter over which the head of department has control but it has a direct connection with the capacity to eliminate unsatisfactory teaching and to make high standards of marking and target-setting general.
77. There are two other barriers to making provision for English of the highest order. Mixed ability arrangements in Years 7 and 8 make teaching which is closely attuned to individual learning needs difficult to manage. Arrangements for drama in Years 10 and 11 make it impossible for students following that course to take examinations in literature. As well as limiting choice in English, this has also recently had the effect of depressing the overall standard of attainment in literature when compared to language.
78. Since the last inspection, results in English have remained well above average. Standards of teaching and learning and students' rates of progress have improved substantially. However, because concerns raised in that report remain as areas for attention (about the monitoring of teaching, and the position of drama in the curriculum), improvement is only satisfactory.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

79. Standards of literacy are good. Nearly all inspectors noted above average literacy skills in their subjects. In English, geography and science, for example, there was evident planning for the development of students' abilities in reading, writing and discussion. No subject made less than satisfactory provision. A paired reading scheme runs as a feature of a very well-planned programme centred on the library. However, there are currently no clear arrangements for overseeing or evaluating the impact of literacy development across the school.

Drama

80. Drama teaching was sampled as part of the inspection. Two lessons were seen. Standards of teaching and learning were good in Year 12 and outstanding in Year 11. Students' comments about their experience make it clear that they find it satisfying, even inspirational. There is however no drama in the curriculum for Years 7 to 9. The option offered for GCSE is hugely oversubscribed and many who wish to do it are unable to because of restrictions on numbers. It is set against literature, so choice for that aspect of the curriculum is consequently compromised. For these reasons provision for drama is unsatisfactory, despite very strong teaching and good studio facilities.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very good leadership and management of the department results in everyone working towards common goals.
- Very good relationships facilitate very effective collaborative pair work.
- The use of French and German as a means of communication is not consistent.

Commentary

81. Results in teacher assessments for Year 9 students in 2003 in modern foreign languages were above the national average for all pupils and well above the average for boys. In 2004, the number of pupils reaching the expected level was broadly similar. In GCSE French in 2003, results were above the national average for all pupils and well above average for boys. In 2004, GCSE results in French were broadly similar. In GCSE German in 2003, results were well above the national average for all pupils and well above average for boys. In 2004, GCSE results in German were slightly higher.
82. In Years 7 to 9 in both French and German lessons, and in students' written work, standards are above average. Most Year 9 students can ask and answer simple questions and express their opinions. They write and speak about familiar topics using basic structures and vocabulary. Students' speaking skills are generally better than writing. Higher attaining students, for example, also use past and present tenses when talking about holidays. In many lessons in French and German, students' pronunciation was good, although occasionally some French was very anglicised. Students with English as an additional language achieve similar standards to their peers. Students with special educational needs are confident in using short phrases and words that they have learned well: they understand classroom instructions and details in short texts, when sufficiently supported. Some high attaining students have very good listening and speaking skills in French and German and also have a very good understanding of basic grammar. All of this represents good achievement for most pupils in French and German in Years 7 to 9.
83. Standards of work observed in French are above average in Years 10 and 11. By the end of Year 11, many students produce work of GCSE A* to C standard. Generally, students have a good understanding of spoken language and their pronunciation is good. The spoken language of higher attaining students is impressive. They are able to speak at length in front of an audience using a good range of tense and more complex structures. Their delivery is confident and their pronunciation is very good. Many students produce accurate written work on GCSE topics. The French of a few disaffected students is weak. They have many gaps in basic structures and vocabulary.
84. Overall, students' achievement in French in Years 10 and 11 is good. Most students achieve well because lessons have a clear structure and work is well matched to their needs and good support is given to individuals. Students with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language achieve well because of the step-by-step approach in lessons and the good use of mime and gesture and visuals to support comprehension. Standards of work observed in French are above average in Years 10 and 11.
85. Standards of work observed in German are in line with national expectations in Years 10 and 11. By the end of Year 11 most students produce work of GCSE B to D standard. Students' reading comprehension is good, but they have gaps in basic grammar and vocabulary. Much of their written work meets the requirements of the GCSE syllabus and practises a range of tenses and structures. It contains a good variety of different text types. In lessons, students were reticent about speaking and produced only short responses to questions or prompts. This represents satisfactory achievement for most students in German in Years 10 and 11.

86. Teaching and learning in French and German in Years 7 to 9 are good. In Years 10 and 11 teaching and learning in French are good and they are satisfactory in German. Within the overall pattern of good teaching one lesson was excellent, several were very good and one was unsatisfactory. Teachers' very good linguistic skills and good subject knowledge have a very positive impact on learning, especially the development of listening and speaking skills. Some teachers, however, do not always conduct lessons sufficiently in the foreign language. Students generally respond well to brisk, well-structured lessons, which make use of stimulating activities and resources. Students learn very well when given the opportunity to work in pairs or groups. The marking of students' work is regular and comments are encouraging, and give advice on how students can improve. Students' learning is particularly enhanced by the very good relationships between teachers and students. The use of ICT in some lessons results in very effective presentation, practise and consolidation of language.
87. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The head of department has a very clear vision and teachers work very hard to achieve common targets. There is a clear departmental development plan and comprehensive documentation. There is very effective monitoring of teaching, learning, achievement and standards. The department's exchange links with France and Germany motivate pupils and help to raise standards. Teaching, learning and achievement in lessons have improved and results in external examinations are better, so improvement since the last inspection is good.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' standards in Year 9 tests and GCSE examinations are well above average.
- Leadership of the department is very good with a very strong sense of purpose.
- Teaching and learning are good so that students' achievement is good in both key stages.
- Management of the department is good overall but there are some inconsistencies.
- The use of ICT is much improved but a few staff lack confidence and expertise.
- The use of plenary sessions to review the effect of lessons is underdeveloped.
- The provision for mathematics across the curriculum is patchy.

Commentary

88. Students' results in the 2003 tests at the end of Year 9 were well above average. They attained similar very good results in 2004. Their performance compares favourably with students in similar schools, based on their prior attainment. GCSE mathematics results in 2003 were well above average and, despite a slight dip in 2004, standards were

broadly maintained. Test and examination results are confirmed by the standard of work seen in classes and students' work.

89. Students achieve well. They enter the school at an above average level and reach a standard well above average by the end of Year 11. Students with English as their second language achieve well overall. In one lesson per week two students in Year 7 have excellent support from interpreters to make sure that they are keeping abreast of the work being covered. Students with special educational needs achieve well because teachers are aware of their requirements and take appropriate action. The size of lower sets in mathematics is generally smaller than average giving teachers more time to support students when an assistant is not available.
90. Teaching and learning are good and match the positive achievement made by students. Teaching and learning are always at least satisfactory and often very good. In the best lessons, students make very good strides in their knowledge and understanding. In these cases teachers engage students' interest and attention by astute questions, explain concepts clearly and logically and promote a rapid pace of work throughout the lesson. For example, in a very good Year 9 lesson the teacher expertly clarified the distinction between volume and capacity. The teacher then gave just enough time for students to work on relevant and challenging examples so that they made very good headway in their understanding and no time was wasted. Teachers routinely plan lessons using ideas from the Key Stage 3 strategy so that there is good variety and balance to most lessons. For instance, students sometimes use personal whiteboards to display their answers so that all participate and the teacher can spot and correct errors. Planning and use of plenary sessions is patchy. Sometimes too little time is left at the end of a lesson and on other occasions students are not fully involved in reviewing what they have learnt.
91. Leadership of the department is very good. The department is committed to ensuring the highest possible standards for its students. For example, reasons for the slightly lower GCSE results in 2004 have been identified. As a consequence, teachers now concentrate much more on enhancing Year 11 students' skills in presenting their coursework and expect to improve results in 2005. The department operates very effectively as a team with individuals using their strengths to introduce curriculum innovations. The quality of mathematics teaching is in the process of being significantly upgraded by the use of ICT. For example, a teacher used Autograph software very effectively with a Year 10 class to display transformations and enlargements and thus improve students' learning considerably.
92. Management is good overall. The monitoring of data on students' performance is regular and productive. Staff review outcomes at departmental meetings and take action when necessary. There is a strong commitment to staff development for improvement. Significant training in the use of new technology has taken place but the department is aware that a few teachers still lack confidence in using it fully to enhance the curriculum.
93. As individuals the high quality mathematics staff employ some very good approaches to aspects such as the use of key words, students' presentation in exercise books and assessment of their work. The department, as a whole, does not have a common approach to these, based on the very good practice around. There is also a lack of consistency across the department in some basic teaching methods such as multiplying and dividing by powers of ten and describing the method of solving linear equations.

