

# INSPECTION REPORT

**Kennet School**

Thatcham

LEA area: West Berkshire

Unique reference number: 110055

Headteacher: Mr Paul Dick

Lead inspector: Brian Rowe

Dates of inspection: 7<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> March 2005

Inspection number: 268840

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

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## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1688
School address:	Stoney Lane Thatcham Berkshire
Postcode:	RG19 4LL
Telephone number:	01635 862121
Fax number:	01635 871814
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr David Wootton
Date of previous inspection:	March 1999

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

Kennet School is a very large, mixed comprehensive for pupils aged 11-18, situated in Thatcham, West Berkshire. The school serves the local area and is very over-subscribed. Since the last inspection, the school has gained specialist status for technology and theatre arts, and Sportsmark and Artsmark Gold Awards. Many of the pupils come from families that are economically and socially advantaged, but from a wide range of backgrounds. There are currently 1688 pupils on roll, including 280 in the sixth form, making it a much larger than average sized secondary school. There is an attached unit for 17 pupils who have a physical disability. Nearly 5 per cent of the pupils come from minority ethnic groups, a much lower proportion than average, and none are at an early stage of using the English language. There are no refugees or pupils in local care at the school. Pupil mobility is low as few start or finish at the school other than the usual times. About 5 per cent of the pupils receive free school meals and this proportion is well below the national average. Pupils' attainment on entry is broadly average overall, but higher in mathematics. Close to 12 per cent of pupils have been identified as having special educational needs and this is below average. Over 60 have a statement for special educational needs and this is above average when compared to other secondary schools. Staff turnover is lower than most schools.

## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM**

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1695	Brian Rowe	Lead inspector	
10173	Catherine Hinds	Lay inspector	
3268	George Knights	Team inspector	Mathematics
2561	Anthony Byrne	Team inspector	English
30434	Chris Corp	Team inspector	Science Post-16 Biology
17345	Paula Askew	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
32216	Annie McCabe	Team inspector	Art Citizenship
17156	Ted Graham	Team inspector	Design and technology
20247	Roger Parry	Team inspector	Geography Special educational needs
22458	Gilbert McGinn	Team inspector	History
32173	Barbara Brown	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages Post-16 French
31660	Marianne Young	Team inspector	Music
14446	Barry Simmons	Team inspector	Physical education
10895	David Wasp	Team inspector	Religious education Post-16 psychology
23137	Ron Fewtrell	Team inspector	Business education
12890	Thomas Jardine	Team inspector	Post-16 chemistry
2741	Christopher Glynn	Team inspector	Post-16 theatre studies

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

Kennet School is a **very good** school with many outstanding features, and provides **very good** value for money. Very high expectations have been a determining factor in ensuring that standards are well above average. The school has gained national and local recognition and the award of specialist college status for technology and theatre arts. Very effective leadership and management ensure that teaching, learning and pupils' achievement are **very good**.

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

- The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and has the commitment and determination to raise standards and improve the quality of education for all pupils. He is very ably supported by his senior colleagues;
- By the end of Year 11, standards are well above average and pupils achieve very well because very effective teaching gives them very positive attitudes to learning;
- The school has a very positive ethos, and as a result pupils enjoy attending, are happy and develop into mature and confident young adults. There is a strong sense of shared purpose in school amongst staff and pupils;
- The house system provides very good care and motivates pupils very well;
- The use made of assessment information is good and improving, but the information is not used well enough to improve learning in every subject;
- Pupils' personal development is very good and enhanced through an excellent provision of enrichment, the house system and extra-curricular activities;
- Standards in ICT by the end of Year 9 are not high enough;
- The school secures a very high level of parental confidence so they are full partners in the education of their child;
- The provision in English, science, modern foreign languages, religious education, history, art and physical education is very good.

Overall, improvement since the last inspection has been very good. The main issues identified in the previous inspection have been successfully addressed, apart from ensuring that the provision for collective worship meets statutory requirements. The priorities identified in the school's improvement plan demonstrate that the school has the capacity to continue to improve.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

#### Year 11 and 13 results

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

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

Since the last inspection, the overall results from the national Year 9 tests indicate that standards have been rising in all subjects and are now above the national average. Compared to prior attainment in national tests at the end of Year 6, pupils make good progress overall and achieve well. Results in GCSE examinations show a dramatic and continual improvement over the past 15 years and were well above average in 2004. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 make very good progress and achieve very well. Pupils achieve better results compared to schools with pupils of a similar prior attainment. Examination results in the sixth form have been above the national average over

the past few years and remained above the national average in 2004. The achievement of students in the sixth form is satisfactory. Throughout the school, pupils with special educational needs, including those in the unit, achieve very well. Pupils develop very good literacy and numeracy skills as they move through the school. Their skills using computers and other technology are good.

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is **very good** throughout the school. Attendance is excellent and punctuality is very good. Pupils have very positive attitudes to school. They behave very well and develop excellent relationships with each other and staff.

### **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

The overall quality of education is **very good**. Teaching and learning are **very good** and arrangements for assessing pupils' work are good, but not consistent across all subjects. Curriculum provision is very good and the contribution of enrichment and extra-curricular activities is excellent. The care, support and guidance given to pupils are very good. Links with parents, partner schools and the community make an excellent contribution to the education provided.

### **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

The overall quality of leadership and management is **very good**. The leadership of the headteacher is excellent and secures the commitment of the whole school community to his vision for success. The leadership of other key staff is very good. Leadership and management are raising standards effectively. Middle managers are committed and contribute effectively to whole-school planning and curriculum initiatives. Financial management and school governance are very good. The school does not meet the statutory requirements to provide daily collective worship or report on pupils' progress in ICT.

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

Parents have overwhelmingly positive views, and the school's image in the local community is exceptionally strong. Pupils are extremely supportive of the school. They say that there is a safe environment where everyone is respected and treated fairly. They feel that their opinions are heard, valued and acted upon. Parents and pupils particularly value the school's well-established house system, which fosters a strong sense of belonging. Parents and pupils have no major concerns.

### **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- Secure consistently good arrangements for assessment across all subjects;
- Raise standards and improve the provision for ICT in Years 7 to 9;
- Ensure all subject leaders of sixth-form courses develop robust procedures to monitor students' progress and raise standards further;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Provide a daily act of collective worship;
- Report pupils' progress in ICT.

## SIXTH FORM SECTION OF THE SUMMARY REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is **good** with many very good features, and it is cost-effective. Standards have remained at above average for a number of years. The quality of teaching and learning are good and students make good progress in lessons. Achievement is satisfactory overall. The sixth-form students are very well supported and guided as a result of very caring and dedicated staff. Leadership and management are good overall and the head of sixth form provides a very effective direction and determination to raise standards.

#### The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Students have very positive attitudes and make a significant contribution to the life of the school by supporting younger pupils and leading and initiating many activities;
- Students are very well supported and cared for and their attendance is excellent;
- Teaching and learning are good, but in some subjects the limited strategies to assess students' progress and develop their learning skills inhibits them achieving to a higher standard;
- There is a very good range of academic subjects and vocational courses and excellent opportunities to work with others in the community;
- Leadership and management are good overall, but not all subject leaders have sufficiently robust monitoring to improve the quality of teaching and learning;
- The provision in English, history, French and psychology is very good;
- Students feel very valued and their views are sought and acted upon.

### QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

Judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses inspected in the sixth form are shown below. They are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects in the sixth form were inspected.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication <b>English</b>	Provision is <b>very good</b> . Standards overall are well above the national average. Achievement is very good because teaching focuses students very clearly on what they need to do to succeed and the most able are extended by particularly good additional learning opportunities.
<b>French</b>	Provision is <b>very good</b> . Examination results are well above average. Students' achievement is very good as a result of very good teaching which is stimulating and challenging. Students' attitudes are very positive.
<b>Mathematics</b>	Provision is <b>satisfactory</b> . Results in recent years have been below average, but students currently in the sixth form are working at average standards. Their learning and achievement are satisfactory because teaching is satisfactory.
<b>ICT</b>	Provision is <b>satisfactory</b> . Examination results are broadly average and students' achievement is satisfactory. The work of students currently in the sixth form is above average because teaching and learning are good.
Science <b>Chemistry</b>	Provision is <b>satisfactory</b> . Standards are above average and students achieve satisfactorily. Teaching and learning are good.
<b>Biology</b>	Provision is <b>satisfactory</b> . The teaching and learning are good. This leads to above average attainment at A-level and represents



	satisfactory achievement by students based on their GCSE results.
<b>Humanities</b>	Provision is <b>very good</b> . Examination results are well above average and students achieve very well. This is due to very good teaching and learning and the students' very good attitudes to work. Leadership and management are very good.
<b>History</b>	
<b>Psychology</b>	Provision is <b>very good</b> . Standards are well above average in both years and all students achieve well in terms of their prior attainment. Teaching and learning are very good and students have excellent attitudes to their work. Leadership and management are very good.
Engineering, design and manufacturing	Provision is <b>satisfactory</b> . The 2004 A-level results for product design are average and students achieve satisfactorily based on their prior attainment at GCSE. Standards are above average for food technology. The teaching is effective and leadership and management are satisfactory.
<b>Design technology</b>	
Visual & performing arts and media	Provision is <b>satisfactory</b> . Past examination results have been below average. Standards are now average and students achieve satisfactorily. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Students are competent users of technology in the music technology course.
<b>Music</b>	
<b>Theatre studies</b>	Provision is <b>good</b> . Standards are improving and are now above average. Students are achieving well. The subject is well led and managed and students are very enthusiastic. Major investment developing the technical elements of the course reflects the school's ambitious plans for the subject.
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 college. Inspectors make judgements in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. Excellent and very good are equivalent to the judgement 'outstanding' in further education and sixth-form college reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to 'very weak'.	

## ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

The overall quality of support and guidance is very good. Students' relationships with staff are very positive and students have readily available access to well-informed personal support and guidance from their subject teachers and form tutors. Consequently, they approach the next stage of their education or career confidently. Students feel valued because the school promotes their involvement in school life very carefully and listens attentively to their views.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management are good. The head of sixth form provides very good leadership and has a strong commitment to raising standards. Year heads also share her clear vision for future development. However, there is inconsistency in the effectiveness of subject leaders in monitoring teaching and learning and the performance of students.

## STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students are overwhelmingly positive and supportive of the school. They enjoy the rich curriculum and additional opportunities provided for them and appreciate the support that teachers give. They relish the many opportunities to organise activities for themselves and younger pupils.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

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

Since the last inspection, the results from the national Year 9 tests indicate that standards have been rising in all subjects and are now **above** the national average. When these results are compared to schools who have pupils with a similar prior attainment in national tests at the end of Year 6, they make good progress overall and **achieve well**. Results in GCSE examinations show a dramatic and continual improvement over the past 15 years and were **well above** average in 2004. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 make very good progress and achieve **very well**. Examination results in the sixth form have been above the national average over the past few years and remained **above** average in 2004. The achievement of students in post-16 examinations in 2004 was satisfactory. Throughout the school, pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as other students.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- In Years 7 to 9, the standards in mathematics have regularly been well above average.
- Pupils do not reach their full potential in ICT because they are not taught the higher levels of work in Years 7 to 9.
- Standards have been rising steadily in Years 10 to 11 over many years.
- The GCSE results were well above the national average in 2004.
- The very good teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 contribute to the very good achievement at GCSE by virtually all pupils.
- The achievement of pupils from Years 7 to 11 is very good.
- A-level examination results have been below average for a number of years in mathematics, design and technology and music.
- The achievement of sixth-form students is very good in English, French, psychology and history.

#### Commentary

##### Years 7 – 9.

1. Pupils start school with levels of attainment that are average, but their numeracy skills are slightly higher. The table below indicates that by the end of Year 9 pupils reach standards that are above the national average. The school reviews and evaluates its performance data in detail, discussing any emerging issues with subject departments and governors. This process has helped subject leaders to review the effectiveness of teaching and learning and has played a major part in raising standards and achievement across the whole school. The Year 9 unvalidated results for 2004 represent good achievement, which is especially strong in mathematics. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well due to the very good support and guidance they receive. Achievement is good in most subjects and very good in German, where the teaching is very supportive and engaging. There is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	33.8 (34.3)	(33.4)
mathematics	38.4 (38.0)	(35.4)
science	34.4 (33.9)	(33.6)

*Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

## Year 10 and 11

2. The table below indicates that pupils reach standards that are well above the national average and their achievement is very good. Many pupils reach standards at or above those predicted from their end-of-Year 9 test results. Standards are well above national expectations in most subjects, but in ICT they are average. Pupils make very good progress in lessons due to very good teaching and learning and the very positive attitudes of the pupils.

### **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	70 (59)	51 (52)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	99 (99)	91 (89)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (99)	97 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	42.1 (40.9)	34.9 (34.7)

*There were 266 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

3. Pupils with special educational needs achieve very well in relation to their individual targets. These may include improving their literacy, personal organisation, behaviour, and self-confidence in relating with other pupils and adults, and to new situations. In subjects and areas of the curriculum, they achieve very well. The standards attained by pupils with special educational needs are usually above those predicted by their prior attainment. Pupils in the unit for pupils with a physical disability also achieve very well. Last year, all pupils, except two, took and passed at least five GCSEs with grades of A\*-G and this indicates the school is very successful at ensuring pupils of all abilities achieve very well.

