

# INSPECTION REPORT

**KINGS NORTON GIRLS SCHOOL AND LANGUAGE  
COLLEGE**

Birmingham

LEA area: Birmingham

Unique reference number: 103561

Headteacher: Mrs P Beanland

Lead inspector: Mr R C Drew

Dates of inspection: 18<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2004

Inspection number: 268843

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Other secondary school

School category: Foundation

Age range of pupils: 11 - 18

Gender of pupils: Female

Number on roll: 947

School address: Selly Oak Road  
Birmingham  
West Midlands

Postcode: B30 1HW

Telephone number: (0121) 4581 305

Fax number: (0121) 4592 514

Appropriate authority: Local education authority

Name of chair of governors: Mr C Parsons

Date of previous inspection: 1<sup>st</sup> February 1999

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The school is an 11 to 18 comprehensive for girls. It is average in size, with 947 pupils on roll, but growing and heavily oversubscribed. The 197 girls in the sixth form are part of a joint arrangement with the nearby boys' comprehensive school, which contributes a further 130 male students. The school serves a wide residential area of south-west Birmingham. Pupils are, on balance, socially and economically advantaged and enter the school with above-average standards. About 85 per cent of pupils come from a white (British) background; another three per cent have other white heritage and about three per cent are of mixed white and black (Caribbean) origin. A further ten other ethnic minorities (mostly Asian) contribute between one and three per cent each. No pupils have refugee or asylum seeker status. About three per cent of pupils do not have English as their mother tongue. Fewer pupils than average - about 12 per cent - are entitled to free school meals and the proportion of pupils with special educational needs is well below the national average. The school was given specialist Language College status in 2001 and has recently been designated a Leading Edge school. The headteacher is now also executive headteacher at a nearby school in challenging circumstances, and her deputy headteacher has become associate headteacher. The school has gained numerous awards in the last few years, notably: Artsmark, Investors in People, Schools Achievement, Sportsmark and the Quality Careers Award.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
7281	Bob Drew	Lead inspector	
9710	Rosie Burgess	Lay inspector	
30899	Ken Boden	Team inspector	Art and design; Design and technology
27368	Michael Merchant	Team inspector	Geography; Geography (sixth form)
20629	John Bryson	Team inspector	English; English (sixth form)
18447	Ron Cohen	Team inspector	Business studies (sixth form); History
10391	Valerie du Plergny	Team inspector	Drama; Music
3100	Geoffrey Hunter	Team inspector	Mathematics; Mathematics (sixth form)
21785	Veronica Kerr	Team inspector	Science; Biology (sixth form); Psychology (sixth form)
31963	Malcolm Padmore	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT); Special educational needs
19404	Les Schubeler	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages; French (sixth form); Work-related learning
18755	Roger Whittaker	Team inspector	Citizenship; Physical education
14596	Tony Fiddian-Green		English as an additional language; Religious education; Religious studies (sixth form)

The inspection contractor was:

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**This is a very good school with some excellent features.** Its overall effectiveness is very good and there are significant areas of excellent practice. Teaching and learning are very good and enable pupils to make rapid progress in lessons. Achievement by the end of Year 11 is excellent, though in the sixth form standards are below average in some subjects. Leadership is excellent and management very effective in setting and meeting high expectations. The school provides **very good value for money**.

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

- Achievement in Years 7 to 11 is excellent.
- GCSE/GNVQ results are very high, amongst the top five per cent for all schools.
- Leadership by the headteacher and associate headteacher is excellent, especially in their contribution to vision, strategic planning and motivating colleagues and pupils.
- Governors are very effective.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good, with much that is excellent.
- Teaching and learning are both very good, with many areas of excellence.
- Links with the wider community are excellent.
- Pupils receive very good support guidance and care.
- The curriculum in the main school is very good with very extensive high-quality extra-curricular activities.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.
- Current achievement in the sixth form, while good, is lower than in the rest of the school and standards are below average in some subjects.
- Recent achievement in Year 9 science tests has been unsatisfactory.

**Improvement in the school's effectiveness since the 1999 inspection has been very good.** It was already an effective school, but GCSE results have risen dramatically and teaching and learning are even more effective. High-quality leadership and management have spread into many more areas of school activity and facilities have been extensively upgraded, although more remains to be done, for instance for indoor physical education facilities.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

From Year 7 to Year 11, pupils make far more progress than usual. This **excellent achievement allows them to reach particularly high standards at GCSE**. Pupils enter Year 7 with above-average attainment and recent Year 9 test results in English, mathematics and science indicate sound collective progress has been made in these subjects, although progress is very good in English and satisfactory in the other two subjects. English and mathematics results were well above, and science above, the average for all schools in 2003; but for similar schools, mathematics results were average and those for science below average. The previous year's science results had been well below average. Achievement seen during the inspection is higher: it is good overall and leads to well above average standards in English, mathematics and science. Most other subjects help pupils make very good gains across Years 7 to 9. By the end of Year 11, pupils have built

extensively on their Year 9 attainment and reach very high standards, placing the school in the top five per cent of schools nationally. For example, nearly 90 per cent of pupils gain five or more passes at A\* to C grades when the national average is 52 per cent. In English, art and design and religious education, standards seen during the inspection were very high and achievement, or value-added were exceptional. Standards in the sixth form are above average and students' recent A2 results indicate satisfactory achievement, while the gains being made in current lessons are good. Pupils' and students' **personal qualities are very successfully developed**. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good as, by national standards, are attitudes, behaviour and attendance.

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION

**The school provides pupils with a very good quality education. Teaching and learning are very effective, at times excellent.** Teachers across the school set extremely high expectations; they show great skill in explaining clearly and most succeed in helping pupils participate and learn securely. The quality is especially high in several subjects, especially those that assess and monitor pupils closely and focus on enabling pupils to learn independently. In Years 10 and 11, staff are remarkably adept at helping pupils understand examination board requirements. Teaching in the sixth form is particularly authoritative and clear; learning is good, although it varies significantly depending on the level of students' active involvement in lessons. Pupils' positive response and attitudes contribute immensely to learning and help explain the excellent achievement made between Years 7 and 11. The school also provides a **very good curriculum and very effective care, guidance and support. Partnership with parents is very strong and links with the wider community are excellent.**

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

**The school benefits from excellent leadership.** The executive headteacher provides exceptional vision for the school, seeking to maximise the potential of all pupils. She has shown great skill and energy in implementing this vision over a sustained period. Staff and pupils have been motivated to raise standards to a remarkably high level for a non-selective school and pupils of all categories achieve equally well. The associate headteacher has given excellent support throughout this period, especially in ensuring that **management is very effective**. Her work in monitoring and support of teaching has had a highly beneficial effect. Training of subject leaders and year heads has been very successful so that the majority now lead and manage their areas very well, with several demonstrating excellent quality. The governing body is far better informed about the school than is common and provides very good strategic advice. Virtually all statutory duties are met, and even the exception - the act of worship requirements - is closer to being met than usual.

## PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents have, in the main, a very positive view of this school and it is popular and very heavily over-subscribed. Ninety per cent or more of those replying to the inspection questionnaire believed that their children were happy, that teaching and their children's progress were good and that staff rightly have very high expectations of pupils. Only very small numbers, much lower than generally found, express dissatisfaction with any aspects of the school's work. Pupils are equally supportive and their demeanour in school is strongly positive. A significant proportion of those interviewed believed that the school's new behaviour policy was needed but that it has not clarified things as well as intended.

## IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Ensure that results in Year 9 tests in science improve to match those for the other core subjects and indicate consistently good performance in relation to pupils' prior attainment.
- Increase the collective value-added or achievement made by students in the sixth form so that it comes closer to sustaining the outstanding progress pupils make in the main school.

- Raise the effectiveness of monitoring in the sixth form so that examples of outstanding practice in teaching and learning styles and use of target-setting are adopted as standard.
- Take all possible steps to provide suitable accommodation where it is currently deficient;

**and, to meet statutory requirements:**

- provide a daily act of collective worship.

### THE SIXTH FORM AT KINGS NORTON GIRLS SCHOOL

The sixth form has 197 students drawn largely from Year 11 of the main school but with about 60 joining from elsewhere. It offers 31 AS and A2 courses.

### OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good. Teaching is very good, standards are above average and achievement by students is good in most subjects. The sixth form is well led and gives good value for money. Improvement since the last inspection has been good, especially in the range of subjects offered and higher standards reached.

