

INSPECTION REPORT

Holy Family Catholic High School

Thornton, Liverpool, Merseyside

LEA area: Sefton

Unique reference number: 104962

Headteacher: Margaret Seddon

Lead inspector: Michael Miller

Dates of inspection: 14th - 18th March 2005

Inspection number: 268832

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: | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils: | 11 - 18 |
| Gender of pupils: | Mixed |
| Number on roll: | 965 |
| School address: | Virgins Lane Thornton Liverpool Merseyside |
| Postcode: | L23 4UL |
| Telephone number: | 0151 9246451 |
| Fax number: | 0151 9321417 |
| Appropriate authority: | Governing body |
| Name of chair of governors: | John Gillespie |
| Date of previous inspection: | September 1998 |

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Holy Family Catholic High School is situated in the Thornton area of Liverpool, on Merseyside. It is a voluntary aided comprehensive modern school for pupils and students aged 11 to 18 (Years 7 to 13). It is about the same size as most other secondary schools. There are 965 pupils on roll, 457 girls and 508 boys, including 179 sixth form students. The school's sixth form is average in size when compared with other sixth forms. The school is slightly smaller in size than it was at the time of the previous inspection. It is currently fully subscribed from Year 9, but undersubscribed in Years 7 and 8 due to falling rolls. Most pupils come from a wide area of Liverpool, not simply from the local catchment area, and travel to school by foot or by bus. The attainment of pupils on entry to the main school is average, and above average for the sixth form. Most pupils are from white ethnic backgrounds. Fewer than 3 per cent of pupils are from other ethnic groups, and a further 2 per cent have chosen not to disclose their ethnic origin. There are currently no pupils or students who are at an early stage of learning English. Employment rates in the area are slightly below the national average. At 14 per cent, the proportion of pupils registered for a free school meal is average, but at 3 per cent it is below average in the sixth form. Eleven per cent of pupils and students are on the register of special educational needs, which is just below average. At just over 1 per cent, the proportion of pupils and students having Statements of Special Educational Need is well below average in the main school, and in the sixth form. The number of pupils moving into, or leaving, the school before the end of Year 11 is low.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

| Members of the inspection team | | | Subject responsibilities |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|---|
| 17556 | Michael Miller | Lead inspector | |
| 19743 | Ann Taylor | Lay inspector | |
| 23082 | Graham Loach | Team inspector | Mathematics |
| 30046 | Ross Parker | Team inspector | English |
| 27984 | John Whitehall | Team inspector | Science Physics |
| 33518 | Terry Freedman | Team inspector | Information and communication technology Business education |
| 32329 | Andrew Stafford | Team inspector | Art and design Citizenship |
| 17156 | Ted Graham | Team inspector | Design and technology Special educational needs English as an additional language |
| 4317 | Ken Madrell | Team inspector | Geography Leisure and recreation |
| 8070 | Joe Haves | Team inspector | History |
| 1258 | Helen Silverstone | Team inspector | Modern foreign languages |
| 31850 | David Nevens | Team inspector | Music |
| 2866 | Robert Battey | Team inspector | Physical education Psychology |

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Holy Family Catholic High School is a successful school with a number of important strengths, which, overall, outweigh some significant weaknesses. Consequently, its overall effectiveness is **satisfactory**, and it provides satisfactory value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Insufficient improvement has been made on important issues from the previous two inspections;
- The governors, new headteacher and senior leadership team are working together well to secure school improvement;
- The school's thorough review of its leadership and management structure is as yet incomplete;
- Whole-school and common strategies relating to assessment, and curriculum, are not in place;
- Standards by Year 11 are above average when compared with all schools nationally;
- Teaching and learning are good, and pupils' achievement is good, by Years 9 and 11;
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are good overall throughout the main school;
- Overall, provision across a range of subjects is good, and very good in physical education;
- Provision in art is unsatisfactory, and its leadership is poor, and provision for citizenship, work-related learning and design and technology are unsatisfactory overall;
- The quality of the school's accommodation and some resources are a barrier to pupils' learning.

Improvement since the previous inspection has been unsatisfactory overall. This is because there are important issues from the previous two inspections, which have not been resolved fully. Until recently, little action had been taken on issues relating to marking and assessment, or whole-school management policies and approaches concerning important national and curriculum strategies. The current senior leadership and governing body are working hard to redress this. Overall, improvement planning is now good. Some satisfactory improvements have been made to the school's information and communication technology (ICT) provision, although financial constraints still hinder its development and access within subjects. Access to the school's successful sixth form has been improved. However, there are important aspects of the school's accommodation which remain unsatisfactory, and such improvements are not entirely in the hands of the governing body.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Pupils' achievement is **good**. Their attainment on entry to the school is average overall. However, currently, about a third of the pupils had literacy difficulties when they started in Year 7. Over recent years, the school has shown above average performance overall by Years 9 and 11, when compared with all schools nationally. The table below shows performance by Year 11 to be below that of similar schools in 2004, compared with the pupils' prior attainment in Year 9. However, inspectors find the pupils make good progress by Year 9, and this is maintained satisfactorily to Year 11. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. Punctuality and attendance are satisfactory overall. Pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is **satisfactory** overall.

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

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.

Standards in literacy, and pupils' competency in mathematics and ICT, are average by Years 9 and 11. Pupils with special educational needs, and those who are gifted, talented or gifted and talented, achieve well. Inspection judgements are that, by Year 9, standards of attainment are above average in mathematics, science, geography, and physical education. They are below average and achievement is unsatisfactory in art and design and citizenship. Standards are average in all other subjects. Achievement is very good in physical education. It is good in mathematics, science, ICT, geography, history and modern foreign languages. It is satisfactory by Year 9 in all other subjects. By Year 11, standards of attainment are well above average in physical education. They are above average in English, mathematics, science, geography, history and modern foreign languages, and below average in art and design and in citizenship. Standards are average in all other subjects. Achievement is very good in physical education. It is satisfactory overall in work-related learning, art and design, music and design and technology. It is unsatisfactory in citizenship. However, achievement is good in all other subjects.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of education provided by the school is **satisfactory**. Teaching and learning are **good** overall. The curriculum is satisfactory overall, but opportunities for curriculum enrichment are good. Because of unsatisfactory aspects of parts of the buildings and accommodation, resources for learning are unsatisfactory overall. Ensuring good standards of care and trusting relationships is important to the school. However, because of some health and safety issues arising from the accommodation, which the governors are resolving, the overall care, welfare, health and safety is judged unsatisfactory. The support, advice and guidance provided for pupils are satisfactory in the main school. Partnership links with parents and other links through the community are satisfactory. Educational links with other schools and colleges are satisfactory overall.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership, management and governance of the school are **satisfactory** overall. The headteacher provides good leadership, and is helping to make the school's leadership team increasingly effective. The leadership and management of other key staff is satisfactory overall. Governors use their specialist knowledge, experience and skills well to the benefit of the school. However, the governing body does not meet fully its statutory requirements. Some health and safety issues were brought to the attention of the governing body.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

In discussions with inspectors, and through the questionnaires, pupils express good attitudes towards the school, and want to do well. They appreciate the very good working relationships within the school. However, they have a poor opinion of the condition of the accommodation. Inspectors have much sympathy with the pupils' views. Parents are supportive of the school and many make a specific decision to choose it for their child. However, they would appreciate improved information on their children's progress, and improvements to the accommodation. Inspectors agree.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- to ensure the successful completion of the school's review of its leadership and management;
- to ensure whole-school, common strategies relating to assessment are established and applied fully by all subjects and departments;
- to ensure whole-school, common strategies relating to the curriculum, and national strategies, are established and applied fully by all subjects and departments;
- to secure the necessary improvements in the provision for art, citizenship, design and technology and work-related learning;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- take the necessary action, along with other responsible authorities, to resolve deficiencies in the school's buildings and accommodation, affecting the welfare and safety of staff and pupils;

- ensure National Curriculum requirements for the teaching of design and technology in Years 7 to 9, and the requirements for careers and work-related education in Years 7 and 8, are met fully;
- ensure the requirement to report to parents on citizenship education is met fully;
- ensure full planning is in place for the support of ethnic minority, traveller and refugee pupils.

SIXTH FORM SECTION OF THE SUMMARY REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The cost effectiveness of the sixth form is **satisfactory** overall. However, teaching and learning in the sixth form are **very good**. Students' attitudes and behaviour are **very good**. Standards of attainment are **well above average** overall, and students' achievement is **very good**. Attendance and punctuality by students are **satisfactory**.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Standards by Year 13 are above average in tests and examinations when compared with all schools nationally;
- Very good teaching and learning in the sixth form enables students to achieve very well;
- Students' attitudes to learning, and their studies, are very good in the sixth form;
- Students make good progress, and are successful in going on to study further when they leave;
- Provision is good in the range of subjects inspected in depth, and very good in physics, leisure and recreation, psychology and French;
- The promotion of students' personal development through the tutorial programme, and other opportunities to promote personal, social, health and citizenship education, is underdeveloped;
- The quality of the school's accommodation and some resources, including the library and access to ICT resources, are a barrier to students' learning.

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 | Very good. Teaching and learning are very good overall in Years 12 and 13 because of teachers' very good subject knowledge. Consequently, students achieve very well to attain above average standards. |
| Mathematics | Good. Attainment is above average by Year 13. Students are making good progress in both Years 12 and 13, and achievement is good overall. Teaching and learning are good, and teachers' subject knowledge is secure. |
| Science - Physics | Very good. Students' achievement is very good, and their attainment is well above average overall. The effectiveness of teachers' methods is very good, and consequently students show very good attitudes and learn very well. |
| Information communication technology | and Good. Teaching and learning are good overall. Students have very good attitudes, and progress well throughout Years 12 and 13. However, achievement is currently good in Year 12 and satisfactory overall in Year 13. |
| French | Very good. Standards are above average in Years 12 and 13. Students achieve very well, and show excellent attitudes towards the subject. Teaching and learning are very good, and teachers have high levels of expertise. |
| History | Good. Students attain average standards, but their achievement is good because they make better than expected progress. This is because teaching and learning are consistently good. Working relationships are good. |

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Leisure and recreation | Very good. Students make very good progress, and standards are well above average. Teaching is very good, and supported very well by teachers' very good subject knowledge. Consequently, achievement is very good. |
| Psychology | Very good. Standards are above average, and students' achievement very good by Year 13. Students make good progress in Years 12 and 13 because of very good teaching. Students' learning, and their attitudes, are very good. |

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

Overall, students receive **good** support, advice and guidance from their teachers because overall working relationships are good. This is coupled with good diagnostic assessment in the sixth form, and the good monitoring of their work. Students' access to support, advice and guidance from agencies outside the school is satisfactory overall. Students enjoy being in the sixth form and feel supported well by their teachers. For the same reasons as in the main school, arrangements to ensure students' care and welfare are unsatisfactory overall because of issues, and some limitations, relating to the school's buildings and accommodation and its maintenance and upkeep. Students' involvement in the life and work of the school is **satisfactory** overall.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The leadership and governance of the sixth form are **good**. The leadership of the sixth form is committed to high expectations for students both academically and personally. Governors are well informed about the work of the sixth form. The management of the sixth form is **satisfactory** overall. This is because, as in the main school, the threads of some whole-school approaches, and national strategies, have yet to be drawn together effectively enough. Nevertheless, the dedicated team of heads of year, and sixth form tutors, know the students well and work hard to give them good support. The leadership and management of the sixth form courses inspected are good overall.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Sixth form students express positive attitudes towards the school, and do so in a manner befitting their status as the most senior pupils. Their approach springs not only from their own desire to do well, but also because they appreciate the very good quality of the teaching. Students are therefore largely positive about the academic side of sixth form work, but less complimentary about other aspects of provision. In particular, they would appreciate the opportunity to have their views on the life and work of the school taken more into account. Furthermore, some students were critical of the careers guidance, feeling it is left to them to seek out advice from outside agencies, rather than it being offered as part of their broader careers education. Inspectors judge these are valid developmental points within what is otherwise a good picture.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Achievement¹ is **good** overall. It is good in Years 7 to 11 and very good in the sixth form. Standards² in work and lessons seen are **above average** overall. Attainment is above average by Years 9 and 11 and well above average by Year 13.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Because pupils are enabled to achieve well, standards by Year 11 in examinations are above average compared with other schools nationally.
- Overall, pupils and students make good progress as they move through the school.
- Sixth form students are enabled to achieve very well overall, and build well on their successes gained in Year 11.
- The achievement of pupils, particularly in Years 7 to 9, is adversely affected because of underdeveloped whole-school approaches to national strategies.
- Unsatisfactory provision in art, citizenship and aspects of design and technology, and poor leadership in art, result in unsatisfactory standards and achievement in these subjects.
- Good provision in a range of subjects, and very good provision in physical education, enable pupils to achieve well by Years 9 and 11.

Commentary

1. The attainment of pupils on entry to Holy Family Catholic High School is average overall. However, it is a school which takes its pupils from some 30 primary schools, situated all over the Liverpool area. Currently, about a third of the pupils had literacy difficulties when they started in Year 7. Nevertheless, the school enables its pupils to make good progress as they move through the school. This is because of the good quality of teaching and the good provision for pupils with special educational needs, which support learning well.
2. Pupils' attainment at GCSE in 2004 was above average when compared with all schools nationally. It was well above average when compared with similar schools. Provisional results for the Year 9 tests in 2004 show above average performance overall by Year 9, when compared with all schools nationally. Results in English and science were above average, and those for mathematics average. Compared with similar schools³ nationally, attainment was well above average overall by Year 9.
3. When compared with schools whose pupils attained similar standards previously in Years 6 and 9, the school's performance in 2004 was below average. However, this prior attainment analysis, based on the pupils' national test and examination point scores⁴, must be viewed with caution. In both Years 9 and 11 in 2004, these point scores fell on the borderline between two important benchmarks. The higher benchmark shows below average progress, but the lower one shows above average progress. Inspectors find the pupils make good progress overall by Years 9 and 11. Furthermore, inspectors accept there were some additional factors outside the school's control which temporarily affected its performance at an important time early in 2004. These included the resignation of the headteacher to take up another post within the authority, and a separate flood and fire, which significantly disrupted teaching and learning.

¹ Achievement refers to the progress pupils make in terms of where they started when they entered the school. Thus, good achievement does not necessarily mean that standards are above average, but that pupils do well and make better than expected progress.

² Attainment refers to the standards pupils achieve compared with national averages.

³ Here, similar schools refers only to those with a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals.

⁴ The average point score provides schools with a single statistic to compare the overall grades attained by their pupils with the grades attained by pupils in another school. At Key Stage 3, the level attained by each pupil in English, mathematics and science is given a score. A Level 5 = 33 points, a Level 6 = 39 points and so on. Therefore, the average points score in the subject is worked out by first adding up all of the points based on the levels attained by the pupils, and then dividing this figure by the number of pupils who took the test. A similar system operates for grades attained in GCSE and A-level examinations.

4. The school sets itself satisfactory targets for success in national tests and public examinations, and continues to set realistic targets for improvement. In 2004, it met successfully its targets for pupils by Year 11 and students by Year 13. However, it failed to meet fully its targets for pupils by Year 9. In English, additional literacy support is now being put into place. Mathematics results were affected by staffing issues, which have now been resolved. In common with a number of schools nationally, an issue relating to the introduction of new test papers affected some science results.
5. Overall, standards in literacy and pupils' competency in mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) are average by Years 9 and 11 and in the sixth form. However, the overall achievement of pupils in literacy, numeracy and ICT, particularly in Years 7 to 9, is affected by the lack of whole-school co-ordination for these important areas of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy⁵. Whilst there is individual good practice in a number of subjects, this is not shared effectively on a whole-school basis. Overall, the management of the national strategies to raise pupils' achievement is unsatisfactory. However, this is an issue which is now being tackled satisfactorily by the new headteacher. The achievement of pupils and students with a special educational need is good. There are currently no pupils or students at the school who are at an early stage of English language development, or who are refugees or travellers. Pupils and students who have been identified as gifted, talented or gifted and talented achieve well.
6. The achievement of pupils with learning difficulties is good in all year groups. However, poor literacy and numeracy skills limit their progress in their early years at the school. However, there are good strategies in place to raise achievement through the effective deployment of the teaching assistants in the classroom and through withdrawal sessions for specific learning.
7. Overall, the achievement of gifted, talented and gifted or talented pupils in lessons is good. All departments have identified such pupils in each year group. Policies are in place and departments show planning to meet the needs of gifted or talented pupils in schemes of work. Some subjects make good use of extension materials in lessons and have planned good enrichment activities, for example in physical education, modern foreign languages and geography.

Key Stage 3 (Pupils in Years 7 to 9)

8. By Year 9, there is no significant difference between the achievement of girls and boys. Over the three years from 2001 to 2003, the standards attained in the core⁶ subjects were well above average overall for both girls and boys. Overall, the school's rate of improvement has been above the national trend. Provisional results for 2004 in English and mathematics show above average performance when compared with all schools nationally, and well above average attainment in science.