## Sixth form

4. The majority of students start their post-16 courses with attainment that is above average. Standards in sixth-form examinations were above the average in 2004, as they had been for the previous three years. This represents satisfactory achievement overall. Standards at A-level in 2004 were well above the national average in English, French and history. Standards of work seen during the inspection are well above average in English, French, history and psychology and the achievement of students in these subjects is very good. This achievement is closely linked to very good teaching and learning and the very positive attitudes of the students to their work. Achievement at A-level in 2004 was unsatisfactory in mathematics, information and communication technology, design and technology and music. Students in these subjects have under-performed for a number of years. However, the standard of work seen during the inspection in these subjects is at least average and students' achievement is satisfactory. Students following a vocational course are making good progress and many achieve very well. Overall, the progress and achievement of students in the sixth form are improving due to the focused intervention of senior managers, but there is still room for further improvement in some subjects.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	95.8 (96.9)	92.3 (92.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	35.5 (40.3)	36.2 (35.6)
Average point score per pupil	283.0 (273.9)	265.2 (258.2)

*There were 127 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for 2003.*

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

Attendance is **excellent** and punctuality is **very good**. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are **very good**. Their personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school achieves excellent attendance because the pupils enjoy going to school.
- The pupils' very good attitudes make strong contributions to the standards they attain and their very good achievement.
- Pupils develop extremely good relationships with other pupils and with adults.
- Pupils are helpful and considerate and consistently behave very well.
- The school's ethos and high expectations are particularly effective in promoting pupils' moral, cultural and social development.
- Sixth-form students contribute significantly to the life of the school, taking very high levels of responsibility for many activities.

### **Commentary**

5. Pupils want to be in school because they feel valued and cared for and recognise the value of the education provided. As a result, the school has significantly improved attendance, which is now excellent. Absences and punctuality are rigorously monitored and followed up, resulting in an exceptionally low unauthorised absence. Pupils arrive at school and in lessons in good time because they are committed to the school.

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data:	4.6	School data:	0.1
National data:	7.2	National data:	1.1

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

6. Pupils absorb the school's very strong work ethic. Pupils want to do well, and success is very well celebrated. In class, pupils confidently articulate opinions and questions with maturity, and listen attentively to teachers and other pupils. The very high quality of pastoral support, based on the house system and with its emphasis on inclusion, secures pupils' loyalty to the school. Pupils enjoy the many extra-curricular activities and participate enthusiastically and energetically. They relish the inter-house competitions in particular, with hundreds participating.
7. Relationships are extremely supportive throughout this community. Pupils work very well together in lessons and enjoy the many group and paired activities. They show high regard for the industry, talent and feelings and beliefs of their classmates, and enjoy celebrating the success of their peers. Older pupils regularly help younger pupils in lessons and in extra-curricular activities. The personal development of all pupils is significantly enhanced by the presence of pupils with physical disabilities in the school. Pupils offer each other

exceptionally good support throughout school life and care very tenderly for any peers with particular or individual needs.

8. The school is a calm and dignified community. Staff promote positive behaviour very consistently. New pupils quickly absorb the school's very high expectations and respond very positively. Pupils therefore conduct themselves properly whether in lessons or around the school. Consequently, the whole community can pursue the business of learning very effectively and efficiently. Pupils state that bullying is unacceptable within the school, and rarely happens. The school deals exceptionally well with any incident. A tiny minority of pupils, mainly boys, occasionally break the school rules. Teachers ensure that this misconduct does not affect the learning of others. Staff work very hard to keep all pupils in school. They work tirelessly to counsel and mentor their charges. They use fixed-term exclusion very sparingly, and hardly ever exclude a pupil permanently.

## Exclusions

### *Ethnic background of pupils*

### *Exclusions in the last school year*

<b>Categories used in the Annual School Census</b>	<b>No of pupils on roll</b>	<b>Number of fixed period exclusions</b>	<b>Number of permanent exclusions</b>
White – British	1575	29	1
White – Irish	2	0	0
White – any other White background	18	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	6	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	6	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	9	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	17	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	7	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	2	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	3	0	0
Black or Black British – African	5	0	0

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

9. The school's ethos is centred around mutual respect and this can be seen in every aspect of school life. Pupils are valued for their individuality, and are helped to do well in as many ways as possible. Staff constantly encourage pupils to consider others and their environment. Pupils respond positively to this and develop into confident and considerate young people. They take their many responsibilities very seriously. School council members ensure that the views of their peers are included in school development planning. Pupils take a well-informed stance on both local and worldwide issues. Pupils with special educational needs have very positive attitudes towards the school. They enjoy the firm line taken in matters of right and wrong, and they are clear about sanctions if they fail to comply with school expectations. They believe the presence of pupils with physical disabilities helps them to develop greater consideration for the needs of others.

10. The religious beliefs of others are both respected and celebrated. Incidents of racism are exceptionally rare, and are dealt with very effectively. Pupils value strongly social, cultural and ethnic diversity. They show a good understanding of, and interest in, other people and cultures. Pupils show compassion for the lives and needs of others. Many responded very sensitively to their lessons on the Holocaust. They can reflect carefully on life's fundamental questions. Most assemblies capitalise on pupils' willingness to be reflective, and teachers create good opportunities in lessons for pupils to explore their feelings. The school does not hold a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

### **Sixth form**

11. Students appreciate the stimulating atmosphere of the sixth form, enjoying the rich academic, social and personal development programme. Sixth-form students are determined to succeed in their lessons and wider activities, and work very hard. They are ambitious for themselves and for others. They embrace the many opportunities to be involved in the school, such as in the school council, mentoring younger pupils and assisting with extra-curricular activities. Their outstanding leadership of the house activities nurtures very high levels of respect from younger pupils. Pupils anticipate eagerly their own chance to be sixth formers and to organise the inter-house competitions and events. Students relish responsibility, and grow in confidence, composure and dignity as a result.

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

The overall quality of education provided by the school is **very good**. The overall quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11 is **very good** and in the sixth form it is **good**. The overall quality of the curriculum for all pupils and students is **very good**. The opportunity for enrichment, including extra-curricular activities, is **excellent**. The quality and quantity of accommodation and resources to meet the needs of the curriculum are **good** in the sixth form and **very good** in Years 7 to 11. Arrangements to ensure pupils' and students' care, welfare, health and safety are **very good**. The school provides **very good** support, advice and guidance and has **very good** procedures for involving pupils and students in its work and development. The school has **excellent** links with parents, other schools and the community.

### **Teaching and learning**

The overall quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11 is **very good** and in the sixth form it is **good**. Assessment of pupils' work is **good** both in the school and the sixth form.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The very good quality of teaching and learning ensures that all pupils achieve well and gain some success in their examinations.
- Very effective teaching motivates pupils and promotes highly positive attitudes and personal development.
- Not all teachers sufficiently explain the purpose of the lesson to pupils or give them opportunities to reflect on what they have learnt.
- Some teachers do not use a wide enough range of teaching strategies in the sixth form.
- Not all teachers use assessment well enough to ensure that pupils know their current level of work and how to improve.
- There is consistent very good teaching in English, history, psychology and religious education.

### **Commentary**

12. At the last inspection, teaching was judged to be good in Years 7 to 11 and very good in the sixth form. The overall quality of teaching has improved considerably, especially in Years 10 and 11. The impact of teaching on pupils' learning is very good from Year 7 when they start to Year 11 when they take their GCSE examinations, and as a result achievement is very good. Over the last few years, improving teaching has been a focus for staff development. Effective

management has ensured that improvement to teaching and learning has been accomplished in many subjects and examination courses. The pupils are very positive about the school and the teaching they receive. In lessons, they are very well behaved overall and have very positive attitudes to their work. Teachers have established very positive relationships with the pupils and this makes a substantial contribution to their learning and personal development.

### **Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 166 lessons**

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
6 (4%)	60 (36%)	77 (46%)	20 (12%)	3 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

13. The above table indicates a very high proportion of good and better teaching, and a relatively low proportion of unsatisfactory lessons. During the inspection, the most effective teaching was observed in Years 10 and 11. In these years, teaching and learning are frequently good or very good and pupils made very good progress. Teaching was good in Years 7 to 9, but not all teachers share the objectives of the lesson or provide opportunities for pupils to consolidate their learning and raise standards even further. The learning was satisfactory in some lessons because of the pupils' very positive attitudes to the school, even though the lessons lacked pace and challenge.
14. Despite the overall very good profile of teaching and learning, there are still aspects that need to be improved further. These are related in some lessons to insufficient planning to match work to pupils' ability. In a few lessons, teachers did not have high enough expectations of what pupils could achieve, especially the most able. In a few subjects there is insufficient internal self-review leading to strategies for improvements to teaching and learning, but in others this is a very strong feature.
15. Teaching for pupils with special educational needs is very good and the co-ordinator provides very good support. Teaching assistants give very good support to pupils with special educational needs, and in a number of subjects teachers discuss their plans with them before the lesson. They make sure pupils understand the instructions for a task so that they can work independently and make progress.
16. Assessment is good overall, but there is some variability in quality within subjects. It is particularly effective in Years 10 and 11, but younger pupils do not know enough about the level at which they are working and how to improve. Marking of some work is insufficiently precise to challenge and guide pupils. Discussions with pupils and scrutiny of work confirmed that the marking in subjects is variable. Assessment is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 because teachers use it well to support individual needs, particularly learning difficulties. Some subject leaders are generally not as systematic in tracking pupils' progress as is the case at whole-school level. Through the house system and the senior management team, pupils who are not doing as well as expected are detected and effective intervention, involving pupils and parents, takes place. There are plans to improve teachers' access to a database of information about pupils' performance, but this alone will not secure more consistently effective assessment. Art, design and technology and physical education are good at involving pupils in assessing their own work, but even then, not always precisely linking it to national curriculum terminology. English is informing pupils in Year 9 about what they need to do to in national tests and pupils doing GCSE are very confident in knowing what is required for success in examinations. Assessment and reporting pupils' progress in ICT is unsatisfactory as the many teachers involved in Years 7 to 9 do not understand the skill criteria well and this results in reports that are inaccurate, offering similar comments on students reported to be attaining different levels. Pupils not following GCSE in the subject are not assessed at the end of Year 11.

## Sixth Form

17. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are good. During the inspection, 50 sixth-form lessons were observed. A third were very good or excellent, 85 per cent were good or better and all were satisfactory or better. A scrutiny of students' work and discussions with students confirmed this good level of teaching and learning. The teaching has improved because of the intervention of the senior management team, who monitor the quality of teaching and learning, and the support given to students on a regular basis. This improved teaching is having a direct impact on students' achievement and standards of work. Regular feedback on how well students are doing is provided and they are appreciative of this drive to raise standards. Teaching and learning are very good in English, French, history and psychology. Not all teaching is good or better and, although satisfactory, further improvements are required in mathematics and music technology.
18. Assessment is good at departmental and whole-school level in the sixth form. Generally, students know their levels and targets well. They are encouraged to research syllabus requirements and mark schemes which are in many cases posted on the school's website. Predictive grades based on prior attainment are used to set target minimums and any sign of performance falling below that triggers a quick response from the head of sixth form and her team. It is a clear expectation that marking will be thorough and helpful and this is checked regularly with students, who are very appreciative of the detailed guidance their teachers give them. English, modern foreign languages, history and psychology offer exemplary guidance to students.

## The curriculum

The overall quality of the curriculum for all pupils and students is **very good**. The opportunity for enrichment, including extra-curricular activities, is **excellent**. The quality and quantity of accommodation and resources to meet the needs of the curriculum are good in the sixth form and very good in Years 7 to 11.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a wide range of academic and vocational courses.
- Specialist college status is having a very good impact in enhancing the ICT provision in all the curriculum areas.
- There are excellent enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities for all pupils and students.
- Routes to vocational courses through the 14 to 19 programme are well planned.
- Procedures for the review, management and development of the curriculum are very good.

## Commentary

19. A wide range of courses provides a very good curriculum for all pupils and students to meet their individual needs. The specialist college status has had benefits across the whole curriculum. This has been particularly good for improving the ICT provision across the curriculum and its extensive use in the classroom. Equality of access to the curriculum and equality of opportunity are very good. In design and technology there is a very good range of courses, including a vocational course in engineering. In modern foreign languages, pupils and students have very good opportunities to study two languages. The departments for physical education, music and drama provide an extensive range of activities in lessons and through extra-curricular opportunities. In religious education there is a good multi-faith approach for all pupils to gain a good appreciation of other cultures.
20. In Years 7 to 9, the curriculum is very good, providing a broad range of subjects. The school is still in the process of implementing the National Key Stage 3 Strategy and training for this has taken place. In Years 10 and 11, pupils can select from a good range of academic subjects with the support of good careers guidance. Work-related learning is in the early



stages of development. There are well-planned opportunities for pupils to follow vocational courses throughout the 14 to 19 curriculum.

21. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. They have full access to all subjects and areas of the curriculum, and participate fully in extra-curricular activities. Additional lessons to develop the reading of selected pupils in small groups, taken by specialist teachers, help to improve pupils' achievement across the curriculum. Teaching assistants also listen to pupils read during a form tutorial. Pupils' progress with reading is recorded, and tested at appropriate intervals. Teaching assistants are attached to subject areas so that they are knowledgeable about the topics that pupils are learning. A few pupils with dyslexia do not take French after Year 7, and this time is used productively for improving literacy with specialist teaching. In Years 10 and 11, pupils who would find nine GCSE subjects inappropriate may take alternative accredited courses leading to the Youth Award and a citizenship award.
22. The management of the curriculum is very good and has the support and involvement of governors. Curricular planning is based on regular review processes. There is a thorough analysis of performance data and consultation with departments to identify curriculum development issues. The school meets statutory requirements with regard to the National Curriculum and in the provision of religious education. However, the school does not meet requirements for a daily act of collective worship, or for reporting ICT in Years 10 and 11.
23. There is an extensive range of recreational activities and subject-based opportunities for pupils and students to reinforce and extend their learning very effectively. For example, the school organises local and foreign visits, language exchanges, music, dance and drama events, numerous sporting activities, debating, revision clubs in most subjects and master classes to extend skills and knowledge. In some of the activities, pupils and students are encouraged to take responsibility, for example in a recent drama production totally managed by Year 12 and 13 students. The links with the local community are very good, for example the link to the Thatcham Arts Festival. Enrichment activities are planned very well into the school calendar and provision for this aspect of the curriculum is efficiently monitored.
24. The school's teaching accommodation is very good overall, with some subjects such as physical education and design and technology having excellent specialist facilities. Most areas have access so that pupils with disabilities can be included. High-quality displays of children's work and school achievements are used very well throughout the school and enhance the learning environment. Accommodation for some subjects such as drama and music needs to be improved, but the school has an ongoing cycle for refurbishment, which is very well managed.
25. Curriculum areas receive generous funding for learning resources and this is well used by staff to provide very good support for teaching and learning through high-quality artefacts, equipment, textbooks and reference materials. There is good access to ICT for all pupils and a high proportion of classrooms are equipped with ICT multimedia to support the teacher in lessons. Staff use this with increasing confidence and skill. The school library provides an excellent learning resource. It is very well and imaginatively led, making an important contribution to learning through a range of pupil activities such as debates, poetry workshops and following international book awards. Books and other learning resources are continually reviewed and updated to meet the needs and interests of all pupils and to support curriculum requirements.