**The main strengths and weaknesses are:**

- Students' A2 results are well above national averages and standards seen in lessons are above average.
- Teaching in lessons is very good overall, with examples of outstanding practice in several subjects.
- The range in standards, value-added and effectiveness of learning in different subjects is wider than commonly found.
- Good leadership and management have promoted good improvement in standards and provision since the last inspection.
- Students show very positive attitudes to work and contribute very effectively to school life.
- Relationships between students and staff are very good.

### 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	<p><b>Provision in English literature is excellent.</b> Consistently very good teaching and very effective learning promote very good achievement by students. Examples of excellent teaching and learning are found. Students' progress is monitored and encouraged by excellent assessment procedures. Recent results are well above average and standards seen during the inspection confirm this.</p> <p><b>Provision in French is very good.</b> Current teaching and learning are very good overall, and sometimes both are excellent. A2 results have been average, but current standards in Year 13 are above average, more students are taking the course and they are making very good progress.</p>
Mathematics	<p><b>Provision in mathematics is satisfactory.</b> Recent results have been below average, but work seen in Year 13 is currently average. Teaching and learning are sound and students are achieving satisfactorily.</p>
Science	<p><b>Provision in biology is good.</b> Current teaching is very good. Learning is good and achievement is also good. Results at A2 were broadly average in 2003 and work seen during the inspection confirms average standards.</p>



Information and communication technology	<b>Provision in ICT is good.</b> Confirmed results and standards seen in lessons are both average. Teaching, learning and value-added are all satisfactory now, although 2004 results indicate too little achievement.
Humanities	<p><b>Provision in geography is very good.</b> Whilst recent A2 results were broadly average, standards in lessons are now good due to the increasingly confident and very good teaching and learning. Achievement is very good.</p> <p><b>Provision in religious studies is excellent.</b> Results, standards and the quality of teaching and learning are excellent. <b><i>This is an outstanding area of the school's provision for students.</i></b></p> <p><b>Provision in psychology is very good.</b> Results and standards seen in lessons are average but this represents good value-added for the students concerned. Teaching and learning are consistently very good.</p>
Business	<b>Provision in business studies is good.</b> Recent results were average, but lessons seen in Year 13 reveal above-average standards due to very good teaching and good learning.
General education	<b>Provision in general studies, key skills and the enrichment programme is very good.</b> Sampling of these areas show that the sixth form now has an imaginative and well-received general studies programme that incorporates statutory religious education requirements successfully. Key skills are evaluated and provided for either in other subjects or specific reinforcement lessons where required. Outside their chosen AS and A2 subjects, many other regular activities, as well as special events, give very good enrichment to students' experience.

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

## ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Students receive very good advice, guidance and support. Their personal and academic progress is increasingly well monitored, careers advice is good and the vast majority of students gain access to the openings they seek in work or in higher education.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The overall quality of **leadership and management is good**. The director of sixth form has worked effectively since the previous inspection to raise standards significantly, double the size of the sixth form, widen the range of subjects available and establish a very strong ethos. The sixth form now offers much better provision. Monitoring is currently satisfactory but is not rigorous enough to impact sufficiently on learning and achievement rates, which currently vary too much. Neither does it lead swiftly enough to the dissemination of areas of excellent practice in assessment, target-setting and independent learning by students. Sixth-form leaders have been very successful in promoting very positive student attitudes, one outcome of their providing a very good general studies and enrichment programme.

## STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students have a very positive overall view of the sixth form, with over 94 per cent believing it is a good place to study. They have a very high regard for the expertise of teachers and strong commitment of tutors. Where a significant minority hope for better advice on options and a clearer response to issues they raise, these are seen as ways to make even better a sixth form they already support strongly. Inspectors confirm that teaching and the work of tutors are very good. They also find that advice is very good and that virtually all students get places on the courses or career paths they choose.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

#### Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Achievement is excellent in the main school: the good progress pupils make in Years 7 to 9 is developed even more successfully in Years 10 and 11, so that the cumulative gains are outstanding. The pupils' standards are very much higher than average at the end of Year 11 and above average in the sixth form.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Collective achievement by the end of Year 11 is excellent.
- Overall GCSE/GNVQ results are amongst the best five per cent in the country.
- Pupils reach very high standards in several individual subjects at GCSE/GNVQ.
- Achievement in Year 9 tests is variable in science.
- Collective standards in the sixth form are above average, but there is marked variability between subjects, both in standards reached and the achievement this represents.

#### Commentary

1. The school takes in pupils who have above average attainment, but the results seen in GCSE/GNVQ examinations far exceed what could reasonably be expected of them. The table below shows the margin by which school's results surpass national ones and this places attainment as very high overall and in the top five per cent in the country. Standards are very high compared with all schools and with those taking in similar pupils. All subjects contribute well to this overall performance because there is more consistency between subjects than is commonly found. Nevertheless, in 2003, results in modern foreign languages, English, science, art and design, and religious education were outstanding. Standards seen in lessons in Year 11 broadly match this picture, being well above average in the vast majority of subjects, including mathematics and science, and high in English, art and design, and history. Consistent features in these subjects include not only very good exposition by teachers but the positive commitment of pupils in lessons and very effective assessment and tracking systems. In religious education and art and design much of this practice is exemplary by national standards. Awareness of examination board requirements is so strong that many pupils achieve full marks in science coursework.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	90 (90)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	99 (100)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (100)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	46.4 (48.4)	34.7 (34.8)

*There were 147 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

2. The achievement over time, or value-added, of pupils between Year 7 and the end of Year 11 is excellent. This success reflects the very substantial gains made by all types of pupils as they build on their already good prior knowledge and skills over a five-year period. The rate of achievement increases in Years 10 and 11, where staff are now exceedingly well versed in GCSE/GNVQ requirements and build this into their very good teaching. They have very positive relationships with pupils and are very effective in motivating them and inspiring them to adopt the very highest expectations of themselves. Management systems are very good or

excellent in most subjects, which ensure well-planned courses, key deadlines being anticipated and prepared for and assessment and target-setting systems being especially effective. Pupils gain a very clear picture of their current standards, what they should aspire to and how to get there. All these processes reflect the central steer given to staff by the headteacher: her definition of acceptable standards is far higher than usual and she has succeeded in convincing staff and pupils that such expectations can be met.

3. All types of pupils achieve successfully by the end of Year 11. Those deemed gifted and talented generally make excellent progress. In music, for example, almost half of those entered for GCSE gain grades A or A\*; in science, the number of those attaining the highest grades approaches a third. Support by the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) and learning support assistants ensures that the progress made by pupils with special educational needs towards their individual targets is very good. Subjects are developing their expertise in matching work to the needs of individuals and some are very successful in doing so. The school monitors the performance of different ethnic groups closely. The numbers in specific categories are too small to make valid statistical comparisons, but the work seen by inspectors indicates that pupils from all backgrounds make equally good progress in lessons. Published results do not contradict this finding.
4. The combined attainment in English, mathematics and science tests at the end of Year 9 is well above the average for all schools. However, compared with performance in similar schools in 2003, English results were well above average, those in mathematics were average and in science below average.
5. This represents an improvement on the previous year in both mathematics and science. Underperformance arose from a combination of factors, including discontinuity in staffing and leadership of Years 7 to 9. In science, where underperformance has been the most marked, the strongest teaching was concentrated very heavily elsewhere and several inexperienced staff worked exclusively in Years 7 to 9. Science schemes of work for these year groups have proved weak in some respects. The school's own analysis led it to change most of these features during 2003 and 2004, and work seen during the inspection suggests that both subjects are continuing to raise standards. Split teaching groups, however, remain a feature in lower-school science. Teaching quality in mathematics is sound, though it still lags behind the school's impressive overall standards. New leadership is strong and clear but has not had time to make a significant impact on standards. In both subjects, trends are positive, but good levels of value-added have yet to be confirmed by formal test results. In English, value-added is already well above the national average.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	36.7 (37.7)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	37.6 (36.6)	35.4 (34.7)
science	35.3 (35.0)	33.6 (33.3)

*There were 147 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

**Sixth form**

6. Standards are above average and current Year 13 students are making good progress. In most recent years, A2 results have been judged well above average and the table below illustrates this strong 'average points score per student'. This success reflects a strong combined performance by students across a slightly wider number of subjects than are taken nationally. In several subjects, 2003 results were well above national averages. In media studies, for example, the proportion gaining the highest grades (A and B) was far greater than average and all candidates passed with relatively good grades. Religious studies produced similar results in both 2003 and 2002. Unvalidated results for 2004 indicate equally

impressive levels of attainment. Gifted and talented students achieve very well in most subject areas and outstandingly so in religious education and in information and communication technology (ICT).