This causes a hiatus in some students' understanding if the second teacher neither uses the approach of the first nor explains their equivalence. Lower ability students are most adversely affected.

94. There has been good progress since the previous inspection in 1999. The department coped very effectively with significant recruitment problems in 2001 to 2003 to maintain students' standards of attainment. Teachers now provide detailed comments more often when marking pupils' work although there is room for further improvement. The use of ICT is much better in both curricular content and presentation of work. In nearly all cases teachers now provide sufficient time for students to respond in lessons.

Mathematics across the curriculum

95. Provision is satisfactory overall but uneven across departments. Mathematics is promoted effectively in science, geography, design and technology and ICT but less well in some other subjects. Students' standards are above average overall but not as high as might be expected, based on their work in mathematics classes. In science, students construct and interpret bar charts and line graphs and determine rates of reaction in chemistry. In geography, students calculate growth rates of different countries and determine birth and death rates. In design and technology, students measure artefacts and collect and make sense of various data. In English, students interpret graphs and tables in work on comprehension.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- National Curriculum test results are consistently well above average.
- GCSE results have improved and are now well above average.
- Teaching is consistently good and pupils learn well as a result.
- Students of all ages achieve well considering their attainment on entry to the school.
- Results in GCSE separate science examinations are inconsistent.
- Enquiry science skills are not sufficiently integral to day-to-day teaching.
- Staffing of the department is very good and is leading to improving standards.

Commentary

96. National curriculum test results in 2003 were well above average but broadly average based on the students' prior attainment on entry to the school. Results in 2004 were similar to 2003, confirming the upward trend of recent years. Pupils can take a range of subjects at GCSE level including separate sciences and double award science. Results, overall, in 2003 were broadly average but improved significantly in 2004. However, higher attaining students did less well in GCSE chemistry and physics than in GCSE biology.
97. Students' standards overall in Year 9 are well above average for their age. Students enter the school with attainment that is above average for their age. As the result of consistently good teaching in this age range, they make good progress so that by the

time they are in Year 9, their knowledge and understanding of science is well above what would be expected for their age. For example, a lower attaining Year 9 group made better progress than might have been expected and achieved well in a lesson where they constructed an electromagnet and measured its magnetic field accurately.

98. Standards of work in Year 11 are also well above average. Students' knowledge and understanding of biology, chemistry and physics continue to improve at a good rate. These students have maintained the good rate of progress seen with younger students and their achievement is also good. Students with special educational needs and those with EAL make good progress and achieve as well as other pupils in the school because they receive good support from teachers and teaching assistants in their lessons.
99. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers have a very good command of their subject areas and as a consequence, scientific theories and concepts are explained clearly and this improves students' learning. Lessons are well planned, often with a good focus on what students are to learn, with the result that the pace of lessons improves. Many lessons are divided into three sections, with a starter activity and plenary session and this uses time effectively ensuring that students maintain interest and learn well.
100. Expectations of students are high and they respond positively to new and more exacting work. There are good relationships between teachers and students and this is an important factor in promoting a better learning environment. Students are very well behaved and have positive attitudes towards science and this improves their rate of learning in class. Students of all age ranges work conscientiously and acquire skills, knowledge and understanding of science well.
101. Although enquiry science skills are a regular feature of teaching, students would make more rapid progress in their learning if this were more integral to teaching. Day-to-day marking does not give students a sufficiently clear indication of actual standards attained and how to improve.
102. Leadership is very good. There is a very good sense of vision for the future. The strategies for improvement in, for example, re-organising the science courses in Years 7 to 9, are leading to higher standards. Management is good and beginning to have an effect. There is a good and improving system to monitor teaching and learning that is leading to common approaches to improving teaching. There is an effective team of teachers and support staff who work very well together to ensure that the department functions efficiently on a day-to-day basis.
103. Since the previous inspection, improvement has been good. In particular, the quality of teaching is much better. Accommodation is significantly better, improving the motivation of both staff and pupils. Staffing is much better. The department is in a very good position to move forward, following a period of some instability.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The delivery of the ICT curriculum across all subjects in Years 7, 8 and 9 supports teaching and learning well.
- There is wide access to ICT facilities through the use of wireless laptops.
- The expertise of teachers in using ICT to enhance the learning within their subjects is good.
- The work of the technicians gives good support.
- The assessment and monitoring of students' work ensure that they know how to improve their ICT skills in Years 10 and 11; in Years 7, 8 and 9, assessment is not so clear on how to improve.

Commentary

104. The standards in ICT are good. In 2003, 67 per cent of students gained Level 5 of the National Curriculum or better in the teacher assessments at the end of Year 9; in 2004, 93 per cent of students gained Level 5 or better, and this represents a significant improvement in the skills of the students. A good number of the students are working at Levels 6 and 7. During Years 10 and 11 students improve on these standards and use their ICT skills to improve their learning and understanding of a wide range of subjects.
105. By the end of Year 9 all students can structure, refine and present information; understand audience and purpose; manipulate variables; and evaluate the use of ICT so that tools are used appropriately. The highest attainers combine information from a range of sources, models, understand the limitations of ICT tools and relate their ICT skills to the wider world. There is no discernible difference in the performance of students from different ethnic groups. In Years 10 and 11, students evaluate their use of ICT to enhance and demonstrate their understanding of subjects. The students are adept at selecting appropriate applications for purpose. In Year 8, students studying geography produced projects that involved importing digital photographs into their text and demonstrated their understanding of data from spreadsheets. Commendable work was seen in DT in Year 7, where students were using Pro-desk top to draw free hand.
106. Teaching is always good, and often very good. Teachers understand the value of ICT within their subjects and use e-learning to reinforce learning or raise standards within their subjects. In history, units of work on 'Who was Robin Hood?', 'The Plague' and the 'Rise of Hitler', allow students to carry out research via the Internet. There is an enthusiasm and pride in using ICT to benefit students' learning, and many teachers explore how to make their lessons more effective by using ICT tools. A good example was seen in a Year 9 French lesson where the use of ICT reinforced students' understanding of where accents are used. The same approach is used in PE, mathematics, English, geography and DT. Now that Technology College status has been attained e-learning needs to develop still further in line with that status.
107. Excellent relationships between the teachers and their students foster a positive learning environment resulting in a team ethos where students and teachers work collaboratively together. Teachers use a range of devices appropriately to make their lessons interesting - projectors, Internet searches, whiteboards and PowerPoint presentations. Students respond well in class to ICT innovations.
108. The school website is very good; especially effective are the department links allowing both students and their parents access to course details and homework tasks.

Assessment is satisfactory and accurate. Departments have undertaken to assess particular aspects of the ICT curriculum and have devised units of work which are effective for this purpose.

109. Recent changes in the management approach to the delivery of ICT, together with an internal ICT strategy plan, has enabled realistic use of ICT provision to be identified in departmental action plans. This has ensured that leadership and management of ICT are effective and well focused on the learning needs of the students and the raising of teachers' expertise.
110. The improvement in ICT since the last inspection is excellent. Statutory requirements are being met and accurate assessment has been introduced. The cross-curricular delivery of the National Curriculum in ICT is both effective and appropriate. These developments have resulted in improved achievement by students and teachers now use ICT in a way that is embedded in their subject. The headteacher and senior management have a clear vision of future developments and the leadership skills exist to implement it.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

111. As ICT is taught and delivered through a cross-curricular programme it is used effectively by a wide range of subjects and embedded in the teaching and learning strategies of the school. Teachers only use ICT when it is of benefit to the students by either helping their understanding or reinforcing what they have learnt. In mathematics for example, Year 10 students were helped in understanding transformations by using relevant software. Another Year 10 mathematics class were accessing a website to help them understand gradients. Teachers in PE and geography lessons made good use of PowerPoint presentations to explain learning objectives and present information to students. Students in Year 8, studying DT, were using Pro-desk Top and in Year 9, presentations of plans and designs for wooden toys used a wide range of ICT skills to produce high quality work. Students visit the library to research topics via the Internet. The provision for ICT across the curriculum is good.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership and teamwork are leading to improved standards.
- Teachers have very good knowledge, high expectations and enthusiasm for the subject.
- Teaching is good and students achieve well.
- Students' work is very well monitored, which ensures high standards and good achievement.
- The range of activities and tasks is, at times, not wide enough to meet the needs of all students especially the higher-attaining students.