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

| Standards in: | School results | National results |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|
| English | 34.4 (36.3) | 33.3 (33.4) |
| Mathematics | 35.5 (37.3) | 35.5 (35.4) |
| Science | 33.9 (36.2) | 33.1 (33.6) |

There were 131 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year (2003).

⁵ The National Key Stage 3 Strategy aims to raise the standards achieved by 11- to 14-year-olds by transforming approaches to teaching and learning. It supports five curricular strands: English, mathematics, science, ICT, and teaching and learning in the foundation subjects.

⁶ The National Curriculum core subjects are English, mathematics and science. The foundation subjects are art, design and technology, geography, history, ICT, modern foreign languages, music and physical education. In addition, religious education is taught to the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus.

9. Inspection judgements are that, by Year 9, standards are above average in mathematics, science, geography and physical education. Attainment is average in English, ICT, design and technology, history and modern foreign languages. Standards are below average in art and design, music, and in the personal, social, health and citizenship education course. Achievement is unsatisfactory in art and design, careers education, and in the school's personal, social health and citizenship education course. It is satisfactory in English, design and technology and music. Achievement is good in mathematics, science, ICT, geography, history and modern foreign languages. It is very good in physical education.

Key Stage 4 (Pupils in Years 10 and 11)

10. Between 2001 and 2004, the school's overall rate of improvement, whilst varying from year-to-year, has risen overall at the same rate as that seen nationally. There are no significant differences between the performance of boys and girls overall at GCSE. However, whilst in the three years from 2002 to 2004 girls' performance was above average compared with all schools nationally, that for boys was well above. In all years from 2001 to 2004, the performance of pupils gaining five or more A*-C passes has been consistently above average compared with all schools, and well above compared with similar schools. However, the percentage of pupils gaining higher A* and A grades is below average overall across a range of subjects. This is because of the school's inclusive approach in entering a higher than national average percentage of pupils for GCSE examinations in almost all subjects. Pupils of all abilities are challenged well to gain, or exceed, their predicted grades. This contributes well to the school's above average performance at grade C or higher pass levels. Consequently, the progress made between Years 9 and 11 for these pupils has been good.

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

| | School results | National results |
|---|----------------|------------------|
| Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades | 60 (58) | 52 (52) |
| Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades | 90 (94) | 89 (88) |
| Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades | 97 (96) | 96 (96) |
| Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects) | 37.8 (38.4) | 34.9 (34.7) |

There were 161 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

11. Inspection judgements are that, by Year 11, standards are well above average in physical education. Attainment is above average in English, mathematics, science, geography, history and modern foreign languages. Standards are average in ICT, design and technology overall, music and business education. They are below average in art and design. Standards are below average and achievement is unsatisfactory in the personal, social, health and citizenship education course. Achievement is satisfactory overall in work-related learning, art and design, ICT, music, and design and technology. It is good in English, mathematics, science, geography, history, modern foreign languages and business education. It is very good in physical education.

Sixth form (Students in Years 12 and 13)

12. In national terms, the attainment of students on entry into the sixth form is above average, and reflects the students' success in their GCSE examinations. Compared with all sixth forms⁷ nationally, the attainment of students by Year 13 in 2004 was well above average. Performance was above average for females and well above average for males. School analysis shows this gender variation resulted from predicted performances by individual students. The trend for the last three years shows no significant differences overall in the attainment of male and female students. Overall, analysis of the school's results shows students attain as well or better than predicted in almost all subjects on the basis of their GCSE results in Year 11. This is due not only to very good teaching and learning, but also to very good working relationships and the general support provided by staff for their students.

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

| | School results | National results |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Percentage entries gaining A-E grades | 90.5 (90.5) | 92.3 (92.3) |
| Percentage entries gaining A-B grades | 33.6 (37.8) | 36.2 (35.6) |
| Average point score per pupil | 311.2 (317.1) | 265.2 (258.2) |

There were 75 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

13. In the eight subjects inspected in depth during the inspection, students' standards are well above average in physics and in the leisure and recreation course. Attainment is above average in English, mathematics, ICT, French and psychology. It is average in history. Achievement is satisfactory overall in ICT. It is good in mathematics and in history. Achievement is very good in English, physics, French, psychology, and in the leisure and recreation course.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are **good** overall. Their personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is **satisfactory**. Pupils' attendance is **satisfactory** overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils and students are keen and enthusiastic learners who take their education seriously.
- The school provides a strong moral steer in pupils' and students' lives, but does not offer enough varied opportunities for pupils' personal development.
- Pupils and students show a good sense of self-control and responsibility for their own actions.
- Pupils and students have a strong capacity to take on responsibility and influence decision-making within the school, but formal structures to promote this are underdeveloped.
- Pupils' and students' chances to appreciate and understand the multicultural nature of our society are too few and far between.
- Attendance rates have fallen to below average in the current year.

Commentary

14. Pupils have good attitudes to their work and want to do well. There are very good working relationships within the school helping these well-motivated pupils to flourish in their academic learning. They have a naturally inbuilt sense of how to behave, and show a good deal of self-control and respect for each other. The school provides good behaviour support for the minority for whom this is difficult. Pupils are not confident in speaking and performing in front of an

⁷ All sixth forms nationally includes comprehensives with sixth forms, city technology colleges, and other secondary, grammar and modern schools.

audience. This is especially true in assemblies. Recognising this, the school is encouraging the greater participation of pupils in speaking and performing activities.

15. Pupils with learning difficulties are well integrated into classes. They have a good working relationship with teaching assistants. This contributes to their good motivation and progress with their learning in lessons. The learning support unit has its own systems for closely supporting certain groups of pupils with significant attendance problems, and these are having some success.
16. Pupils have a poor opinion of the condition and hygiene in the school. This is to a certain degree mirrored in their neglect of care for the premises, which at times is not as strong as it could be, especially in the amount of litter and food left around. However, inspectors have much sympathy with the pupils' views. Care for others who are less fortunate is a very strong feature of their personalities. Pupils raise considerable amounts each year for a number of charities and the school's influence, encouraging them that this is the Christian approach, is powerful. The moral encouragement the school provides is strong and the school chaplain makes a good contribution to this aspect of school life.
17. Opportunities for pupils to develop as well-rounded individuals capable of playing a full role in society are satisfactory overall. The good arrangement whereby Year 11 pupils act as mentors for pupils in Year 7 is a good example of the kind of thing which has yet to be expanded further. A good range of curricular enrichment activities, such as circus skills, electronics club and samba band, is helping to broaden pupils' experiences. The pupils' involvement in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme is a particular strength of the school. However, in a number of areas such as personal, social, health and citizenship education and in careers education, there are weaknesses. Inspectors' conversations with pupils showed the huge untapped capacity for them to play a much higher-profile role in improving the school, for example through a school council. Pupils would appreciate more involvement and consultation through such formal channels. Consequently, the school's vision statement "to develop pupils as well-rounded individuals, make a contribution to the community and the world and care about their environment" is not yet being realised to its full potential.
18. The new headteacher has recognised properly the need to inform the pupils and students better about the multicultural nature of our society today. She knows the school needs to be much more upfront in helping pupils to understand how other people live their lives. This is indeed the case as multicultural influences around school and within subjects are distinctly too low profile.

Sixth form

19. Sixth formers have very good attitudes to their work and they behave very well in a manner befitting their status as the most senior pupils. These very good attitudes come not only from their own desire to do well, but also because the teaching is very good and inspires them to even greater heights. Students have the capacity to make a real difference to the younger school community in terms of showing what good role-models they are, by helping out and developing their leadership skills. However, as in the main school, students would appreciate the more regular use of formal channels, such as the sixth form council, to help them to make a difference. Students' views are listened to and acted upon by the headteacher and key staff, but on a more informal basis which does not always get the publicity it deserves. Nevertheless, students are largely positive about the academic side of sixth form work.
20. The attendance rate in the sixth form is average and judged as satisfactory. Students are prompt to lessons and timekeeping is good. There are satisfactory procedures for checking on those who are absent for any length of time and for supporting them when they return.

Attendance

21. Whilst attendance is below the average overall, the attendance and punctuality of the majority of pupils, who attend regularly, is satisfactory. However, unauthorised absence is high compared with the national average. Taking into account a higher than usual amount of illnesses, including mumps and other viral infections, attendance has fallen this academic year. The school believes that holidays during term-time are another factor, but this currently accounts for only half of 1 per cent of all absences.
22. Nevertheless, the school has effective systems for monitoring the attendance of those pupils whose attendance falls below expectations, and such absences are rigorously followed up with parents. The school has a direct campaign to promote 100 per cent attendance by all pupils. However, displays and posters promoting attendance are not eye-catching or interesting enough to capture fully the pupils' imagination. Nevertheless, there has been a strong focus recently on rewarding pupils who have achieved full attendance, and this has had a positive effect on the more regular attenders across all year groups.
23. The school now has a full-time attendance officer, and the headteacher has provided a clear job description for this post. There is therefore a clearly defined, developmental role for this post. However, staff absences have meant chasing-up procedures with pupils have not been as consistently rigorous as they might. Heads of year monitor attendance regularly within the time they have and attendance targets are satisfactorily linked to the school's drive for 100 per cent attendance.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%): 2003-04

| Authorised absence | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| School data: | 6.9 |
| National data: | 6.9 |

| Unauthorised absence | |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| School data: | 1.6 |
| National data: | 1.1 |

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

Exclusions

24. Pupils and students are very rarely excluded in this school. This is because behaviour is good and any poor behaviour is dealt with through the school's effective sanctions and support systems, as implemented by the heads of year. Use of exclusions is extremely low compared with other schools nationally.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year: 2003-04

| Categories used in the Annual School Census |
|--|
| White – British |
| White – Irish |
| White – any other White background |
| Mixed – White and Black Caribbean |

| No of pupils on roll |
|-----------------------------|
| 923 |
| 8 |
| 2 |
| 3 |

| Number of fixed period exclusions | Number of permanent exclusions |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 18 | 1 |
| -- | -- |
| -- | -- |
| -- | -- |

| | | | |
|---|----|----|----|
| Mixed – White and Black African | 1 | -- | -- |
| Mixed – White and Asian | 4 | -- | -- |
| Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background | 1 | -- | -- |
| Black or Black British – African | 2 | -- | -- |
| Black or Black British – any other Black background | 1 | -- | -- |
| Chinese | 1 | -- | -- |
| Any other ethnic group | 2 | -- | -- |
| No ethnic group recorded | 17 | -- | -- |

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

Overall, the quality of education provided by the school is **satisfactory**. Teaching and learning are good overall. The curriculum is satisfactory overall, but opportunities for curriculum enrichment are good. Because of some unsatisfactory aspects of the school's buildings and accommodation, the overall resources for learning are unsatisfactory. The support, advice and guidance provided for pupils and students are satisfactory in the main school, and good in the sixth form. However, because of some health and safety issues arising from the accommodation, which the governors are resolving, the overall care, welfare, health and safety is judged unsatisfactory overall. Partnership links with parents and other links through the community are satisfactory. Educational links with other schools and colleges are satisfactory overall.

Teaching and learning

Teaching is **good** and learning is **good** overall throughout Years 7 to 11 and **very good** in the sixth form. The quality of assessment is **satisfactory** overall. It is **satisfactory** in the main school and is **good** in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is no whole-school policy or approach to assessment practice, and this is unsatisfactory.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils and students, which stimulate interest in learning.
- Teachers have a good specialist knowledge and understanding of their subjects.
- Good levels of challenge raise pupils' and students' expectations and support achievement.
- Some teachers do not give students sufficient opportunity to become involved fully in lessons.
- Teaching and learning are not currently effective in citizenship and in art.

Commentary

25. In Years 7 to 9, teaching and learning are very good in physical education. They are good in mathematics, science, ICT, geography, history and modern foreign languages. They are satisfactory in English, design and technology overall, and in music. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in art and design and in the school's personal, social, health and citizenship education course.
26. In Years 10 and 11, teaching and learning are very good in physical education. They are good in English, mathematics, science, ICT, geography, history, modern foreign languages, music and business education. They are satisfactory overall in design and technology. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in art and design and in the personal, social, health and citizenship education course.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 143 lessons

| Excellent | Very good | Good | Satisfactory | Unsatisfactory | Poor | Very Poor |
|-----------|------------|------------|--------------|----------------|----------|-----------|
| 5 (3.5%) | 38 (26.6%) | 59 (41.3%) | 31 (21.7%) | 9 (6.3%) | 1 (0.6%) | 0 (0.0)% |

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

27. Most of the unsatisfactory learning took place in Years 7 to 9. Where teaching is unsatisfactory or poor, this is due mainly to a lack of co-ordinated planning for the subject, as in the school's citizenship and personal, social and health education course. There is a lack of a whole-school approach to the effective support of learning in the subject. This is because the monitoring of teaching and learning in this citizenship course is unsatisfactory. Where good expertise exists, this is not being shared effectively to support and develop the teaching skills of non-specialist teachers. Where significant weaknesses occur in other subjects, such as art and design and technology, this is due mainly to a lack of challenge for the pupils. This is because the teachers concerned tend to dominate the lessons. Furthermore, there is a lack of probing questions to encourage pupils to think for themselves, and assessment and guidance to help pupils know how to improve are unsatisfactory. Overall, homework is used satisfactorily, but whilst being used to reinforce learning, it is not always used effectively to extend pupils' learning.
28. In some subjects, the quality of learning is adversely affected by the quality of the school's accommodation, particularly in the practical areas of design and technology and in music. Here, the working conditions and environment are not conducive to either learning or teaching. This is in spite of the best efforts of the music teachers, although some design and technology teachers do not do enough to make their workshops interesting places to be, and thus improve the quality of learning for their pupils.
29. Very good or excellent teaching in Years 7 to 11 is seen in a range of subjects. These include English, mathematics, science, ICT, business education, geography, history, modern foreign languages, personal and social education, and physical education. Overall, teachers have good, personal subject knowledge and expertise, and use this well to challenge the pupils. In the best lessons, there is very effective use of questioning to stimulate pupils' thinking, as well as enabling the teacher to assess effectively pupils' learning and progress. This is because the teachers' good command of their subjects has enabled them to plan their lessons well to ensure all groups of pupils are involved fully in the work. The objectives for lessons are shared clearly with pupils, and this enables a good pace to learning because pupils are clear about what it is they are aiming to achieve.
30. In lessons, there is good support for pupils with learning difficulties through the personal support of teaching assistants. The teaching assistants are deployed well to provide the maximum support and continuity for pupils in their learning. There is good recording and monitoring of pupils' progress by the teaching assistants and concerns are raised with subject teachers and the co-ordinator as issues arise. However, there is inconsistent use of specific teaching materials for pupils with learning difficulties in subjects across the curriculum.
31. In Years 10 and 11, pupils with learning difficulties make good progress when learning material is tailored to meet their learning needs and with the individual guidance from teachers. For pupils in Years 7 to 9, learning and progress are limited because of low standards in literacy and numeracy. Teaching assistants prepare well to support pupils in lessons through good liaison with subject teachers. Teaching assistants maintain good daily records of the work completed by pupils in order to monitor their progress and to identify the need for additional support if it is required, as when referring a pupil to the learning support unit for anger management.

Sixth form

32. In the eight sixth form subjects inspected in depth, teaching and learning are very good in English, physics, French, psychology and the leisure and recreation course. They are good in mathematics, ICT and history. All teaching and learning seen in the sixth form, including sampled subjects, was satisfactory or better, with nearly 90 per cent being good or better. This is because sixth form teachers are very secure in, and confident with, their subjects. In the best lessons, discussion and debate clearly reflect the mutually high expectations the students and teachers have of each other. This results in a positive and beneficial partnership in learning, and is also at the heart of why students are able to achieve very well across their range of subjects.
33. Assessment is generally good in the sixth form, and in psychology it is very good. Only in mathematics is the assessment system failing to support students sufficiently well. In most classes, students receive regular feedback in lessons on how they are doing, and there is a formalised system of monitoring cards, which they take home every half-term. They are appreciative of the information and support they are given.