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	95.1 (93.1)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	22.5 (23.9)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per pupil	289.7 (285.5)	258.2 (263.3)

*There were 66 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

- The same table also indicates that, overall, the school is not yet gaining as many high-grade passes (A and B) as nationally. This is indicative of a relatively modest overall value-added in recent results. In general, the school's students start their sixth form work with better than average GCSE results, and there is too much variation in the additional learning that takes place; achievement can range from excellent in some subjects to only just satisfactory elsewhere. The collective value-added in the sixth form was better in the lessons seen during the inspection, amounting to good overall achievement. However, it is still too far below the achievement these pupils manage in the main school. While it is difficult to keep adding greatly to prior attainment, several subjects demonstrate how this can be done: current practice in English literature, French, geography and religious education, for instance, illustrates the emphasis on independent learning, challenging use of targets, self-evaluation by students and active participation in lessons that lead to very good or excellent achievement in Year 13. Monitoring by the head of sixth form and colleagues has not yet brought about sufficient consistency of practice, although several new strategies have been put in place to assist this process.

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

Pupils' attendance is very good and they arrive very punctually to school and lessons. Pupils' attitudes to school and their behaviour, including the low exclusion rate, are very good, and their personal development is very good.

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

- Relationships between pupils and with teachers are excellent.
- Pupils' social development and their sense of place in the community are excellent.
- Pupils are very well motivated to learn and achieve very well.
- Pupils are keen to be involved in the very good extra-curricular opportunities and play a full part in the life of the school.
- Spiritual development is not as well planned for as other aspects of personal development.

#### **Commentary**

- The school has a very good ethos of achievement, underpinned by a strong and caring pastoral system, which promotes excellent relationships and where personal development in academic and pastoral terms is closely fostered. Pupils express their views articulately about what the school offers them, and its shortcomings. They make a very good contribution to charitable works and raise funds to help those less fortunate than themselves.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. They are keen to attend school and want to succeed. Many are fully involved in the sporting, music, language and other activities offered outside lessons. In lessons, pupils enjoy challenge; they work both independently and collaboratively in a purposeful way and show mutual respect. They communicate their ideas well, listen well and are sensitive to others' views. Pupils also show high appreciation of the

additional activities that enhance their experiences, such as those planned on International Day, when pupils explored the international nature of British cities and experienced some of the traditions that make up Japanese and Latin American culture. In discussion with inspectors, some Year 10 pupils were surprisingly negative about their experience of school, but in class their attitudes to learning are always at least good and usually better.

10. High expectations are set for behaviour in the school, which is very good and often excellent in lessons. However, the recently revised behaviour policy, with its hierarchy of consequences for misbehaving, is not consistently applied by all staff and was a cause of concern to parents and pupils at the time of the inspection. Very occasionally, pupils indulge in off-task chatter in lessons, but this is the exception. The majority of pupils say that there is very little bullying or harassment of any sort, and that staff handle such problems well. Pupils are encouraged by the system of rewards for good work, behaviour and attendance.
11. Pupils' involvement enables them to develop moral and cultural awareness very well, and excellent social awareness. They reflect and respond well in discussion, for example, on the existence of God or medical ethics, and the spiritual dimension of human nature is promoted very well in religious education. Whilst some assemblies and the introduction of a thought for the day in tutor times can provide a reflective start to the day, this is not consistently applied and the school fails to meet its statutory requirement for a daily act of worship. Whilst some lessons evoke a very good response to spiritual issues, as in the study of English texts and poetry, this is more often because it is an inherent part of the work rather than being specifically planned for.

### Sixth form

12. Attitudes and behaviour in the sixth form are consistently very good and in lessons often excellent. Students play a full part in the life of the main school, although their ability to do so is somewhat limited by the need to be off-site for lessons at the boys' school campus. Students show excellent creative effort and make enthusiastic contributions to class discussions.

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.0	School data	0.5
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.*

### ***Ethnic background of pupils***

### ***Exclusions in the last school year***

Categories used in the Annual School Census	Number of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	801	19	0
White – Irish	6	0	0
White – any other White background	31	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	28	1	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	4	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	14	1	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	17	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	8	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	3	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	13	0	0
Black or Black British – African	8	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	2	0	0
Chinese	3	0	0
Any other ethnic group	6	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	1	0	0

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

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

The overall **quality of education provided by the school is very good**. This is because **teaching and learning are very effective** and they are supported by a **very good curriculum in the main school** and a good curriculum in the sixth form. Assessment by teachers is good in Years 7 to 9, very effective in Years 10 and 11 and broadly satisfactory in the sixth form.

### **Teaching and learning**

The quality of **teaching and learning** across Years 7 to 11 is very good. In the sixth form, learning is good and teaching very good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is very good overall.
- Staff have excellent subject knowledge across the school, especially in the sixth form.
- Expectations are very high in all year groups.
- There is very effective use of assessment and target-setting in Years 10 and 11.
- Several subjects have a significant proportion of excellent teaching and learning.
- Assessment and target-setting are broadly satisfactory in the sixth form.
- Learning in the sixth form, whilst good overall, often lacks the independence and self-reliance seen in the best lessons.
- Overall teaching and learning quality is good in mathematics, science and ICT, whereas the quality is very good for the school as a whole.

## Commentary

13. For the school as a whole, teaching and learning are both very good. Ninety-eight per cent of lessons seen during the inspection were at least satisfactory and over half were at least very good. This is partly the outcome of high-calibre staff working to their own high standards and is also the result of the school's leadership and management inspiring and insisting on unusually challenging expectations for staff and pupils. The very good GCSE results gained by pupils are largely explained by this great strength of the school. Virtually all lessons had the pace and structure to ensure good progress by pupils and this consistency reflects systematic monitoring by senior staff as well as a willingness by teachers to improve. Staff have established it as normal for planning across Years 7 to 11 to provide activities for pupils across the ability range and to stretch and support pupils appropriately, using good knowledge of their prior attainment as a guide. Teachers are excellent at insisting on high standards of behaviour and it is rare for time and momentum to be lost because of inattention or disruption.

### **Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 140 lessons**

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
20 (13.9 %)	54 (38.7 %)	53 (37.9%)	11 (8.0%)	2 (1.5%)	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.*

14. Subject expertise is very good overall and often excellent. Younger pupils and those taking GCSE recognise the authoritative nature of teachers' explanations and learn rapidly because presentations are well structured and clear. Very high expectations are a feature in all year groups so that there is in nearly every lesson the challenge to learn new and more demanding skills and concepts. In Years 10 and 11, teachers have a particularly detailed knowledge of GCSE/GNVQ. They show a most impressive grasp of how the criteria for the highest possible attainment should be interpreted to pupils and met by them and how their learning and presentation of coursework and examination answers should be shaped to answer questions with relevant, well-ordered information. Pupils are left in no doubt about what is required to gain an A\* grade or how to improve from a D to a C grade.
15. The tracking systems used in Years 10 and 11 ensure that in most subjects the rate of progress of all pupils is very efficiently monitored. In science, the system is particularly effective and allows staff maximum opportunity to anticipate strengths and weaknesses in performance by individual pupils, teaching groups or the full year group. In these year groups in general, assessment practice by teachers contributes significantly to overall achievement.
16. Several subjects have a significant proportion of excellent teaching and learning. In these, there are factors over and above those that apply generally. In many modern foreign language lessons, for instance, teaching is remarkably well paced, structured with great care and designed to maximise the oral and written contributions of virtually every pupil in the class. This is achieved with even greater success than by good language teaching nationally. Pupils are permanently on the alert and constantly having ideas and content reinforced. In the best religious education lessons, pupils are equally involved: they question and explain at length, evaluate their own performance and tackle very challenging ideas, and teachers ensure that learning is secure by testing knowledge and understanding at every turn.
17. The teaching of gifted and talented pupils is very good. Teachers are aware of which pupils are identified by their departments as gifted and talented and ensure that they are provided with challenging work. They are also kept abreast of which pupils are identified in other departments by information posted on the school's intranet.
18. The quality of teaching and learning is lower in some subjects than for the school as a whole. The quality is good by national standards in mathematics, science and ICT, but is very good

for the school as a whole. There has been discontinuity in leadership in mathematic and ICT and the strong collective expectation of teachers seen so clearly elsewhere has yet to be fully re-established. In science, there is great expertise and experience alongside more limited experience and teaching with some shortcomings. In all three subjects, monitoring and support within the department have had some impact, but have yet to reduce inconsistency sufficiently.