## **Sixth form**

26. The curriculum in Years 12 and 13 is very effectively planned around the requirements of students, enabling the school to meet their individual needs from a wide range of academic and vocational courses. This approach works very well. There is also a well-structured pastoral curriculum planned for students in Years 12 and 13 with a focus on personal health,

citizenship, careers and study skills. The sixth-form study and social areas are inadequate for the large number of students who need to use them.

### Care, guidance and support

Arrangements to ensure pupils' and students' care, welfare, health and safety are **very good**. The school provides **very good** support, advice and guidance and has **very good** procedures for involving pupils and students in its work and development.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The house system makes an exceptionally strong contribution to the support of all pupils.
- Excellent induction procedures help incoming pupils to settle quickly.
- Staff track and guide pupils' personal development particularly carefully.
- The school takes very good account of pupils' and students' views.
- Sixth-form students take a leading role in promoting pupil involvement in school life.
- Daily procedures for ensuring pupils' well-being are very effective.

### Commentary

27. Parents and pupils rate the house system highly. It promotes very effective support for all pupils, and fosters a genuine sense of belonging. Pupils identify very closely with their house. It encourages their commitment to the school and helps them feel safe, secure and valued. The system engenders healthy competition between pupils, as illustrated by the intense excitement during the inspection week over the house music competition. Pupils say there is someone they can trust to assist them if they have concerns or problems. They value the constant support provided by the tutors. Each head of house tracks pupils' personal development very carefully. Staff are alert to any change in a pupils' demeanour. They take prompt action to arrest any further deterioration, and to help the pupil to get back on track. Pupils with particular needs know that specialist staff provide sensitive and well-considered help. The school works exceptionally well with an impressive range of agencies to secure this support.
28. Teachers track pupils' academic progress effectively. Many teachers help pupils to set clear targets so that they know how to improve their work. This process is stronger in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. The school provides very good careers guidance for each individual, so that pupils approach the next stage of their education or training with confidence.
29. Pupils with special educational needs receive very good care, guidance and support. In addition to the teachers and teaching assistants attached to the special educational needs department, they know that help is available from any member of staff. Pupils judge their induction to the school to be very good. Their progress and current needs are monitored and reviewed at weekly meetings of the special educational needs staff. The special educational needs co-ordinator monitors their achievement by analysing progress made at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Pupils with statements of special educational needs are invited to express their views on their progress at an annual review.
30. The school works constantly with local primary schools to ensure a smooth transition into Year 7. Pupils confirm that they settle very well in their new surroundings and quickly establish secure relationships. They are already very familiar with Kennet School on arrival because of the many, and very original, activities organised for them during Years 5 and 6.
31. Pupils know that their views matter. They are encouraged to give honest opinions with the headteacher and senior staff during individual interviews. The school uses the school council very effectively to harness pupils' views about the impact of the school development plan.
32. Staff promote a safe and healthy environment very effectively. Daily routines are carried out thoroughly. Highly proficient and very willing support staff ensure that information about

pupils' needs flows very efficiently. Outstanding first aid facilities are an indication of the school's commitment to caring for the health and welfare of all pupils.

## **Sixth Form**

33. Students express their opinions very thoughtfully and responsibly because they know that the school takes their views very seriously. Staff treat them as adults. Students value and respect this and are very good ambassadors for the school. The house system fosters a very strong sense of corporate responsibility among the students. It is the principal, but not the only, vehicle for exercising influence on school life. Students also evaluate school development planning, and recently began reviewing the teaching in the sixth form. Students are very well supported through the sixth form because staff know them very well. A clearly defined programme of support and guidance begins as soon as they declare their intentions in Year 11. Academic progress is very well monitored in most, but not all, subjects. Staff share detailed assessments regularly with students and give precise targets for improvement. Staff guide students' personal development very carefully. Well-informed staff help individual students to make informed choices about their future careers. Consequently, leavers pursue an extremely wide selection of higher education courses.

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

The school has **excellent** links with parents, other schools and the community.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school works exceptionally well with parents to support pupils' learning and well-being.
- The school has a high profile in the local community and plays a leading role.
- Specialist status promotes an impressive range of links with other schools and the community.

### **Commentary**

34. Staff are completely united in their efforts to include parents in their child's education. The stability promoted by the house system ensures that staff know their pupils very well. Staff involve parents quickly when any intervention is necessary. Parents report that any concerns are handled immediately, using correct procedures. Staff communicate constantly with parents of children who have any special educational or additional need. The school arranges very effective support from a wide range of agencies and ensures that parents are full partners in this collaboration. Parents are therefore extremely confident that the school meets their child's needs, and they value the support given. Shared learning projects for Year 7 pupils and their parents promote parental involvement in, and understanding of, homework. The school ensures that parents' views are fully included in the school's development planning.
35. The school provides very good information for parents. Very informative curriculum booklets ensure that parents know exactly what their child is studying and how they can help. Annual reports are good. Teachers provide good detail about pupils' performance, noting particularly the efforts pupils make. Most reports, but not all, include precise suggestions for securing further improvement. However, the school fails to report the progress of some pupils in Years 10 and 11 in information and communication technology. Parents value the effort reports and the regular individual letters from the school, which allow them to check their child's performance during the year. The special educational needs co-ordinator contacts parents to keep them informed of the progress of their children when necessary, in addition to the school's written reports.
36. Parents praise the school's exceptionally good links with the local community. Many visitors significantly enhance the curriculum by sharing their interests and skills with the pupils and students. Pupils, including those with physical disabilities, benefit from a well-organised work experience programme. Local employers willingly support the programme because they know

how effectively the staff prepare, motivate and advise the pupils and how well the pupils will perform. Pupils' and students' understanding of the world of work, and their aspirations and self-confidence, are greatly enhanced by their involvement in many competitions and local events. Pupils take real responsibility for their locality, and provide willing help for civic events.

37. The school is sincerely committed to working in partnership with other schools and colleges. It makes a very strong contribution to the improvement of education locally. Staff take a lead role in many of the jointly organised projects, especially in the sixth form. The additional funds attracted by specialist status enable the school to share its expertise with others. Pupils from a nearby special school benefit from weekly lessons in Kennet School. Kennet also constantly supplies other schools with resources, including technical help. Most departments have very strong links with the primary schools. Pupils and students are regularly involved in activities such as performing a nativity play in French and helping primary pupils with their reading. Pupils and parents praise the excellent arrangements for pupils' transfer from primary school, which include annual evaluation by both groups.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

The overall leadership and management of the school are **very good**. The leadership of key staff and the effectiveness of management are **very good** and have a significant impact on raising expectations and aspirations in the school. The leadership of the headteacher is **excellent**. The governance of the school is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The clear vision and determination of the headteacher ensures continual improvements to the quality of education.
- The very effective senior management team provides very good support for the headteacher, staff and pupils.
- The senior managers are committed to ensuring that all pupils achieve success.
- The quality of subject management is variable and especially inconsistent in the sixth form.
- Governance is very good, but they do not meet statutory requirements to provide an act of daily worship or report pupils' progress in ICT at Years 10 and 11.
- The recruitment, retention and training of staff are very effective.
- There are very good procedures for financial management.

### **Commentary**

38. The leadership provided by the headteacher is excellent, giving the school its distinctive and very clear direction. His clarity of vision and measured implementation of change have successfully influenced all aspects of the school's work. Central to this vision is the commitment to raise standards that is based on valuing individuals and encouraging the potential of all pupils and students. The headteacher is a very visible presence around the school, and is approachable to staff, parents and visitors alike. He is fully involved in all aspects of the school's life and knows the pupils very well. Since the previous inspection, he has overseen very significant changes and improvements, including improved examination results, enhanced accommodation and the gaining of specialist technology and theatre arts status. The headteacher is very influential in both local and national educational initiatives. He works tirelessly on behalf of the school's pupils, exploring every avenue that will bring in extra resources and improved opportunities for the pupils. Throughout the school, there is a strong sense of shared purpose, which communicates itself to pupils, parents and the community.
39. The school is very well served by a dedicated and hardworking senior management team. They bring a wide range of skills and experiences that complement each other and this results in them being a highly effective team. Senior managers share a commitment to raising standards and are very supportive of each other and the headteacher.

40. The school is very well managed. There are regular reviews of the work of the departments and a very strong critical analysis of examination results. Middle managers are closely involved in this process, but the quality of leadership and management at departmental level is variable and inconsistent. In most departments, management is good, and is most effective in English, modern foreign languages and religious education. Management in design and technology and business education is satisfactory. Procedures to review pupils' progress and set them realistic and challenging targets lack rigour in some subject areas. The school has very clear self-evaluation strategies and a very effective development plan to which all members of the school community, including pupils and parents, are invited to make contributions. Strategic planning throughout the school is very good and there is very efficient use of the buildings. There is also innovative use of the administrative staff, who are closely involved in all aspects of school life.
41. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very well led and managed. The special educational needs co-ordinator carefully deploys her large team of teachers and teaching assistants to fulfil statements of special educational needs and meet the identified needs of pupils. The special educational needs code of practice<sup>1</sup> is met both in spirit and in practice. The headteacher takes a close interest in this area of provision, chairs annual review meetings of pupils with statements of special educational needs, and reports to governors.
42. The match of staff to the curriculum is very good. Staff are very well qualified and have a wide range of experience and expertise. Both the recruitment and retention of staff are very good and are directly determined by departmental need and whole-school planning. There is a very good balance of new teachers and longer-standing staff. The provision for development and training is very good. A wide range of very well-organised and very well-funded development initiatives are directly linked to the school improvement plan. There is a clear sense of purpose and direction underpinning the priorities in staff training events. An important feature of staff development is the performance management system that is thorough and regular and reflects and supports the aspirations of the school. Included in these systems is a very good support network for the induction of staff new to the school.
43. Financial management is very good. The bursar and finance committee of the governing body oversee the school budget very efficiently and apply value for money principles very well. The school has been very successful in gaining financial support from a variety of sources and there is a clear vision of the school's future development.
44. The school has made very good improvement since the previous inspection. Overall, standards have increased considerably and a robust system of subject reviews is now in place. The key issues arising from the previous report have been addressed successfully, with the exception of providing a daily act of collective worship.
45. The overall quality of governance is very good. Governors are very well informed and very committed to raising standards in all aspects of the school's life. They are well organised, meet regularly and have a well-established committee structure for planning and decision making. Governors have specialist knowledge and skills that they readily use to the benefit of the school. There are appropriate committees and delegated powers and governors regularly visit the school. Decisions about curriculum developments, for example their involvement in the bid for technology college status, reflect their desire to get the very best for the pupils in terms of facilities and funding. They act as a critical friend, providing support and challenge where they feel it necessary. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Governors are not fulfilling their statutory duties in ensuring that there is a daily act of collective worship and that pupils' progress in ICT is fully reported.

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

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<sup>1</sup> Legislation that guides the statutory requirements for pupils with special educational needs.

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	5,050,498
Total expenditure	5,062,134
Expenditure per pupil	2999

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	44,768
Balance carried forward to the next	32,132

### Sixth form

The leadership of key staff and the effectiveness of management are **good**.

### Commentary

46. Overall, leadership and management in the sixth form are good. The head of the sixth form provides very good leadership with her clear vision and strong aspirations for raising standards. She is a very good role-model in showing strong concern for the needs of all students. After careful evaluation, very effective improvements have been made to the pastoral system and programme, including better provision for general studies. This has led to very good guidance and support for the students' academic and personal development, especially the promotion of their full and very effective involvement in activities in the whole school. The head of sixth form and other senior managers have begun to monitor the quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form, although it has not yet had time to have an effect on examination results or students' achievement over time in some subjects.
47. Subject leadership and management are very good in English, history, French and psychology. However, there is inconsistent monitoring by other subject leaders of the quality of sixth-form teaching and learning. Consequently, there is inadequate development of students' study and independent learning skills in some subjects. Senior staff and subject leaders have identified some of the constraints to raising achievement in the sixth form, in mathematics, design and technology and music in particular. However, the measures taken to reduce the identified underachievement in these subjects over the last four years is now beginning to redress the problems.

## OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

### Work-related learning

Provision in work-related learning is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Careers education lessons, careers guidance and work experience contribute very well to pupils' understanding of the world of work.
- Some pupils develop good problem-solving skills, but this is not true for all.

### Commentary

48. Standards in work-related learning are above average and students' achievement is good. Pupils gain a good understanding of the world of work, both through the teaching of careers education and guidance and by taking part in a programme of work experience. Very good arrangements for evaluating work experience are particularly helpful in strengthening pupils' learning about work and learning from work. The involvement of parents in this evaluation is particularly helpful.