Assessment

34. Overall, the quality of assessment has improved satisfactorily since the previous inspection. Key staff have now been given the responsibility for developing assessment and target setting and the appointment of a data manager has facilitated the use of whole-school data. Data is given to all departments and this is used well by many to develop a good knowledge of the needs of different groups of pupils. Most departments moderate the data they receive for their own pupils. However, there is currently no whole-school policy or common approach to assessment across the school. This is a significant weakness because it is part of an unresolved issue from the previous two inspections. Nevertheless, the new management of the school has stated the firm intention to resolve this situation, in consultation with staff, using best practice in the school to underpin their approach.
35. The thoroughness of the procedures in assessing pupils' work is inconsistent overall. Although there is some good and even very good practice in many departments, it is not yet sufficiently widespread for assessment to be judged good overall. Similarly, pupils' understanding of how to improve their own work is good in some subjects, and in several departments self-review by the pupils is being introduced satisfactorily. Consequently, more pupils are now aware of their own strengths and weaknesses. However, the overall quality of target setting varies considerably. In departments where assessment is good, pupils are aware of what their targets are and what they have to do to attain them. However, in a minority of subjects, marking is perfunctory, there are no formative comments and pupils are not aware of the criteria against which their efforts are being judged.
36. Overall, data is well used to monitor the progress of pupils with learning difficulties. Regular visits are made to primary schools by the special educational needs co-ordinator to see pupils in Year 6 with learning difficulties to assess their learning needs and to attend review meetings. Other pupils who may need help are also identified at this stage so that they can be monitored and assessed when they transfer into Year 7. The individual education plans are good and provide concise details of the pupil's learning difficulty, assessment information and classroom strategies for the teacher. There are clear targets for each pupil with an individual education plan and subject teachers inform the special educational needs co-ordinator about how well pupils have reached their targets.

The curriculum

Provision in the curriculum is **satisfactory** overall. It is satisfactory in Years 7 to 11 and good in the sixth form. The provision for enrichment and extra-curricular activities is **good**. Resources for learning are **unsatisfactory** overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum does not fully comply with all statutory requirements and has unsatisfactory features in Years 7 to 11.
- The unsatisfactory accommodation adversely affects learning across a range of subjects.
- Physical education and business education offer very good opportunities for all pupils taking the courses, and there is good provision in a number of other subjects.
- The sixth form curriculum in psychology and leisure recreation is very good.
- There is a wide range of activities enabling pupils and students to broaden their interests.

Commentary

37. The school provides a satisfactory curriculum, which gives pupils of all abilities a broad range of opportunities to progress in their education. There are not only a number of important strengths in provision, but also some significant weaknesses. The curriculum for English, mathematics, science and ICT is satisfactory, but with strengths in science for Years 10 and 11 where a good range of courses is well matched to all abilities. The curriculum in physical education is very good because of the wide range of provision, including extra-curricular opportunities. The curriculum for business education is also very good because of the diverse range of courses, both practical and academic. There is also a good-quality curriculum in geography, history and modern foreign languages.
38. However, the curriculum is unsatisfactory in a number of subjects. It lacks depth and breadth in art, with a narrow focus on drawing and painting. In design and technology, it does not meet National Curriculum requirements for Years 7 to 9. In the personal, social, health and citizenship education course, the curriculum lacks cohesion and has developed piecemeal. The curriculum for careers education does not meet all statutory requirements, particularly in Years 7 and 8.
39. Overall, curricular provision for pupils in the main school, as part of the National 14 to 19 Strategy⁸, is satisfactory because it provides sufficient opportunities for learning to progress in most subjects. Pupils have good opportunities to access the curriculum, irrespective of age, gender or ability. The school provides satisfactory opportunities for enabling pupils to move onto the next stage of education or to employment. For example, work-related learning in Years 10 and 11 enables all pupils to gain work experience and to learn about working practices. However, departmental provision is inconsistent. Curriculum innovation is satisfactory, with good practice in a number of subjects, including geography and music.
40. Pupils are given good opportunities to take part in a varied programme of activities, which take place following morning and afternoon school. This includes a wide range of sporting, dramatic and other leisure pursuits. Opportunities for extra-curricular sporting and team activities are very good and pupils speak enthusiastically about their participation in these. Additional time is provided for homework, further study and revision classes. In Years 10 to 13, there is a thriving and well-supported Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, which includes an activity week in the Lake District. In science, there is a revision club, and there are opportunities for all year groups to attend science shows, lectures and a trip to the National Space Centre. In drama, all pupils have the opportunity to take part in school productions, and there are regular theatre visits. In modern foreign languages, there is an annual French study trip. In physical education, there is an annual football tour to Spain. In health and social care, pupils support reading in primary schools, and make visits to the elderly in care settings to help and support entertainment and activities.

Sixth form

⁸ Schools are required to comply with curriculum development in line with *The Learning and Skills Act 2000*, which sets out the key objectives for the government's 14 to 19 strategy, which extends aspects of inspection from 16 to 19 provision to 14 to 19 provision.

41. The sixth form curriculum is good. It provides well for all students in meeting their differing needs. In English, there is good choice enabling students to study either language or literature. The psychology curriculum is matched well to examination requirements. The very good French curriculum provides ample choice and covers a wide range of scientific, technical and social themes. There is a good range of vocational courses, which meet the needs of students well. For example, the leisure and recreation course provides very good opportunities for practical and investigative work. All students have good access to sixth form provision.
42. In the sixth form, there are good opportunities for curriculum enrichment. Students in psychology take part in the National Youth Parliament and Bar Council competitions, and attend conferences at universities. There is also a one-week trip to New York to meet university lecturers in psychology. In drama, Year 12 and 13 students are prepared well for National Youth Theatre auditions. In government and politics, there is an annual trip to the Houses of Parliament. In modern foreign languages, there is a Spanish work experience programme. In science, students attend a variety of lectures and an aeronautical engineering day.

Resources for learning

43. Accommodation is unsatisfactory because a very high proportion of rooms are uninviting. Some are depressing and the overall environment for learning is uninspiring. Pupils comment that the lack of display in some rooms, and especially the corridors, is a weak feature of the school. Pupils also complain about the condition and availability of hygienic toilet facilities. A shortage of rooms means that dining areas have to be used as classrooms, which results in intrusive noise from the kitchens. The beginning and end of these lessons are curtailed when the areas are about to be used, or have been used, for eating. The continuity of learning is adversely affected in science because there are insufficient laboratories. This is because pupils are not able to see practical demonstrations in ordinary classrooms. The accommodation for design and technology is poor. All the rooms are old and in urgent need of upgrading. The room used to teach resistant materials is very untidy and is organised poorly. The sports hall is of a suitable size and is equipped satisfactorily, but there is inadequate storage space. This reduces the scope of physical activities which can be attempted because large pieces of apparatus line the walls. The changing rooms are cramped and need redecorating. There are occasions when older pupils change with younger ones, and this is unsatisfactory. The rooms allocated to teach music and modern foreign languages are dispiriting and, for each subject, far apart. During the inspection, a number of health and safety issues were raised with the school, and these are dealt with in paragraph 47.
44. The library has improved since the previous inspection, but remains too small to house a whole class. There are not enough reading or reference books for any subject. There are only four computers. These are insufficient to meet the needs of pupils to research topics or word-process work. Inadequacies in the library accommodation and resources remain an unresolved issue from the previous inspection. The school is staffed fully with well-qualified teachers, including staff with responsibility for pupils with special educational needs. The majority of subjects have an adequate number of suitable textbooks, videos and equipment to support teaching. Although there are networked rooms, there are not enough computers for pupils to learn in the classrooms. Consequently, computers are not used enough in lessons. Science and ICT have good technical support.
45. The accommodation for the special educational needs department is satisfactory and it meets teaching requirements. Wheelchair access is satisfactory. There is a good office and a small teaching room. However, there is a limited stock of specialist resources for teaching pupils with learning difficulties. There are no resources for ICT to enhance or extend the learning of pupils in the special educational needs department. Nevertheless, the requirements of pupils with special educational needs for support in lessons are met well by six teaching assistants.

Sixth form

46. Students share the main school accommodation and are similarly affected by its weaknesses. However, they benefit from the specific sixth form centre, which improves a proportion of the conditions for learning. Specialist teachers contribute significantly to achieving good examination results. However, the availability of computers for private study is inadequate.

Care, guidance and support

Arrangements to ensure pupils' care and welfare are **unsatisfactory** overall. Pupils receive **satisfactory** support, advice, and guidance. The extent of the school's involvement of pupils in its work and development is **unsatisfactory** overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The governors are doing all they can to secure necessary improvements in health and safety.
- The roles and responsibilities of form tutors are not sufficiently well clarified.
- There are very limited formal procedures for consulting with pupils and students.
- There are useful review systems in place where form tutors meet with pupils and their parents to discuss progress.
- Year 7 and 8 pupils are not receiving their entitlement to careers education.
- Contingency planning is not in place for refugees, travellers, or pupils whose first language is not English.

Commentary

47. During the inspection, a number of health and safety issues were brought to the attention of the school and the governors. These relate directly to aspects of the quality of accommodation in design and technology, art, music, physical education, the condition of temporary classrooms, and the use of the dining areas as classrooms. Subsequently, inspectors held a most helpful meeting with representatives of the school, the governing body, and the local education authority. The school's architects represented the Diocesan Education Authority, which has an important responsibility for the funding of the school. As a result of these discussions, an action plan involving short-, medium- and long-term plans has been drawn-up successfully to secure the necessary improvements. Progress on the action taken relating to these plans will be reported to parents on a yearly basis in the governors' annual report.
48. Day-to-day care, which staff show for pupils, is good, and especially so through the services offered by the learning support unit. It is here where pupils, coping with a variety of issues preventing them from learning as well as they might do, are helped through difficult times and put back onto the right track. This is funded through the school's involvement with Excellence in Cities and staffed effectively by the head of the unit and two experienced learning mentors. Throughout the school, good working relationships between staff and all groups of pupils are making for a positive learning atmosphere in lessons. The school's own survey of pupils' views revealed a high degree of satisfaction regarding teachers' ability to help with problems. Pupils are very clear about the good-quality systems in place, supporting them through any incidents of bullying. They are happy that staff listen to them and take firm action. Inspectors agree with these views.
49. Overall, the way in which form tutors carry out their roles lacks consistency in quality and effectiveness of provision. Inspectors' attendance at the 10-minute registration time confirmed this. Some form tutors have established successfully better pastoral working relationships with their forms than have others. Some heads of year are now being given additional non-contact time to enable the more effective development and fulfilment of their roles. Furthermore, recent developments under the new headteacher are ensuring the curriculum and pastoral roles within year groups are defined more clearly.

50. As part of the headteacher's reorganisation of the school's management, there is now a clear job description for the new role of senior tutor, which reflects the reorganisation of the pastoral system. However, the role of heads of year, in providing guidance through year group events and activities designed to help pupils develop as well-rounded individuals, is yet to be developed fully. There are a few initiatives to help staff develop into more effective year group teams and more are envisaged in the long term. Nevertheless, a strength of the pastoral system is the day wherein form tutors meet with pupils and their parents to talk over how things are going and to set targets for improvement. This occurred during the last day of the inspection and was seen to be working well. However, the guidance for pupils in Years 7 and 8 on careers and how they need to start thinking about what life after school may hold for them is unsatisfactory. This is because there is no taught careers programme in place in these years, contrary to statutory requirements.
51. There is very good support, welfare and guidance for pupils with special educational needs. This is provided through the special educational needs department, the learning support unit, and the school's pastoral team. The special educational needs department is responsible for pupils on the special educational needs register using teaching assistants for in-class support and through withdrawal lessons. However, during break and lunchtimes, pupils with learning difficulties do not have anywhere specifically to go if they need personal support and guidance.
52. The learning support unit, including learning mentors, deals with the day-to-day short- and long-term concerns of pupils, which are having an impact on their learning, such as poor behaviour, bereavement and personal problems. There is good liaison between special educational needs teachers and support staff to share information and provide the best strategy to support pupils. Pupils may go directly to the learning support unit to seek help, as well as being referred through heads of year. Decisions are made as to whether support is provided through the unit or, if the pupil is on the special educational needs register, to involve the special educational needs co-ordinator. This is achieved through consultations between the manager of the learning support unit with the special educational needs department when decisions need to be made. The further development of this process has been identified in development planning by the department. Nevertheless, there are regular formal and informal meetings between the teaching assistants and the special educational needs co-ordinator to review the provision for pupils with learning difficulties and to resolve specific issues concerning individual pupils. There is good close monitoring and care of pupils. However, the school does not have any policies or contingency plans for pupils with English as an additional language, travellers or refugees and this is unsatisfactory.
53. Child-protection procedures are good and the 'named person' has a strong commitment to continuing training to a high level of competency. The numbers of families with whom there is contact in this role continues to grow. There is a good degree of liaison with a range of external agencies, who provide different levels of support for pupils. Training is good and staff receive regular briefings to keep them up to date.
54. Consultation with pupils and students is unsatisfactory overall, and an area the new headteacher has already moved to improve. She has demonstrated a strong commitment to giving pupils and students a voice, for example through a school council. In turn, they are positive about her effect and the way she is already a high-profile presence around the school. There have been some recent consultations with pupils over the curriculum and their attitudes to the school. The school's own survey has only just been published, but it reveals pupils' and students' unhappiness with the cleanliness and condition of the building. There were also concerns about the quality of the personal, social, health and citizenship education course and the careers programme. Inspectors agree improvements are required, as explained in the curriculum section of the report.

Sixth form

55. The procedures for academic monitoring are good and students and parents are regularly informed about progress. Underachievement is identified and appropriate support is given.

Consequently, the support and guidance students receive in the sixth form are good. Students are the first to praise subject staff for the help and support they give them throughout their time in the sixth form. Half-termly monitoring cards provide a valuable guide on progress for both student and parent. However, there is a weakness in the students' perceptions of their personal guidance. Furthermore, the quality of the tutorial programme is unsatisfactory because there is little provision for a personal development programme outside of general studies. Some students were critical of the careers guidance and feel it could be taught more regularly, particularly as the local education authority's contract with the Connexions service only allows limited time for sixth form students. Inspectors judge these are valid developmental points within what is otherwise a satisfactory careers picture. However, whilst most students go on to higher education, there is good evidence of the school making the necessary appointments with a Connexions officer for students wishing to explore the world of work. There is a high-profile week each year during which students have the opportunity to explore well their potential options, following which they are encouraged, and expected, to undertake their own research, particularly using the Internet. Students are offered good opportunities to visit universities and sample courses.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's links with parents are **satisfactory** overall. Links with the community are **satisfactory** in both the main school and in the sixth form. Partnerships with other schools and educational establishments are **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are provided with a good number of opportunities to find out about pupils' progress.
- Parents provide an impressive amount of financial support for the school.
- There are good links with parents of pupils with a special educational need.
- The school's links with the wider community are very limited.
- Links with other educational establishments, to share good practice, are limited.
- Working relationships with main feeder primary schools are developing well.

Commentary

56. Parents are supportive of the school and many make a specific decision to choose it for their child. They translate their faith in the school into good support for fundraising events. The annual amount they give is impressive and makes a significant difference to the quality of that which their children are offered.
57. The school provides parents with a good number of chances to visit and find out how their children are progressing. Parents from most year groups receive termly assessment sheets, a parents' evening with subject teachers, and an invitation to review day where they meet with form tutors and discuss, with their children, how things are going. Pupils' reports are helpful and individual to the child. This means parents are kept well informed about progress. However, there is a weakness because the school is not reporting on citizenship, as it should be.
58. Parents whose children attend the learning support unit enjoy a good level of contact through the work of learning mentors. The mentors make a fair number of home visits and if they cannot provide the family with help, they often point to people who can. They succeed in building up strong links with families. The school hopes to develop more of this kind of supportive work with

parents and a new post is now in place to build on these recognised links. However, budgetary constraints are making developmental work such as this very difficult.

59. Good-quality reviews of pupils with special educational needs are undertaken as required involving parents, school staff and the appropriate agencies to ensure needs are assessed and catered for fully. There is good contact with parents at all times when there are concerns about the learning, behaviour or attitude of pupils. Nevertheless, not all parents attend review meetings.
60. There has not been a strong tradition in this school of looking outward to establish the kinds of links with the wider community which most schools now enjoy. The school's most effective and active links have been through the local faith community. However, although the school uses the nearby Roman Catholic church for its annual Christmas service, there are few other contacts influencing pupils' personal development. Nevertheless, whilst contacts adding business or industry skills to the curriculum have been limited in the past, there is good evidence for growing links, for example through the local Rotary Club. There are good links with local sports clubs through the physical education department. There are other satisfactorily developing links for some pupils through, for example, disability rights groups, play-schemes and community projects involving local hospitals. The school's programme over the past year shows a useful range of visiting speakers in support of a satisfactory range of subjects and activities.
61. Links with other schools and educational establishments are currently few and far between. One essential difficulty preventing more partnerships is the school's timetable, which is at odds with that of many others. However, this is changing and the school is hopeful that it will allow it more freedom to develop relationships and learn from others. Nevertheless, the school is fully using its entitlement to access at the North Sefton City Learning Centre, and visits are proving useful as a way to motivate a group of boys who have been highlighted as being at risk of underachieving. There have been joint visits abroad with other schools and shared sixth form drama workshops.
62. The main strength in its work with other schools is through the developing primary school links. This is especially so for music, physical education and French. Its music technology course for pupils in Years 5 and 6 is part of tradition. There is an established rolling programme of events organised for primary schools, and staff visit to take specialist lessons. In addition, the school is involved in working parties with other schools to share good practice in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science.