### **Sixth form**

19. Teaching in the sixth form is very good and there are many subjects in which excellent practice exists. Learning overall is good, but varies quite strongly. All lessons seen had at least satisfactory teaching and learning and it was most common to find the quality good or very good. In over 12 per cent of lessons, teaching and learning were excellent. The most consistent factor across all subjects is the very high quality of subject expertise shown by staff, which is greatly respected by students, who gain confidence and motivation from seeing such expertise on a regular basis. Communication skills are equally strong and, in virtually all lessons, exposition by teachers was a great strength. Students are consistently very positive and highly committed to learning, which has a marked beneficial effect on their progress.
20. In several subjects, a range of teaching strategies are employed and these train students to think for themselves, work in pairs and groups, question and be questioned and acquire independent research skills. There is a significant place for self-assessment in lessons, a regular feature in, for example, English literature, art and design, geography and religious education lessons. Learning by students in these contexts is very good. It is more common, however, to find exposition by teachers a more dominant feature of lessons, with less scope for extended dialogue with students and their active involvement more constrained. This was evident in some mathematics, business studies, music and biology lessons, for example. Students entering the sixth form demonstrate above-average knowledge in most subjects and in some they are arriving with study and personal skills to match. In others, they start Year 12 being too dependent on guidance from teachers and remain so for too long. Their learning skills are good by national standards, but not very good, and this hinders long-term achievement.

### **The curriculum**

Overall, the curriculum is very good. Enrichment is also a strength of the school. Accommodation places some limits on the curriculum.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The curriculum for Years 7 to 9 meets all requirements.
- In Years 10 and 11, a range of innovations has led to an imaginative curriculum.
- Extra-curricular activities are numerous and well supported.
- Access to the curriculum for pupils with special educational needs is good.
- There are more AS and A2 courses than usual in the sixth form. However, there is a lack of vocational subjects.
- Careers and guidance education is good.
- Accommodation limits aspects of provision in the main school and in the sixth form, and several subjects require specialist rooms.

### **Commentary**

21. In Years 7 to 9, the curriculum is very good. It meets all statutory requirements and provides a broad and balanced programme. ICT is firmly embedded in the curriculum and all pupils take GNVQ full award from Year 8, completing at the end of Year 10 with four GCSE's. Innovative projects and programmes enhance the effectiveness of the curriculum at this stage of the pupils' learning. For example, the physical education and modern foreign languages



departments work together with Year 9 pupils on a media digital project, sponsored by the BBC. The school, a designated specialist language college, very strongly encourages modern languages. All pupils in Year 9 take two languages chosen from French, German and Spanish. Citizenship is taught as a discrete subject in the current Year 7, and this will continue as pupils advance through the school.

22. A very good curriculum is provided through a wide range of GCSE option subjects offered in Years 10 and 11. These include all the subjects of the National Curriculum, which are augmented by a wide range of additional subjects at GCSE, such as sociology, child development and media studies. Opportunities for vocational accreditation in administration and health and social care are also offered via an arrangement with a local college of further education. These latter subjects are part of a strategy to expand opportunities for pupils to engage in a wider range of work-related learning. These include a successful work experience programme for all pupils in Year 10, and a programme of mentors from industry for pupils. However, the school is aware that there is a need to expand its vocational provision at this stage of the pupils' learning. Requirements for religious education are fully met: all pupils take the short course GCSE and some attend after-school classes in order to study the full course. Excellent curricular arrangements for gifted and talented pupils include early entry for GCSE in design and technology and modern foreign languages and planned opportunities for extension in almost every subject. In art and design, for example, there is a specific programme for those with especial talent; in design and technology, additional work enhances their ability to use computer-aided design and manufacture.
23. There is good careers education and guidance. The Year 9 'Learning Pathways' programme and the 'World of work Day' and good relationships with the Connexions service enable pupils to make informed choices about their future plans.
24. Overall provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is very good. English, history, art and design and religious education especially contribute well, although there has been no audit of provision and even the best examples often arise as fortuitous response rather than being carefully planned for.
25. The provision for personal, social and health education is good. There is a well-planned and coherent agenda that gives pupils opportunities to take part in discussion on a variety of appropriate topics. Visitors to the programme from industry and business add a strong dimension to the pupils' understanding of the need for the development of personal skills to enhance their opportunities for future employment.
26. There is a very good range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities, both within and outside the school day. Opportunities to participate in sports and the arts and other activities are numerous and provision is matched by very good levels of participation.
27. Pupils with special educational needs have equality of access to all areas of the curriculum. The school is successful in developing its curriculum to ensure that pupils with special educational needs make good, and sometimes very good, progress.
28. Very good provision is made for the very small number of pupils who have English as an additional language. Using a specialist test programme, staff determine how much support they will need. The special educational needs team then provides this help and pupils make very good progress in their use of English.
29. In several subjects, accommodation is unsatisfactory and limits the range of activities teachers can offer. The lack of specialist accommodation for some subject areas, such as drama, music and physical education, are known to the school management and plans are in place to improve these facilities.

## **Sixth form**

30. The curriculum in the sixth form is good, and is well organised.
31. The range of academic courses is wide. Minority subjects, such as psychology, photography and sociology, were added some years ago, allowing a high proportion of students to find courses that suit their needs and interests. Additional features of the curriculum, such as general studies, key skills courses for students without Level 2 in ICT and a range of voluntary courses in first aid, self-defence and various sports, enrich the curricular provision. Provision for gifted and talented students includes an effective 'early entry to university' agenda.
32. However, the curriculum lacks the range of vocational courses commonly found in similar sixth forms and the sixth-form intake contains students for whom such courses are generally appropriate. Religious education provision is sufficient to meet statutory requirements. There is a lack of specialist sixth-form accommodation for some subjects, such as business studies, which, together with the concomitant difficulty of access to ICT, has a negative impact on students' achievement.
33. The school is aware of these deficiencies and has restructured the leadership group as part of a response. The deputy headteacher with responsibility for the curriculum has been involved in creating a well thought out implementation model for developments in the curriculum which sets out a good base from which the school can address the issues.

## **Care, guidance and support**

The procedures to ensure pupils' care, welfare, health and safety are good. The support, advice and guidance for pupils, based on the monitoring of their achievements and personal development are very good. The extent to which the school seeks to involve pupils in its work and development is very good.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pastoral care is very good.
- Procedures for child protection are exemplary.
- Induction arrangements for transfer into Year 7 and the sixth form are very good.
- Pupils are offered many opportunities to become involved in school development.
- Assessment and target-setting in the sixth form are less effective than in the main school.

## **Commentary**

34. Tutors and the recently appointed personalised achievement managers (PAMs) for each year group know their pupils very well. The work of PAMs is clearly focused on academic performance, with a strong emphasis on personal development. Regular interviews are held with individuals and groups of pupils to assess progress and discuss targets. Pupils' individual needs are identified and appropriate support provided, so that all groups of pupils achieve their best. Manageable records are kept on individual behaviour, areas of praise and parental contacts. Pupils maintain a progress file of their achievements and a trial is being conducted with Year 10 to set personal challenges. Good careers education and advice is provided from Year 9 and the school has good links with the Connexions service, although some pupils consider the advice they received to be of little value.
35. The school takes its responsibility for child protection matters very seriously and all staff and visitors to the school are routinely provided with clear guidance to help eliminate abuse against children. Appropriate steps are taken to ensure the health and safety of pupils.
36. The very good links with the feeder primary schools and contacts with other schools ensures that pupils settle easily in their new school. Because of the variety of links, pupils have often

visited the school and met staff prior to their inclusion in the well-organised induction programme for entry into Year 7.

37. The school offers many routes for pupils to become involved in the development of the school. Pupils can communicate their ideas through their form representative to the school council, although some pupils have insufficient feedback on the decisions taken. Surveys of pupils are undertaken and they are involved in policy reviews. A group of pupils is currently working with a governor to establish ways of improving the catering arrangements.