49. Work-related learning is not taught as a separate subject and the school has yet to identify how best to meet the requirements for this new course. Pupils develop their problem-solving skills well in subjects such as history, science and geography. In history, for instance, each topic begins with a 'big problem', which sets the scene for further study. In addition, those pupils who study vocational courses successfully explore business simulations. These problem-solving activities and simulations help pupils taking these courses in their preparation for work.
50. Leadership and management of work-related learning are satisfactory. The work experience programme and careers education and guidance are well established and co-ordinated well. The school receives valuable support from the local Education Business Partnership and the local Connexions service in these aspects of work-related learning. This provision mean that pupils learn well about work and through work. However, the school has not undertaken an audit to see whether all pupils, in their chosen subjects in Years 10 and 11, are able to develop their problem-solving skills. Neither has it worked with teachers to ensure that pupils are made aware of the potential application of these skills in a work context. Hence, this aspect of work-related learning is not developed as far as it should be.
51. The lack of a co-ordinated approach to work-related learning means that a programme of review and evaluation has not yet been developed. Therefore, the school does not ensure that all pupils experience a similar range of experiences in preparing them for the world of work. Work-related learning is a new curriculum requirement and was not reported on in the previous inspection. Hence, it is not possible to judge improvement since that time.

### **The physically disabled resource (PDR)**

The provision of the physically disabled resource is **excellent**.

### **Commentary**

52. The physically disabled resource is an excellent provision that is highly successful in promoting the inclusion of pupils with physical disabilities in all aspects of the life of the school. The presence of pupils with physical disabilities has a very beneficial impact on all pupils and adults in the school. It broadens their view and they take greater account of people with disabilities. For example, in a geography lesson on access to different types of shops, a Year 8 pupil said travelling to Reading might be limiting for people with disabilities. A number of pupils have special educational needs in addition to their physical disability, and they receive effective support in lessons, and in smaller groups taught by specialist teachers of reading or dyslexia. Teachers of the visually and hearing impaired visit pupils once or twice a week to teach new skills, such as learning Braille, and to test progress. They also arrange for pupils to take part in special events, such as a drama course. Parents have a very high regard for the work of the physically disabled resource. The head of the physically disabled resource meets parents who bring their children to school, and she regularly contacts parents by telephone when necessary. The annual review provides a very good opportunity for parents and pupils to give their views on the progress made, and to plan for the next year.
53. The central aim of the physically disabled resource is that pupils should be full members of the school community, and increasingly become independent young people. They have a full curriculum, and the need for medical treatment is restricted as far as possible to non-lesson times so that their learning is not interrupted. They achieve very well in their studies. Those who are capable gain a full range of nine GCSE pass grades, study GCE A-levels and go on to higher education. Such achievement arises from the very high expectations of their teachers and teaching assistants. This attitude was observed at the start of the day when a pupil transferred himself from one wheelchair to another totally unaided. The welfare assistant was there to check his safety, but wisely respected the pupil's need to be independent. Teachers plan activities so that physically disabled pupils have similar learning experiences to other pupils. For example, in a physical education lesson, one pupil was totally involved in a modified gymnastics activity, well supported by a teaching assistant, so

that he enjoyed himself greatly because he was taking part and making progress. Pupils say they enjoy the school immensely, and one pupil spontaneously applauded to signal his feelings. They greatly value being members of a large school, with the opportunities to go on fieldwork and visit other countries. The physically disabled resource base is a thriving, happy place where pupils bring their friends to play purposeful games, and complete pieces of work. The physically disabled resource organises the Kennet Games for approximately 100 physically disabled young people in the locality so they can enjoy the thrill of competitive sport.

54. The head of the physically disabled resource provides excellent leadership and management. She communicates very effectively with the team of teachers and teaching assistants so that there is a common approach to their work. The welfare assistant, who plays a very important role in the smooth running of the physically disabled resource, assists her most ably. Deployment of resources, including staff, is carefully considered so that they are used efficiently and for the benefit of pupils' learning and achievement. The headteacher takes a close interest in the physically disabled resource, chairs the annual review meetings, and keeps governors informed of developments and progress. The local education authority funds the physically disabled resource directly, negotiates admissions with the head of the physically disabled resource, and monitors its work and resource needs.

### **Specialist college status**

55. The impact of technology college status is very positive. The school gained technology college status four years ago and as a result of this initiative the school has gained very good resources with secure systems to promote technology across the whole school campus. The school has put in place a very good technical ICT team to support both the staff and pupils in their use of ICT. This has resulted in an accepted intention across subjects of exploiting technology in order to raise pupils' achievement. Another major improvement has been the cohesion of the technology department in a well-designed and resourced new building.
56. Technology college status has also made a significant impact on improving community links with master classes and summer schools for Years 5 and 6 pupils from local primary schools in mathematics, science, technology and ICT. The school has also developed courses for parents and the community and regular training opportunities for staff. The school has successfully bid for a second specialism in literacy and theatre arts as well as a renewal of technology college status.



## **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 **very good**.

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

- Very good leadership secures continuous improvement.
- Teachers plan lessons to give pupils confidence in the subject.
- Boys achieve exceptionally well.
- Support for reading is very good.
- The planning of some lessons is not precise and pupils are unsure about the learning.

##### **Commentary**

57. Pupils start in Year 7 with attainment that is broadly average. Results at the end of Year 9 are consistently above the average nationally, even though in comparison with similar schools, results vary between above and below average. In Years 7 to 9, pupils achieve well. At the end of Year 11 in GCSE, the full year group is entered and results are well above the national averages. Unusually, boys do better than girls relative to both their attainment in other subjects and to gender-based results nationally. Girls' high results in other subjects outshine their results in language and literature, but they still attain higher standards than girls nationally, representing very good achievement. In class and in written work over time standards are above average by Year 9 and well above by Year 11. There are no perceptible differences between the opportunities and standards reached by boys and girls. Pupils achieve very well, making increasingly rapid strides as they move up the school. Those of lower ability and those with learning difficulties make very good progress, especially because of support for reading. Pupils of high ability achieve well. Ethnic minority groups achieve in line with fellow pupils.
58. Teaching and learning are very good. The most consistently high-quality learning is in Years 10 and 11. There is no evidence of any unsatisfactory teaching. Pupils have excellent attitudes to their learning because their relationships with teachers make them enthusiastic and give them confidence in the subject. Teachers divide the learning into short and interesting episodes and give clear instructions, allowing pupils to learn very well. It is characteristic of the department that tasks are shared out amongst pupils and because they take responsibility to the class seriously and listen with respect, pupils' learning is enhanced. Tight adherence to the structure of the syllabus, to underpin exam success, suits the learning of many pupils, especially boys, but occasionally curbs the extent to which the most able can explore ideas. However, in the best lessons, very good opportunities for very able pupils are seen, as in a Year 10 lesson where free choice of novel was allowed, accompanied by opportunities to share approaches to literary criticism. A minor weakness is that occasionally planning does not make the learning objective very clear and timing of activities is not precise enough.
59. Leadership is very good because it is determined and inspires pupils and staff to continuously strive for improvement. The firm leadership makes sure that all staff can give of their best and that pupils' attitudes and behaviour are constructive. Management is also very good because the needs of pupils are very well met through staffing, high-quality resources and especially good additional learning opportunities.

60. Improvement since the last inspection is very good because results are higher, literacy has risen from average to well above average and teaching and the use of assessment are stronger.

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

61. Standards of literacy rise to well above average as pupils progress through the school. Subjects generally provide at least satisfactory support, especially for using specialist words, but do not mark the work of younger pupils in sufficient detail to support highly correct use of written English. There is strong support from English, where results at GCSE show that nationally identified barriers to boys' literacy are overcome. Pupils listen well to each other and to teachers and subjects provide good opportunities to develop speaking. Pupils who have difficulties reading are well supported by reading aloud to teaching assistants in the library during some tutorial sessions. Wider reading is further supported by encouraging pupils to write and read book reviews, which are attractively displayed in English classrooms. The school library is a major asset, which is very well resourced and managed. The range of stock is very wide and up to date and although borrowing falls off in Years 10 and 11, it rises again in Years 12 and 13. The librarian very effectively publicises books, hosts visiting authors and teaches research and study skills at appropriate points in pupils' education. In making it a feature of specialist status, the school shows it continues to place high priority on literacy.

### **Modern foreign languages**

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

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

- The leadership and management of the department are very good and promote improvement.
- Pupils achieve very well in all of the three languages studied.
- There is intensive use of the foreign language by both teachers and pupils.
- Sharing of information with pupils is underdeveloped, especially in Years 7 to 9.
- Standards are very high in German.

#### **Commentary**

62. Pupils start school with varied experience of modern languages and their attainment is close to national expectations. The teacher assessments indicate that standards in French and German are above national expectations by the end of Year 9, as was the work seen during inspection. GCSE results in 2004 were in line with the national average in French, well above average in German and well below average in Spanish. This reflects the distribution of higher- and lower-ability pupils and the languages they study. Taken over all three languages, standards seen during inspection were above average. The achievement of pupils by the end of Year 9 is good across all languages and very good by the end of Year 11.
63. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall. Pupils' achievement is clearly linked to very good teaching, which is stronger in GCSE classes than in Years 7 - 9. Very good learning is the result of the teachers' excellent command of the language they are teaching and that they insist upon pupils using their verbal language skills as much as possible in lessons. Teachers challenge pupils to be highly accurate and this, with the very good relationships, ensures that pupils are willing and confident to experiment with language and make very good progress. In GCSE classes, teachers ensure that pupils are aware of their grades, relative areas of strength and weakness and how to improve.
64. In Years 7 to 9, pupils have a good understanding of what National Curriculum levels mean, but are as yet unable to use this information as a tool to improve their work. Teachers explain the overall theme of the lesson, but do not make the objectives clear to the pupils who are therefore unable to measure their own performance. Targets are clearly set for groups of

learners, but are not finely tuned for individual pupils.

65. The department is very well led and managed by a very effective subject leader who strives for improvement in all aspects of the department's work. Standards and performance are thoroughly analysed and subsequent changes made according to clear priorities. The head of department has a good appreciation of any areas for development. A particularly strong feature of the department's work is the very beneficial and realistic contact pupils have with speakers of foreign languages both here and abroad. This in turn enhances and further develops their ability to express themselves for real purpose. Pupils are actively encouraged and taught to use information and communication technology, which they successfully do for their own research. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The department has an impressive record of past test and examination results.
- Pupils learn mathematical skills and techniques very successfully.
- The use of a narrow range of teaching styles means that pupils do not consistently develop their understanding of mathematical ideas as well as they learn other aspects of the subject.
- Although attaining high standards, some pupils are not enthused about learning mathematics.

### **Commentary**

66. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2004 were well above average, as they were in the previous year. This represents good achievement, given that pupils join the school with above average standards in mathematics. Results in the 2004 tests were very much better than in similar schools and are likely to be in the top 5 per cent of schools nationally. Pupils did better in mathematics than they did in English and science.
67. In 2004, results in GCSE examinations were well above average and above the average for similar schools. Pupils did better in mathematics examinations than they did in most of their other subjects. These results were better than in the previous year and represent the maintenance of good achievement for these pupils. The proportion of pupils who gained the higher A\*/A grades was more than double the national average. In tests at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations, targets were met both in 2003 and 2004.
68. Pupils currently approaching both the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are working at well above average standards overall and their achievement is good. They achieve particularly well in the acquisition of knowledge, skills and techniques because teachers make this the priority in mathematics lessons. Teachers give less attention to developing the ability to think and reason mathematically and to gain an understanding of underlying mathematical ideas. Pupils' achievement in gaining this understanding is thus satisfactory, rather than good.
69. Pupils learn mathematics well because teaching is good in all years. However, the quality of teachers' work in mathematics varies considerably from very good to unsatisfactory. Teachers concentrate very successfully on developing pupils' mathematical skills and techniques, covering the areas of number and algebra, shape and space and data handling very well. As a result, pupils are confident and competent in applying these skills in routine exercises. Teachers generally match tasks well to pupils' abilities and previous learning, ensuring that good progress is made. The most able are challenged effectively and develop some complex skills well. The least able also make good progress, but sometimes inaccurate teaching slows their learning. Occasionally, teachers do not take enough account of pupils' needs and, in these lessons, learning is unsatisfactory. Pupils respond well to enthusiastic teachers who show that they are, themselves, enthusiastic about the subject.

70. Pupils are not consistently confident in talking about their mathematics because this is not a priority for their teachers. They are not regularly encouraged to explain and describe their thinking and so do not gain a very good grasp of these abilities. Teachers too often tell pupils the rules rather than encouraging them, through investigative and extended problem-solving activities, to develop an understanding of how they are formulated for themselves. When this good practice occurs, pupils demonstrate that they are capable of understanding quite difficult ideas and making links between the different topics they have studied.
71. A programme of regular tests gives teachers a valuable check of how fast each group is learning. Careful comparisons of results are used to identify the rate at which each group is acquiring skills and techniques and to challenge groups that may not be doing as well as they should. This good practice is not, however, complemented by equally good assessment on a day-to-day basis. The marking of pupils' work varies considerably. In the best lessons, pupils are very aware of what they need to do to improve their mathematics, but this is not always the case. In lessons where teachers question pupils well and attend carefully to their answers, they modify activities to ensure that the needs of each pupil are met.
72. Leadership of the department is good. Success in gaining impressive examination results stems from a strong sense of purpose and a shared commitment to raising standards in those aspects of the subject that are directly tested. Management is satisfactory. As at the time of the previous inspection, a rather limited range of teaching styles is used and the department has yet to embrace some aspects of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy. Evaluation of work in the department successfully identifies who are the best and weakest teachers, but has yet to identify in detail why variations occur. Steps have been taken to share the learning strategies used by the best teachers, but reluctance to consider new ideas by some members of the department has slowed improvements.
73. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. Standards have been maintained at well above average levels. Not enough work has been undertaken to identify how to improve the development of pupils' thinking and reasoning skills or to extend the range of teaching methods being used. These were identified as weaknesses in the previous inspection report and have not been addressed adequately.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

74. Standards in mathematics across the curriculum are well above average. Pupils use their mathematical knowledge and skills very well in other subjects, thus supporting learning. Helpful guidance from the mathematics department has enabled teachers to reinforce the graphical skills that pupils have learned in mathematics. This is particularly successful in geography and science. Pupils' statistical knowledge is applied very well to analyse data in subjects such as food technology and geography, and their algebraic skills contribute well to the development of spreadsheets in information and communication technology.