Sixth form

63. Parents receive the same good-quality information about progress as they do in the main school. However, community links are a little stronger at sixth form level. Although there is still much scope for development, good practice in the leisure and recreation course is setting the standard at which to aim. Visits to the local sports and leisure centre to find out how events are organised, together with useful first-hand knowledge passed on from the editor of a local newspaper, means students are learning well from real-life experiences. There are also good links with local universities, where students attend lectures as guests.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school are **satisfactory** overall. The headteacher provides **good** leadership. The leadership of the sixth form is **good** and that of other key staff is **satisfactory** overall. The overall management of the school and the sixth form is **satisfactory**. The governance of the school is **satisfactory** overall. However, the governing body does not fully meet its statutory requirements concerning the curriculum for pupils in Years 7 to 9 and the reporting of citizenship education. Plans for the support of ethnic minority, traveller and refugee pupils are not in place.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The new headteacher is providing good leadership and taking firm action for improvement.
- Governors are supportive and have an improving knowledge about the work of the school.
- Procedures to review the work of the school are unsatisfactory.
- Financial management and control are good.
- There are weaknesses with the whole-school co-ordination of national strategies.
- National Curriculum requirements are not met fully in design and technology, citizenship, and in careers education in Years 7 and 8.

Commentary

64. The newly appointed headteacher recognises the urgent need to move the school forward and has developed a good school improvement plan which focuses well on improving leadership and management, assessment, the curriculum and the learning environment. She is working successfully with governors and staff to implement this plan, but it is too early to see any changes relating to pupils' standards and achievement. Nevertheless, there is a recognition that, until the recent past, a number of departments, whilst successful in themselves, have been rather insular in approach. This has resulted in a lack of co-ordination and the unsatisfactory management at whole-school level of important national strategies and initiatives. This is a significant weakness, which the new headteacher is slowly and steadily resolving through a review of the school's management structure. The views of pupils and parents show she is having a good impact on the school, and communications with parents have improved. At the meeting with parents before the inspection, parents were very supportive of her approach to securing improvement.
65. Good progress has been made with the reorganisation of the senior leadership team and in the designation of their roles and responsibilities. New policies and procedures are being implemented satisfactorily. For example, improvements with assessment and the use of data at whole-school level have been supported well by the new data manager, but practices remain inconsistent across subjects. Procedures to review whole-school policies and practices have not been implemented fully and this remains a weakness, and is unsatisfactory, although the intention to resolve this is clearly evident. Overall, the newly revised line management of departments by senior staff, who provide satisfactory support, is effective.
66. The leadership of most departments is good. There is very good leadership in geography and physical education because of dedicated specialist teachers who are innovative and have a clear vision for their subjects. However, leadership is unsatisfactory in design and technology. In art, leadership is poor because of a lack of vision and the low morale of staff. Management of departments is satisfactory overall. However, features of good management are to be seen across a number of subjects. These include effective teamwork, good planning and systems to review the work of the subject. Management is unsatisfactory in English, design and technology, art and citizenship. There is unsatisfactory management in these subjects because of a failure to implement effective procedures to review the work of the department. There are particular weaknesses with the co-ordination of numeracy and work-related learning. There is no co-ordinator for numeracy and this leads to weaknesses with the use of mathematics across the school. The required whole-school audit of work-related learning has not yet been completed. There are no common procedures to monitor and evaluate learning.
67. The co-ordinator for special educational needs provides very good leadership for the good team of well-qualified teaching assistants. Although only recently appointed, there is already an ethos for high-quality support and teamwork. This is evident through the commitment and obvious good working relationship between the co-ordinator and the teaching assistant team. In the short time the co-ordinator has been in post, good management systems have been established to manage documentation and reviews. All departments have been supplied with comprehensive information for all pupils on the special educational needs register, including individual education plans. The teaching assistants are deployed well and provide good support for pupils in the classroom. There are good opportunities for the teaching assistants to attend courses to maintain and improve their expertise. Information is shared well when they return to

school from a course. The co-ordinator is establishing good working links with the main feeder primary schools, ensuring that when pupils transfer to the secondary school their needs are catered for very effectively.

68. A new co-ordinator to develop and monitor the provision of gifted or talented pupils was appointed last year. Good progress has been made in developing departmental policies, but the use of materials for pupils of different abilities is underdeveloped. The co-ordinator has provided a series of courses for gifted and talented pupils as extension activities within school and through the local education authority. However, there has been no attempt by the co-ordinator to identify examples of good practice in departments and to share this across the school. There are no clearly defined curriculum strategies to promote and extend initiatives for gifted or talented provision.
69. A school governor is attached to the special educational needs department. The governor has recently taken on this role and is already well informed about provision for pupils with learning difficulties and has reported on this to the governing body. The annual governors' report to parents meets statutory requirements by providing information regarding provision to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties.
70. The governance of the school is satisfactory. Governors use their specialist knowledge, experience and skills well to the benefit of the school. Through high-quality reports from the newly appointed headteacher, governors are developing a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. The role of critical friend is well developed by the chair of governors, but the attachment of governors to subjects is underdeveloped. Governors are now well informed about the school improvement plan and are involved actively with improving the quality of accommodation. Whilst the governing body has fulfilled most of its statutory duties, the school is not meeting the requirements for careers education in Years 7 and 8, the curriculum in design and technology in Years 7 to 9, and reporting on citizenship. The governors and headteacher are aware of the non-compliance issues and inspectors are satisfied that they are taking the necessary action to remedy the situation.

Sixth form

71. Governors are well informed about the work of the sixth form. The leadership of the sixth form is committed to high expectations for students both academically and personally. The dedicated team of heads of year and sixth form tutors know the students well and work hard to give them good support. The day-to-day management of the sixth form is satisfactory. There are regular meetings to review key areas such as attendance, academic monitoring, induction and university entrance. The subject leadership and management of courses in the sixth form are good overall, and highly qualified and committed subject staff plan courses very well.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

| Income and expenditure (£) | | Balances (£) | |
|----------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------|---------|
| Total income | 3,656,325 | Balance from previous year | 174,799 |
| Total expenditure | 3,692,098 | Balance carried forward to the next | 139,026 |
| Expenditure per pupil | 3,745 | | |

72. The financial management of the school is good. The school monitors income and expenditure very carefully. The bursar and the governors ensure the school finances are handled efficiently and that the principles of best value are adhered to well. Departments are provided with regular

statements to monitor their spending. In the current financial year, the school is predicted to carry forward a deficit balance caused solely by external funding factors. Credit balances, earmarked for accommodation improvements, have had to be used to put right the damage caused by the flood and fire in 2004. Furthermore, there was a rise in staffing costs and a fall in pupil numbers. Population trends in the area mean the school is now facing a period of falling rolls. To minimise the impact, governors are planning decisive action to reduce staff numbers and are drawing-up an agreed budget recovery plan with the local education authority. The most recent audit of school finances by the local education authority confirms the efficient management of procedures. All the recommendations made have now been resolved. The school provides satisfactory value for money and the sixth form is cost effective. The new headteacher is creating a good atmosphere for improvement. However, financial constraints are a major barrier to improvement.

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

Work-related learning

Provision for work-related learning and careers education is **unsatisfactory** overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Statutory requirements for careers education in Years 7 and 8 are not met.
- There is a well-thought-out programme of work experience in Years 10 and 11.
- There are examples of good practice in a number of individual subjects.
- Most departments do not make their required contribution to work-related learning.
- There is no effective whole-school monitoring of work-related learning.

Commentary

73. In Years 7 to 9, the school is not meeting its statutory requirement, introduced in September 2004, to extend the teaching of careers education into Years 7 and 8. Although a sound scheme of work for careers in Years 7 and 8 has been devised, this has not yet been implemented. Furthermore, opportunities to learn about work through all subjects of the curriculum are patchy. Not all departments have carried out the required audit to identify areas in their schemes of work where work-related learning may be promoted properly. However, there is some good practice in other aspects of careers and work-related learning.
74. When learning about work, there is comprehensive assistance for Year 9 pupils choosing their options for Year 10. In Years 10 and 11, the application of classroom learning to the 'real' world is good in business studies. Furthermore, a high proportion of sixth form students go on to higher education. There is some good practice in terms of learning about work. For example, students' knowledge of the vocational area they are studying is good in particular subjects, such as business studies. However, most pupils are not trained in effective self-evaluation, a skill which is required in a work situation, and good practice is not shared between departments. Overall, the work experience programme is not integrated into the work of departments, and so the potential benefits are not realised fully. Moreover, it is too dependent on one person organising it, placing it in jeopardy should that member of staff become unavailable.
75. The provision for learning through work is characterised by good practice in regard to work experience. In Year 10, pupils spend half a term preparing for work experience by undertaking activities such as learning how to choose a work placement. The Year 10 programme continues well in Year 11 when the pupils go on two weeks work experience following an industry day in school. This preparation helps to ensure the time actually spent on work experience is fruitful. In addition, the Curriculum Plus programme provides work experience for one day a week for a small group of pupils for whom traditional education is unsuitable. There is good practice in some departments, such as English and business studies in Years 10 and 11, and a Spanish work exchange experience in Year 12.

76. Leadership is satisfactory. This is because plans are in place for a more structured approach to work-related learning and careers, and some well-thought out and aspirational schemes are in place. The head of work-related learning and careers is committed to the extension of careers advice and work-related learning to all pupils, but some extensive absence by this co-ordinator has affected development in these areas. Nevertheless, management is unsatisfactory. This is because there is little teamwork across the school, and no formal monitoring and evaluation, and so the effect of work-related learning on pupils' achievement cannot be discerned. Plans have been drawn-up for the professional development of careers teachers, but policies are not applied systematically throughout the school and good intentions are not always followed through.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good behaviour management and good relationships promote very good attitudes.
- Teachers' enthusiasm for literature promotes pupils to gain a better understanding of texts.
- Management of the subject is not enabling a consistent approach in order to sustain above average standards.
- Support for literacy is insufficient within some subjects to combat the increasing levels of difficulty which pupils have on entry to the school.
- The quality of the accommodation restricts teaching and learning for some classes.

Commentary

77. Results in the 2004 GCSE English literature examination were well above average, but English language results fell to average for the first time in four years. Pupils come to the school in Year 7 having achieved slightly above average standards in the Year 6 tests. They all achieve satisfactorily in Years 7 to 9 to develop above average skills in understanding and responding to literature. However, the least competent pupils do not develop their language skills to the same level so standards are only average overall. Consequently, the results in the 2004 tests did not reach the school's expected targets for pupils achieving the expected Level 5⁹ or above. However, provisional unvalidated results show pupils achieved above average when compared with all schools nationally. Standards are above average in Year 11 and achievement is good. This is because teachers are highly committed to helping pupils to explore and appreciate complete works of literature. However, they are more reluctant to use fragments of texts in order to focus on language skills. The most competent pupils attain well in both language and literature. Other pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve well, as demonstrated in their clear appreciation of Macbeth's dilemmas. They identify well the ways in which Shakespeare portrayed these for an audience, but their written expression lacks skill and accuracy.
78. Teaching and learning are good overall. They are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, but good in Years 10 and 11. In the earlier years, the inconsistent emphasis on literacy skills is most pronounced, and there is more variation in the ways in which teachers teach and assess pupils' work. Teachers know their subject well and most organise the work so pupils are active and challenged throughout each lesson. However, some make too little use of the methods and materials which have been shown to be highly effective in supporting and improving literacy skills in schools across the country. All teachers give too much attention to assessing reading and understanding, and too little emphasis on gauging the quality of the writing when pupils express their understanding. Although teachers mark work regularly and assessment is satisfactory, their comments give pupils too little guidance about how to improve. Questioning in class is not used sufficiently well to check how successful the teaching has been. Nevertheless, pupils throughout Years 7 to 11 have very good attitudes towards the subject, and working relationships with teachers support pupils' approach to learning well.
79. Improvement since the previous inspection has been unsatisfactory, and results have declined. This is because teachers have not adopted the best practice seen in other schools, and staffing

⁹ The National Curriculum has been written on the basis that pupils, by the end of Year 9, are expected to reach Level 5. If a pupil is attaining Level 6 or 7 then he or she is reaching standards above that expected for a pupil of his or her age.

instability has made it hard to maintain standards. Nevertheless, leadership is currently satisfactory. The acting head of department, who has been in post for two terms, is working hard to provide good guidance and support for the team. However, management is unsatisfactory. This is because whole-school responsibilities mean there are too few experienced teachers who are committed to driving improvement forward. The acting head of department has not been able to monitor the work of the department, and the use of assessment data is at an early stage. Individual teachers are interpreting guidance in different ways and using different systems to tell pupils how well they are working. Consequently, the team is not able to identify quickly enough potential underperformance. Accommodation is unsatisfactory and too many lessons have to be adapted to enable them to be taught in the dining room.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

80. Standards of literacy across the curriculum are average, although oral skills are less well developed. The National Literacy Strategy¹⁰ was embraced initially when a co-ordinator was appointed and whole-school training raised awareness of what was needed. In some subjects, teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to use and extend their skills, and give good additional support for those who find writing difficult. In a Year 7 science lesson on reproduction, pupils were offered the opportunity to write a story about fertilisation from an egg's viewpoint. In geography, teachers make good use of templates to enable pupils to structure their written tasks. In music, ICT and business education, there are good examples of teachers emphasising the need to use correct vocabulary, and in providing displays to help pupils to do this. However, although the literacy coordinator works closely with the local authority on literacy initiatives, momentum overall for further development has slowed. This is because, although the development of literacy is satisfactory overall, the drive for further improvement, involving a consistent approach throughout all subjects of the curriculum, is unsatisfactory. Consequently, some very effective ideas from the National Literacy Strategy remain untried.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have very good knowledge and command of the languages they teach.
- Teachers prepare pupils well for national tests and examinations.
- Working relationships are good, which enables good teaching and learning.
- There is a lack of formal monitoring of teaching and learning within the department.
- Resources and accommodation restrict the use of ICT and some elements of learning.

Commentary

81. Standards at GCSE in French and Spanish in 2004 were significantly above the national average for both boys and girls. Pupils taking French achieved some four grades higher than other subjects taken at the same time, and nearly three grades higher in Spanish. Consequently, their achievements provided some of the best results for the school. All but a very few pupils were entered for a GCSE examination, and in French all achieved a pass grade. Pupils with learning difficulties who are entered for examinations achieve well. Teachers' assessments of pupils at the end of Year 9 in 2004 were average. Inspection judgements are that standards are average in Year 9 and above average in Years 10 and 11. There is clear evidence of the pupils' rising confidence in speaking French and Spanish, and in tackling effectively different exercises. This is reflected in rising standards of work and good progress throughout Years 7 to 11. Consequently, achievement is good by Years 9 and 11.

¹⁰ See footnote 5 for an explanation of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy.

82. Teaching and learning are good overall throughout Years 7 to 11. Pupils' learning is supported well because of the teachers' competence in the languages studied. Consequently, they provide very good role-models for all learners to follow. Furthermore, teachers have an extremely good grasp of examination requirements, and pupils are prepared well for the skills and strategies required for success. Working relationships are good, enabling the excellent advice given by teachers on test and examination requirements to be accepted and followed. Pupils work well and co-operatively in pairs and in groups. This is because teachers' planning is very good and lessons are structured well, thus allowing pupils to improve in confidence and knowledge and to undertake tasks effectively. The pace of the lessons is demanding and there are rigorous requirements for accuracy at all levels, which pupils work hard to meet. However, in a very few lessons, the teacher had difficulty in disciplining a minority of pupils. This was because these pupils lacked confidence, and the teacher did not have the strategies to support them. Overall, teachers use the department's resources well. However, ICT use is underdeveloped because of difficulties in booking rooms and access to equipment. Furthermore, learning is adversely affected by the poor accommodation, which also makes teaching difficult as teachers have to move around the school carrying resources, and displays are not always safeguarded.
83. Assessment is good overall because there are clear assessment tasks at the end of each unit of work. In Years 10 and 11, there is good marking for both content and accuracy with examination groups, and there are helpful comments, which show pupils how to improve. However, in Years 7 to 9, teachers' comments are not always as helpful as with the older pupils. Nevertheless, pupils keep satisfactory records of their achievement and have in many cases contributed well towards them. They understand well what they have to do to improve.
84. Leadership and management of the department are good. The acting head of department shows enthusiasm for the subject and for teaching, and this transmits itself readily to other staff and pupils. The examination courses have been chosen carefully to suit the needs and abilities of different groups of pupils. The careful study and use of the National Curriculum requirements and examination criteria to raise standards are exemplary. A good start has been made in implementing the National Key Stage 3 Strategy, and contact with other schools is helping to broaden work in the department. However, the formal monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, to ensure all work is of the standard of the very best, and that all learners have an equally good opportunity to succeed, are underdeveloped. Overall, improvement since the previous inspection is good.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The head of department provides very good vision and clarity of leadership.
- There is a whole-team commitment to the raising of standards.
- Very good working relationships exist between pupils and teachers, and support learning well.
- The use of dining rooms as classrooms is a barrier to learning.
- There is insufficient use of ICT within the teaching of mathematics.
- There is no whole-school co-ordination of mathematics across the curriculum.