### **Sixth Form**

38. Students are well supported in the sixth form and receive good guidance and advice on careers and further courses of study. Access to the up-to-date careers library and a very good partnership with the Connexions service enable pupils to make informed choices about their future plans. Sixth-form students receive good support from the school with their UCAS applications. Regular discussions between students and tutors are effective and details of these discussions are maintained as a personal record. However, students are less clear about their target grades for AS and A2.
39. Students' views are taken note of in a variety of ways. As well as being involved in the school council, students sit on a sixth-form committee, serve on the governing body and say that their views are well represented and listened to.
40. Assessment and target-setting in the sixth form are, on balance, satisfactory. They help students achieve very well in some subjects, but in others, while they are useful, they contribute less successfully than in the main school. Students' perception of their target grades vary: many have a clear picture of a suitably challenging level of attainment to aim for, but others are uncertain about the grade or find limited motivation in it because they feel it is too low. Monitoring students' progress is an excellent feature of religious education provision and very effective in several other subjects. There is less self-evaluation by students in the sixth form, and less evidence of teachers reassessing progress and the suitability of initial targets. Tutors and the director of sixth form are aware that past monitoring processes did not contribute sufficiently to achievement or to the gaining of sufficient high grades at A2 and have recently introduced a regular one-to-one interview with tutors to rectify some shortcomings. This is adding positively to students' acquiring personal and specific study skills. Several subjects already demonstrate best practice but this is only partially disseminated across the sixth form as a whole.

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

The effectiveness of the school's links with parents is very good. The quality of links with the community and the provision of extended services are excellent. Links with other schools and colleges are very good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The provision of language courses for the community is excellent.
- Very good links with primary schools smoothes transition from Year 6 to Year 7.
- There are extensive links with other schools.
- The quality of information provided for parents is very good.
- Parents are fully involved in their daughters' education.

### **Commentary**

41. The quality of links with the community and the provision of extended services are excellent. There is an impressive range of language courses provided for primary-age children and adults in the community. These are well matched to local needs. Charity events and visits, as

well as visitors to the school, represent a very wide range of people, both locally and from other cultures and countries. Very good links have been cemented with local industry, which provide good opportunities for work experience and contribute in many other ways to school life. Very good links with primary schools ensure that pupils and their parents are familiar with the school's provision and expectations.

42. The quality of information provided for parents is very good and parents are very supportive of the school. They regularly attend events and there is an effective Friends' Association which raises funds for school improvement and helps the school in other ways. There is very good communication between the school and parents, with many formal and informal occasions to discuss progress and to deal with any concerns.
43. Staff play a very full part in the local partnership of schools which provides them with very effective staff development.

### **Sixth form**

44. Students express very positive views about their time in the sixth form. The arrangement for shared provision with the boys' school is effective in enabling a wider range of courses to be offered than would be otherwise. Parental involvement and support for students is very good.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

The school is very well led and managed. Leadership by the executive and associate headteachers is excellent. Governance is very good and the school is very well managed.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The executive and associate headteachers provide excellent overall leadership, especially in setting a clear vision and very high aspirations for pupils and staff.
- Management is very effective and has helped the school achieve its ambitious aims.
- Several subjects have excellent leadership and management.
- The governing body is very effective.
- Aspects of accommodation are unsatisfactory.

### **Commentary**

45. The school has made very good improvements since the last inspection because leadership by the headteachers is excellent. The school has a headteacher of nine years standing who is now also the executive head of another local school. Much day-to-day leadership and management is the responsibility of the former deputy, now the associate headteacher. They collaborate extremely well together, providing excellent vision and setting very high expectations for both pupils and staff. Their ability to realise their ambitions for the school through planning and implementing policy is excellent. They have great success in motivating and inspiring colleagues and pupils. The goals and strategies used to ensure teaching quality have been highly effective and collectively staff provide very good teaching, with significant areas of excellence. As a result of such high-quality leadership, the school's already good performance at the time of the last inspection has improved so much that standards at GCSE now are amongst the top five per cent nationally.
46. The impact on other leaders and managers has been excellent. The headteachers have pursued imaginative approaches to teamwork. The senior team, for instance, has been extended to include several distinctive posts, each one leading new emphases in school activity, such as linking pastoral and academic monitoring closely and pioneering support for pupils' individual learning routes through school. Other staff are offered experience of leadership at whole-school level on a short-term basis, both to help their professional development and to include classroom practitioners in decision-making and in implementing

policy. Subject leaders and leaders of year teams benefit from this close cooperation, which has led to very effective leadership of the majority of areas and exceptional quality in the case of English, art and design, modern foreign languages and religious education.

47. Senior managers have built up a stable staff of specialist teachers and a strong team of support staff. The school takes a very positive approach to performance management and procedures are very good. The process is fully implemented and has a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. There are very effective procedures in place for supporting the professional development of teachers. Priority is given to the training needs associated with the school development plan, departmental plans and those identified as a result of individual teachers' performance management reviews. The induction of staff new to the school is excellent and newly qualified teachers, in particular, receive a first-class programme of mentoring, support and guidance, as well as meetings on a wide range of relevant whole-school topics. The school is a very good provider for initial teacher training.
48. Monitoring in the main school is very effective. Senior staff lead an extensive programme of lesson observations and other evaluations of the work of teachers. They give high-quality feedback and link their general findings to a most effective training programme. As a result, teaching is more consistent than is common and there is a high proportion of very well planned and strongly paced lessons, with close attention to the different learning needs of pupils. Best practice is identified and spread very successfully.
49. Governors play a far more effective role in this school than is usual. They show a very good knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses because they receive regular, detailed reports from senior staff, visit the school in session frequently and comprise a majority of very committed members who ensure that meetings are well attended and purposeful. They are thus very effective as supporters and challengers of senior managers: they question plans and decisions early enough to have an impact, but show their full support once a consensus has been reached. The governing body fulfils its statutory duties more effectively than most, and goes some way, but not far enough, to ensuring that a daily act of worship is provided.
50. Financial management is very good. The school spends considerably more per pupil than nationally, but uses this sum very well. Staffing levels are very favourable and the quality of staff is very good, contributing significantly to the impressive teaching and support pupils receive and the high standards they reach. There are many instances in which 'best value' principles are applied successfully. For instance, financial monitoring is done by part-time, independent consultants, who cost considerably less to employ than full-time appointments, but who have the advantage of seeing a far wider range of practice. Also, some posts have been shared with a nearby school when neither could have afforded the costs alone. The school is very alert to the way its performance compares with that of other schools. Its current large carry-forward total is almost entirely comprised of earmarked funds paid into its account late in 2003-4 to be spent early in the following financial year.
51. The school has adequate resources to support its work in all departments except drama. Although there has been an extensive programme of refurbishment and extension since the last inspection, the school's accommodation remains unsatisfactory overall as there is inadequate provision for English, religious education, business studies, physical education, special educational needs, drama and music. In addition, the canteen is too small for current demands and the lavatories are, rightly, viewed with distaste by the girls.

## Financial information

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

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	4,308,376
Total expenditure	4,055,756
Expenditure per pupil	4,065

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	3,516
Balance carried forward to the next year	252,620

### **Sixth form**

52. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Improvements have been realised by persisting with policies to increase numbers, raise students' expectations, widen course choice and create a positive learning climate. As a consequence, the sixth form is nearly twice the size it was at the last inspection and A2 results have risen from below average to above, some years well above, average. It offers effective joint provision with the nearby boys' school. This policy gives a wider range of courses but even more importantly gives more flexibility of choice to students. Leadership and management have established a much stronger work ethic than prevailed in 1999. Students are very positive in their attitudes to study.
53. Valued-added varies more than it should between subjects, and collectively is no more than satisfactory, which partly reflects the range in effectiveness seen in monitoring and target-setting. In some subjects, students have very challenging targets clearly in their minds, often revised upwards in the light of good interim performance. However, too many perceive themselves as working to undemanding expectations, which they have already surpassed. In addition, students' learning is not quite as strong as the very good teaching they receive. A majority enter Year 12 with GCSE attainment that is higher than usual but independent thinking skills that are underdeveloped. This hinders their ability to benefit fully from the contribution made by teachers. Monitoring of teaching and the use of strategies to spread best practice are not as strong in the sixth form as in the main school. Thus the excellent practice seen in religious studies and English has not been fully extended across all other subjects.
54. The co-ordination of the provision for students identified as gifted and talented is excellent and allows them to be challenged in every area of study. Annual audits, with management follow up where required, ensure that policy is matched by practice in every curriculum area.

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

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

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

#### **English**

Provision in English is **excellent**.

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

- Achievement is outstanding.
- By the end of Year 9, standards are very high.
- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Target-setting is excellent.
- Pupils have few opportunities to develop ICT skills.