### **SCIENCE**

The provision in science is **very good**.

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

- Standards at GCSE are well above the national level and rising.
- Pupils achieve very well in science, especially in Years 10 and 11.
- The team of specialist teachers is very enthusiastic with very good subject knowledge.
- The attitudes and behaviour of pupils are very good.
- Pupil attainment data is not used fully to monitor the progress of pupils.

## Commentary

75. The results of the 2004 national tests taken at the end of Year 9 were above average. The trend has been upwards since the last inspection. In the 2004 GCSE examinations, the number of pupils gaining grades A\*-C were well above the national average. The trend has again been upwards over the past few years.
76. Inspection findings from lesson observations and pupils' work indicate that standards are above national expectations in Year 9 and well above those nationally by Year 11. The pupils enter the school with attainment that is broadly in line with the national average in science and achievement is very good overall from Years 7 to 11. Pupils' very good achievement is the result of many factors, including the teachers' high expectations, challenging lessons and the commitment of the pupils. Pupils with special educational needs are very well supported by both teachers and teaching assistants and achieve very well, especially in Years 10 and 11. Higher-attaining pupils achieve very well and the number gaining the highest grades possible at GCSE is well above the national figure.
77. Teaching and learning are very good with the most effective lessons being in Years 10 and 11. The courses are very well planned with teachers using very supportive topic booklets that are produced by the department. These booklets are reviewed on a regular basis, modified to match the attainment of the class and give full coverage of the required topics. In lessons, the effective planning ensures that the pupils are fully engaged and challenged by setting suitable activities. The pupils' attitudes to science is very good and they tackle all the tasks set with interest and enthusiasm. Very good relationships between teachers and pupils lead to a pleasant, co-operative atmosphere where the teachers can concentrate on teaching. The teachers use a wide range of teaching and learning styles, including many practical sessions. Most teachers use computers effectively for activities such as research and data-logging. The teachers are very well qualified and have very good subject knowledge. This enables them to teach with confidence and to explain concepts with clarity.
78. The leadership of the department and science subjects is very good and there is a clear, shared vision of what can be improved further within the departmental evaluation process. The teachers work in a co-operative manner and follow the agreed procedures well. The teachers are well supported by a very efficient group of technicians who ensure all the required resources are available in lessons. The management of the department is good. The department has been successful in raising results, especially at GCSE, by co-ordinating teams of specialist teachers. Further support for pupils who are not reaching their potential grades is required. The department has recognised this need and is planning a central system to identify the progress of individual pupils. The monitoring of lessons and other aspects of teaching is organised well and used to identify and share good practice. The accommodation in science is very good and teachers have access to a very good range of resources.
79. The improvement since the last inspection is good. The standards have been raised, the use of computers is more widespread and the teaching and learning are better.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good use of ICT across the curriculum to support teaching and learning in subjects.
- Teaching of ICT as a discrete subject
- Standards are not high enough and pupils do not achieve as well as they could in Years 7 – 9.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to the subject and use ICT very well to support their learning.
- Arrangements for assessing and reporting ICT are unsatisfactory.

## **Commentary**

80. In 2004, teacher assessments in Year 9 indicated an above average proportion of pupils gained the expected level, but very few reached the higher grades. This represents satisfactory achievement. Standards in information and communication technology of pupils when they join the school are average. In Year 7, pupils have separate ICT lessons, which are taught on a six weekly block of lessons. The standard of work seen during the inspection was close to average. The lack of continuity slows the progress made by pupils. In Years 8 and 9, ICT is taught solely through other subjects in the curriculum and although carefully planned and monitored, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to work at the higher levels. The arrangements for assessing ICT in Years 8 and 9 do not tell pupils how to improve in order to achieve higher standards.
81. Two GCSE courses were offered and examined in 2004. The GCSE results in ICT studies were well below average, but these results represent satisfactory achievement in relation to the pupils' ability. The results of another cohort in an Applied ICT GCSE were well above the national average. In both examinations, all pupils successfully gained a pass grade and their achievement was satisfactory. The standard of pupils' work now in Years 10 and 11 is above the national average and their achievement is satisfactory.
82. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teaching and learning in the ICT lessons in Years 7, 10 and 11 are good. Teaching and learning in other subjects are satisfactory, but there are significant weaknesses in assessment arrangements. The specialist teachers have very good subject knowledge and make good use of a range of resources to support both whole-class and individual pupil's needs. They use interactive whiteboards very well for demonstrations and discussion. Teachers effectively monitor pupils' progress in specific ICT lessons and give feedback so that pupils can improve further. Those who do not follow a specific ICT course in Years 10-11 make satisfactory progress as a result of their extensive use of ICT in other subjects, but their progress is not tracked or reported. Pupils were observed using ICT effectively and responsibly both in lessons and out of class. Pupils have good access to ICT resources.
83. Leadership of the department is good. The department's very detailed development plan identifies areas for improvement. The department has played a key role in the developments resulting from gaining technology college status, which has resulted in improved provision both in ICT as a subject and as a cross-curricular provision. It has provided an effective structure for moving forward with new forms of technology. Management of the overall provision for ICT is satisfactory, but the arrangements for assessment outside of ICT lessons do not raise pupils' achievement. The department benefits from good technical support.
84. Since the last inspection there has been satisfactory progress. There has been good improvement made in the use of ICT for both teaching and learning in other subjects. There is a considerable increase in the access to ICT, particularly in light of the new technologies available since the last inspection.

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

85. Provision for ICT across the curriculum is very good. As a result of the school's technology college status and very good management, the school has significantly improved resources and created good systems to support both the staff and pupils in their use of ICT. The use of ICT to support teaching and learning in many subjects is very good and it is firmly embedded in subject schemes of work and lesson plans.
86. The school has carefully planned ICT provision in all subjects in Years 7 to 9 and monitors this regularly. Subject leaders assess pupils' attainment of ICT in subjects, which they report annually. The monitoring of teaching and learning of ICT across the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is not as developed. The school does not ensure that all statutory requirements for reporting are met or that all pupils have equal opportunity to use ICT to support learning.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **History**

Provision in history is **very good**.

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

- Standards in Years 10 and 11 are well above average as a result of very good teaching.
- Teaching encourages pupils to learn independently.
- The subject is very well led so that high expectations are being set.
- The very good attitudes of the pupils promote very good learning.
- Assessment procedures are used well in Years 10 and 11 to target pupils' improvement, but are undeveloped in Years 7 to 9.

#### **Commentary**

87. Standards in Year 9 are above average and match the teachers' assessments for 2004. This represents good achievement by all pupils, given that they enter the school with knowledge and skills in history that are average. Pupils understand and record key events well. They develop very effective skills of enquiry and of explaining different interpretations of events. Pupils with special educational needs also make good progress in developing these skills as they are well supported by suitable materials and the teachers' very caring attitude. More able pupils in Year 9 have very good skills of critically analysing different sources and of extended writing.
88. GCSE examination results have improved significantly since the previous inspection and have been consistently well above average in recent years. Standards by Year 11 are well above average and pupils achieve very well. Pupils develop very good skills of enquiry in doing coursework, often by using a range of written sources from the well-stocked library and the Internet. They successfully evaluate sources for reliability and usefulness and make clear links between events. The more able write very well-structured essays with carefully balanced arguments.
89. Overall, teaching and learning are very good. Lessons are of a consistently high standard in Years 10 and 11. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge well to plan lessons thoroughly. A range of challenging activities and resources, including regular use of computers, very effectively stimulate pupils' interest and learning. The emphasis in the teaching on developing literacy and independent enquiry promotes in the pupils very good skills of research, extended writing and of working by themselves. The very good working relationship with pupils, and the teachers' very effective classroom control, promotes very good learning. This is further enhanced by the pupils' very positive attitudes to work, encouraged by celebrating their achievements through the very good displays of their work. Regular marking provides pupils with helpful advice about how to improve. Analysis of assessment results and target setting are good in Years 10 and 11. However, although pupils in Years 7 to 9 generally know their National Curriculum levels, they are less sure as to how to improve their work after they have completed assessments.
90. Leadership of the subject is very good. The head of department has a very clear vision for improvement and a strong determination to achieve it. He is a very good role-model, setting high standards of teaching and expectations of pupils. Management is good. Effective analysis of examination results has led to successful changes in curriculum and teaching strategies. Regular monitoring of teaching through classroom observation promotes the sharing of good practice. Improvement since the last inspection has been good, except the development of a more effective use of assessments in Years 7 to 9.

#### **Geography**

Provision in geography is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are above average because lesson planning is good and pupils' motivation is high.
- Pupils achieve well because they listen carefully and participate fully in lesson activities.
- Pupils do not have enough knowledge of their standards and how to improve them, especially in Years 7-9.

### **Commentary**

91. Pupils start with standards in geography that are in line with national expectations. By the end of Year 9, standards are above expectations, and pupils achieve well. Higher-attaining pupils extend their work through homework to reach well above average standards. Lower-attaining pupils write less extensively, but nevertheless develop their geographical understanding.
92. In the 2004 GCSE examination, pupils gained above average results. However, higher-attaining pupils under-performed in gaining the highest grades A\*/A and teachers attribute this to a new style of question, and the examination board has acknowledged that schools were not notified of this. Standards of current work are above average. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as other pupils because teachers and teaching assistants give them good support and suitable resources.
93. Teaching and learning are very good overall. They are very good in Years 10 and 11, and good in Years 7 to 9. Teachers' very good subject knowledge supports very good planning, and leads to searching questions in lessons. They use a variety of methods that motivate pupils' interest. For example, in a lesson on China's 'One Child Policy' in Year 9, the teacher made effective use of a data projector to show high-quality images of posters used in China to promote this policy, and she asked challenging questions about what they revealed. However, the lesson overlooked the moral issues involved. The use of ICT has improved since the previous inspection and features regularly in selected topics. Teachers match methods and tasks very well to the needs of pupils. Teachers deploy teaching assistants well to support these groups. While teachers assess standards periodically using National Curriculum levels, pupils do not have a written record of these so they cannot recall them or see if they are improving. National Curriculum levels have little meaning for them because they are not referred to in lessons or marking of work. The quality of marking is variable, and comments that help pupils to improve are not used enough in Years 7-9.
94. The head of department provides very good leadership to her team, and geography is managed well. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The curriculum is monitored and evaluated well and this leads to the introduction of new topics that increase pupils' interest. There is very good delegation so that all teachers gain experience of responsibility. Assessment data in Years 7 to 9 is not used with sufficient rigour to compare standards with national expectations, and measure pupils' achievement over time.

### **Religious education**

Provision for religious education is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are very high in the short-course GCSE examination for all pupils.
- The quality of teaching is very good and sometimes excellent.
- The subject makes an excellent contribution to the personal development of all pupils.
- The department benefits from very good leadership and management.
- Marking and target-setting lack sufficient rigour.

### **Commentary**



95. Pupils start school with average levels of attainment in religious education. In lessons seen and work analysed during the inspection, standards are above those expected by the locally agreed syllabus by the end of Year 9 and pupils achieve well. From Year 7 onwards, they develop a very good understanding of the Christian faith and those of other world religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism. They also write fluently and, in this context, some very detailed extended writing was seen from Year 9 pupils on Buddhist beliefs. In recent GCSE short-course examinations, results have been well above expectations, particularly in the A\*-C grade range. The number of entries for the full course has been small, but those entered have achieved very well. In the current Years 10 and 11, pupils sharpen the skills they have developed earlier and also acquire a very good understanding of moral and spiritual issues. At this stage, standards are well above national expectations and pupils have achieved very well.
96. The quality of teaching and learning is very good in all years. It is sometimes excellent. Specialist teachers use their subject skills very well to promote very good learning. There is an air of rigour and purpose in lessons and teachers have very high expectations of all pupils. The latter respond eagerly to a wide variety of learning experiences, including group work, use of video, class discussion and pupil presentations. As a result, all pupils thoroughly enjoy their lessons and show very positive attitudes to their work.
97. The department is led and managed very well. Display is used to very good effect to create a stimulating learning environment and ICT is used well as a tool for teaching and learning. The subject makes an excellent contribution to the personal development of all pupils, especially in the area of multicultural understanding. Marking techniques, however, do not give pupils sufficient advice on how to improve their work, particularly in terms of setting individual targets.
98. Overall, the department has made good improvements and built well on the previous positive inspection report. This is a very strong department with an experienced teaching team. It has the undoubted ability to build on its current success, especially by increasing the number of pupils who study for the full-course GCSE examination.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **Design and technology**

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

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

- The good teaching leads to high standards being achieved in Year 11.
- There are excellent accommodation and ICT facilities for design and technology, which are used well to extend the work of pupils.
- Assessment arrangements in Years 7 to 9 are effectively established, but pupils do not understand the National Curriculum level they have gained or are working towards.
- Schemes of work in Years 7 to 9 do not provide the technological challenge expected or identify the research skills to be taught or the creative ideas to be developed.
- The vocational engineering course in Year 10 is not effectively covering modern manufacturing processes.

#### **Commentary**

99. Pupils start in Year 7 with average attainment, but have had a varied range of experiences at their primary school. The standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 9 in 2004 were above the national average for design and technology. In the lessons observed and the work seen in Years 7 to 9, standards are above average and achievement is good. There is a good focus on making activities to learn practical skills in all the material areas, including electronics. However, the ability to design products involving effective research and creating

ideas is less well developed. Graphical skills are not developed effectively to communicate ideas well. There is increasing use of ICT for graphical presentation and computer-based manufacture, but this is not being reinforced and embedded effectively by the end of Year 9. Projects in Years 7 to 9 do not have the technological difficulty to sufficiently challenge the more able pupils.