Commentary

85. The percentage of pupils obtaining a GCSE grade A* to C in 2004 was above average. The performance of boys was better than that of the girls. In work seen during the inspection, pupils' attainment by Year 11 is above average, and their achievement is good. In 2004, standards attained in national tests at the end of Year 9 were average compared with the provisional results for all schools, although below average when compared with schools having similar levels of prior attainment. There was no significant difference between the attainment of girls and that of boys. In work seen during the inspection, attainment by Year 9 is above average

and represents good achievement. This improvement in standards is as a result of good teaching and the very good leadership provided by the recently appointed head of department.

86. The National Numeracy Strategy¹¹ is reflected well within the teaching of mathematics, and there is good teaching and learning across Years 7 to 11. Teaching was at least satisfactory in all lessons seen during the inspection, and there was a high percentage of very good and excellent practice. Pupils are set work which is suited well to their abilities. Teachers use well the individual education plans, which are provided for pupils with special educational needs. In very good or excellent lessons, teachers have high expectations of their pupils. Teachers demonstrate good classroom management skills, which lead to very good pupil behaviour and the acquisition of new skills and knowledge. Pupils in these lessons work well in groups, sharing ideas and enjoying independent learning opportunities. In less successful lessons, insufficient account is taken of the wide range of ability within the group and, as a result, there is a lack of challenge for the more able pupils. As was the case in the previous inspection, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to use ICT as part of the learning process. This is because although the use of ICT has been planned into the teaching programme, the department lacks suitable computers available for day-to-day use by the pupils.
87. The great majority of pupils are motivated well by the enthusiasm of their teachers and contribute well to class discussion and questioning. Working relationships between pupils and teachers are very good and are built upon trust, respect and good humour. The welcome, which the teachers extend to pupils as they enter the classroom, creates a good work ethos and helps lessons to start promptly and purposefully. Pupils' work is marked regularly, although there is some inconsistency in the giving of constructive advice to help improve future performance. Pupils' prior attainment is used effectively as a basis for planning work, and the use of data as a tool for setting targets and monitoring progress is much improved from the previous inspection. Satisfactory systems for recording assessment and producing targets have been established and implemented. However, a recognised area for development is the monitoring of marking to ensure pupils receive consistently diagnostic assessment, and maintain an acceptable standard of presentation.
88. Leadership of the department is very good because the recently appointed head of department has a clear vision for improving standards and receives strong support from the second in department. Issues which need to be resolved have been identified and prioritised, and policies and plans are in place to make things happen. The head of department is an excellent role-model for other teachers, with high expectations for the pupils, and has gained the respect and commitment of colleagues within the department.
89. Overall, management is good. A helpful departmental handbook has been produced recently, and sound new schemes of work introduced. The department is adequately resourced with regard to books, materials and equipment apart from computers. However, the accommodation for the teaching of mathematics remains unsatisfactory. Enforced early finishes and noise from surrounding areas adversely affect lessons and learning taking place, of necessity, in the dining room area. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. However, there remain concerns over the lack of opportunities for ICT and over the continued use of the dining room as a teaching area.

Mathematics across the curriculum

90. Overall, the National Numeracy Strategy¹² has been fully embraced within the teaching of mathematics itself, and is helping to raise standards of attainment at all levels. Consequently, pupils demonstrate a satisfactory ability to use and apply their numeracy skills in most subject areas. For example, in physical education, pupils measure heartbeats, draw graphs and interpret data satisfactorily. In history, pupils analyse election results, and in geography they use graphs to illustrate population trends and are proficient in the use of co-ordinates. In

¹¹ See footnote 5 for an explanation of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy.

¹² See footnote 5 for an explanation of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy.

science, pupils are satisfactorily able to analyse data, interpret charts and demonstrate good understanding of graphs. However, the school does not currently have a numeracy co-ordinator in post. Consequently, there is no overall view of whole-school provision, and this is unsatisfactory. Provision across departments is therefore inconsistent. In the best practice, departments plan well for the use of mathematics in their work, and implement a numeracy policy.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' achievement is good because of the promotion of improvement in standards.
- The high standard of the revised schemes of work in Years 7 and 8 supports improvement.
- Well-planned and structured lessons offer challenging ideas to the pupils.
- Teachers do not review enough the effectiveness of pupils' learning.
- Effective leadership and management form a good basis for continued improvement.
- Working relationships between teachers and pupils are good and support learning well.

Commentary

91. The results of the GCSE examinations in 2004 were above average. Provisional results for the standards at the end of Year 9 in the national tests in 2004 were above average. Inspection judgements confirm these standards. Achievement by Years 9 and 11 is good. Boys' achievement is higher than that of girls'. Pupils with special educational needs, and gifted or talented pupils, achieve well. A fundamental revision of the schemes of work in Years 7 and 8 has contributed well to the recent improvement in standards. However, this has not, as yet, been reflected fully in the results in national tests. The skills involved in investigations are taught well from Year 7, forming a firm base for the above average standards seen in GCSE coursework. However, the relatively short length of the lesson periods restricts the scope for practical work, thus reducing the opportunities for learning, and pupils' achievement.
92. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Tasks are usually matched well to the needs of the pupils, but, in a minority of lessons, there is insufficient material to stimulate higher-attaining pupils. Teachers have secure subject knowledge, structure their lessons well and in the majority of lessons put forward challenging ideas at a brisk pace. As a result, scientific ideas are presented in an interesting manner, so as to promote effective understanding by the pupils. Classes are managed well. Pupils respond with interest, behave well and co-operate with the teacher and each other in small group work. Learning objectives are stressed strongly, but the endings of lessons are sometimes hurried and do little more than review the main content. Therefore, the opportunity to assess the effectiveness of learning is missed. Pupils' work is corrected and marking is encouraging, but it does not always show the pupils how to improve. However, assessment overall is effective in relating pupils' current level or grade to their target.
93. Leadership and management are good. Leadership is ensuring the drive to improve standards in each year is focussed clearly and is shared by the teaching and non-teaching staff. The move this year to a staged assessment course at GCSE, aimed at limiting difficulties caused by poor long-term memory skills and falling interest, reflects the needs of the pupils more closely. The revised schemes of work for Years 7 and 8 are of a very high standard and provide a coherent, complete structure, thus enabling effective lesson plans to be produced. Test results are recorded, but they are not yet entered into an electronic database to identify more clearly underachievement and any widespread misunderstanding. Such a database is to be introduced next year, following a trial with the results of tests in the current Year 10. Although the head of department has only been in post a short period of time, the effectiveness of teaching and learning is not yet monitored regularly, and this is unsatisfactory. However, formal monitoring arrangements are currently being developed. Nevertheless, the department works well as a

team, assisting each other and sharing good practice. Accommodation is satisfactory, but three laboratories are not of the standard of the remainder. The support staff make a significant contribution to the effective management of the laboratories. There is a satisfactory level of resources, including a small ICT room. The department has made good improvement since the previous inspection. However, assessment of the effectiveness of learning is underdeveloped.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in ICT is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A very comprehensive assessment system supports pupils' achievement well.
- Lessons are planned well, and provide well for different styles of learning.
- Staff in the department are committed to raising pupils' standards and achievement.
- The co-ordination of ICT across other subjects of the curriculum is unsatisfactory.
- The limited use of, and access to, ICT by other subjects is an area of concern.

Commentary

94. All pupils in Years 10 and 11 now undertake a key skills course in ICT. They learn and apply ICT skills satisfactorily in a range of contexts. However, the course offered to these older pupils is too easy for some, particularly the higher attainers who are capable of a GCSE course. Consequently, there is some underachievement. The department is currently considering the introduction of a GCSE equivalent option. Test results at the end of Year 11 in 2004, and teacher assessments at the end of Year 9, were below average. However, inspection judgements are that standards are average by Year 9, and this represents good achievement from below average attainment on entry to the school in Year 7. Because of the continued good teaching, pupils maintain the progress made and standards are average and achievement satisfactory by Year 11. The standards and achievement of the older pupils have, to some extent, been hindered until recently by older computing resources.
95. The National Key Stage 3 Strategy¹³ for ICT has been adopted satisfactorily within the department, and this has led to the work being both challenging and at the required level in Years 7 to 9. Consequently, pupils are confident users of word processing and presentation software in Year 7. By Year 9, they satisfactorily carry out database searches and integrate the results into a word-processed report. However, in some lessons, pupils are not challenged sufficiently. For example, in a Year 7 lesson, involving computer generated graphics through the design of logos, several pupils had covered the same ground in primary school. By Year 11, pupils plan, draft and then evaluate their work well. They satisfactorily undertake database searches, including the use of spreadsheets, and higher-attaining pupils use well the advanced functions of program software. In all year groups, working relationships are cordial, resulting in good behaviour and attitudes in the classroom.
96. Teaching and learning are good overall across all year groups, and the teachers' subject knowledge was a key factor where good teaching and learning were seen. Teachers make good use of the resources available to them, and this helps to maintain the quality of learning well. The starter activities in Years 7 to 9 are chosen well, setting the scene well for the rest of the lesson. In Years 10 and 11, good individual monitoring during activities helps to ensure pupils learn well. Lessons with these older pupils benefited especially from having a leading ICT teacher who used exciting teaching methods to keep the pupils engaged fully in their work. However, overall, other teachers do not question the pupils deeply enough, resulting in lost opportunities to check and extend pupils' understanding. Nevertheless, pupils' learning and progress are aided well, both by the schemes of work and by comprehensive assessment and tracking systems. However, assessment techniques are not used extensively enough in lessons to consolidate pupils' understanding of the concepts taught. Nonetheless, diagnostic marking, coupled with self-assessment, does support well pupils' progress overall. In addition,

¹³ See footnote 5 for an explanation of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy.

there is some very good work being undertaken for lower-attaining pupils in collaboration with the City Learning Centre¹⁴, but the extended use of these facilities for all groups of pupils in order to raise the level of challenge in learning is underdeveloped.

97. Leadership and management are good overall. There is a very strong drive for improvement, supported well through the department's planning. The staff share a common purpose in this respect. However, the use of the leading teacher to disseminate good practice within the department is underdeveloped. Target setting and the monitoring of achievement are well established, and the management of the department is supportive, with its strong focus on improvement. In addition, senior management have been very supportive, with extra funding and time being secured for the subject. However, whilst promoting the use of numeracy well, the department's planning does not specifically focus on the pupils' use of literacy. Neither has it considered fully its promotion of ICT within a multicultural world society, nor its required contribution to work-related learning. This has resulted in some lost opportunities to enrich the teaching of the subject and extend pupils' knowledge and understanding. Nevertheless, management has ensured the department is resourced well in terms of hardware, software and technical support. Consequently, teaching and learning are enhanced well. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Statutory requirements are now fully met because all pupils in Years 10 and 11 take a specialist ICT course.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

98. The use of ICT across the curriculum is unsatisfactory. Lack of access to computers in most subjects means pupils are not given adequate opportunities to apply the skills they have learnt in specialist ICT lessons. Whilst there is satisfactory evidence of the use of ICT in some subjects, such as geography, history and English, this is very much dependent upon pupils' access to ICT outside normal school hours. This is because access to the computer rooms is difficult. In addition, there is no whole-school monitoring or co-ordination of the use of ICT across the curriculum, although the role of ICT co-ordinator is about to be given to a member of the senior leadership team. However, each department has at least one electronic whiteboard, each head of department has a laptop, and there are plans, finance permitting, to extend the provision of computing facilities to the whole school.

HUMANITIES

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' achievement is good, and is supported well through good working relationships.
- Leadership and management are focused well upon raising standards.
- Good specialist teaching helps pupils to develop well key skills in the subject.
- Opportunities to use ICT are insufficient to support pupils' learning.

Commentary

99. In the 2004 GCSE examinations, standards were above average. Boys' attainment was slightly higher than girls'. Standards were near to the school average. In the teacher assessments for Year 9, standards were judged to be above average. Standards seen during the inspection are average overall in Year 9. This good achievement is because the pupils entered the school with attainment in history being below average. Standards seen in Year 11 are above average, with about half the higher-attaining pupils achieving well above average, and achievement is good.

100. Pupils acquire good levels of knowledge and understanding and improve well their range of historical skills as they move through the school. In Year 9, they write in considerable detail

¹⁴ City Learning Centres are specialist resources providing access to ICT for local communities.

about their discussion on Nazi election posters. They identify how people were targeted and assess the effectiveness of each poster by drawing well on their knowledge of different social groups in Germany. They contrast these effectively with British elections today and, through good teaching, identify citizenship objectives.

101. By Year 11, pupils acquire a wide range of skills, being able to analyse historical evidence effectively and evaluate well its reliability. For example, they use primary sources effectively to assess the similarities and differences between Russian governments before and after the First World War. They develop their literacy and numeracy skills effectively by studying historical data and interpreting it accurately. Pupils demonstrate good personal skills in working together and reporting back to others, presenting them with a clear picture of change over time.
102. Teaching and learning are good in all year groups. Teachers have a secure command of their subject and pupils are therefore supported well in their learning. Working relationships are good, learning objectives are clear and pupils know what is expected of them. However, occasionally, there is insufficient challenge for higher-attaining pupils because questions asked and tasks set are not focussed sufficiently well. Nevertheless, where achievement is very good, a lively pace encourages active pupil involvement and very good learning follows. In Years 10 and 11, teaching is often very good. Such lessons are typified by good oral work, which informs subsequent written work well. For example, pupils offer perceptive comments when comparing their own school timetable with that experienced by children in Nazi Germany.
103. Leadership and management are good. There is a clear view of priorities and positive action to raise standards. The head of department's approach supports staff and pupils well, and provides a very good role-model for both groups. Standards are monitored carefully, data is used sensibly to inform planning, and assessment procedures are good. The department evaluates carefully its own progress at regular intervals. The curriculum is good, being enriched satisfactorily through educational visits and activities which encourage individual study. There are impressive projects produced in Years 7 and 9. Pupils receive good guidance to help improve their work. However, the use of ICT is unsatisfactory because the department has insufficient access to whole-school facilities. As a result, pupils do not make sufficient use of ICT to research and present their work. Improvement since the previous inspection is good.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers are subject specialists who use their knowledge well to make learning interesting.
- There is unsatisfactory access to ICT.
- The good curriculum is enhanced well by fieldwork.
- The very good leadership of the department is well focused on improving pupils' achievement.

Commentary

104. In 2004, GCSE results were well above average, and show a consistent high level over recent years. Overall, there is little difference in the performance of boys and girls. Standards in the current Year 11 are above average. Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of glaciation, resources and rivers. Written work is supported well by the accurate use of geographical language and diagrams. Coursework is good, and pupils present data effectively in maps, tables and graphs. Many pupils use ICT well to enhance the presentation of their work.
105. The Year 9 teacher assessments in 2004 were below average, but marking was too harsh and the procedures used did not accurately represent the performance of the boys. Improvements have now been made, and there are better opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding in the subject. Standards in the current Year 9 are above

average. Pupils have developed a good knowledge and understanding across the range of aspects of physical and human geography. Pupils demonstrate good skills with the analysis and interpretation of photographs and maps. A weakness is the pupils' drawing and annotation of diagrams, and their limited use to explain geographical events.

106. Pupils arrive at school with standards which are average. The achievement of pupils in Years 7 to 9, and those pupils who opt for the subject in Years 10 and 11, is good. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is good. Boys and girls of all abilities and of all ethnic backgrounds achieve equally well. Achievement is good because of good teaching and the good attitudes pupils have towards the subject. Lessons are planned well with resources and activities, which meet the needs of all pupils. There is good support with writing for those pupils with weak literacy skills. There are good opportunities to extend learning for gifted and higher-attaining pupils. For example, such pupils in Year 9 recently produced an informative video programme on the South East Asian tsunami.
107. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, and use this well to explain topics and to plan effective approaches in the classroom. Video and other resources are used effectively to make lessons interesting and to help pupils consolidate what they have learnt. All members of the department establish high expectations for learning and behaviour. Good use is made of maps to help pupils develop their understanding of where places are. However, access to ICT is unsatisfactory, which is a weakness in pupils' learning as its limited use does not support sufficiently well their writing and research. As yet, there are too few opportunities for oral work to ensure pupils use the correct geographical language and respond with full answers. Assessment is good, pupils' work is marked accurately and there is good guidance on what they need to do to improve. In Years 10 and 11, good use is made of GCSE questions and marking schemes to help improve pupils' examination technique. Working relationships in the classroom are good and pupils display good attitudes to their work.
108. The leadership of geography is very good. The head of department has very good knowledge of the subject and has used this well to develop the schemes of work and supporting documentation. The management of geography is good. There are good procedures to monitor and evaluate teaching, but procedures to review pupils' work lack rigour. Resources and staffing meet the needs of the curriculum well, but there are shortcomings with accommodation. There are no blackout facilities in the main teaching room and the interactive whiteboard is broken. Fieldwork is good and in Years 7 to 9 each year group is involved with investigations on the school site, whilst pupils in Year 10 are involved with visits out of school. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

Religious education

109. Because Holy Family Catholic High School is a voluntary aided Roman Catholic school, the inspection of religious education and collective worship is carried out under Section 23 of the Schools Inspections Act 1996 (Denominational Education) by the inspector approved by the Diocese and appointed by the governing body. The Diocese therefore publishes a separate report for parents on these elements of the pupils' and students' education.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieved very good results in GCSE textiles in 2004.