COMMENTARY

112. Results in the 2003 GCSE examination were well above average, which represents very good achievement from students' prior attainment. Students do better in geography than they do in their other subjects. Similar examination results were gained in 2004. From Years 7 to 11, achievement is good, showing that the department adds good value.
113. Students join the school with a wide range of geographical experiences demonstrating geographical standards that are broadly average. By the end of Year 9 standards are above average and given their starting point, students are achieving well. By the end of Year 9, students have an above average knowledge and understanding of a wide range of topics. They correctly use a wide range of geographical terms, such as those associated with population, like birth rate, death rate and national increase. High attaining students grasp the concept of a country's gross national product. Work shows a good understanding of river basins and the consequences of flooding and destruction of the rain forest. Students make good use of a range of graphs to represent data, including bar graphs and scatter graphs.
114. By the end of Year 11, students' standards are well above average, which shows that they are achieving very well. They build very successfully on knowledge and skills learned in Years 7 to 9, as exemplified in a Year 10 lesson on urban change. The high standards of classroom work are reinforced by practical work and regular fieldwork. Students with special educational needs and students from ethnic minorities achieve as well as their peers.
115. Overall, teaching and learning are good. In Years 7 to 9, teaching and learning are good and in Years 10 and 11, they are very good. Teachers show very good geographical knowledge and apply it well in their teaching with high expectations. Challenging questions make students effectively evaluate and analyse, as seen in a Year 11 lesson mapping limestone outcrops. Students usually know what is expected of both their behaviour and work. However, occasionally students behave badly and this constrains learning if not firmly managed, as was seen in a Year 8 lesson. Overall, teachers manage classes well and lessons proceed smoothly. Lessons are well prepared with suitable resources. In a few instances, the range of activities and tasks is not sufficiently wide enough to meet all the students' needs, especially those of the higher-attaining students. This was exemplified in a Year 7 map work lesson and a Year 9 lesson on population. Resources are well used to support learning. For example, Year 8 students successfully evaluated a video clip about Barton Hills in the Chilterns.
116. A consequence of the good marking and very good assessment is that students know what they need to do in order to improve. Students show good positive attitudes and produce high quality work and assignments. A high percentage of students successfully use computers in presenting their work. Students with special educational needs receive very good support from teachers.
117. The subject is very well led and managed. The department works well together as a team and has a commitment to improving standards. The head of department has a very clear vision for the development of the subject. Very good improvement has been made since

the previous inspection, particularly in the curriculum, assessment procedures, use of computers, maintaining and improving standards and the monitoring of students' and teachers' work.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above expectations at the end of Year 9.
- GCSE results in 2003 were well above average, and students are already reaching above average standards.
- Teaching and learning are of good quality across Years 7 to 11.
- Pupils have high levels of involvement in their learning and respond very well to the subject.
- The department is well led and managed; the team of history teachers works well together and have a very good command of their subject.
- The current development plan does not contribute sufficiently to the raising of standards and the improvement of teaching and learning, unlike that for 2003-04.

Commentary

118. Students are very enthusiastic about history and have attainment on entry to Year 7 that is above that expected for those of a similar age nationally. As they move through Years 7 to 9, good teaching and learning enables students to achieve well and reach standards by the end of Year 9 that are well above expectations. This is evident within the teachers' assessment of their work and in class and homework assignments. All students gain the knowledge, understanding and skills that enable them to begin to work as young historians. They develop research skills, the ability to consider the significance of different sources and to put together an account of an event they have been studying.
119. In Years 10 and 11, students make significant progress and achieve well. Standards of current work seen are already above expectations, although 2004 GCSE results were slightly lower than those in 2003 when results were well above average. At this stage, an increasing level of challenge is provided through good quality teaching. Learning is carefully sequenced and content is systematically explored within imaginative and demanding tasks that help students to acquire good levels of knowledge, understanding and skills. They also develop important techniques to assist them in tackling a range of searching questions on examination papers. Students from ethnic minority groups work well, achieve similar standards to their peers and are full participants in learning.
120. Across Years 7 to 11 students make good progress in their literacy skills and can use and spell technical terminology accurately. They are also increasingly able in class to present responses to questions that are supported by well-developed arguments and appropriate evidence. Progress in their use of number is less obvious, although their understanding of chronology is good. The development of ICT skills is good, especially in Years 7 to 9.

121. The quality of teaching is good, and sometimes very good, and is supported by detailed schemes of work. Teaching is well planned and takes account of the range of needs within the class. Whilst the teaching ensures that students are fully involved in the learning, the mixed ability groupings do not always sufficiently extend all pupils. Very good use is made of question and answer sessions to consolidate knowledge and clarify understanding. Students benefit from well-structured teaching that has high levels of challenge, especially in Years 10 and 11 and this enables them to achieve well. Whilst undertaking tasks in class, students' work is carefully monitored to ensure that the understanding of the topic is secure. Learning is well supported by a range of media and resources. Work is regularly marked and detailed comments assist each student to set targets to improve the standard and quality of their assignment.
122. The history department is well led and managed. The team of teachers have high levels of subject knowledge, share expertise and are reviewing approaches to assessment at the end of Year 9. A broad and interesting curriculum is provided that fully meets statutory requirements and supports students' personal development. Planning for the current year is insufficiently focused on the further raising of standards and improving of teaching and learning – unlike the plan for 2003-04. Accommodation is satisfactory: its drabness is alleviated by good display work that supports students' learning.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE religious education short course and religious studies results are both well above the national average.
- Very good leadership and management promote good curriculum planning and the raising of standards.
- The use of ICT is not yet effective in supporting students' learning.

Commentary

123. The attainment of students at the end of Year 9 is above the level expected by the locally agreed syllabus of religious education. Almost all students reach the expected level and the majority exceed it. Most students have a good knowledge and understanding of the key features of the world religions they are studying. Year 7 students engage well in group research of the Mosque in Islam and present accurate and evaluative feedback showing their understanding of the connection between belief and practice. Year 8 students use religious language accurately in describing the symbolic aspects of the festival of Passover and its significance to Jewish people. The standards attained at the end of Year 9 reflect good achievement overall.
124. GCSE results in 2003, in both GCSE Religious Studies and the Religious Education Short Course were well above the national average, reflecting good achievement. High standards were maintained in 2004. All students in Years 10 and 11 follow the GCSE Short course and some opt for the Religious Studies course. Students in both courses demonstrate a detailed knowledge of the beliefs and practices they study and can ably link these to their own experience. Year 10 short course students identify different

religious beliefs and scientific theories for the creation of the world and make thoughtful personal judgements which they support with argument. Higher attaining students are able to consider the philosophies in more depth. Written and oral contributions by Year 11 religious studies students demonstrate a very good grasp of beliefs about marriage in Sikhism. All students, including those with special educational needs, achieve well.

125. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Lessons are well planned and students' learning benefits from teachers' good subject knowledge. The very good and good lessons seen used challenging questioning and built on the students' ability to work collaboratively together on research and problem-solving. In a minority of lessons, however, the slow pace and over-emphasis on discussion slowed the students' learning. Teachers know individual students well and use assessment effectively to identify areas for improvement. Provision for students who have special educational needs is satisfactory, although few examples of specific work targeted at gifted and talented students were seen. The use of ICT to support and assist learning, although developing, is not yet effective.
126. Subject leadership and management are very good. The head of department has worked hard to raise standards and improve the quality of teaching and learning. She provides clear educational direction, a good understanding of curriculum planning and assessment, is aware of the department's strengths and weaknesses, and is actively working to maintain high standards in GCSE and achieve consistency in teaching and learning. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very good GCSE examination results.
- Students achieve above average results by the end of Year 9.
- Teachers' very good subject knowledge has a positive impact on standards and the achievement of all students.
- Students are very well motivated to learn.
- The assessment system for students in Years 7 to 9 does not inform them how they might attain at higher levels.

Commentary

127. By the end of Year 9, standards of work of the majority of boys from all ethnic backgrounds are above what is the norm nationally, and their achievement is good. Teacher assessments show few students attaining at higher levels but standards of work seen during the inspection indicate that more students do attain these levels. Students of all levels of competence have good practical skills. They can analyse a design problem and formulate possible solutions. Students have good skills in the use of computers for designing and know how they can be used for manufacturing. They have a good

knowledge of the materials they use and of their properties. Students with lower levels of competence do not always show the links between the stages in the design process.

128. The 2004 GCSE examination results are likely to be well above the national average for boys, as they were in 2003. This high standard has been maintained overall since the previous inspection, although results for graphic products in 2004 are lower than in the other design and technology options. Standards of work seen are above what might be expected at this age, which represents good achievement. Students with special educational needs also achieve well. The majority of students produce good quality practical work and, when designing, can take account of the needs of possible users of their products. Students of lower levels of competence do not always have a full understanding of specialist terms, such as the names of the components which they use in Year 11 electronic products.
129. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which they apply well when, for example, directing questions to further students' understanding. Good lesson planning leads to time being well used. Teachers are skilled in using computer technology to support students' learning. Students' very good attitudes to work lead to good learning. Teaching is less effective when students are given too few opportunities to contribute to discussions.
130. The department is well led and improvement since the previous inspection has been good. There is a good team sense in the department. The recently appointed head of department has vision and is already initiating positive change, for example, to make the assessment system for students in Years 7 to 9 more effective. The department has benefited from specialist school status, which has led to significant improvements in accommodation and the provision of ICT resources. However, the food technology room is cramped. The department has yet to assess its contribution to students' work-related learning.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good student attitudes enable them to achieve well as a result of good teaching.
- Computers are used creatively to refine and modify ideas.
- Students' good understanding of subject-specific language allows them to express themselves well verbally and to annotate their work meaningfully.
- There is not enough careful, detailed, sensitive drawing from observation.
- Inspiration from non-European cultures does not feature prominently enough.

Commentary

131. In 2004 by the end of Year 9, students were working at a level well above that expected nationally according to teacher assessments and this was supported by work seen during the inspection. The percentage of grades from A* to C at GCSE was significantly above

the national average for boys with a high proportion of A* and A grades in 2003 and 2004. This is an improvement on 2002, especially in the proportion of higher grades and confirms a rising trend over the last three years. Students performed slightly better in art than in most other subjects they took.

132. According to work seen during the inspection, students in Year 9 are working above the level expected nationally. Students in Year 11 are working at a standard that is well above expectations. Attitudes are generally very good, with most students taking their work seriously and enjoying their art lessons. They express themselves well verbally using specialist vocabulary. Higher attaining students use a variety of media, including computers, to experiment with effects and develop their ideas creatively. Drawing is used well to sketch and modify ideas but not enough time is spent on drawing with accuracy and detail. Most students are achieving well, including those for whom English is an additional language and those with special educational needs. There is, however, a small percentage who do not achieve as well as expected due to some weaknesses in teaching.
133. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, with the teaching seen ranging from excellent to unsatisfactory. Strengths in teaching lie in using key language very well to explain clear learning objectives, confident and appropriate use of visual aids and skilful questioning, ensuring that all students understand. Lessons are brisk and students are focused and productive, encouraged by teachers' high expectations. Less strong features of teaching are the inadequate use of visual aids, unclear learning objectives and imprecise explanations leading to confusion and resulting in a small proportion of students not achieving as well as expected.
134. The quality of leadership and management is good. There has been good improvement on all points raised in the last inspection, and there is a detailed, strategic plan for further improvement. There is good communication between teachers, support assistants and technicians creating an effective team. Monitoring of teaching identified weaknesses but actions taken have as yet been insufficient to solve the problem. Art makes a good contribution to students' cultural development. Work inspired by non-European cultures does not feature sufficiently prominently. Visits to galleries and museums to see the work of others are not very frequent.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strength and weaknesses

- Provision for extra-curricular activities and take-up for instrumental teaching is outstanding.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Teaching is consistently good.
- Students' attitudes and behaviour are excellent in Years 10 and 11 and very good in Years 7 to 9.
- There is insufficient use of ICT in Years 7 to 9.
- Teaching of notation and composition in Years 7 to 9 is sometimes too theoretical.

Commentary

135. GCSE results in 2004 are likely to be well above national averages, showing an improvement on the previous year when a new syllabus was introduced. In Years 10 and 11, current standards in work seen are well above average with a significant number of students likely to achieve high grades. Standards in performance are generally the highest but some students also produce very good compositions in various styles. In Years 7 to 9, standards are above average with a high proportion of the students playing instruments. Students show a good grasp of musical notation and use keyboards effectively for composition. Singing standards are high. High standards are also achieved in the many extra-curricular activities. Students in Years 7 to 9 achieve well in relation to their prior musical experience. They continue to achieve well in Years 10 and 11 particularly in view of the limited time which is allocated to the subject. Students from differing ethnic backgrounds, those with special needs, and those for whom English is an additional language, all achieve equally well and make good progress.
136. Teaching and learning are good in all year groups and in instrumental lessons. Quality is consistent; in all lessons seen teaching and learning were good or better. The teachers, both class and instrumental, are well qualified musicians and use their skills effectively to demonstrate and illustrate. Lessons are well planned and organised resulting in good progress and use of time. A very good level of individual attention helps students with special needs to make good progress. Talented students also benefit from this and from the additional tasks which they are given. The teaching of notation and composition in Years 7 to 9 is sometimes too theoretical and insufficiently practical. There is insufficient use of ICT in Years 7 to 9, mainly due to a lack of computers in the department. Relationships are good and this makes for good collaboration in group and paired work.
137. Marking and assessment are very good. Marking is detailed and tells the students how they can improve. There is also good use of self-evaluation by the students. The management of students is very good and this, combined with their very positive attitudes, results in very good behaviour in Years 7 to 9 and excellent behaviour in Years 10 and 11. The teaching is inclusive; students with special needs and of differing ethnic backgrounds are fully integrated into all activities, including instrumental and extra-curricular.
138. Leadership and management are very good. Although very new, the leadership has already shown vision and implemented effective changes, for example improving the assessment procedures. The department is very well managed with good routines which are familiar to the students. Instrumental teaching is very well co-ordinated as are the extra-curricular activities. The class and instrumental teachers have been welded into a very effective team with a good involvement of the instrumental teachers in the ensemble activities. The extra-curricular provision is outstanding. It is a vibrant scene which involves all year groups and capitalises well on the very high take-up for instrumental lessons and the good singing standards.
139. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. High standards have been maintained, assessment and marking improved, and there has been an increase in the percentage of A* and A grades at GCSE, but limited progress has been made on the upgrading of software and computers.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The range and quality of extra-curricular physical activities and games is outstanding.
- The department is very well led.
- The students show very positive attitudes and consistently high standards of behaviour.
- There is insufficient formal monitoring of teaching.
- Accommodation and facilities are of very good quality.
- There is no formal accreditation for Year 11 students not studying GCSE.