100. In 2004, the GCSE results were well above the national averages. In the lessons observed and the work seen in Years 10 to 11, overall standards are above average and achievement is good. In food, current standards are well above average. However, the percentage of pupils gaining the highest grades is still below the national average. Overall, pupils develop a good knowledge and understanding of their chosen material area, although graphical skills are underdeveloped. The use of ICT is very good and well embedded in coursework for food and systems and control for research, presentation and graphical design. Less use is made of ICT for computer-aided manufacture and graphical presentation in resistant materials. Pupils have very good guidance on how to meet examination requirements.
101. The overall quality of teaching and learning in lessons is good and sometimes very good. Where lessons are good or better, the planning is thorough, the work is challenging, expectations are high and learning is reviewed very well with pupils. Teachers have a good working relationship with pupils that contributes to their good motivation and progress in lessons. Pupils with learning difficulties are supported well in lessons and also make good progress. However, although the more able pupils do well, the work is often insufficiently challenging for them to achieve higher levels or grades.
102. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Schemes of work in Years 7 to 9 are well planned, but inconsistent in format and do not include cross-curricular aspects, for example numeracy, literacy, ICT and citizenship. Although monitoring by the head of department using lesson observation and reviews of pupils' work is good, good practice is not shared across the department. Assessment practice is well established in Years 7 to 9 and used effectively to monitor progress and for reporting to parents. However, pupils do not have a good understanding of National Curriculum levels. In Years 10 and 11, assessment is detailed and provides good direction to pupils on how to improve their work. The new vocational engineering course in Year 10 is not providing the content or the challenge expected for pupils to gain a good understanding of modern manufacturing systems. There is a well-structured development plan to extend provision and to raise standards further.
103. The accommodation for design and technology is excellent with a new purpose-built block for technology. Teaching rooms are well maintained and well organized. However, limited use is made of display within each teaching area to show pupils' work, identify expectations and develop an ethos of designing and making. The resources for teaching and learning are excellent, particularly the access to a wide range of ICT facilities. Good use is made of links to industry to extend the experience of pupils. Technicians provide very good support for the department.
104. There has been very good progress since the previous inspection. The school's achievement of 'technology college' status has led to benefits in provision and additional funding to promote the teaching of technology. The overall quality of teaching has improved. Standards in all design and technology subjects continue to be above national averages. The accommodation is now excellent with a purpose-built technology block. However, the unsatisfactory development of graphical skills remains an issue for the department.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

## Art and design

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is very good teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11.
- The very good resources, especially ICT, are very effectively used to support learning.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to learning in art and design.
- The powerful use of display within specialist rooms and across the school contributes to the subject's high standing with pupils.
- The assessment system and use of data to track pupils' progress and address any early underachievement is not fully effective in Years 7 to 9.

### Commentary

105. Pupils enter Year 7 with standards at the expected level and achieve well during their first three years. Standards of work by the end of Year 9 are above the national average. Standards of work in the current Years 10 and 11 are well above average, but the most recent GCSE results dipped from the previous year when they were well above average. Overall, pupils in Years 10 and 11 are achieving very well. The wireless laptops made available for pupils are used with confidence with pupils making good decisions about how and when to use them. Staff increasingly use their computers and interactive whiteboards well to critically examine artists' and pupils' work.
106. Teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 are good. In the best practice, teachers ensure pupils are fully engaged in their own learning by providing exciting and demanding learning activities. Pupils enjoy these lessons and work hard to achieve the highest standards and consequently achieve well above expected levels. In other lessons, teachers do not use a wide enough range of strategies or sufficient challenge to motivate pupils to achieve the highest level of work. In Years 10 and 11, the teaching and learning are very good and consistently ensure pupils achieve well above the national average because they are challenged and stimulated by the learning opportunities provided for them. As a result, pupils enjoy the subject and have very good attitudes to learning. Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge and teaching experience to extend pupils' understanding of artists and artistic skills and pupils work hard to do their best. The excellent resources are thoughtfully used to provide a wide range of experiences and approaches. This approach ensures that all pupils find individual areas of interest to follow.
107. Assessment in Years 7 to 9 is confusing for pupils as teachers do not sufficiently inform them of how well they are doing and the standards they have reached. Assessment is not rigorous enough for teachers to closely track individual progress or to intervene early enough when pupils or groups are not achieving as they should. This is because the assessment scheme is over-complex and teachers do not make the expected learning clear enough to pupils at the start of lessons. In Years 10 and 11, individual tutorials arranged during lessons are of a high quality and contribute to pupils' progress. However, the use of target setting is not being used well enough in Year 10 for it to be helpful to teachers or pupils. However, in Year 11, all pupils are clear about the level at which they are at and work well towards their target grades.
108. Leadership is very good. There is a clear focus on raising standards and action is taken to make improvements as necessary. The teachers work well as a team and make available a wide range of art-related extra-curricular and community activities to pupils. Good management and imaginative use of the accommodation and resources make a powerful contribution to pupils' learning. The high-quality displays of pupils' work throughout the department and across the school set the standards expected of pupils and promote their achievements very well.

### Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils attain above average standards by Year 11 and pupils achieve very well.
- High-quality teaching, which challenges all pupils in Years 10 and 11, is not always evident in lessons for pupils in Years 7 to 9.
- Leadership ensures very good-quality musical experiences for many pupils.
- Pupils value and enjoy all that the department has to offer, which makes a very significant contribution to their personal development.
- The current method for assessing pupils' work and monitoring progress does not give a clear picture of their strengths and weaknesses or enable them to understand how to improve.

### **Commentary**

109. Standards at the end of Year 9 are well above average, according to assessments of pupils' work by teachers. This was not matched by work seen during the inspection when standards were above average. Pupils' musical ability is average on entry to the school, so achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good. This is so for all groups of pupils, including those who have special educational needs.
110. The number of pupils attaining A\*-C grades in GCSE examinations in 2004 was above average for both boys and girls. This maintains a three-year rising trend in the proportion of pupils attaining these grades. The standard of work seen during the inspection by the current Year 11 pupils is well above that expected nationally, and their achievement is very good. This maintains the above average standards in Years 10 and 11 identified in the previous inspection. Pupils are competent performers, who analyse music with clarity and precision, identifying musical techniques and using key language with ease. Composition work is a weaker area as pupils do not use complex harmonies or develop melodic ideas.
111. Teaching and learning are good overall. They are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. The key characteristics of the very good teaching and learning are teachers' comprehensive musical knowledge and very good role-models in lessons. Rigorous questioning where pupils are expected to describe their work accurately means that they describe complex musical expressions confidently. Content in lessons is relevant to pupils' interests so they work hard in lessons. All pupils enjoy their lessons and working relationships are strong. Where the purpose of the lesson is not made clear to pupils, or the introductory teaching is insufficient, pupils do not learn so effectively. Their achievement in these lessons is satisfactory. Occasionally, teachers do not use time productively or provide opportunities at the end of lessons when pupils can reflect upon and review the progress they have made.
112. Leadership of the subject is very good. There is a consistency of approach, strong teamwork has been established and morale of staff is high. All teachers, including visiting instrumental staff, contribute to the very good musical environment which pupils enjoy. Pupils are very involved in the extensive range of enrichment that takes place regularly. A large number of pupils take part in the very popular house music competitions, assuming responsibility for arranging and organising rehearsals. Workshops, which develop pupils' awareness and understanding of music from other cultures, are a regular feature. All activities contribute very significantly to pupils' appreciation of different musical styles and their personal development. Management is good, but the monitoring of pupils' performance and relating it clearly to National Curriculum levels is a weakness. Pupils do not know how well they are doing in relation to national expectations, nor do they set themselves targets in order to improve their work. This was an issue at the previous inspection. However, improvement has been good because the quality of teaching has improved, standards for all pupils are now higher.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Results in both physical education and dance GCE examinations are well above average.
- The extensive range of extra-curricular activities is well supported by large groups of enthusiastic pupils.
- The excellent standard of accommodation helps to enhance both pupils' enjoyment of the subject and their achievement.

### **Commentary**

113. Pupils' attainment at the start of Year 7 is average and they arrive from their primary school with a range of physical education experiences. They settle into the school quickly, make good progress, and by the end of Year 9 their attainment is above the national average. In all year groups there is a wide range of ability, but teachers accommodate this well through individual support and varied activities. As a consequence, all pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and they apply the techniques, skills and competition rules effectively to many aspects of physical education. Basic skills are well developed and provide a sound platform for future development. The standard of swimming is very good.
114. Results in the GCSE examinations have improved since the previous inspection, and in 2004 the number of pupils gaining the higher A\*-C grades passes was well above the national average. Pupils' results in the physical education examination compare very favourably with their results in other subjects. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have the opportunity to take a GCSE in dance and enthusiastic and able groups of pupils have taken this course. The number of pupils gaining the higher A\* - C grades in dance is well above the national average with many pupils performing at the highest level. The achievement of pupils in the GCSE physical education and dance courses is very good.
115. The overall standard in the non-examination course is well above that seen nationally. Pupils make very good progress in all activities throughout Years 10 and 11 and achieve very well. Good use is made of the excellent on-site swimming pool with some pupils attaining high levels of competence not only in swimming, but also in water polo, synchronised swimming and life-saving techniques. Pupils with special educational needs are given much sensitive support and achieve very well. Talented pupils are identified and are encouraged to extend their skills both in school lessons and with outside clubs and organisations. Many pupils have represented Berkshire in a range of events.
116. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall. Teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 are very good, and some teaching is excellent. All teachers have a very secure knowledge and understanding of the subject. They are enthusiastic and teach lessons that are well structured with a choice of tasks that permits a high level of interest and effort. Pupils respond very positively to this high-quality teaching. Teachers give very generously of their time to provide a wide range of extra-curricular activities that are well supported and appreciated by the pupils.
117. Leadership and the effectiveness of management are good. At the time of the inspection, the head of department had only been in post for six weeks. In this short time he has made an impressive start and is already clear about the direction he wishes the department to take. He has inherited some good-quality documentation, but he recognises that it now needs to be revised and updated to include recent curriculum initiatives. Hardworking, talented teachers work well together, support each other and show a very strong commitment to their pupils.
118. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. Examination results have improved and the curriculum offer has been expanded to include dance at GCSE. In September 2001, the school gained the Sportsmark award. This is national recognition of high-quality provision in physical education.

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

## **Business studies**

The provision in business studies is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There are good relationships between teachers and pupils.
- Pupils' attitudes towards their learning are positive.
- There is insufficient provision for gifted and talented pupils.
- Links with business are insufficiently developed.
- There are good procedures for assessment.

### **Commentary**

119. The results of the 2004 GCSE examinations in business studies were in line with national averages, representing satisfactory achievement in terms of pupils' prior attainment. The standard of work seen in lessons and in pupils' folders was above national expectations. There is no significant difference between the success achieved by boys and girls.
120. Teaching and learning are satisfactory with examples of good practice. Lessons are well planned and the teachers have good, secure subject knowledge. This has a positive effect on pupils' learning. Teachers use resources well and most pupils benefit from good use of ICT in lessons. Overall, the teachers have high expectations for their pupils, although the provision for gifted and talented pupils is not sufficiently developed. As a result, the proportion of A/A\* grades achieved in 2004 was well below school and national averages. Assessment procedures are good and constructive in informing pupils of their standard and how they can improve. The teachers encourage and support their pupils well and as a result relationships between teachers and their pupils are good and most pupils have a positive approach to their learning. Homework and mini-projects are used effectively in consolidating learning and raising achievement. Whilst there are some links with local businesses, these are not sufficiently developed and this restricts pupils' understanding of the business world and their overall achievement.
121. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. The head of department is committed and has a clear vision for the development of business studies. He has a strategy for sharing good practice and creating an effective team of well-qualified and experienced staff. Teachers in the department have good opportunities for their professional development. The use made and monitoring of pupils' performance data is insufficiently developed. Teachers give willingly of their time outside the classroom and the subject is very well resourced. These have a positive impact on pupils' motivation and achievement. Since the last inspection, there have been satisfactory improvements in the quality of coursework, the use of projects and the level of resources, including ICT.

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

122. The provision for personal, social and health education is good. The provision was sampled through observing lessons, looking at work and talking to pupils. The programme of work is very well planned and teaching and learning are good. Pupils learnt especially well when they were encouraged to take responsibility in lessons and were challenged by teachers to become actively involved in their own learning.

### **Citizenship**

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The overall co-ordination of citizenship within and across the whole school curriculum is good.

- The emphasis on pupils' involvement in the school's house system and extra-curricular activities contributes greatly to their active involvement in citizenship.
- Monitoring and assessing pupils' achievement in citizenship and the quality of reporting to parents are not consistent or rigorous enough.
- Some subjects do not sufficiently plan elements of citizenship into schemes of work and miss opportunities in lessons to raise pupils' achievement.

### **Commentary**

123. Standards in Year 9 are above average and pupils' achievement is good. Pupils are confident to talk about their learning and are able to recognise and evaluate their own progress towards becoming knowledgeable citizens. In Year 11, standards are also above average. Pupils discuss environmental, political and moral issues with confidence and commitment. There is a school council and prefect and house systems so that pupils are very well involved in the running of the school and take responsibility within the school and the community.
124. The quality of teaching and learning is good. This is because lessons are planned well to interest pupils and they are encouraged to reflect on what they do and apply what they learn to their own experiences. Staff are good role-models, particularly through the way they ensure all pupils are included in activities and involved throughout the school. They treat pupils with respect and as a result all pupils feel valued. The particularly high level of pupil involvement in extra-curricular, community and house activities means that many pupils take advantage of the very good opportunities for independent learning, working in teams and taking some responsibility for organising their own learning. Pupils work well together and respect the views of others. The school does not yet fully address all aspects of political understanding in the curriculum, but planning for this is already in hand.
125. Leadership and management are good. A detailed audit of the elements of citizenship has been carried out resulting in a clear, shared strategy to deliver the citizenship curriculum through tutorial time, assemblies, personal and social education, religious education and contributions from each subject. Specific contributions to areas of the citizenship curriculum are planned within schemes of work, but teachers do not always identify or extend the citizenship aspects of pupils' learning sufficiently well. Assessment of pupils' achievement across these areas is not rigorous enough, which means that their progress is not monitored and that form tutors do not always have full and accurate information on which to base their reports.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 11 subjects were inspected and are reported in detail. Work in other subjects 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**.