- Accommodation and resources are poor throughout the department.
- The leadership of the department has not resolved issues from the previous inspection.
- Pupils' learning is not supported well enough in graphic products and resistant materials.
- Pupils do not have a good understanding of the design process when developing their ideas.
- Schemes of work do not meet National Curriculum requirements.

Commentary

110. The GCSE examination results for food and resistant materials in 2004 were average, textiles were well above, but results in graphic products were below. In Years 10 and 11, standards in lessons and the work seen are below average in graphic products and resistant materials and achievement is unsatisfactory. However, in food and textiles, standards are above average and achievement is good. In graphic products and resistant materials, pupils do not have a good understanding of the design process and fail to explore a range of design concepts for coursework. Design ideas are not being produced based on thorough research, and as graphical skills are underdeveloped, they do not enable pupils to show their ideas clearly. There is very little use of ICT for graphic products or presentation. Nevertheless, there has been a gradual improvement overall in standards at GCSE level in the past three years.
111. The standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 9 in 2004 were above average for design and technology based on unverified teacher assessments. In lessons and the work seen, standards overall in Years 7 to 9 are average and achievement is satisfactory. However, there are weaknesses in graphic products where skills are underdeveloped, and in resistant materials pupils are not gaining a good understanding or use of the design process. Overall, the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is not meeting statutory requirements. Pupils do not gain sufficient experience or understanding of structures, mechanisms, electronics, control systems and the use of computers for manufacturing.
112. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 7 to 11. However, teaching and learning are good in food and textiles, but unsatisfactory in resistant materials and graphic products. Where teaching and learning are unsatisfactory, there is often a lack of challenge in the lessons and progress with learning is slow for all pupils. In an attempt to overcome the underachievement of boys, the department is trialling gender group teaching.
113. The leadership of the subject is unsatisfactory because many issues from the previous inspection have not been resolved. Progress has been unsatisfactory because issues still remain concerning the accommodation, the variation in standards, the quality of teaching and risk assessments. However, since taking up the post three years ago, the head of department has had to contend with many difficult problems in staffing, resourcing and accommodation. Management is unsatisfactory because there has not been effective planning to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum in Years 7 to 9. In addition to this, although assessment practice is well established across Years 7 to 9, it is not effective or consistent across all the material areas, and pupils do not have a good understanding of National Curriculum levels. In Years 10 and 11, the use of assessment is unsatisfactory in resistant materials and graphic products. Consequently, pupils receive unsatisfactory guidance on how to improve their work. The good practice which exists in some parts of the department, as with the effective use of display as a resource in food and textiles, is not being shared in order to raise pupils' expectations.
114. The accommodation for design and technology is poor in every area. In food, graphic products and textiles, the best use is made of old teaching rooms. The workshop for resistant materials has been allowed to fall into a particularly poor state. The school has already identified a number of health and safety issues in the department, but action to improve the situation has not been successful. The level of resources available for teaching, learning, and making is unsatisfactory. There is very limited provision for the use of ICT across the department.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

In these areas, music and art and design were inspected in depth. Drama was sampled.

Drama

115. Two drama lessons were sampled, one in Year 8 and one in Year 11. In the Year 11 lesson, standards were above average. Teaching, learning, pupils' achievement and their attitudes were all very good. This was because the teacher's very good subject expertise enabled a fast pace to the lesson. Very good self-assessment by the pupils enabled them to move securely to the next level in improving their performance. The teacher and pupils had high expectations of each other's work. However, in spite of some lively teaching, the Year 8 lesson was unsatisfactory because there was too little emphasis on the performance skills set out in the objectives for the lesson. Consequently, the pupils were not able to adapt or explore their roles sufficiently well.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership is not resolving vital issues, and this is depressing standards and staff morale.
- Unenthusiastic teaching stunts learning.
- Weak teaching is further weakened by an ineffective assessment system.
- The curriculum is too narrow and does not include required elements from national strategies.
- Pupils are unaware of how to improve their work and reach their targets.

Commentary

116. GCSE results in 2004 were below average. The senior moderator did not uphold the school's appeal concerning the grades awarded. Current standards are below average. Nevertheless, a large majority of those who choose art at GCSE have positive attitudes, which contribute significantly to their performance, making their achievement satisfactory by Year 11. Pupils join the school in Year 7 with average standards. Achievement is insufficient in Years 7 to 9 and standards fall to below average. The gains which pupils make in acquiring basic skills and understanding the formal elements of art are unsatisfactory. The standard of observational drawing is poor. Too often, pupils draw from photographs. On these occasions, they struggle to produce worthwhile outcomes. The results of teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2004 were very high, but standards of current work are below average. This shows that the department's assessments were far too generous.

117. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory overall. They are unsatisfactory when lessons are not interesting, topics are laboured and teachers' approaches lack enthusiasm. Where the teaching is weak, lessons do not have a sound structure. There are limited opportunities for pupils to talk about their work and explain what they are aiming to do. Pupils do as they are asked because their attitudes are compliant. The range of tasks is too narrow and gives inadequate scope for pupils to create imaginative responses. Where there is unsatisfactory teaching, it gives pupils little experience of work in three dimensions, or work on a variety of different scales. Most of the activities are drawing and painting, which lack challenge and result in superficial learning. Too few opportunities are given for pupils to make observational drawings from nature, which can be used as preparation for developing work. Pupils are taught about the work of artists, but their critical understanding is insecure. Insufficient attention is given to the needs of the more, or the less, able pupils through the use of individual tuition and specially devised tasks. However, the more successful teaching on the GCSE three-dimensional studies course is based on methods which appeal to pupils, and which build on the work of the more successful teaching in Years 7 to 9. Lesson requirements are made clear and the steps needed to achieve well are spelt out explicitly. The use of computers to research topics has an inspirational effect. Overall, pupils know the levels at which they work, but do not understand how they came to

achieve them. Consequently, they do not know how to improve. Pupils are set targets, but are unclear about how to reach them. The assessment of pupils' work is unsatisfactory because teachers do not have a secure understanding of National Curriculum levels or examination grades. Display in art rooms has a strong visual impact, but lacks the precise grading in order to help pupils understand the standards required.

118. Leadership is poor. The senior leadership team have supported the drive for improvement in provision, but the effects of this have not been successful and provision is deteriorating. The lack of improvement in assessment, curriculum and provision is seriously depressing staff morale. Management is unsatisfactory. The moderation of standards and monitoring of teaching and learning are inadequate. Insufficient attention is paid to the support of national strategies such as literacy and numeracy, work-related learning, or the pupils' personal development. Provision has worsened since the previous inspection, and progress has been unsatisfactory because of the negative impact of leadership and management.

Music

Provision in music is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The new subject leadership has identified priorities for improvement, which are providing better opportunities for pupils' development in music.
- Subject monitoring, review and use of data are insufficiently focussed on raising attainment.
- Poor accommodation and limited resources, particularly in ICT, continue to limit the range of pupils' activities.
- Pupils' good attitudes to the subject support well their approach to learning.

Commentary

119. GCSE results in 2004 were below average, although entry numbers were very small. There are now more students opting for music in Years 10 and 11, and they now have properly timetabled lessons. As a result, their standards are average overall, and there are some good performers. However, pupils in Year 11, and particularly those in Year 10, have greater potential to achieve better results. Pupils' standards of attainment on entry in Year 7 are below average with a significant proportion of pupils who are well below average. Consequently, although pupils are making good progress in relation to their attainment at the start of Year 7, their overall achievement is satisfactory by Years 9 and 11. The school's assessment of pupils in Year 9 in 2004 was that their standards overall were above average. This has been accepted as an over-assessment. Inspection judgements are that attainment by Year 9 is below average overall, but significantly more pupils are approaching average standards. Pupils do best at performing and composing music, but their knowledge of its repertoire, history, styles and theoretical processes is relatively weak. Their keyboard techniques are not developing sufficiently well during Years 7 to 9 to support fully the fluency they need for the greater challenges they will meet if they continue with music in Years 10 and 11.

120. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. In the work and lessons seen, they are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, and good overall in Years 10 and 11. Good learning is supported by pupils' generally good attitudes. This is because as pupils become increasingly aware of the progress they are making, their enthusiasm for the subject grows. The best teaching promotes as good a range of learning activities as the poor accommodation allows. There is good development of pupils' use of literacy through key words and technical language, and in the evaluation and appraisal of music they listen to, or have composed. However, pupils' learning in Years 7 to 9 is sometimes less successful. This is because of insufficient reinforcement and consolidation through questioning and note taking. Although teachers provide good options for pupils of differing capabilities, talented and higher-attaining pupils are not encouraged enough to try the more challenging tasks provided. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 make good use of ICT,

especially for composing, but lack of access to ICT resources means that the use of it by pupils in Years 7 to 9 is unsatisfactory.

121. A potentially good assessment system, using a combination of teachers' marking and pupils' evaluation of their own and others' work, is too new as yet to have had the maximum impact on learning. However, targets and predicted GCSE grades for pupils in Years 10 and 11, which are based on un-moderated data in terms of pupils' musical potential, are sometimes unhelpful in promoting progress.
122. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new, relatively inexperienced head of department has prioritised some important improvements. These include a revised curriculum with good multicultural sources and contexts, timetabled lessons for GCSE pupils, the new assessment scheme, more extra-curricular activities, and positive contacts with feeder schools and professional musicians. All of these are aimed well at providing better opportunities for pupils' development in music. The subject development plan is satisfactorily linked to whole-school priorities. However, the monitoring of teaching and learning, review of provision, and use of data is insufficiently focussed on strategies designed to raise attainment in Years 7 to 9. Nevertheless, the co-ordination, focus and status of music are severely hampered by poor accommodation. This not only has a depressive and restrictive effect on pupils' learning, but also causes additional stress on teaching staff. Inadequate accommodation and inadequate ICT provision are unresolved issues from the previous inspection. Other developments are more positive, so that overall improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is excellent clarity of vision by the head of the department and teamwork amongst staff.
- As pupils progress through the school, standards in practical skills rise at above average rates.
- Because teachers have an excellent command of the subject, pupils are very clear what to do to improve.
- The accommodation is very limited.
- There are inadequate resources for ICT.

Commentary

123. GCSE results in 2004 were well above average. The subject was the strongest performing one in the school. Over time, standards have been rising. On entry to the school in Year 7, pupils' attainment is below average. The 2004 teacher assessments of pupils at the end of Year 9 were very low. The inspection agrees with the school that these were too harsh. Work has subsequently been undertaken with the department to ensure a more accurate understanding of National Curriculum levels. Consequently, assessment procedures and their use are now very good. Furthermore, what pupils need to do to improve is explained to them in very good detail.
124. Inspection judgements are that by the end of Year 9, pupils attain above average standards and achieve very well. By the end of Year 11, standards are well above average and they continue their very good achievement. All pupils progressively achieve very high standards in their practical work. Their achievements are underpinned very well by the very good evaluation and support they receive from their teachers as lessons progress. However, GCSE pupils do not always perform as strongly in written theory examinations, where some of them have problems expressing themselves with the written word. Pupils work very well at their tasks, showing very good attitudes.
125. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Teachers show an excellent command of the subject because of the teachers' excellent subject knowledge, and have a high expectation of

their pupils. Very good use is made of question and answer. Pupils accurately and quickly respond to the challenging questioning, illustrating a very good understanding of their bodies and the effects of exercise. There is a very good equality of opportunity for all pupils. Pupils who have special educational needs achieve very well due to their excellent inclusion in lessons.

126. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. There is an excellent clarity of vision, sense of purpose and high aspirations from the head of department and staff. Teamwork is excellent and all strive to give of their best. Very good schemes of work support the development of a very wide and relevant curriculum. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities and opportunities for enrichment. However, teachers have to work very hard to overcome the unsatisfactory accommodation. The sports hall is too small and has no space for the safe storage of large apparatus, and there is limited hard surface and playing field space. There is no designated classroom for the teaching of physical education and sports study theory, and teachers have to use the dining hall, which is unsatisfactory. They frequently have to carry apparatus to the drama studio to use it for physical education when the sports hall is being used for assemblies and examinations. Provision for ICT is unsatisfactory. The department has no suitable computers or software available for day-to-day use by pupils. Nevertheless, the improvement since the previous inspection has been very good because standards, teaching, learning and the curriculum have improved substantially.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

In these areas, business education was inspected in depth, and the health and social care course was sampled.

Health and social care

127. One Year 10 lesson in the vocational health and social care course was sampled. Standards were average and pupils' achievement was satisfactory. Teaching, learning and pupils' attitudes were satisfactory. This is because although there was a good pace to the start of the lesson, and pupils showed a willingness to learn, the routine use of textbook exercises lacked challenge, and there were missed opportunities to involve the pupils in discussion about their work. However, they were given satisfactory opportunity to recount their learning at the end of the lesson.

Business education

Provision in business education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Effective assessment and pupil tracking are in place, resulting in higher achievement.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge and different teaching approaches lead to good learning.
- There is a constant drive for improvement by all members of the department.
- ICT resources for the subject are insufficient.

Commentary

128. Year 11 examination results in 2004 were below average. However, standards seen in lessons and in pupils' work are now average because of measures implemented by the relatively new head of department. Pupils' work shows a good range of coverage of topics. At GNVQ level, pupils gain expected standards in their work relating to topics such as how businesses work. At GCSE, they attain average standards in their work relating to factors of production. However, planned extension work on the GCSE course in order to raise the level of challenge for pupils has not yet been implemented.

129. Overall, achievement is good, with pupils making good progress in lessons because of good teaching. Extensive assessment and tracking systems are in place, with pupils knowing what

their predicted grade is and how to improve. This knowledge is enhanced by the fact that information about assessment criteria is prominently displayed in the classroom. However, the extension of the use of assessment for learning techniques in order to raise achievement further is underdeveloped. This is illustrated by the fact that the department is raising the achievement of lower-attaining pupils at a faster rate than those who are attaining more highly.

130. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers' knowledge and planning, together with good use of ICT, give rise to a variety of interesting teaching methods. For example, in a business finance lesson, class recitation was used to help the pupils remember an essential formula. However, lessons are sometimes too teacher-led, which prevents pupils from sharing what they know and understand. Nevertheless, comprehensive and analytical assessment procedures are in place.

131. Leadership and management are good. The head of department is supported well by the senior leadership team. Self-evaluation is embedded well in the work of the department, with the head of department taking steps to disseminate good practice and eliminate any unsatisfactory practice. Indeed, there is a shared vision of an urgent desire to raise the achievement of all pupils taking business education courses. However, the department has not yet planned its required contribution to work-related learning in order to improve on the already good experiences it provides. Faced with a dearth of resources, the department has created its own, thereby providing pupils with a detailed and helpful set of documents relating to the courses on offer. In addition, the department's documentation is impressive, with a range of policies, including literacy, numeracy, health and safety, and homework. However, at present, there is heavy reliance on the head of department for the maintenance of standards. Nevertheless, staff in the department are well-qualified, having all worked in industry. The range of courses on offer is very good, since it means that all pupils have access to a course that is suitable for them. However, limited access to ICT, and the absence of a specific business suite, acts as a barrier to learning. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. In particular, more use is being made of the school's central ICT facilities, when they are available, and assessment has very much improved.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship and personal, social and health education are taught through an integrated programme of specialist lessons in all year groups. A contribution is made to the pupils' personal and citizenship education through religious education, especially in respect of their spiritual development. This is reported by the Section 23 inspection carried out by the diocesan representatives.

Personal, social, health and citizenship education

Provision in the school's personal, social, health and citizenship education course is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The course lacks continuity, progression and reference to whole-school policies.
- The schemes of work are currently being strengthened.
- The school's chaplain contributes effectively to the personal development aspects of the course.
- The lack of a citizenship report to parents is a statutory breach.
- Pupils' work is not assessed consistently and work is not monitored rigorously.
- The planned contribution of other subjects to the course is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

132. Personal, social, health and citizenship education is taught as part of the school's personal development programme, in which all pupils receive one lesson per week. The school has devised its own course based on a variety of sources. Lessons seen during the inspection show that tutors know their pupils well. However, the course has inconsistent success in promoting personal development. This is because when teachers show enthusiasm for the lesson's topic, pupils respond well and discuss issues eagerly. In scantily prepared lessons, pupils do not concentrate sufficiently and their achievement is poor. The subject is now being

co-ordinated by senior management and indications are that it is emerging as a subject which will assume its rightful place in the curriculum.