Commentary

140. Although the department's main focus is on the teaching of rugby, hockey, and cricket, the curriculum is very well planned to allow all students the opportunity to experience an extensive range of physical activities and games. The department has very good specialised indoor and outdoor facilities, including a sports complex owned by the school, that enable a variety of sporting activities and games to take place simultaneously. Members of the local community are strongly encouraged to make use of the facilities at the sports complex when they are not being used by the school.
141. On entry to the school in Year 7 students have very varied experiences of physical activities and games. Students who attend local clubs are already developing the skills necessary to play games successfully, but for others many of the activities offered by the school are a new experience. They make good progress and achieve well and by the end of Year 9, standards of attainment are good and above the national expectation. The GCSE results for students in Year 11 in 2004 are also good with 100 per cent achieving grades A*-E. Evidence from school data, observation of lessons, and discussions with teachers, indicates that standards for students who do not take GCSE are good. A significant number of students have well above average skills in games such as rugby, hockey, basketball, badminton and volleyball. Good role models are provided for younger students by a number of sixth formers who assist in some games lessons. The department, through its very good assessment procedures, monitors and records students' progress, but there is a lack of formal accreditation for the efforts of students who are not studying for GCSE.
142. Teaching is good and has a positive impact on learning. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Activities are well planned and appropriate so that skills and understanding are developed logically. The teachers provide competent demonstrations and good modelling of technique. Relationships are very good. Students are interested in the lessons and respect the teachers' efforts to help them. The majority of students behave very well and are very positive about taking part in all aspects of the physical education programme. Occasionally, activities are too challenging because insufficient time is allocated to the development of new skills. Such inconsistencies in the quality of teaching are infrequent but are not identified and addressed quickly enough as the head of department does not formally monitor teaching. This is a particularly important area as the department uses a number of non-specialists to teach physical education.

143. The leadership and management of the department are very good. Teachers work very well together to improve practice and, with the head of the department providing clear educational direction, have produced a comprehensive action plan for improvement. Students respond very enthusiastically to the excellent extra-curricular programme. Staff give freely of their own time to organise a variety of well-attended activities and games where students can further develop their interests, expertise, and skills. School teams and individual students take part successfully in many inter-school, local, county, and national competitions. The school, following a review of its provision, has recently received national recognition for its work in promoting physical education and sport. Progress since the last inspection is good, with the areas for improvement identified in the previous report addressed.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Provision in business studies is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There was significant underachievement of students entered for the GCSE in 2004.
- Leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory.
- The department does not have its own process for reviewing and evaluating its performance.
- Teaching is good where it is well prepared, enthusiastically delivered and has clear learning outcomes.
- The department's website is an innovative development and is a useful source of student support but is yet to be effectively evaluated.

Commentary

144. The 2004 GCSE results indicated significant underachievement of students. Only 44 per cent gained A* to C grades compared to 75 per cent in 2003, well below the national average for the subject and the school's target of 73 per cent. Whilst the school's senior management has undertaken its own subject review, the department itself has not effected a rigorous analysis and evaluation of its own results, particularly with regard to measuring individual achievement, evaluating teaching and learning strategies and ascertaining students' views.

145. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall but vary between unsatisfactory and good. In addition, even when teaching is consistently just satisfactory, the long-term effects on learning are unsatisfactory and result in underachievement. Current students are attaining at a satisfactory level of performance and in Year 11, have begun to produce work which shows a satisfactory level of understanding of basic business terminology. Students with special educational needs are achieving as well as their peers. Students are polite, well behaved in lessons and work co-operatively.

146. Teaching is good when it is well prepared, enthusiastically delivered and has clearly expressed learning outcomes which are shared with students and used to check understanding at the end of lessons. For example, a good, well-prepared Year 11 lesson on sources of business finance was delivered at a brisk pace, engaged students' interest and used effectively targeted questions to ensure that all made progress and understood

the purpose and content of the lesson. There was also very good differentiation with additional materials prepared for the higher attaining students. However, in an unsatisfactory Year 10 lesson on business finance, checking of students' understanding was minimal and opportunities for student input into the lesson were limited.

147. There is unsatisfactory leadership and management of the subject with no departmental evaluation process in place, planning that is neither comprehensive nor rigorous, no obvious mechanism for sharing good practice and no programme of continuing professional development. In addition, the recording of student progress and keeping of students' records off-site is unsatisfactory. There are no formal policies and practices in place to support whole-school developments, detailing, for example, the subject's contribution to developing students' skills in numeracy and literacy. However, the subject website and disk of business studies materials are innovative developments which support students' learning. Unfortunately, there has been no evaluation of their usefulness and usage in the two years of their development. The use of ICT in lessons is effective where it is used to support and monitor learning and its relevance to business situations clearly explained. There has been unsatisfactory progress since the last inspection.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

148. Five lessons were sampled in PSHCE. The quality of teaching ranged from excellent to satisfactory and was good overall.
149. In Year 7, teaching was focused on strategies for managing homework and the school's systems of rewards and sanctions. Both lessons helped students very new to the school to learn how to manage their new responsibilities and to understand what the school expects of them, as well as the support available. Both were effective in promoting independence and good self-management within a supportive framework.
150. In Year 8, students were looking at advertising. The teaching encouraged them to form and articulate their own opinions, as well as introducing correct technical vocabulary such as "subliminal". Another group defined shyness and drew up a well-considered list of words which described shyness for them. A written task accompanied the discussion, which students found very challenging.
151. In Year 10, a group looked at the effects of alcohol misuse and this forms the example of outstanding practice in the teaching section of this report. In all the lessons observed, there was clear structure, emphasis on keywords and correct vocabulary, and tasks, often written, which underlined the significance of what students were learning.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A wide range of good teaching materials support the students' learning.
- Assessment of students' learning and reports to parents are not yet sufficiently focused on citizenship descriptors.

- The scheme of work is not consistently identifying learning outcomes that ensure the focus of learning is on the citizenship programme of study.

Commentary

152. Specific lessons in citizenship are provided through an extended tutor period, and in conjunction with aspects of other subjects, the school meets the requirements of the citizenship National Curriculum programme of study.
153. Students in Year 9 have a satisfactory knowledge of rights and responsibility and law and order issues. They know how democracy works and confidently engage in discussion with peers and teachers about matters of news and concern to people worldwide. Year 7 students confidently unravel scenarios which develop their understanding of the importance of being involved in decision-making processes. Achievement overall is satisfactory.
154. Good attainment and achievement at the end of Year 11 in the lessons seen, results from the use of interesting resource materials and teaching methods which extend the students' communication and enquiry skills. Students actively debate and consider the impact on the community of both local and global issues.
155. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall but ranged from unsatisfactory to very good. Planning of lessons and provision of resource material is effective in most lessons but the scheme of work and lesson plans provided to form tutors do not adequately clarify the required learning outcomes for each lesson. Where teaching is good or very good, students are appropriately challenged and the teachers' own subject knowledge and expertise supports the learning. Self-assessment by students is used well but the reports to parents and assessment practice are not sufficiently focused on the end of Year 9 and Year 11 National Curriculum descriptors of expectations.
156. Folders which illustrate students' citizenship work vary in quality and are not yet uniformly marked or monitored. An audit of how PSHCE and other subjects contribute to citizenship has been undertaken but not all students' portfolios demonstrate the full breadth of their achievements.
157. Leadership is satisfactory. The co-ordinator's enthusiasm and commitment have led to rapid progress in implementing the requirements for citizenship. Management of the subject is good. The co-ordinator has good subject knowledge and has produced a wide selection of good information and lesson plans to support teaching and learning. She has put in place the appropriate policies and a development plan, and is aware of the further monitoring and training role required that will help to improve teaching and learning.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

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

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	4	100	80.1	25	23.7	32.5	29.9
Biology	5	80	65.2	0	11.1	24.0	20.6
Business Studies	3	33.3	76.4	0	16.3	6.7	26.2
Chemistry	2	50	72.7	0	13.9	10	24.1
Classical Studies	7	57.1	87.4	0	34.3	15.7	35.2
Drama	2	100	86.5	0	19.6	30	30.6
Economics	6	16.7	73.6	0	20.1	3.3	26.4
English	8	100	82.9	0	17.5	30	28.7
French	4	75	78.2	0	18.9	20	27.6
Design and technology	2	100	74.9	50	15.1	45	25.3
Geography	2	100	74.3	0	19.8	35	26.5
History	3	66.7	80.7	66.7	19.5	33.3	28.6
Information and communication technology	7	28.6	67.0	0	10.9	7.1	21.4
Mathematics	21	38.1	61.9	4.8	17.1	11.9	22.1
Music	3	100	86.5	66.7	21.4	40	30.7
Other social studies	18	77.8	69.7	5.6	16.7	21.7	24.1
Physics	6	50	68.6	0	14.4	15	22.7
Sports/PE Studies	1	0	73.2	0	11.4	0	23.1