### 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	7	100%	78%	57%	22%	44.3	28.5
Biology	2	100%	64%	0	10%	40.0	19.8
Business Studies	11	91%	75%	9%	15%	32.7	25.7
Chemistry	2	100%	70%	0	13%	25.0	23.0
English Language	4	100%	85%	25%	16%	37.5	29.0
English Literature	6	100%	86%	0	17%	36.7	29.7
French	7	100%	80%	14%	19%	31.4	28.2
Technology	3	100%	73%	0	14%	33.3	24.3
General Studies	54	80%	74%	20%	17%	30.7	25.5
Geography	3	100%	76%	0	20%	26.7	27.0
History	4	100%	82%	25%	21%	35.0	29.2
Computing	7	71%	67%	14%	8%	24.3	20.6
Mathematics	11	91%	60%	9%	14%	27.3	20.5
Physics	4	100%	66%	0	15%	27.5	22.4
Religious Studies	1	100%	82%	0	26%	30.0	31.2
Psychology	12	83%	67%	42%	15%	35.0	22.8
Sociology	5	100%	72%	60%	20%	40.0	25.9
Physical Education	1	100%	72%	0	12%	30.0	22.8
Accounting/Vocational Studies	3	100%	57%	0	9%	30.0	18.0



**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
Accounting/Vocational Studies	10	90%	91%	10%	24%	58.0	67.1
Art	11	90%	98%	27%	50.2%	78.2	87.1
Biology	16	94%	97%	31%	40%	72.5	79.3
Business Studies	30	100%	99%	60%	39.4%	88.7	81.8
Chemistry	12	100%	98%	33%	50%	78.3	85.7
Computing	9	78%	96%	22%	26%	57.8	71.1
English Language	36	100%	99%	50%	36%	90.0	81.1
English Literature	25	100%	99%	52%	45%	86.4	85.5
French	4	100%	99%	100%	53%	115.0	88.9
General Studies	30	100%	95%	37%	31%	82.7	72.9
Geography	21	100%	99%	38%	46%	84.8	85.2
German	1	100%	99%	100%	49.5%	120.0	86.3
Food Technology	4	100%	98%	50%	35%	68.4	77.9
History	25	100%	99%	48%	46%	92.0	85.1
Mathematics	19	95%	97%	31.5%	57%	76.8	89.5
Further Mathematics	1	100%		0		40.0	
Music	4	100%	98%	25%	37%	36.9	79.5
Music Technology	9	78%		0%			
Physical Education	13	100%	98%	31%	31%	80.0	75.4
Photography	5	100%	98%	20%	27%	80.0	87.1

Physics	9	89%	97%	22%	45%	75.6	82.6
Psychology	32	97%	97%	59%	44%	88.1	82.5
Religious Studies	7	100%	99%	14%	50%	82.9	87.4
Sociology	12	100%	99%	25%	45%	75.0	84.6
Theatre Studies	12	100%	100%	16%	43%	75.0	85.1
Technology	15	100%	98%	7%	35%	68.4	77.9
Art VCE	3	100%	95%	100%	45%	112.0	82.4
Business Studies VCE	5	100%	92%	0	24%	60.0	67.9

### **Level 2 vocational qualifications**

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Leisure & Tourism	2	100%	n/a <sup>2</sup>	0	n/a	0	n/a
Health & Social Care	12	100%	n/a	42%	n/a	17%	n/a

## **ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

### **English**

Provision in English is **very good**.

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

- Results in English language are particularly good.
- Expectations are high and backed up by thorough organisation.
- Very good subject expertise and imaginative teaching lead to very good learning.
- Assessment is very effective in helping students to improve.
- The subject is popular with boys and they achieve very well.
- Very good additional learning is offered to talented students.

#### **Commentary**

126. Standards are well above average overall. Results in English language at A-level are particularly high, with a higher proportion of high grades (A/B) being obtained than in English literature A-level. However, results in both subjects are significantly above national averages.

<sup>2</sup> No comparable national results available

Boys and girls do significantly better than their gender group nationally, but boys at Kennet attain higher than in their other subjects, whereas girls do not. In the work seen, there is no significant difference between standards of boys and girls. Students do well at AS level, even though a number take the subject out of interest, not intending to study beyond that level. In 2004, two-thirds of a large entry passed English language at grades A – C and more than half passed at A – C in English literature.

127. Students in Years 12 and 13 achieve very well, grasping the broader and deeper ideas associated with post-16 English compared with GCSE. The most able are extended by particularly good additional support for learning and one-to-one teaching and they achieve very high standards. For example, one student is exceeding the demands of the syllabus in her essay on the narrative techniques of Sterne and Joyce. Very good progress is also made by a few Year 12 students studying to improve on the GCSE grade they obtained at the end of Year 11.
128. Teaching and learning are very good because teachers' enthusiasm and expertise inspire students to engage with confidence. Class discussions of linguistic theory or literary texts are animated and supported by carefully structured personal and small-group preparation. Students listen to their teachers and to each other very attentively and thoroughly grasp ideas that subsequently inform their writing. They enjoy the subject and learn well because the teaching develops their understanding through imaginative approaches, such as role-play. Very good learning is supported by highly detailed marking and advice that is focused on teachers' thorough knowledge of syllabus requirements and how to succeed in examinations.
129. Leadership is excellent because it secures commitment to high expectations from staff and students and management is excellent because courses are thoroughly organised and supplemented by additional learning opportunities. Improvement since the last inspection is good because the curriculum has been extended by adding, with great success, English language and because very good additional learning is offered.

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

130. Very good standards continue in the sixth form. In lessons, students contribute very well orally to class discussions and group work in English and humanities subjects, and some participate with success in national debating competitions.

### **Modern foreign languages**

#### **French**

Provision in French is **very good**.

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

- Examination results are well above average and students' achievement is very good.
- The quality and use of the language in lessons are very good.
- Teaching is stimulating and challenging.
- Information and communication technology is used very well to promote learning.

#### **Commentary**

131. A-level examination results in 2004 were well above the national average, and all students gained an A or B grade. These high standards were reflected in the quality of the work seen during the inspection. The AS level examinations were also well above national averages, as was the quality of work seen in Year 12. Students' achievement in Years 12 and 13 is very good and is directly attributable to the very good teaching they receive and their very positive attitudes.

132. The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth-form examination courses is very good. Teachers have an excellent command of the language and use it extensively in lessons, providing models of accuracy and fluency that they insist students follow. They employ a wide range of strategies to ensure that all students use their language and practise it with enthusiasm and clear enjoyment. Classes have access to very good study facilities and are taught how to make best use of their opportunities, which is reflected in the very high quality of their research and coursework. This is particularly evident in their use of information and communication technology. Students are challenged, but supported well in order for them to extend their knowledge and skills at a very good pace. Teachers work in close collaboration with the French language assistant to cover a range of topics and subjects which students are then able to discuss with fluency and skill.
133. The subject is very well led and managed by a very effective head of department who ensures that the best use is made of time and resources. The very effective organisation of examination courses and the planning which has taken place lower down the school is evident in later studies as students have the knowledge and skills to work and research independently. Students develop complex and high-level linguistic skills because they build upon previous practice. High-quality department documentation effectively supports teaching and learning. There has been good improvement since the last inspection, particularly in the percentage of students attaining the higher grades at A-level.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students currently in the sixth form are achieving higher standards now than those who took examinations in recent years.
- Students learn skills and techniques well, but their understanding of mathematical ideas is not well developed.

### **Commentary**

134. Results in mathematics for the past four years have been below average. This represents unsatisfactory achievement given the attainment of students on entry to the course. The department has looked closely at reasons for this underachievement and has modified the course as a means of helping to improve results. Changes made are effective, with students currently in the sixth form working at above average standards overall. Further evidence of improvement is that results in AS level examinations in 2004, for students at the end of Year 12, were above average. Recent 2005 results are much improved and many students gained the higher grades. For many students, the 2005 results represent good achievement.
135. Sixth-form students have satisfactory attitudes to the subject, but many do not show real enthusiasm for the subject. Many are reluctant to talk about their mathematics and teachers do not set up enough opportunities for students to work in pairs or groups to discuss their mathematical thinking. Too often, teachers tend to lead students, providing them with techniques rather than guiding them to develop these skills for themselves.
136. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, although with some good teaching. Because teachers have a good command of the work being taught, they present it accurately. Students successfully acquire knowledge and skills well. Teachers give students clear explanations so that students are confident in what they are learning. However, as in the main school, not enough attention is given to developing students' investigative and extended problem-solving skills. Consequently, students' understanding of the mathematical ideas behind the

techniques they are learning is not well developed. This means that students' ability to apply what they have learned is not as secure as it needs to be. The assessment of students' work is satisfactory, but teachers do not provide students with enough guidance, on a day-to-day basis, on what they need to do to improve.

137. Leadership and management of the sixth form are both satisfactory. There is concern within the department that standards need to improve and some steps have been taken to review current practice. However, whilst evaluation of sixth-form work in the department successfully identifies where best practice occurs, it does not yet focus enough on aspects of teaching that need to be improved. Early steps to share the learning strategies used by the best teachers within the department have met with some resistance by others and this has slowed improvements.
138. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. Standards are not as high as reported then and are less lively and questioning than was the case at the time of the previous inspection. Teaching and learning are not as good as reported at the last inspection.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

139. Students' key skills in mathematics are well developed. Students join the sixth form with well-developed skills and techniques. Thus, they are able to handle the mathematical demands of their sixth-form courses well. This is evident in good graph and data analysis skills in subjects such as geography and science. Those students studying science subjects in the sixth form and who are not studying mathematics to A-level find some mathematical applications challenging, but receive good help from their science teachers and successfully overcome any potential problems. The mathematics department provides a successful course for sixth-form students who wish to improve their GCSE grades in mathematics.

## **SCIENCE**

Biology and chemistry were the focus subjects in this curriculum area. Physics was also sampled. In the one A-level physics lesson observed, the teaching and learning were good. The attitudes of the students were very good and this led to good progress in the lesson on cosmology. Standards seen were above the national average.

### **Biology**

Provision in biology is **satisfactory**.

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

- There are very good relationships between teachers and students.
- The team of teachers is enthusiastic and very well qualified.
- The department does not identify and support students who are underachieving.
- The lessons are well planned and delivered in an effective manner.

### **Commentary**

140. The 2004 GCE A-level results in biology were above the national average. The department has some individual student data from 2003 and 2004 that clearly demonstrates that many students reach their potential grades and in some cases exceed them. However, a significant number of students do not reach their predicted grades, and the achievement of students is satisfactory overall. Results of the 2004 AS level examinations were average.
141. The current standard of work is above the national average in Years 12 and 13. In lessons, the students are motivated and have a good attitude to learning. Their progress in lessons and within coursework modules is good in both Years 12 and 13 because of their good

attitudes and the effective teaching. However, the students' achievement over a longer period of time is not as good. In discussions, students admit they are reluctant to reinforce their learning outside lessons. The department has recognised there is a need to motivate students further. As a result, there are plans to introduce more rigorous routine testing of students' learning to ensure they understand and have learnt the topics thoroughly. At present, this is not always the case.

142. Teaching and learning are good overall. Lessons are well planned and taught by teachers who have very good subject knowledge. Students share very good relationships with the teachers and work well co-operatively. This gives students the confidence to enter into class discussions in an effective manner. Modular tests and homework are marked in great detail, with many constructive comments that indicate how the students can improve. Students are, however, not fully aware of their potential grade or of their current progress. Teachers support the students and ensure they understand the work covered by asking well-structured, specific questions throughout lessons. Students appreciate the support and guidance given by the teachers and the fact that the teachers were prepared to help and assist.
143. The leadership of the department is good. There is a shared, strong desire for the department to improve the examination results. The management of the department is satisfactory with well-planned units of work and lessons. The department has started to identify students who are underachieving, but monitoring is not yet performed with sufficient rigour. The department has plans to overcome the under-performance of students and raise their attainment. There was insufficient detail in the previous inspection, regarding A-level biology, to determine the progress made to date.

## **Chemistry**

Provision in chemistry is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students have underachieved in recent GCE examinations.
- Teachers are enthusiastic and have good subject knowledge.
- Students' progress is not monitored frequently enough.
- Students are co-operative and learn well in class.
- Ready access to very good resources helps students to learn.

### **Commentary**

144. Standards in recent A-level and AS level examinations have been average. Almost all students have passed, but the proportion of higher grades has been below average and achievement, based on prior attainment at GCSE, has been below expectations. Current standards are above average and students' achievement is now satisfactory due to the extensive individual help given to students and the provision of further resources to encourage them to read more widely. The proportion of students who withdraw from the AS or A-level courses before taking the examination is very low.
145. The standard of teaching and learning is good. Teaching is enthusiastic, lesson content is challenging and teachers expect students to work hard. Students' ability to plan and carry out practical work is good and they show increasing understanding of complex topics. Students respond well in class and make good progress accordingly. Learning outside class is less effective, hence students' achievement is lower than the progress they make in lessons. Students tend to do the work set, but not much reading around the subject. They find the transition from GCSE, where they were not called upon to do much independent learning, difficult. Students' work is regularly marked with some corrections, but no specific targets for improvement are set and this hinders their progress.
146. Leadership of the course is good. The head of chemistry has high aspirations and keeps in close touch with the other teachers. All the teachers are very well qualified and experienced

and two have experience of examining. Management is satisfactory. Although the weaknesses of the course have been known for some time, effective action to address them has been rather slow in coming. Testing does not identify students' weaknesses early enough for teachers to remedy them before the external examinations. Very good books, equipment and ICT are available to help students to learn. There is no enrichment of the course in the form of visits or visitors, which might inspire the students.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good practice in assessment is in place.
- Students benefit from good teaching by specialist teachers.
- There is limited take-up for the subject.
- There is good provision of ICT to support other subjects.