#### **Commentary**

55. In 2003, National Curriculum test results for pupils at the end of Year 9 were well above average. When compared to their standards on entry in Year 7, these results represent very good achievement. In 2004, the school's National Curriculum test results show that the proportion of pupils gaining the higher levels has increased. In 2003, GCSE English language and English literature results were very high, demonstrating outstanding achievement. The unvalidated GCSE results for 2004 suggest that standards have remained very high.
56. Pupils join the school in Year 7 with levels of literacy above the national average. By the end of Year 9, the standard of their work is very good, and by the end of Year 11, it is excellent and represents outstanding achievement. At the end of Year 9, pupils speak with fluency and make significant contributions to small-group and whole-class discussions. They can communicate ideas, give opinions, respond to listeners and speak formally. Most pupils read accurately and independently. They understand ideas, themes and characters in literature. They can select essential points from written material and identify key features. Higher-attaining pupils can read between the lines, give personal responses and understand the ways in which language shapes meaning. The writing of average and higher attainers is organised, clear and correctly punctuated. Ideas are developed and sustained and words are used precisely. Average and high attainers use polysyllabic words and spell them accurately. Lower-attaining pupils do not use full stops, capital letters and question marks correctly. By the end of Year 11, pupils speak purposefully with increasing complexity. They can make personal and critical responses to what they read and understand how writers use techniques. The writing of higher attainers is lively and thoughtful. Lower-attaining pupils have insufficient control of spelling, punctuation and paragraph construction, but they achieve as well as their peers because teachers provide carefully designed learning materials and tasks. The achievement of gifted and talented pupils is well matched to their abilities because their teachers provide intellectual challenge and assessment criteria so that the girls can manage their own learning. Pupils have few opportunities to develop ICT skills.
57. Teaching and learning are very good. Excellent lessons were observed in Years 10 and 11. All teachers are specialists. They have high expectations of pupils and challenge them effectively. Pupils respond with high expectations of themselves. They have positive attitudes to learning and want to do well, so they work well on their own. They are supported in this by the way teachers encourage them to assess their own performance. Teaching and learning are monitored annually by the head of department so that teachers and pupils receive further guidance on how to improve. Planning, curricular and assessment processes have been reviewed and improved. Marking and assessment consistently support improvement for all

pupils. The department has an excellent system of target-setting that encourages pupils to become involved in their learning. Homework is used very effectively to support learning.

58. Leadership and management are excellent. The head of department is dedicated to providing a rich learning environment. Her strategic thinking and planning for improvement have helped her team to produce departmental policy documents that are clear and focused on raising pupils' attainment. Evaluation is embedded in the department's practice and is open, frank and accurate. For example, a programme of peer evaluation has been developed to provide mutual support through observation of lessons. The first phase of this programme will evaluate the use of the plenary session. The subject has made very good progress since the previous inspection.

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

59. The literacy framework is in place in English classes. The school has an effective strategy for teaching the basic skills of literacy across the curriculum. Standards of literacy are very high and enable pupils to achieve exceptionally well. Pupils communicate their knowledge of subjects very clearly in writing. They read fluently, with good comprehension, and make effective use of higher-order reading skills such as skimming and scanning. They are fluent speakers and thoroughly enjoy discussions.
60. Teachers consistently place a strong emphasis on the use of technical vocabulary and hence pupils use it accurately. In modern foreign languages, teachers highlight the application of correct grammatical structures. Writing frames are provided in geography and history to support pupils in their written work.

### **Language College status**

61. Since being awarded specialist college status in 2001, the language college has had a major impact on the modern foreign languages curriculum, on attainment and on the development of a strong international dimension in the school.
62. The leadership of the language college is very good. The college is on course to meet all of its main, well-considered and achievable, yet challenging, targets.
63. Attainment in modern foreign languages at GCSE has improved. Results are now well above the national average. In 2003, 95 per cent of pupils entered for GCSE French gained A\* to C grades. At the end of Year 9, the proportion of pupils working at or above Level 5 is well above the national average.
64. Three main languages are taught in the school curriculum. All three have equal status. All pupils, except for a very small minority, study two foreign languages. In addition to GCSE courses, the school offers a vocationally based language course leading to the British Airways Language Flag award. In 2005, a group of pupils will be entered for GCSE German at the end of Year 10.
65. An excellent programme of extra-curricular activities includes International Day, Our World Day, Languages in the Workplace Day, visits to France and Spain, a German exchange and a film project with the Ecole de Musique de Lyon.
66. There has also been a beneficial effect upon the school's feeder primary schools. Teachers from Kings Norton Girls School teach French and Spanish there and, in conjunction with the French, Spanish and German assistants, they run well-attended after-school language clubs.
67. Accommodation has been improved. Modern foreign languages lessons are regularly timetabled in the new, multi-media suite. A good range of software programs is used to support all pupils' learning. The way that all pupils are included in the language college



initiatives is well illustrated by the use of a very well prepared programme for small groups of pupils with special educational needs, who work on it with the help of a teaching assistant.

## **Modern foreign languages**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are high as a result of very good teaching.
- Pupils' positive attitudes help them to achieve very well.
- Excellent leadership by the three heads of subject ensures a commitment to improving standards further.
- Not enough is done to enable more pupils to follow full GCSE courses in two languages.

### **Commentary**

68. In 2003, teachers' assessments of pupils' work showed that standards were well above the national average at the end of Year 9 and represented very good achievement. GCSE results in French and German were very high, which also indicated very good achievement. Pupils' GCSE results in modern foreign languages were higher than those they gained in most other subjects.
69. In Years 7 to 9, pupils study two foreign languages from French, German and Spanish. They have a very good understanding of spoken language. Speaking skills are of a high order in tightly controlled situations in the classroom, but pupils do not use the foreign language freely in less structured work in lessons. Standards are well above the national average and indicate very good achievement.
70. Pupils continue to achieve very well in Years 10 and 11. As a result of their teachers' high demands and of their own positive attitudes, their standards in understanding the foreign language and in writing are very high. They develop a thorough knowledge of a wide range of grammatical structures that enables them to produce accurate writing.
71. Teaching and learning throughout the school are very good and are sometimes excellent. Teachers plan their lessons very well and enable pupils to develop their language skills through a wide range of appropriate activities that are very well matched to pupils' needs. They have high expectations, as shown in the constant challenge that they set pupils by using the foreign language extensively in the classroom. A strong focus on examination preparation in Years 10 and 11 is very effective in ensuring very good GCSE results. However, not enough opportunities are given to pupils to communicate routinely in the foreign language with the teacher or with one another. Teachers contribute very effectively to the development of pupils' literacy skills by encouraging them to think about language patterns. The three foreign language assistants provide very good support. Regular use of ICT, including multi-media presentations, effectively supports pupils' language learning and has a positive impact upon pupils' attitudes.
72. The three heads of subject share the same vision and provide excellent leadership that has a clear focus upon improving standards further. Excellent teamwork and collaboration ensure that all three languages have equal status in the school. Very good management means that schemes of work are comprehensive and cater for the needs of all pupils and that assessment procedures enable pupils to know how to improve their performance. The organisation of the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 does not enable enough pupils to follow full GCSE courses in two languages. Formal procedures relating to the observation of teaching in the department are underdeveloped.

73. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Standards and the quality of teaching are higher, and previous strengths remain.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good teaching and very good behaviour create a good ethos for learning.
- Pupils achieve very good results compared with national standards.
- Newly installed interactive whiteboards enable teachers to teach better so that lessons are interesting and exciting.
- The newly appointed head of department is providing very good leadership. Teachers are well trained and improvements to the curriculum and assessment are in hand.

### **Commentary**

74. National test results of Year 9 in 2003 were well above the national average, and better than might be predicted from their results in national tests in 2000. In 2004 results were similar to those of 2003. Over time, results have been well above average, and have improved at a rate above that seen nationally.
75. GCSE results in 2003 were also well above average, reflecting the significant progress that pupils made in Years 10 and 11. Although results have fallen slightly over the last three years, they have consistently been well above the national average.
76. The pupils' current work reflects good achievement by Year 9 and excellent achievement by Year 11. On entry to the school, pupils' mathematical skills are above average. As they move through the school their work shows good improvement. By Year 9, those who find mathematics difficult can work out the VAT for items that they purchase. In Year 11, they can solve equations by trial and improvement. Currently, the great majority are on track to achieve Level 5 or higher in the national tests at the end of Year 9 and a grade C or better for GCSE in Year 11.
77. Teachers mark pupils' work well, but the department's current assessment procedures do not ensure that the pupils are sufficiently involved in their own target-setting, or in checking and grading their own work against National Curriculum and GCSE standards, if standards are to rise higher still.
78. The quality of teaching is good and on occasions very good. It enables pupils to learn well. Teachers are knowledgeable. All are graduate mathematicians or have mathematics as a major element in their teaching qualifications. Teachers use time in lessons effectively. Planning is generally good, but occasionally pupils are not challenged sufficiently with the level of work they are given. The recent installation of interactive whiteboards enhances the quality of lessons substantially. Where teaching is very good, teachers present ideas with breathtaking pace and clarity. In a Year 8 lesson, for example, the teacher used a virtual dice thrower to demonstrate the patterns of experimental probability. This led to pupils investigating probability when playing 'pass the pigs'. In a Year 10 lesson, the likely outcome of pupils' investigation, into how the volume of an open box changes when created from a square with different sized corners cut away, were presented in a flash. Pupils saw very quickly and graphically the likely outcome of their calculations. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and pupils respond by doing their best in class. Their standards of presentation and of behaviour are very good.
79. Leadership and management are good, a feature at the time of the previous inspection, and the department has progressed well. The new head of department has made a very good

start. He has identified the main areas that are in need of improvement. He has introduced regular testing of basic skills for pupils in Years 7 to 9. This is popular with parents and is providing an extra avenue for communication with them. He provides a very good role model for both staff and pupils and leads by example. The teachers respond with enthusiasm and work hard. Under his guidance there is a coherence about the department's work, which is further supported by effective and continuing staff development.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