133. Standards overall in the school's personal, social, health and citizenship education course are below national expectations. Work booklets contain a minimum record of written work. Standards of written work in lessons are inconsistent and overall below average. However, in Years 7 to 9, pupils experience satisfactorily new skills relating to aspects such as participation, opinions and persuasion. Two short modules in Year 10, dealing with the law and right and wrong, contribute satisfactorily to pupils becoming responsible citizens. Nevertheless, achievement is unsatisfactory overall because progress over time is limited and achievement in lessons is inconsistent.
134. The quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory. Curriculum development has been haphazard, leading to a lack of continuity in the teaching of the programmes of study. There has been no recognition of national strategies for improving learning through pupils using literacy and numeracy in the course. Furthermore, the use of ICT for teaching and learning is underdeveloped. Teaching, through the use of work booklets, does not support the separate needs of pupils of different capabilities. There is insufficient challenge in the content of the work booklets. Presentation of work in booklets is often scrappy and shows some poor attitudes to the subject. However, the specialist skills of the chaplain are used effectively to teach modules like personal responsibility and adherence to a moral code. Pupils in Year 11 become engaged effectively in considering issues of right and wrong in countries where there is conflict. However, lack of assessment and a weak policy for this limit learning. These indicate to pupils that the subject lacks importance. This is compounded by the fact that the school does not meet its statutory requirement for the specific reporting of citizenship education to parents.
135. Overall, leadership is satisfactory because recent co-ordination by senior leadership is bringing a satisfactory drive for improvement in the subject. School records show that meetings, to which all involved in teaching the subject contribute, are arranged to review provision. This includes the planning of a scheme of work, which has '*Every Child Matters*¹⁵' at its heart. Planning also allows for the satisfactory teaching of sex, relationships and drugs education. However, management is unsatisfactory. This is because the monitoring of standards is non-existent and the monitoring of teaching and learning lacks rigour. Nevertheless, suitable lines of responsibility and communication are now in place. Whilst some aspects of the course are related to learning in other subjects, the contribution which these make to pupils' understanding of personal, social, health and citizenship education has not been identified or co-ordinated. The exception is in history where links are made to rigged elections and the impact of television opinion. Pupils have limited opportunities for voluntary community work, which provide opportunities for participation and responsible action.

¹⁵ *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* sets out a national framework for 150 local programmes of change to be led by Local Authorities and their partners, including schools. This framework is central to the programme of change which is at the heart of the **Children Act 2004**. The Government's ambition is to improve these outcomes for all children and to narrow the gap in outcomes between those who do well and those who do not.

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 2004 by Year 13 students, the latest year for which national comparisons are available.

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

| Subject | Number entered | % gaining grades A-E | | % gaining grades A-B | | Average point score | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------------|---------|----------------------|---------|---------------------|---------|
| | | School | England | School | England | School | England |
| Art and design | 1 | 100.0 | 78.3 | 100.0 | 21.6 | 50.0 | 28.5 |
| Biology | 7 | 71.4 | 63.5 | 0.0 | 10.4 | 20.0 | 19.8 |
| Business studies | 3 | 100.0 | 75.3 | 33.3 | 15.4 | 36.7 | 25.7 |
| Chemistry | 5 | 20.0 | 70.3 | 0.0 | 13.2 | 6.0 | 23.0 |
| Drama | 3 | 100.0 | 86.6 | 0.0 | 19.8 | 36.7 | 30.9 |
| Economics | 1 | 100.0 | 71.6 | 0.0 | 18.6 | 20.0 | 25.8 |
| English language | 7 | 71.4 | 85.3 | 28.6 | 16.1 | 27.1 | 29.0 |
| English literature | 7 | 75.0 | 86.2 | 50.0 | 17.4 | 32.5 | 29.7 |
| French | 1 | 100.0 | 79.8 | 100.0 | 19.4 | 60.0 | 28.2 |
| Design and technology | 1 | 0.0 | 72.6 | 0.0 | 13.9 | 0.0 | 24.3 |
| General studies | 38 | 55.3 | 73.6 | 5.3 | 16.9 | 13.9 | 25.5 |
| History | 5 | 60.0 | 82.2 | 20.0 | 20.8 | 22.0 | 29.2 |
| Information technology | 13 | 53.8 | 66.6 | 0.0 | 8.8 | 14.6 | 20.6 |
| Mathematics | 5 | 40.0 | 59.9 | 0.0 | 14.1 | 10.0 | 20.5 |
| Physics | 6 | 33.3 | 66.4 | 0.0 | 14.8 | 11.7 | 22.4 |
| Politics | 4 | 50.0 | 67.8 | 0.0 | 15.1 | 12.5 | 23.2 |
| Psychology | 7 | 42.9 | 67.8 | 0.0 | 15.1 | 11.4 | 23.2 |
| Sociology | 7 | 71.4 | 72.1 | 0.0 | 19.6 | 20.0 | 25.9 |
| Spanish | 2 | 100.0 | 77.1 | 50.0 | 17.0 | 45.0 | 26.5 |
| Sports / Physical education | 11 | 81.8 | 72.2 | 27.3 | 11.8 | 30.0 | 22.8 |

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

| Subject | Number entered | % gaining grades A-E | | % gaining grades A-B | | Average point score | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------------|---------|----------------------|---------|---------------------|---------|
| | | School | England | School | England | School | England |
| A2 Courses | | | | | | | |
| Art and design | 5 | 100.0 | 98.3 | 20.0 | 50.2 | 88.0 | 87.1 |
| Biology | 14 | 85.7 | 96.6 | 35.7 | 40.0 | 70.0 | 79.3 |
| Business studies | 18 | 100.0 | 98.9 | 38.9 | 39.4 | 83.3 | 81.8 |
| Chemistry | 9 | 100.0 | 97.7 | 44.4 | 50.0 | 84.4 | 85.7 |
| Drama / Theatre studies | 8 | 100.0 | 99.6 | 50.0 | 42.8 | 85.0 | 85.1 |
| Economics | 4 | 100.0 | 98.8 | 25.0 | 54.3 | 80.0 | 89.8 |
| English language | 19 | 100.0 | 99.2 | 47.4 | 36.4 | 81.1 | 81.1 |
| English literature | 8 | 100.0 | 99.4 | 62.5 | 44.9 | 95.0 | 95.5 |
| French | 10 | 100.0 | 99.0 | 50.0 | 53.1 | 88.0 | 88.9 |
| General studies | 60 | 98.3 | 94.9 | 33.3 | 30.5 | 75.3 | 72.9 |
| History | 9 | 100.0 | 99.0 | 22.2 | 45.6 | 71.1 | 85.1 |
| Information technology | 10 | 100.0 | 96.3 | 10.0 | 25.7 | 60.0 | 71.1 |
| Mathematics | 11 | 100.0 | 96.8 | 72.7 | 56.6 | 100.0 | 89.5 |
| Physics | 6 | 100.0 | 96.7 | 83.3 | 45.3 | 106.7 | 82.6 |
| Politics | 9 | 100.0 | 97.4 | 22.2 | 42.5 | 77.8 | 81.6 |
| Psychology | 19 | 100.0 | 97.4 | 25.0 | 42.5 | 76.4 | 81.6 |
| Sociology | 9 | 77.8 | 98.5 | 22.2 | 45.3 | 62.2 | 84.6 |
| Spanish | 14 | 92.9 | 98.2 | 57.1 | 53.5 | 80.0 | 88.7 |
| Sports / Physical education | 10 | 100.0 | 97.8 | 10.0 | 30.9 | 74.0 | 75.4 |
| AVCE Courses | | | | | | | |
| Business | 10 | 100.0 | 91.6 | 60.0 | 24.1 | 94.0 | 67.9 |
| Health and social care | 2 | 33.3 | 93.5 | 0.0 | 24.9 | 20.0 | 70.0 |
| Leisure and recreation | 4 | 100.0 | 90.7 | 100.0 | 18.3 | 105.0 | 64.6 |

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

In these areas, English and French were inspected in depth. Spanish was sampled.

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have very good knowledge, which supports students in making the transition to advanced level very well.
- The high level of support for students of all abilities creates a very productive atmosphere in lessons.
- Dining rooms provide unsatisfactory accommodation for lessons.
- There are occasions when teachers take too much responsibility in lessons.

Commentary

136. One third of students in the sixth form study one of the English options and results at AS and A2 level have been above average in recent years. All students starting the English courses completed them. In 2004, students achieved very well, doing significantly better in English than in their other examinations. Similar very good achievement was evident during the inspection. Overall, standards in the sixth form are above average. From the start of Year 12, students learn rapidly to apply their skills in language analysis, moving confidently from the relatively familiar language of *'The Big Sleep'* to Edgar Allen Poe's more archaic prose. They work hard to grapple with complex ideas, such as the way that the form and structure of a poem can shape its meaning. By Year 13, students synthesise well their understanding of a number of poems and their historical context to appreciate the deeper purpose behind William Blake's apparently innocent writing. However, less practised oral skills mean students occasionally need prompting to express their understanding.
137. Teaching and learning are very good overall in Years 12 and 13. The main strength is the teachers' very good subject knowledge and the skill with which they build on the techniques developed in Years 10 and 11. The teaching team combines a good range of skills and experience, so lessons are varied and support well many different approaches to learning. Consequently, students maintain a high level of focus. Assessment is very good, and students gain confidence from very clear feedback about how they can improve their work. However, there are occasions when teachers take too much responsibility for summarising ideas emerging from discussion, and this reduces the opportunities for students to develop fully their oral skills.
138. Leadership and management are good. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory, and the acting head of department is now providing clear guidance to the team on the most up-to-date examination requirements. Teaching some lessons in the dining rooms is a hindrance, which whilst as yet having no obvious impact on students' achievement, makes the lessons much harder work for everybody.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

139. Students in the sixth form have above average literacy skills. They use their skills well in writing clearly and effectively, and are able to make good use of discussion in lessons. However, in more formal oral situations, students are sometimes less confident as speakers. This was evident in a Year 13 business lesson where students gave a presentation, making the links between individual training needs and those of an organisation. Overall, oral presentations were weaker because the students' lack of assurance showed when they missed opportunities to explain the reasoning behind the plans they had created. Occasionally, teachers do not help this situation by taking responsibility themselves for reading or summarising the conclusions from discussions.

Modern foreign languages

The main focus of the inspection was on French, but work in Spanish was also sampled.

Spanish

140. One Year 13 Spanish lesson was sampled. Standards were above average. Teaching, learning, students' achievement and their attitudes were all good. This was a well-planned and useful lesson. It was good because the teacher provided a good model for the spoken language. Furthermore, students were taken well through a translation, showing good listening

strategies as well as good spoken accents and fluency in Spanish. They achieved well because of good working relationships and the encouragement and guidance given by the teacher.

French

Provision in French is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers are fluent French speakers and know their subject very well.
- Teachers have a very good knowledge of examination requirements.
- Assessment is very good, enabling students to know what they have to do to achieve very well.
- Students are very enthusiastic, work hard and achieve above average standards.

Commentary

141. Standards for the Year 13 students taking the A2 examination in 2004 were average, with male and female students performing equally well. All students completed their courses. Current students say they enjoy the subject and, as a result of their teachers' enthusiasm and careful guidance, they learn very well. In 2004, Year 12 students taking the AS examination achieved above average results, with over a third gaining higher A or B passes. Inspection judgements are that students in Years 12 and 13 demonstrate above average standards. They show a good level of understanding in their written work, as well as in listening and reading exercises. They are confident speakers and are able to sustain a discussion and explore lines of reasoning in French. Achievement is very good because students are enabled to focus exceptionally well on their work, and try hard to use the language they are learning to express their own thoughts and interests.

142. Teaching and learning are very good overall in Years 12 and 13. Students' speaking, reading and writing develop very well. This is as a result of a carefully prepared range of lessons, which use resources culled from the Internet and other contemporary resources. Detailed planning, well-managed lessons and enjoyable activities in groups and pairs help students to acquire a good range of vocabulary. Furthermore, learning is underpinned very well by the students' excellent attitudes to the subject.

143. Teachers have high levels of expertise. They speak accurate and fluent French throughout lessons. This focuses students to listen carefully, and provides them with excellent models of pronunciation. Teachers also have an extensive knowledge of the examination courses, and share with students the requirements for achievement of the higher grades. This, coupled with the marking scheme, which marks for both content and accuracy, ensures students know exactly what they have to do to score high grades.

144. The subject is led and managed well by the acting head of department. This is because there is a strong focus on high standards. Furthermore, this shows itself in students' interest in learning French, and in the support they are given in organising and improving their work. Several students plan to study French at university. There has been good progress since the previous inspection and strengths have been maintained.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers are confident and have very good subject knowledge.
- There is insufficient marking of students' work.
- Very good working relationships between students and teachers create a positive work ethos.

Commentary

145. Year 13 A2 level results in 2004 were well above average. Students taking the Year 12 AS examination in 2004 gained above average results, with just over a third gaining higher A or B passes. All students who started their A2 or AS courses in the last academic year went on to complete them. In work seen during the inspection, students' attainment at A2 and AS level is above average. Students in both Years 12 and 13 are achieving well. In Year 13, there are some outstanding students who are predicted to achieve the highest possible grades.
146. Students who have not obtained grade C at GCSE level are given the opportunity to attend re-sit classes, but there is no provision for key skills in the sixth form.
147. Advanced level teaching is good. Teachers are very secure in their own subject knowledge and lessons are planned well with clear objectives, which are conveyed well to students. Students respond well to teacher questioning and there are good opportunities for independent learning. Consequently, students' learning is good. In the best instances, students engage in group discussion and provide strong support for each other. Very good working relationships exist between students and teachers, as a result of which students are comfortable when approaching their teachers to request help and guidance.
148. Assessment of student progress is satisfactory overall, but the marking of students' work is unsatisfactory. The quantity of marking is insufficient and there is a lack of written feedback which shows how to improve future performance. The irregular marking has, in some cases, adversely affected the quality of presentation.
149. Leadership of the department is very good and there is a strong team commitment to the raising of standards. The head of department and the second in department are very good role-models for colleagues and students. They identify well where improvements are needed to improve performance at AS level, and expectations have been raised. Management at sixth form level is good, although some aspects are underdeveloped. For example, analysis of student performance has been established, but there is no regular monitoring of teacher marking and students' presentation of their work. However, overall, there has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

Mathematics across the curriculum

150. Most students on advanced level courses display good mathematical skills. These are used well in science and geography when collecting, analysing and displaying data. In business studies, students analyse cash flows well, and prepare profit and loss accounts. However, there is unsatisfactory provision for students who enter the sixth form with weak skills in mathematics, and there are no key skills courses on offer, and limited access to GCSE re-sit courses.

SCIENCE

In these areas, biology and chemistry were sampled, and physics was inspected in depth.

Biology

151. One Year 13 lesson in biology was sampled, and discussions were held with students. Standards were above average. Teaching and learning were very good, students' attitudes good and their achievement very good. This was because the students' learning was very well supported by the teacher's very good subject knowledge. This enabled the students to develop a high level of understanding of the role of insulin in controlling blood sugar levels. A very good dialogue between students and their teacher was indicative of high levels of challenge and concentration on the work.

Chemistry

152. One Year 12 lesson in chemistry was sampled, and discussions were held with students. Standards were above average. Teaching, learning, students' attitudes and their achievement

were all good. The teacher set a brisk pace, and clear explanations provided students with a sound basis for developing techniques in answering examination questions. However, this was more of a lecture, with some missed opportunities to involve willing students in discussions. Nevertheless, there were good working relationships and mutual respect between students and their teacher.

Physics

Provision in physics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have deep subject knowledge and motivate their students well.
- Lessons are planned and structured well, and offer challenging ideas.
- Mutual respect forms the basis for very good working relationships between teachers and students.

Commentary

153. In 2004, standards for the Year 13 students taking the A2 examination were very high, in the highest 5 per cent nationally, with all students entered gaining an A or B grade. All students who started their courses in Years 12 and 13 completed them. In 2004, a third of the Year 12 students entered for the AS examination gained higher A or B passes, and results were above average. Inspection judgements are that by Year 13, standards are well above average, and students' achievement is very good. This is because complex ideas are understood well and applied effectively. There is a wide range of prior attainment at GCSE in the groups, but students soon adapt to the pace of A-level work, adjusting well to the more difficult concepts. Students' ready response to questions and their eager participation in oral work make significant contributions to their good progress in lessons.

154. The quality of teaching, shared between two teachers for each year, is very good. The students appreciate this dual approach and there is an easy, respectful working relationship where difficulties are readily made known and overcome. The teachers' thorough planning, their understanding of the subject and the expert way ideas are developed are the main factors in the well above average standards currently being achieved. Learning is very good because the close interaction between teacher and students enables the teacher to assess very well the level of each student's understanding. The notes made by students on physics theory are comprehensive and together with the solution of searching problems allows them to tackle A-level problems effectively.