### **Commentary**

147. Two courses are offered in the sixth form related to ICT, a full A-level in computing and AS level information and communication technology, both offered over the two years. In 2004, the results in A-level computing studies were below average. The results of the other Year 13 group in AS level information and communication technology were well above the national average, as were those of the Year 12 students who took AS level computing. Both courses had very small cohorts of under 10 students. Overall, students' achievement is satisfactory.
148. Students' work seen during the inspection in Years 12 and 13 on both courses was above average and their achievement was satisfactory. Students make good progress in lessons and learn well as a result of the good teaching by specialist staff, who support them in developing the problem-solving skills needed for their coursework. The teachers also effectively track students' progress and target support as needed. Overall, attainment is improving, but take-up on both courses is still low with very few girls opting for ICT. Pupils show a mature attitude to the subject, an understanding of the use of ICT in the wider world and the implications of new technologies on society.
149. Leadership and management are good. Since the last inspection there has been an increase and widening of course provision with the introduction of the AS level in information and communication technology. Additionally, there has been very good improvement made in the equipment available for use in ICT for both teaching and learning. Students make good use of e-mail to get feedback from the teachers on work in progress and the interactive whiteboard to explore ideas with fellow students.

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

150. Provision in ICT in the sixth form across the curriculum is good. Technology college status, which the school gained four years ago, has resulted in very good ICT resources being available throughout the sixth form with clear systems to support both the staff and students in their use of ICT for teaching and learning. All sixth-form students have good access to ICT in their subject areas for research and to support their coursework. All students have school e-mail accounts, however, and make good use of this facility to get feedback from teachers on work in progress.

## **HUMANITIES**

The focus of the inspection was on history and psychology.

## History

Provision in history is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching makes a strong contribution to students' very good achievement.
- Teaching encourages students to develop independent learning skills.
- Very good leadership and management gives a clear direction to the subject.
- The students' very positive attitudes to their work help them to learn very well.

### Commentary

151. Examination results at AS and A-level have been consistently well above the national average and are now some of the best in the school. This is because of close monitoring of students' progress and emphasis in teaching on developing students' learning skills, especially critical enquiry and analysis. In work seen, standards in Years 12 and 13 are well above average and students achieve very well.
152. Both Year 12 and 13 students have a very good knowledge and understanding of the characteristics of the periods under study. Students articulate ideas well and most are ready to challenge each other in putting forward their views with conviction and evidence. Coursework and essays are very well researched, with students using very good skills of enquiry, often using computers to research and present their findings. The most able students use sharp, analytical skills to construct well-balanced arguments, often with references to the views of different historians. These skills are being effectively developed by students of all abilities as a result of rigorous monitoring of writing techniques by the teachers.
153. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to thoroughly plan a variety of challenging enquiries that stimulate students to think for themselves and to be fully engaged in learning independently. There are also well-taken opportunities for students to study collaboratively. This strongly reinforces their understanding of key concepts and their skills of discussion, critical analysis and independent thought. The very thorough marking, target setting for improvement and close monitoring of students' progress also promote their learning. Teachers do not routinely check on students' progress at the end of lessons and opportunities for students to evaluate their own work are lost. Learning benefits considerably from students' strong motivation and often excellent attitudes to work. Students feel well supported as a result of the extra classes and regular, individual feedback provided on their progress. This produces very good working relationships in the classroom and an atmosphere where students are ready to participate in discussion. Nearly all teachers use rigorous questioning to make students defend their opinions or invite challenges from others.
154. The subject is very well led and managed. The head of department provides very clear vision and direction. He is a very good role-model, setting high standards of teaching and expectations of pupils. The team of experienced teachers is committed to improvement and works well together. Examination results are thoroughly analysed and positively responded to, especially in revising the coursework topics and monitoring students' progress. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good so that history is now one of the most popular and successful subjects in the sixth form.

## Psychology

Provision in psychology is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average in Years 12 and 13.



- The quality of teaching is very good and high expectations ensure students make good progress in lessons.
- Students have excellent attitudes to study.
- Students are given very good feedback on their progress.
- Leadership and management are very good and this results in the subject being very popular.
- Students do not have enough opportunities to attend conferences and listen to visiting speakers.

### **Commentary**

155. Examination results in recent years have been above the national average on both the AS and A-level courses. In the most recent A-level examination, for example, all but one of the 32 students entered achieved a pass and 19 achieved A or B grades. Standards of work seen during the inspection are well above average in both years and the very large number of students who currently study the subject achieve well in terms of their prior attainment at GCSE. In Year 12, students become familiar with the key theories and major developments in psychology and write fluently about them, for example, in some very detailed and well-presented note-taking on cognitive approaches to learning. Retention rates into Year 13 are high and, at this stage, students develop their independent learning skills very well. Their written work also becomes more analytical and they explore key areas of psychological research to considerable depth. In this context, some very impressive handouts from Year 13 students were seen on their own PowerPoint presentations about biological theories of aggression.
156. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Both teachers use their subject knowledge very well to stimulate students and to promote academic debate. Expectations are very high and there is a sense of shared purpose and academic rigour in the classroom. Lessons are conducted at a lively pace and a wide variety of techniques are used to engage students' interest, including student presentations, case studies, group work and examination practice. As a result, students participate fully in lessons and display excellent attitudes to their work.
157. Leadership and management are very good. Assessment techniques give students very detailed written and oral feedback so that they know precisely how to improve their grades. Resources are very good and ICT and the Internet are used to very good effect. In particular, the library is an excellent resource for students to hone their research skills. Accommodation, however, is very scattered. Students do not sufficiently benefit from opportunities to attend conferences and listen to visiting speakers. The department has plans to address both of these issues. Overall, this is a very popular and highly successful area of sixth-form provision. It is becoming a significant strength to the school. Students themselves are very appreciative of the support they are given.

## **ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING**

### **Design and Technology: Product Design and Food Technology**

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

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

- The good and sometimes very good teaching ensures that above average standards are achieved in food technology.
- There is very good use of ICT in all aspects of the work.
- The projects selected for A-level product design do not provide the technological challenge expected and students have underachieved in examinations for the last four years.

### **Commentary**

158. Results for the examinations in product design in 2004 were average. However, at the end of Year 13, several students were underachieving based on their prior attainment at the end of

Year 11. There has been considerable underachievement in product design examinations during the last four years. Results were above average for the few students taking AS and A-level food technology and their achievement was good. In lessons and the work seen during the inspection in both food technology and product design at AS and A-level, standards are now above average and students' achievement is satisfactory.

159. At AS level in product design, ideas are based on thorough research using a range of sources, although there is little exploration of the technological aspects of products that is required to gain higher grades. Very effective use is made of ICT for presentation and the development of design concepts. At A-level, students undertake original research and explore designs, leading occasionally to creative outcomes, but in most instances students undertake 'safe' projects that lack technological challenge. In food technology at both AS and A-level, the work is challenging and students have good skills in testing, evaluating and developing food products.
160. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Where teaching is very good, the lessons are well-prepared with challenging activities. Teachers' expectations are high for the quality of work produced and learning is reinforced and extended very effectively. Students are keen and well motivated and have developed good independent learning skills, but they are not sufficiently challenged to gain the highest standards.
161. Leadership and management are satisfactory with well-planned programmes of work ensuring students are well motivated. There are very good resources available to support research studies with very good access to computer facilities within the department to enhance and extend the work. Assessment is good and provides detailed feedback from teachers so that students know how to improve their work.

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

The focus of the inspection was on music technology and theatre studies.

### **Music technology**

Provision in music technology is **satisfactory**.

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

- In recent years, the results in GCE examinations have been too low and many students have underachieved.
- Recent changes are contributing to improvement in students' achievement.
- Students are competent users of technology, but their compositions lack musical sophistication.
- Students enjoy the subject and collaborate well with each other.

#### **Commentary**

162. Performance by both male and female students in the 2004 A-level examination was below average and their achievement was unsatisfactory. Results were lower than expected because of weaknesses in examination preparation and students' compositions. Performance by students in the 2004 AS examination, although an improvement on results in 2003, was still below average. These results continued a three-year trend of underachievement in this subject. Following a thorough review of the provision for music technology, the work seen during the inspection by students in Years 12 and 13 is in line with national expectations. Students are not able to develop musical ideas and use harmonies successfully to give flair and character to their pieces of music. More competent students, both male and female and especially those who studied music for GCSE examination, attain above average standards. Achievement of the students currently studying music technology is satisfactory.

163. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers plan carefully in order to help each individual student. The system of using e-mail in order to communicate with students between lessons means that they receive regular and structured feedback. When teachers explain new concepts, however, students are not always fully involved in explaining and justifying their answers. Questioning is not thorough enough to ensure students understand musical ideas and devices and come up with their own solutions. During practical lessons, tasks are well chosen, students are given responsibility for their own learning and there is an expectation they will demonstrate their understanding when using technology. Students are enthusiastic learners, working relationships are very good and they are supportive of each other during practical lessons.
164. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. The head of department is enthusiastic, striving for improvements in standards and provision. The staff work hard to support each other, are self critical and committed to their own professional development. New ways are sought to improve their teaching practice through professional development. Data is not used with sufficient rigour to set challenging but realistic targets for students. They do not know how well their work compares with national criteria in all aspects of the course. The subject was not reported at the previous inspection.

### **Theatre studies**

Provision in theatre studies is **good**.

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

- The quality of teaching is good and current students are achieving well.
- Students are very well supported and results in examinations are improving.
- The subject is well led and managed and drama is emerging as a strength in the school.
- Specialist school status for theatre arts has brought a significant increase in resources and broadened the range of opportunities for students to follow in examination courses.

#### **Commentary**

165. The results in AS level examinations in 2004 were the best to date with all students gaining at least a C grade. Standards seen in lessons indicate that current students are on target to achieve above average results in AS and A-level examinations in 2005. This represents a move from unsatisfactory achievement in recent years to good achievement for the current students. The department is rightly aiming to increase the number of higher grades in the results in both GCSE and A-level examinations. Male and female students do equally well in theatre studies.
166. Students are very articulate and competently explore complex concepts relating to role, texts, characterisation and performance. They have good skills in improvisation and a very secure grasp of the work of major playwrights and theatre practitioners. They are given access to a wide range of productions and workshops.
167. Teaching and learning are good. Through well-informed discussions led by teachers, the students successfully develop a strong critical sense, which enables them to analyse effectively the form and structure of many different theatre styles. They use their new knowledge well to inform the way they interpret the texts they are studying and have very good insights as to how to bring these texts to performance. The resources, recently provided to promote the technical elements of theatre arts, are being used enthusiastically by students who all have very positive attitudes towards the subject. They work both independently and very co-operatively with each other. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers' very strong enthusiasm for the subject, their own theatre skills and their effective classroom management

skills have created a climate where opportunities to model a wider range of teaching styles could and should be taken.

168. Leadership by the head of department, appointed since the last inspection, is good. He has introduced new work schemes, guidance and new procedures that emphasise his ambitious vision for the future. The involvement of the other staff has been significant. Work is still needed to complete the assessment procedures. Management of the department is good and the new systems are being well integrated into the day-to-day running of courses. Planned improvements to the accommodation for theatre studies and in staffing levels demonstrate the school's very strong commitment to expanding the range and impact of theatre arts based work throughout all years. While more continuous provision in Years 7 to 9 for all pupils will enable them to gain better basic skills to build on in the upper school, the department already makes a significant contribution to the social and personal development of students. Drama is emerging as a strength of the school.

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

169. Work in **leisure and tourism** was sampled. Attainment at intermediate GNVQ in 2004 was above national averages and represented very good achievement in terms of the students' prior attainment at GCSE. Teaching, learning and student achievement in the two lessons observed were very good. Leadership and management of the subject are very good.

## **BUSINESS**

No subject was inspected in depth in this curriculum area, but the work in business studies, Young Enterprise and accounting were sampled.

170. In **business studies**, results at A-level in 2004 and 2003 were above national averages and represented satisfactory achievement in terms of the students' prior attainment at GCSE. Standards in business AVCE were below national averages in 2004, having been above average in 2003. In the two lessons observed, teaching, learning and achievement were good and the students showed a positive attitude towards their learning. Relationships between the teachers and their students are good and there are very good links with local business. The subject is well led and managed.
171. Attainment in the Level 2 Certificate in **Enterprise** in 2004 was above the national average and represented good achievement by the students. Teaching, learning and student achievement in the lesson observed were good and the attitudes of the students were very positive. The students' achievement and interest are enhanced by the opportunities available to participate in business competitions. The subject is well led and students develop very positive attitudes to the course.
172. In an **accounting** lesson observed, students were working at average standards. They were successfully learning about standard costing techniques because the teacher provided them with a clear procedure for performing the necessary calculations.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

173. Work in health and social care was sampled. One lesson was observed. Students made good progress because the teacher had prepared them well to research an assignment by making good use of the computers. Students spoke with confidence about their successful experiences in work placements and most are on line to gain a distinction in the forthcoming examination. Their achievement has been very good because of very effective teaching and leadership and management.

## **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES**

No subjects were inspected in this curriculum area.



## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

The leadership of other key staff	3	2
The effectiveness of management	3	2

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