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	8	100	98.6	0	50.2	77.5	87.5
Biology	13	100	96.4	46.2	39.2	86.2	78.6
Business Studies	7	100	98.7	42.9	36.8	85.7	80.1
Chemistry	6	100	97.6	66.7	49	90	84.9
Classical Studies	2	100	99.5	0	55.9	70	90.9
Drama	10	100	99.5	40	40.1	84	83.6
Economics	9	100	98.9	11.1	52	68.9	88.3
English	15	93.3	99.4	20	36.3	70.7	80.9
French	5	100	98.8	40	51.5	72	87.6
Design and technology	11	100	97.8	18.2	35	76.4	77.9
Geography	28	100	98.7	60.7	44.5	92.9	84
History	5	100	99	40	44.6	84	84.6
Information and communication technology	4	100	95.6	25	24.6	80	69.5
Mathematics	30	93.3	96.7	50	55.6	81.3	88.8
Music	2	100	98.8	0	38.9	70	81.1
Other Social Studies	27	96.3	97.4	25.9	42.7	70.4	81.8
Physics	15	100	96.7	26.7	44.6	72	81.7
Sociology	1	100	98.2	0	44.3	80	83.6
Sports/PE Studies	6	100	98	33.3	30.9	70	75.2
Information technology VQ (Level 2)	7	100	77.9	28.6	23.4	71.4	64.9

Note 1: These are results for all students at Hitchin Boys' School, regardless of where they were taught in the consortium. They may differ from results referred to in subject paragraphs, which are those for students taught at Hitchin Boys' School.

Note 2: AS level results reported here are those that have been "cashed in". They may differ from those referred to in subject paragraphs where inspectors use the whole range of AS results.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The inspection focus in this area was on English, but work was also sampled in modern foreign languages and Latin. One lesson each in French and German was observed. Teaching was very good in French and learning and achievement were good. At times, students were too passive to benefit from the demand and challenge offered to them. In German, teaching, learning and achievement were satisfactory and helped students to fill basic gaps in their knowledge and understanding. In Latin, one Year 12 lesson was observed. The good quality teaching enabled students to learn and achieve well in developing accurate and idiomatic translation skills.

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers know their subject and their students well.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Results at AS and A2 level are improving.
- Most lessons are planned and conducted to encourage students' participation and independence.
- Some teaching is unsatisfactory because it does not give sufficient challenge and support.

Commentary

158. Results in AS examinations in 2003 were above average, but below average for A2 level. Results in 2004 show an upward trend, with two-fifths of students achieving A and B grades at A2. Achievement as shown by these results is at least satisfactory because the majority of students do at least as well as expected.
159. Work seen during the inspection gave a better picture than these results would suggest. In lessons, and in their writing, most students were doing better than might be predicted from their previous attainment. For example, students' original writing, (story openings in a variety of genres) showed a secure appreciation of convention and style. A pastiche of Tolkein was remarkable for its assurance and command. Similar qualities were evident in students' annotation and discussion of texts (*Wuthering Heights*, and *Othello*). Teachers' good subject knowledge and awareness of their students' capabilities lead to productive lessons and clear progress. Students are similarly well served by the quality of teachers' marking and assessment. They feel very well supported and appreciate teachers' availability and concern for their academic and personal welfare.
160. The quality of teaching overall is good. This judgement masks some disparity in standards of planning and practice, however, because one lesson (of the four observed) was unsatisfactory. Too little was required of students, who consequently made little progress. More typical was a very good lesson that optimised student involvement through expertly managed group work. Students analysed different passages from *Wuthering Heights* in preparation for presentations to the larger group. This discussion and writing demonstrably took students forward in terms of their appreciation of the text,

the development of skills of summary and presentation, and their capacity to work independently.

161. Leadership of the department is very good. The head of department models, in her own practice, methods that challenge and support in equal measure. Assessment is used well to track progress and to give students a clear indication of what they need to do to improve. The curriculum is well planned, together with extra-curricular opportunities, to stimulate interest and a sense of achievement. However, there is too little time available for monitoring the work of the department to ensure that the highest standards of teaching and learning are shared and made entirely general. Management therefore is satisfactory.
162. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Although standards remain below expectations in some respects, there is an upward trend in recent results and the overall quality of teaching and learning is better than indicated in the last report. Numbers of students doing AS and A2 courses are rising significantly; this is an indication that approaches to language and literature in the lower school are beginning to motivate and interest potential sixth formers.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

163. Sixth form students have generally good language and literacy skills. Although no discrete provision is made for teaching key skills, all courses give evident attention to matters of literacy. In English, history, DT and ICT for example, inspectors noted good support for extended writing. All subjects give planned opportunities for discussion and oral presentation of information and opinion. There is no formal monitoring and evaluation of the impact of literacy provision across the sixth form. However, because standards are good, provision is at least satisfactory.

MATHEMATICS

The provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Mathematics is a popular subject and a high proportion of students achieve an A-level grade A.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge, teaching effectively so that students achieve well.
- Leadership is very good with staff fully committed to raising standards for all students.

Commentary

164. GCE A-level results in 2003 were in line with the national average. Students achieved similar results in 2004 and significantly increased the proportion obtaining a grade A. GCE AS-level results were below average in 2003 but much better in 2004. Evidence indicates that these students' performance in GCE A-level in 2005 is likely to be better than average. Mathematics is a popular subject. The number of students studying it to GCE A-level is encouragingly high in comparison to other subjects. There is a wide choice of courses within the GCE AS and A-level programme including pure mathematics, mechanics, statistics and further mathematics.

165. Teaching and learning are good overall, and sometimes very good, so that students achieve well. Teachers have excellent command of the subject matter leading to significant gains in students' knowledge and understanding. Teachers are enthusiastic about mathematics thereby stimulating much more interest from the students. For example, in a very well taught further mathematics lesson the teacher used his passion for geometry to illustrate more elegant approaches to questions on imaginary numbers than the standard algebraic route. This significantly expanded students' appreciation of the power of geometry to short-circuit a more cumbersome method. Some teachers make very good use of ICT to present lessons. This provides a very good dynamic display of various topics, especially graphs, and it generates very pertinent discussions. Students very quickly grapple with the main points thanks to the immediate visual effect. The department is in the early stages of introducing this so that there is an element of unfamiliarity and consequent over-control of the teacher's method. There are a few occasions when the pace of lessons is too slow for the very brightest students.
166. Leadership is very good and management is good. Teachers work very effectively as a team and are strongly committed to maintaining the popularity of mathematics and improving standards. The department is taking part in a local education authority initiative to improve A-level provision. Higher attaining students have considerable opportunities for challenge through the senior mathematics challenge competition, Hertfordshire University master classes and the international mathematics Olympiad. The construction of a department website was planned to give extra help to lower attaining students by July 2004. It is near completion but a little behind schedule.

Mathematics across the curriculum

167. Provision is satisfactory and standards are above average. In physics, students consider kinetic and gravitational energy when designing a roller coaster. In ICT, they use devise formulae to investigate the binary system. In business studies, students use spreadsheets competently when learning about break-even analysis. In psychology, they use empirical data from research projects effectively to evaluate related issues and draw conclusions.

SCIENCE

The main focus in this area was on physics but one lesson each of biology and chemistry was observed. In the Year 13 biology lesson, students were developing a good knowledge and understanding of aerobic and anaerobic respiration as the result of teaching that focused well on their individual strengths and weaknesses. In the Year 12 chemistry lesson, students made very good progress in their understanding of chemical periodicity through individual research using the Internet.

Physics

Provision in physics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average and examination results are improving.

- Staffing of the subject is very good.
- Students' good achievement is underpinned by their positive attitudes towards the subject.
- Teaching is consistently good and students learn well as a result.
- Some teaching is narrow in its scope.