155. Leadership and management are very good. This is because of the high aspirations of the head of department, and the excellent role-model provided for other staff and pupils. Consequently, the course is structured well, reflecting the needs of all the students. The two teachers cooperate very fully and strategies to continue the consistently high achievement are securely in place. Visits by the students to universities and conferences provide additional stimulation. Progress is assessed regularly and theoretical ideas consolidated effectively in lessons and through the solution of challenging problems. Physics was not specifically mentioned in the previous inspection report, but science results overall by Year 13 have been maintained at a high standard.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The monitoring of ICT in other subjects is unsatisfactory and access to equipment is limited.
- Students' achievement is underpinned well by an extensive tracking system.
- Students are proficient in a range of practical applications.
- Teachers use a good range of activities, which helps students to achieve well.

- Teachers do not always allow enough time at the end of lessons to check students' learning.
- The department as a whole is highly committed to improving students' grades.

Commentary

156. Attainment on entry in Year 12 is below average and examination results in Year 13 in 2004 were below average. However, all students who started the A-level courses completed them. Although all students taking the Year 12 AS examination in 2004 gained a pass, only one gained a higher grade. Inspection judgements are that standards in the current Years 12 and 13 are above average. In particular, high standards of work are seen in practical lessons, such as sophisticated database work. Furthermore, a Year 12 student has had work adopted as exemplar coursework by an awarding body. A wide variety of topics is covered, including system testing in the AS course, and systems analysis in the A2 course. Achievement in Year 12 is good and in Year 13 it is satisfactory overall. This is because some Year 13 students' grasp of theory is more limited. However, students' progress is good overall in each year group, and their very good attitudes to the subject help to underpin this. The department is notable for the fact that students are both pleasant and articulate. Consequently, students show good levels of maturity.

157. Teaching and learning are good. A key factor is teachers' knowledge of both the subject and the syllabus. This is evident in lessons where the teacher explicitly links the two, giving crucial advice to students on what will gain them the most marks in a given situation. Furthermore, some very interesting teaching approaches lead to a high level of concentration by students and good achievement in lessons. However, some lessons lack pace, and do not allow for different learning styles, resulting in limited learning, especially of theory, by some students. Occasionally, the concluding part of the lesson is too short to check adequately students' understanding of the work covered in the lesson.

158. The head of department has implemented a comprehensive assessment and tracking system, created by the department. This is helping to raise standards in Year 12 by identifying any potential underachievement at an early stage. Students know their predicted grade, and what they must do to achieve it. This results in students entering Year 13 at an overall average level of attainment. However, the 2004 examination results suggest that some students found these particular courses too hard, and the department accepts there is scope for exploring others.

159. Leadership and management are good. All staff are concerned well with improving both the provision and students' attainment. For example, students were invited to attend a 'catch-up' day during the Easter holidays. There is good teamwork and staff enjoy good working relationships both with each other and with students. This results in a very pleasant learning atmosphere in the lessons. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Courses are now offered at AS and A2 levels, and there are now higher expectations of all students.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

160. The use of ICT across the curriculum is unsatisfactory. Whilst access to computers is a problem for students because there are not enough of them in departments, there are pockets of good and very good practice. For example, in the leisure and recreation course, there is very proficient use of ICT for research purposes. However, even though ICT is represented in some schemes of work, such as psychology, lack of access means there is little impact on learning. ICT across the curriculum in the sixth form is neither co-ordinated nor monitored, and this is unsatisfactory.

HUMANITIES

In the humanities, history and psychology were inspected in depth. Geography, government and politics and sociology were sampled.

Geography

161. One Year 13 geography lesson was sampled. Standards were well above average. Teaching, learning, students' attitudes and their achievement were all very good. This was a very good lesson because the teacher's specialist knowledge enabled high levels of challenge of the students. The pace of the lesson was very good, maintaining students' interest and motivation, and students of all levels of ability were supported very well in their work. Consequently, they made very good progress in their study of volcanoes, and understood very well what to do to improve further their work. The work was related very well to strategies helping students' understanding as to how to tackle successfully examination questions.

Government and politics

162. One Year 13 lesson in government and politics was sampled. Standards were average. Teaching, learning, students' attitudes and their achievement were all satisfactory. This was because students made satisfactory progress overall in their understanding and assessment of the political ideologies of the main, contemporary political parties in the United Kingdom. However, at times, this was more of a lecture from the teacher, and opportunities were missed to challenge and involve the students more in dialogue and debate. Overall, the teaching was more encouraging of individual work than group interaction. Nevertheless, the lesson made a sound contribution to the students' citizenship education, particularly through a satisfactory exploration of the concepts of freedom and responsibility. However, the lesson was not enhanced by the drab condition of the temporary hut serving as a classroom.

Sociology

163. One Year 13 lesson in sociology was sampled, and discussions were held with students. Standards were average. Teaching, learning, students' attitudes and their achievement were all good. This was a good lesson with some very good elements, particularly in the students' open-minded approach in exploring religions and beliefs from different sociological perspectives. Good planning by the teacher, and very good working relationships, ensured good discussion and effective exploration of moral and ethical issues. In addition, the work was related well to examination requirements. However, being held in the dining area adversely affected the lesson. This was because noise from the nearby kitchen sometimes made it difficult for students and teacher to hear one another.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students make good progress in the subject, and their achievement is good by Year 13.
- Students become proficient in learning independently.
- Students do not have sufficient opportunities to use ICT in school.
- Leadership and management ensure students receive good guidance.

Commentary

164. In 2004, standards attained in the Year 13 A2 examinations were below average for the higher grades A or B, but average for grades A to E. All students who started the AS and A2 courses completed them. An above average percentage of students taking the Year 12 AS examination

in 2004 gained a pass, with just under a third gaining higher A or B grades. Inspection judgements are that standards by Year 13 are average. Achievement is good because students make better than expected progress based upon their prior attainment. One reason for this is because the department has taken positive action to ensure students receive good guidance to help maximise marks gained in test questions.

165. Students in Year 12 make a good start by building effectively on their standards attained at GCSE. They write in considerable detail to analyse political ideas and policies. For example, higher-attaining students comment effectively upon the long- and short-term causes of the First World War. By Year 13, students acquire a secure and detailed knowledge of events. They use evidence well to identify motive and analyse trends accurately. They improve their skills in literacy and numeracy by interrogating election data effectively to chart the decline of the Liberal party in the 1920's, and then writing clear explanations which draw upon the evidence.
166. Teaching and learning are consistently good. Staff have a very secure command of the subject and plan lessons carefully. Working relationships are good and students work hard. However, on a few occasions, teachers' questions are not focussed sufficiently well in order to challenge the thinking of all students in a group. Nevertheless, where questioning is more successful, students progress well in their interpretation of the intricacies of political manoeuvring, as in Stalin's Russia. Students achieve well because of good teaching, which encourages independent learning. They have good opportunities to develop a wide range of knowledge and skills through their personal studies in the subject. Literacy and numeracy skills are developed effectively, as is their personal development. Whilst students do make use of ICT for research and written presentations, they are still dependent on their own personal computers as whole-school facilities are not sufficiently available to them. As a result, not all students are able to make best use of ICT to inform and support their learning.
167. Leadership and management are good. There are clear priorities for development and improvement, with good curricular innovation which encourages independent learning. The department analyses carefully prior results to identify ways of improvement. Guidance for students is good, and based upon secure assessment procedures. Students are encouraged well to identify how their studies in history can benefit them in higher education and future employment. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The head of department has a very clear vision for the development of the subject.
- The teaching is focused well on raising standards and achievements.
- The very good involvement of students in their learning supports their achievement well.
- Very good assessment ensures students are very clear what to do to improve.
- There is a very limited provision for the use of ICT.

Commentary

168. This is a subject of increasing popularity amongst students, whose previous GCSE examination grades show they cover a wide spectrum of prior attainment. In the 2004 AS examination, students, on their first attempt at the examination, attained well below average standards, achieving unsatisfactorily. The head of the subject evaluated very well the reasons for this and made changes to the teaching of the students, encouraging many to re-take the examination. Most who did this achieved at least average standards and their achievement was good. In the 2004 Year 13 A2 examination, students attained broadly average standards, achieving well and improving on their previous standards. All students who started the advanced level courses in psychology went on to complete them.

169. Inspection evidence shows standards and achievements rising further, supported very well by the teacher focussing on students' individual needs. By the end of the AS course, in Year 12, students attain average standards. Because many did not get the higher grades in their previous GCSE examination, their achievement is good. Year 13 students working towards their A2 examination are attaining above average standards and their achievement is very good. All students show very good attitudes to their work and working hard with high levels of enthusiasm and motivation.
170. Teaching and learning are very good. During the inspection, teaching and learning never fell below very good and were sometimes excellent. Students are supported, encouraged and challenged in an excellent manner. Assessment procedures and their use are very good. Students are very clear what they need to do to improve, and strive to give of their best.
171. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The head of the subject makes a very thorough analysis of trends and takes the necessary action to make relevant changes. This was illustrated well when standards fell and the necessary changes to the quality of teaching and learning were successfully made. There is very good clarity of vision and sense of purpose to take the subject forward. Schemes of work and lessons are prepared well, and the students are given a wide range of challenging resources to further their learning. However, the provision and lack of resources for the use of ICT are unsatisfactory. Furthermore, students have very limited access in school to computers and suitable software. The subject was not taught at the time of the previous inspection.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

172. One Year 13 textiles lesson was sampled. Standards were well above average. Teaching, learning, students' attitudes and their achievement were all very good. This was because the teaching offered high levels of challenge for the students in the development of their individual, creative thinking. Consequently, their practical work was of a high level. Students were encouraged very well to be open in discussion and debate, and to share very effectively their research. Discussions with students, and a scrutiny of their portfolios, showed secure evidence of very extensive planning for their projects, which was of a high quality. Consequently, these discussions showed high levels of analytical and evaluative skills on the part of the students. As a result, they had a well above average understanding of the nature of the materials with which they were working and how to use them to their best advantage.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art

173. One Year 13 art lesson was sampled. Standards were below average. Teaching, learning and students' achievement were satisfactory. However, students' attitudes were very good. This was a satisfactory lesson because students' individual learning styles and requirements were being supported adequately through individual advice and tuition. Although below expectations, there was good evidence of students' technical skills showing improvement. Their intentions were often ambitious and, in some cases, conceptually impressive. Collectively, the students were clearly aspirational and intent on improving their achievement.

Theatre studies and drama

174. Two lessons were sampled in theatre studies and drama. In the Year 12 lesson, standards were above average. Teaching, learning and students' achievement were very good. The students' attitudes to the subject were excellent, showing high levels of maturity. In preparing for their practical examination, students found themselves highly challenged in the use of mime and body language to express emotions in various contexts. The teaching underpinned the

very good progress students made in their creative and analytical tasks. In the Year 13 lesson, although standards were below average, teaching, learning, students' attitudes and their achievement were all good. There was good collaborative work, and students were being supported well through a clear framework for both theory and practical work, which provided a good structure for their portfolios.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

In these areas, the physical education and sports studies course was sampled, and the leisure and recreation course was inspected in depth.

Physical education and sports studies

175. One Year 12 lesson in the physical education and sports study course was seen, and work in Years 12 and 13 was sampled. Standards overall were above average and students' achievement was good. Teaching, learning and students' attitudes were very good. This is because there were high levels of challenge for the students, which encouraged them well. Consequently, students were clear what they had to do to improve, and showed a good applied understanding of theoretical concepts.

Leisure and recreation

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very good subject knowledge of teachers is shared effectively with students.
- The head of department provides a strong vision and direction for the subject.
- The department provides very good support for students.
- Assessment is detailed and accurate.
- The accommodation for some teaching is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

176. Standards in AVCE leisure and recreation were well above average in 2004. All students gained the higher grade A or B. In the previous year, results were similar. All students starting this vocational course completed it. Students currently following the course are working at well above average standards and are achieving very well. Their assessed assignments show in-depth knowledge and understanding of topics such as the sports industry, marketing and business planning.

177. Year 12 and 13 students show very good attitudes to their studies and have very good working relationships with their teachers. Together, these create a positive and mature working atmosphere. Learning is very good. In Year 12, students apply very well their knowledge, skills and understanding to topics such as physiology and anatomy, and in the planning of coaching activities. In Year 13, students understand and analyse complex concepts and are comfortable with the use of specialist terminology in their work. They have very good computer skills, which they use well for writing and research, as seen in their work on planning a football tournament and in their study of the sports industry. However, learning is restricted by a lack of sufficient opportunities for oral work to ensure students use the correct technical language and respond with full answers.

178. Teaching is very good and is supported very well through planning and very good subject knowledge. This was illustrated well in a Year 13 lesson, following a visit to a local sports and leisure centre, where the teacher's knowledge led to incisive questioning of the students. Very good assessment is an integral part of lessons and, as a result, students know what they must do to achieve the high marks. Good standards of written work are a result of detailed feedback and helpful comments given for improvements. High expectations inspire students'

independence and probing questions encourage them to develop well intellectually. Consequently, learning is very good. Furthermore, learning is supported through good links with the local community. For example, in Year 13, students planning a sports event had a talk from the editor of a local paper describing how he had organized a fun run. Visits are also made to venues such as local sports centres and there are good links with local primary schools. These activities and visits make a very good contribution to the students' learning.

179. Leadership and management are very good. An experienced and committed practitioner leads the subject as part of the business studies department. Good professional development support for the team is provided, and there is very good planning in order to underpin the future development of the subject. Assessment is detailed and consistent across the department, and support systems for students are very good. The department is resourced well, but accommodation is unsatisfactory. Much teaching, especially in Year 12, takes place in non-specialist rooms, which are of poor quality and do not have access to ICT. Leisure and recreation was not inspected during the last inspection.

BUSINESS

Business education

180. One Year 12 lesson in AS business studies and one Year 13 A2 lesson in business finance were sampled. In the Year 12 lesson, standards were above average. Teaching, learning, students' attitudes and their achievement were all well above average. This was a very well-paced lesson in which the levels of challenge for the students were high. Consequently, when exploring the impact of batch production, students were able to explain well the concepts involved. They also applied this learning well in their explorations of the roles of factory workers and managers, and at whole-company level. In the Year 13 lesson, standards were average. Teaching, learning and students' achievement were good, and their attitudes very good. This was a good lesson because, in their exploration of the importance of training and development in an organisation, good teaching clearly focused on ensuring good levels of involvement by the students. Very good working relationships ensured students had confidence in presenting their work to the rest of the group. Good, challenging questioning by the teacher ensured good progress as the students thought through and explained the results of their research into the topic.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

Personal, social, health and citizenship education

181. These aspects of the school's personal development course are taught within general studies in the sixth form. Two such lessons were sampled, one each in Years 12 and 13. In the Year 12 lesson, citizenship and social responsibility were promoted satisfactorily through work on energy generation and conservation. However, although many issues were covered, none were adequately recorded, and the lesson was more of a lecture from the teacher. In the Year 13 lesson, community links were supported well through an address by the editor of a local newspaper, based on the influence of the media in a general election. From the work available, and discussions with students, it is clear they approach local, national and world topics seriously and form considered opinions. An example of good practice is the teaching of business opportunities in business education.

182. The voluntary co-ordinator has a clear vision for the development of personal, social and citizenship education. Leadership views the subject as unique and vital and provides a strong role-model. However, provision is not monitored effectively across the whole sixth form, and no policies for provision are in place. Management is awaiting returns from departments to show how students' understanding of citizenship is being approached across the sixth form. School records show planning for the future is ongoing, and the time allocated is being reviewed. Nevertheless, overall, sixth form students are being effectively led to become responsible citizens.

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 | 4 |
| How inclusive the school is | | 3 |
| How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection | 4 | 5 |
| Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school | 4 | 4 |
| Overall standards achieved | | 3 |
| Pupils' achievement | 2 | 3 |
| Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities (<i>Ethos</i>) | | 3 |
| Attendance | 4 | 4 |
| Attitudes | 2 | 3 |
| Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions | 2 | 3 |
| Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | | 4 |
| The quality of education provided by the school | | 4 |
| The quality of teaching | 2 | 3 |
| How well pupils learn | 2 | 3 |
| The quality of assessment | 3 | 4 |
| How well the curriculum meets pupils needs | 3 | 4 |
| Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities | | 3 |
| Accommodation and resources | 5 | 5 |
| Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety | | 5 |
| Support, advice and guidance for pupils | 3 | 4 |
| How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views | 4 | 5 |
| The effectiveness of the school's links with parents | | 4 |
| The quality of the school's links with the community | 4 | 4 |
| The school's links with other schools and colleges | 4 | 4 |
| The leadership and management of the school | | 4 |
| The governance of the school | 3 | 4 |
| The leadership of the headteacher | | 3 |
| The leadership of other key staff | 3 | 4 |

| | | |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| The effectiveness of management | 4 | 4 |
|---------------------------------|---|---|

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