80. Pupils' numerical skills are well above average and contribute well to their learning in other subjects. For example, weighing and measuring in design and technology are very secure, and in history, pupils interpret bar charts effectively to further their understanding of the growing influence of Nazism and communism in German politics between 1928 and 1932. Most departments understand the importance of numeracy and have reference to mathematics in their schemes of work. Nets and grids are well used in art and design and in design and technology to help pupils model and understand in two and three dimensions.

### **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **very good**.

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

- GCSE results are well above the national averages.
- Pupils achieve very well from Year 9 to Year 11.
- Well-qualified teachers are exceptionally dedicated to their pupils' academic and personal development.
- In recent years, achievement from Year 7 to Year 9 has been unsatisfactory.
- The use of ICT by pupils as part of their learning opportunities is limited.

#### **Commentary**

81. Results in the national tests taken at Year 9 were above the national averages in 2003. When these results are compared to the standards of pupils who were at a similar level in Year 6, they show unsatisfactory achievement. Results in 2004 were similar to those of 2003.
82. Observation of lessons and analyses of pupils' books indicate rising standards. Pupils in the present Year 9 are achieving at least satisfactorily, and if this rate of progress is maintained, results in 2005 should be better than in 2004. For example, pupils in one high-attaining set in Year 9 already have a detailed knowledge of the properties of alkali and transition metals. The unsatisfactory achievement evident in the most recent Year 9 tests was in large measure due to unplanned changes in staffing. Many classes experienced frequent changes in teachers and this adversely affected pupils' progress. These difficulties have now been resolved. The department has also recognised deficiencies in the schemes of work that underpin lesson planning and is rapidly effecting improvement.
83. GCSE results in 2003 were well above the national average and very high when compared to pupils nationally who were at a similar standard in Year 9. These results show very good achievement. Results in 2004 were better. The number of higher grades (A\* to C) was similar, but the proportion attaining the highest grades (A\* or A) rose significantly.
84. These recent very high standards are being maintained. Most Year 11 pupils, for example, have a very secure understanding of the periodic table of elements and a good grasp of atomic structure.
85. Overall, teaching is good, with much that is very good and some that is excellent. Very good knowledge of the subject and the syllabus, combined with excellent classroom management,

form the firm basis for all lessons. Teachers use data projectors skilfully and extensively to make lessons more stimulating and to help pupils grasp difficult abstract concepts. Despite teachers' enthusiasm and very high-level skills in ICT, however, lack of sufficient modern equipment, such as electronic temperature or pH detectors, limits pupils' own direct use of this very valuable resource. Teaching methods are being developed that involve pupils in active participation, emphasise understanding and result in very secure learning. Very occasionally, the pace of lessons or the level of difficulty in the work that pupils can cope with is misjudged, resulting in less effective learning. In some lessons, teachers use a restricted range of questioning techniques. Particularly, they ask the whole class a question that has only one appropriate response and accept the first correct answer offered as evidence that all are engaged and understanding.

86. The way the timetable is drawn up means that some classes in Years 7 and 8 are split between two or three teachers. This interrupts learning and makes it difficult to check how well pupils are achieving lesson by lesson. The arrangement that allows specialist teaching for each of the three sciences for older pupils results in very good learning and is a major factor in the success at GCSE.
87. At the beginning of this year, a change was made from the traditional hierarchical structure of management with a single head of department, to a collegiate approach that shares responsibility between several teachers. To date, this arrangement is working well. Very good management systems are well established and most aspects of provision are organised very well. For example, assessment of pupils' progress and the use of data to monitor the effectiveness of teaching are very good. Ambitious targets are set for pupils and they are given very good guidance on how to improve their performance. Teachers and the excellent technicians work together as a mutually supportive team.
88. Pupils' learning opportunities are greatly enhanced by an unusually rich programme of extra-curricular activities. In addition to the science club for Year 8, there are many visits to universities and guest speakers are invited to the school. These activities, to which teachers give unstintingly of their private time, are of particular benefit to gifted pupils.
89. Since the last inspection, there has been satisfactory improvement and the potential for further gains is good.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

Provision in information and communication technology is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards in Years 9 and 11 are well above national averages.
- Starting GNVQ in Year 8 provides a good challenge.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Technical support is very good.
- The use of ICT across the curriculum is good in a number of subjects.

### **Commentary**

90. Students enter the school in Year 9 with average standards in ICT. They make very good progress and by Year 9, standards are well above average. Students begin a GNVQ course in ICT in Year 8 and by the end of Year 9 most gain well above average standards in the units of work they have completed. In 2003, teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 indicated that pupils achieved well above national averages. The levels awarded this summer are also likely to be well above national averages. Pupils' folders are well organised. They demonstrate high standards of evaluating and annotating their work. Pupils develop very good critical skills, for example, when evaluating search engines or presentations.

91. Current Year 11 pupils have successfully completed their GNVQ course and nearly 90 per cent have been awarded pass grades or better, representing attainment that is well above average. They have a well above average knowledge and understanding of hardware and software and demonstrate advanced skills of systems analysis in realistic small-scale operations. Overall achievement is very good.
92. Teaching and learning are good. The GNVQ courses are well planned and provide very good challenge for pupils in Years 8 to 10, despite the fact that the time allocated to the course is less than that recommended by the examination board. The best teaching follows the structure of the National Curriculum ICT Strategy, which includes introductions that are short, sharp and lively, often using the power of the interactive whiteboard to engage and motivate. Main activities are challenging and closing sessions are well used to celebrate achievement as well as to share what has been gained by individual pupils with the rest of the class. Teachers are good facilitators, offering high-quality support and guidance in lessons. They often supplement this with step-by-step guides that help pupils to acquire skills that they then apply in their work. This approach helps pupils to work independently of the teacher. Pupils demonstrate very good attitudes to learning. Their folders are well organised and presentation is very good.
93. Leadership and management of the subject are good. This is an effective team of teachers, very well supported by the technical staff. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

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

94. The provision of cross-curricular ICT is good. A number of subjects use ICT well to enhance teaching and learning. The modern foreign languages department makes very good use of the multimedia suite, using a range of software that promotes good language learning for pupils of all abilities. Pupils in design and technology use a good range of software for research and for design and manufacturing of products. The physical education department uses ICT very well to analyse performance, as well as for assessment purposes. The potential of ICT to transform images is well used in art and design. Newly acquired interactive whiteboards are having a beneficial impact on teaching and learning in mathematics. However, the use of ICT in science is limited, particularly for data-logging in Years 7 to 11 and some subjects have difficulty in booking time in ICT rooms. The school recognises the need to develop a whole-school scheme of work for ICT to provide a framework for further development in this area and to improve provision so that subjects have easy access to ICT.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **History**

Provision in history is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- GCSE results are far above national norms.
- Pupils make good progress from relatively high levels of attainment at entry.
- Pupils' overall progress is hampered by a lack of 'hands on' artefacts and visits.
- There is insufficient access to ICT, particularly interactive whiteboards.
- The teaching of history is very good, with some excellent features. This leads to very good learning in Years 7 to 9 and good learning in Years 10 and 11.
- History is planned, managed and led very well by the head of department.