Commentary

168. In 2003, GCE A2 results were slightly below the national average although all students achieved at least a pass grade. Results in 2004 were much better with many students gaining higher A/B grades. AS results in 2003 were in line with the national average and improved considerably in 2004. The latest results confirm that students' achievement is good. Retention rates are good and most students go on to complete their study of physics in Year 13.
169. Current standards are above average in both Year 12 and 13 and reflect the most recent examination results. Both Year 12 and Year 13 students are achieving well and better than might be expected in relation to their GCSE results. Students in Year 12 build effectively on their GCSE experience and cope well with the AS-level course. For example, in a very good Year 12 lesson students made very good gains in their knowledge and understanding of transformation of gravitational potential energy to kinetic energy by focusing on investigative aspects of the topic. There is a particular emphasis on the development of mathematical skills by the department and this contributes significantly to students' good achievement. Students grasp and learn concepts in physics well. For example, Year 13 students were able to use their understanding of gravity to investigate more complex concepts such as Newton's Universal Law of Gravitation. As a result, they made good progress in the topic. Due to consistently good teaching, students make good progress in their lessons and their achievement is good.
170. Teaching is good and this is confirmed by scrutiny of students' work. Lessons are well planned, although the range of learning opportunities could be wider to cater for all ranges of capability. Teachers make effective use of very strong subject expertise to ensure that concepts are clearly explained. As a result, learning is better. There is a very good emphasis on the teaching of experimental physics through individual experimentation. This results in better progress because this 'hands on' approach consolidates theoretical knowledge and understanding well. Expectations of students are high and students respond well. Students' learning is good across both age ranges. They work hard and show considerable interest in their work. Their attitudes to the subject are very positive and show a mature outlook evidenced by the quality of their work. Students' views of the subject are very positive. They feel they are doing well and this increases their motivation to succeed.
171. Leadership is very good. Management of the department on a day-to-day basis is good and improving. There is a commitment to build on what has already been achieved. The department is in a good position to move forward.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very good quality of teaching on the VCE and GCE courses encourages students to become independent learners.
- Students use advanced ICT skills very effectively to aid their research and learning.

Commentary

172. The standards in the VCE and GCE courses are good, with all students achieving pass grades in 2003 and 2004. Students in 2004 achieved a range of grades from A to E, and half of them gained a grade C or higher.
173. The quality of the teaching seen was very good, and sometimes it was excellent. Lessons were stimulating and challenging because of the teachers' subject expertise, enthusiasm, and teaching styles, which encouraged the questioning of hypotheses and ideas. Students in Year 12 were able to discuss the implications of download time in web-designing, and the meticulous planning of the teacher, together with expert knowledge, meant students could link the theory of bytes and bits to their own web page designs.
174. Students are encouraged to evaluate their work and support each other in lessons; this, together with the questioning by the teachers of individual students as they work, ensures that all students are challenged and pace is maintained. In Year 13, the teachers have high expectations and encourage the students to analyse what they are doing in detail. Students were able to make a detailed analysis of program rings and apply the necessary understanding of binary notation to the topic. Students are challenged and their understanding extended by a positive and supportive learning environment created by teachers who can simplify complex issues into simple stages, allowing students to achieve their potential. The basis of this success is the mutual respect that exists between students and teachers. Leadership of the subject is very good and management is good.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

175. The use of ICT across the curriculum is of a high standard. Students use all aspects of e-learning to help them research, explain and present their knowledge. Students are encouraged to use ICT to log and analyse data, for research purposes through access to the Internet and for the preparation of coursework, using a range of methods to present information and illustrative diagrams and images. Teachers also make their teaching more effective by developing PowerPoint presentations, guiding students carefully in the use of the Internet, and structuring the effective use of presentational devices in the delivery of information.

HUMANITIES

The main inspection focus in this area was on psychology. However, work was also sampled in both geography and history. Two lessons of geography were sampled. Teaching, learning and achievement were very good – and in one lesson were excellent – as a consequence of the teacher's very good subject knowledge, careful planning and the high level of challenge provided. The 2003 A2 results were well above average with further improvement in the 2004 results. Two lessons of history were also sampled. In the Year 12 lesson, teaching, learning and achievement were good and enabled students to develop good levels of analytical and critical-thinking skills. In a Year 13 lesson, teaching, learning and achievement were very good.

The high achievement reached was a result of the very high order of challenge provided by the teaching.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in 2004, at GCE AS and A-level, have improved on those from previous years.
- Teaching is never less than good, and sometimes very good, in both Years 12 and 13.
- Good leadership and management provide a clear direction for developing the subject and a commitment to raising standards.
- There is no strategic plan to provide a secure framework for improving departmental effectiveness.

Commentary

176. Students enter Year 12 with a range of attainment, as measured by their GCSE grades. Standards in 2004 show a considerable improvement on the examination results in 2002 and 2003, with well over three-quarters of Year 13 students achieving or exceeding their minimum target grade. Current standards are in line expectations. Retention rates are high.
177. As students move through Years 12 and 13, they achieve well and gain knowledge and understanding of the key concepts and skills in the design and conduct of psychological investigation. In Year 12, they make good progress in their exploration of cognitive development, and in Year 13, they make good gains in their understanding of possible explanations for criminal behaviour. In both years, students learn to analyse and interpret the content of original research reports in these specialist areas.
178. Students respond enthusiastically to the subject. Their work is well presented and shows significant improvement in literacy as well as in the application of number and ICT. There is improvement in syntax and spelling with appropriate use of important technical terms in both oral and written work. Most students have good levels of understanding of number for analysing and interpreting data. ICT is well used to present information, produce coursework and explore the Internet for appropriate current information to support their learning.
179. Teaching and learning are good, and sometimes very good. Lessons are well planned and clear learning objectives are identified, so that students are clear about what they should know, understand and be able to do by the end of the session. Students from ethnic minority groups are full participants in the learning and achieve as well as their peers. In all lesson planning, account is taken of the wide range of learning needs present in the large teaching groups. Significant challenge is provided throughout and learning is well supported by an appropriate range of well chosen learning resources. In some groups, however, the large number of students present can limit the range of teaching and learning styles used and activities undertaken. Students' work is well marked and detailed comments provide guidance for improvement in the standard and quality of the assignment.

180. Leadership and management are good. The current head of subject, new to the school in the last year, works well with other staff and has begun to address important issues relating to standards, teaching and learning. There is no overall plan to secure the effectiveness of the department, especially to further raise standards and improve teaching and learning. The department's work benefits from the strong positive relationship it enjoys with psychology departments in other consortium schools. The curriculum offered is broad and meets the needs of all students on the course, including those who have special needs, English as an additional language and those that are gifted. Good support is provided for students' personal and intellectual development and monitoring of individual progress is effective.
181. Accommodation is of poor quality and, given the large teaching group sizes, is lacking in flexibility. The level of departmental resources is inadequate to support the wide range of students' learning needs in the specialised units within the course.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

The inspection focus in this curriculum area was on design and technology.

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards attained in the A2 examinations are high.
- Teaching is very good, leading to students learning and achieving well.
- Students have very good attitudes to learning.
- A limited range of teaching techniques is sometimes employed.

Commentary

182. AS level examination results in 2004 are likely to be above average. This standard has been maintained overall since the previous inspection. Examination results for A2 level are likely to be well above average. Standards of work seen from students of all ethnic backgrounds are above average. Students' high quality practical work indicates good skill levels. Students are very good at identifying real life needs that generate design opportunities. They have a good understanding of how to analyse potential design tasks, taking account of the wide range of factors that need to be considered. They take great care with the presentation of their work, making excellent use of their very good ICT skills for this purpose. This includes the use of computer-aided design and manufacture equipment. However, some students tend to collect research materials without fully analysing their value.
183. Teaching and learning overall are very good. Teachers have a high level of subject knowledge and of examination requirements. This knowledge is applied very effectively when working with whole classes and individual students. Students' very good attitudes to learning are a significant factor, which contributes to their good attainment and achievement. There is very good provision and use of ICT resources to support learning.

Teaching leads to students having a good appreciation of design techniques employed in industry. Students learn well when a very good range of teaching strategies is employed, for example, in a Year 12 class, when analysing the design requirements of an existing item. However, the use of a range of strategies is not evident in all lessons.

184. The courses are well led and managed. The three teachers concerned share their considerable expertise to the benefit of students. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Standards at A2 level have been maintained and an AS Level course is now included. The new workshop and additional resources resulting from the specialist schools' status make a significant contribution to students' learning. The curriculum is satisfactory.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The inspection focus in this curriculum area was on art and design. However, work in music was sampled and one Year 12 lesson was observed. Teaching, learning and achievement were good and students made significant progress in their understanding of the principles of counterpoint in baroque music. Worked was also sampled in a Year 12 drama lesson where good teaching and learning allowed students to achieve well in their understanding of characterisation.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good student attitudes enable them to achieve well as a result of good teaching.
- Computers are used creatively to modify and extend ideas.
- Students use subject-specific language well orally but not so well in their extended writing about artists.
- There is not enough careful, detailed, sensitive drawing from observation.

Commentary

185. Both AS and A2 have had groups too small to allow comparison with national data in recent years, but in 2003 numbers did show that standards were average, with students achieving much as expected. In 2004, the proportion of A/B grades increased at A2 with most achieving well.
186. Students in Year 12 are working at a standard in line with expectations, whilst those in Year 13 are working at a standard above expectations. Generally, standards are higher in the second year of A-level because there is open access in Year 12, but in Year 13 students have already successfully completed the AS course. Sketching is well used to record observations and modify ideas although accurate, detailed drawing is less well developed. A variety of media are used experimentally in journals; finished pieces can sometimes be less exciting. Students use computers creatively to extend their ideas and journals document this well. Specialist language is well used to make notes and talk about artists' work, but extended writing is not as competent as oral work. Students

achieve well by the end of Year 13 as a result of good teaching and their own very conscientious attitudes and they are successful in working independently.

187. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Strengths of teaching lie in good use of visual material, including CD-Rom, PowerPoint presentations and working on location to ensure that all students are inspired and understand. All students benefit from individual advice on how to improve, which is based on thorough assessment of their strengths and weaknesses linked closely to the examination criteria. Some students, however, continue to find extended writing difficult and alternative strategies are in the process of being developed.
188. The quality of leadership and management is good. There are clear systems in place to aid the sharing of sixth form teaching and communication is good between teachers. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Art rooms have been suited and enlarged and standards have risen. The information and communication technology facilities are used more widely to develop work. There are plans for an artist to visit to talk about his work but there could be more opportunities to see the work of artists in galleries and museums.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

189. There was no inspection focus in this curriculum area. However work in PE was sampled and two lessons were observed. In a lesson that included Year 12 and 13 students, very good teaching and learning enabled students to achieve high standards in understanding and measuring 'body fat' and in learning how to devise individual fitness programmes. In a Year 13 lesson, teaching and learning were satisfactory but lacked pace. Students achieved adequately in their exploration of the difference between assertion, instrumental aggression and hostile aggression.

BUSINESS

The inspection focus in this curriculum area was on both business studies and economics.

Business studies

Provision for business studies is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory.
- The department does not have its own process for reviewing and evaluating its performance.
- Teaching is good and very good when it is well planned, has clear learning objectives and is enthusiastically presented to students.
- The department's website is an innovative development and is a useful source of student support but its effectiveness is yet to be evaluated.
- The teaching accommodation is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

190. In 2004, 74 per cent of students entered for the AS level achieved at least a pass grade, which is around the national average, but with only one student achieving one of the top grades. There were no students entered for the full A-level this year. All students entered for the previous two years gained at least a pass in the full A-level. The school has undertaken its own subject review but the department does not itself track and review student performance to measure whether students are achieving their full potential. Current students are attaining at least at a satisfactory level of performance. Higher attaining students are able to use business terminology very effectively, for example when discussing the advantages and disadvantages of different forms of business enterprise and how the principle of limited liability works.
191. Teaching and learning are good overall with the teacher able to bring a wealth of practical business knowledge and experience to the classroom. Teaching is very good when it is well prepared and enthusiastically delivered with clearly expressed learning outcomes that are shared with students and used to check understanding at the end of lessons. For example, in two very well prepared lessons observed on market segmentation, the interesting teaching and pace of learning engaged students' interest throughout. The teacher ensured that the lessons were inclusive, using individually targeted questions to check understanding. Students were able to explain clearly how an airline market had developed and the crucial relationship between customers' needs, prices and costs. Lessons that are teacher-centred are less effective in providing pace and challenge in the learning with fewer opportunities for reflection and the formal noting of important points. Students are well motivated, have a positive attitude to the subject and appreciate the access to the teacher.
192. Leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory. There is no departmental evaluation procedure in place and the improvement plan is neither comprehensive nor rigorous. The subject website is an innovative development which supports students' learning, but there has been no evaluation of its relevance and usage despite being launched two years ago. A number of business representatives are invited to present relevant topics to students; this is a rich source of experience and practical information to support learning in the subject. There are, however, no formal business partnerships in place and only a limited number of visits arranged to major commercial partners. The regular annual business trip to Paris has now been discontinued. When the subject is taught in the sixth form block the accommodation is unsatisfactory. A dreary, dilapidated classroom is used that presents students with an unsatisfactory learning environment. There has been unsatisfactory progress since the last inspection.

Economics

The provision for economics is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory.
- The department does not have its own process for reviewing and evaluating its performance.
- Teaching and learning overall are unsatisfactory with poorly planned and structured lessons unenthusiastically delivered with no clearly expressed learning outcomes.
- The department's website is an innovative development and is a useful source of student support but is yet to be effectively evaluated.

- Sixth form accommodation is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

193. Results at AS level in 2003 and 2004 show significant underachievement with five out of six and ten out of fifteen students, respectively, failing to gain a pass grade. However, eleven of the twelve completing the full A-level in 2004 gained at least a pass grade, eight gaining one of the top grades. As for business studies, senior management has undertaken its own subject review but the department does not itself track and review student performance to measure whether students are achieving their full potential. Current students are attaining at least at a satisfactory level of performance with one particular student asking challenging questions and displaying a good knowledge of economic theory and terminology. A significant number of students do not choose to take the course on from AS to A2.
194. Overall, the quality of teaching is unsatisfactory. Little review of teaching methods and lesson planning has resulted in poorly planned and unfocused teaching with no clearly identified learning outcomes shared with students. As a consequence, the checking of students' understanding and progress is not well done. Students are generally positive in lessons; some ask interesting and challenging questions. In a Year 13 lesson on the theory of 'the firm' the pedestrian teaching of the topic, with diagrams being copied from the whiteboard, was only made interesting by students' enquiries about the use of terminology. Similarly, in a Year 12 lesson on economic systems, the uninspiring teaching did not focus rigorously enough on the key features and, subsequently, students' understanding was not carefully checked. Students are compliant although they often ask challenging questions. Overall, even when teaching is just satisfactory the long-term effects on learning and achievement are unsatisfactory. One piece of coursework was seen, on the effects of the UK joining the Euro, and this was an excellent piece of research. No other students' work was available for scrutiny.
195. As detailed in the business studies reports, leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory with, among other issues, no departmental evaluation process in place and planning that is neither comprehensive nor rigorous. Again as detailed elsewhere, the subject website is an innovative development which supports students' learning but there has been no evaluation of its use and usefulness despite being launched two years ago. Accommodation for the subject is unsatisfactory, being taught in one of the old buildings on-site with a dreary, dilapidated classroom that presents students with an unsatisfactory learning environment. There has been unsatisfactory progress since the last inspection.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school	3	3
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
Overall standards achieved		3
Pupils' achievement	3	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities (ethos)		2
Attendance	2	2
Attitudes	2	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		3
The quality of education provided by the school		3
The quality of teaching	3	3
How well pupils learn	3	3
The quality of assessment	3	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	2	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		2
Accommodation and resources	5	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	2	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		3
The quality of the school's links with the community	2	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	3
The leadership and management of the school		3
The governance of the school	3	3
The leadership of the headteacher		3
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).