## Commentary

95. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is above average. Standards of attainment in Year 9 are well above the expected level, judged by teachers' assessments of National Curriculum levels. These standards are replicated in classes seen during the inspection and in pupils' work.
96. By the end of Year 9, pupils' handling of different forms of historical data is good, and pupils are able to work effectively as individuals or in pairs and groups to develop their understanding of history. Pupils use historical sources well, deciding their order of importance to the subject in hand and making judgements about their reliability. Higher-attaining pupils use their knowledge and understanding to identify, evaluate and use sources of information critically to analyse relationships between features of a particular period.
97. Pupils make good progress, even from relatively high levels of attainment at entry and achieve well. Those with special educational needs make good progress, in line with other pupils, because their teachers know them well, use good differentiated materials and provide effective guidance in lessons. However, overall progress is hampered by a lack of 'hands on' artefacts and visits, and there is not enough access to ICT, particularly interactive whiteboards, to support pupils' understanding of the subject and to allow them to present their work well.
98. At GCSE, pupils' attainment is far above national averages, indicating very good achievement across Years 10 and 11. Pupils develop their analytical skills effectively and the higher-attaining pupils demonstrate a high degree of sophistication both in their ability to engage in historical polemics and in preparing and presenting coursework. For example, Year 11 pupils, in their studies of the American West, discern the push-pull factors that drove the homesteaders across the continent in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and discuss their relevant impact on homesteaders' choices.
99. Teaching is very good overall, and was excellent in one lesson. A similarly strong profile of teaching applies to all years. Teachers know their subject very well, have an obvious love for it and communicate their commitment and enthusiasm strongly to pupils, providing a firm basis for learning. Lessons are well planned and teachers use a wide range of methods that supports learning well. They help pupils to use evidence effectively. Homework is set regularly and marking is well focused, supporting progress, learning and achievement.
100. Learning is very good in Years 7 to 9 and is good in Years 10 and 11. Very good relationships underpin learning and pupils listen intently to each other and work well together in all years. At GCSE, learning is good, because pupils behave well, with high levels of concentration and focus, which leads to their good historical knowledge. However, many pupils do not know how to study effectively on their own, and prefer to rely on teachers' knowledge and notes.
101. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department has produced documents that signal his clarity of vision about the future of the department. The documents underpin much of the good work of the department, particularly, but not exclusively, in the areas of formal and informal assessment, and in effective teaching. In this, he is supported particularly well by his colleagues, whom he, in turn, supports. The head of department is aware of the need for specialist history accommodation. He and his colleagues are excellent role models of commitment to maintaining the highest standards.
102. Good improvement has been made, in this strong department, on the pleasing situation described in the previous report.

## Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards of work are well above average by the end of Year 11.
- Pupils achieve very well because teaching and learning are consistently very good.
- Very good leadership and management of the subject provide a clear vision for continued success and future development.
- Fieldwork and investigative activities enhance pupils' enjoyment of geography and promote independent learning.
- Teachers produce high-quality resources and make imaginative use of ICT to enhance pupils' learning.
- Teaching rooms, although containing excellent displays of pupils' work, are too small and cramped.

### Commentary

103. In the 2003 GCSE examination, results were above the national average, a decline in the position established in previous years, when results were well above average. Pupils performed less well in geography than in their other subjects, but, overall, achievement was good, given pupils' knowledge on entry to the school. The 2004 GCSE results were much better and closer to those attained in the years up to 2003.
104. Pupils enter the school with below-average levels of geographical knowledge and skills. Throughout the first three years they achieve very well, reaching above-average standards by the end of Year 9. Pupils are quickly introduced to essential map, computer and investigative skills that increase their self-confidence and their ability to work independently. Higher attainers write fluently and accurately about geographical issues ranging from the destruction of the rain forests to urban problems in Japan. Lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs achieve equally well because in lessons they have resources that are adapted appropriately for them. Pupils have a keen sense of exploration and enjoy active participation in lessons and fieldwork.
105. Standards of work seen by the end of Year 11 are high. Geography is a popular optional subject, attracting a large number of pupils with a wide range of prior attainment. Most achieve very well, reaching standards that are well above their predicted performance. Pupils are able to take responsibility for their own learning and know how to improve because the department has established thorough systems for assessing work and setting targets. Many pupils produce detailed, sophisticated coursework. This, together with access to very good revision lessons, enables them to make very effective use of their knowledge in examinations.
106. Teaching and learning are consistently very good. Teachers have expert subject knowledge, which they share very readily in a wide variety of teaching and learning styles; pair work, group work and role play are intelligently used in classrooms so that pupils are prompted to think hard about geographical issues. Most lessons proceed at a very rapid pace and teachers have extremely high expectations of pupils. Exciting ventures using ICT in lessons are commonplace, so that constantly changing geographical ideas and information are available to engage pupils. In this way, independent learning and research skills are very well developed. These are complemented by very high quality teaching materials produced by teachers, which spur on pupils to want to learn. The marking of pupils' work is regular, accurate and extremely helpful to pupils in pointing out not only where they may have gone wrong, but how to further improve.
107. The department is very well led and managed. Individual expertise within the team is celebrated and there is a strong focus on continued development of teaching and learning

through shared expertise and supportive monitoring of lessons. The department maintains a high profile within the school with an energetic vision for future success and thus improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

## Religious education

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good.
- Examination results are very high.
- The challenges offered to pupils are very good.
- Pupils are encouraged to explain the contributions they make in discussions.
- Assessment and recording are excellent.
- Leadership and management are excellent.
- The school's organisation for religious education limits the status of the subject.

### Commentary

108. Standards of attainment by Year 9 are above the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. Pupils, including higher-attaining pupils and those who have special educational needs, make very good progress and achieve good standards.
109. By Year 11, attainment is well above average. Examination results are very high for both full and short GCSE courses. Pupils of all abilities make outstanding progress.
110. The quality of teaching and learning is very good, with some that is excellent. One key feature is the very high level of challenge that teachers present to pupils. Much care and thought is given to the activities in lessons. For example, in a very good Year 9 lesson, the teacher set up an opening incident, unknown to the class, which pupils then had to report on. They learnt, first-hand, that when there are several witnesses, accounts do not always agree and that the same applies to the writing of Biblical stories. An example of excellent questioning techniques and challenge was seen in a Year 10 lesson when, in a simulated radio phone-in, the teacher kept the pace going with a string of questions and suggestions for various members of the 'panel'. In another excellent lesson, this time with Year 8, the teacher repeatedly challenged pupils to prove their answers, which led to very good learning.
111. The leadership and management of religious education are excellent. The team of teachers is very committed and they bring a very high level of expertise to the subject. They meet frequently, carry out monitoring and self-review, and generally share their very good practices. The head of department, leading by very good example, monitors and is monitored, carefully. The management and planning that he has put in place are excellent, and includes an outstanding assessment system that allows for pupils' self-assessment and peer assessment. Schemes of work are very good and meet the requirements of the syllabus as well as those of the examination boards.
112. The department has only one dedicated room between three teachers. Visits and visitors are curtailed due to lack of time allocated to the full GCSE course, and some classes take place outside school hours. Plans are in place to rectify this. However, these shortcomings currently limit the department, and also do little to enhance its status in the eyes of pupils. Significantly, the teachers do not allow these constraints to impact on achievement, which remains of an outstanding quality. There has been very good improvement since the last report, namely in the quality of teaching, results and the assessment processes. The subject is a strength of the school and is a great credit to the dedication and hard work of the leader and the teachers.



## TECHNOLOGY

### Design and technology

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

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are high.
- Very good teaching leads to very good achievement for pupils.
- Very good leadership and management, supported by very good teamwork and planning, create a very good technological experience for pupils.
- An accelerated learning programme has led to high standards for current Year 10 pupils.
- Standards in resistant materials technology are not as high as in other areas.

#### Commentary

113. GCSE results in 2003 were well above average and figures show that pupils' achievement was satisfactory in comparison with their performance in other subjects. Provisional figures for 2004 indicate a further improvement and an overall improvement in the number of higher grades attained.
114. Teacher assessment grades for Year 9 pupils in 2004 were very high and reflect the benefits of the accelerated learning programme for these pupils, who are now in Year 10. Standards for current pupils in Years 7 to 9 are above average. Based on pupils' average attainment on entry, this represents good achievement. In most technology areas, pupils are able to research design situations, formulate simple design briefs, generate design ideas and make their products with good practical skills. Higher-attaining pupils are able to write mature evaluations of their work. Lower-attaining pupils benefit from structured course materials in, for example, textiles work booklets. Pupils' very good personal organisational skills were seen to good effect in Year 9 food technology, when a wide range of complex dishes was being prepared in readiness for a visiting assessor. These skills are not as evident in resistant materials, where pupils do not have the skills to work independently and, consequently, standards are not as high.
115. Overall, standards for pupils in Years 10 and 11 are well above average. The accelerated learning programme, introduced for Year 9 pupils last year, has resulted in improved motivation and standards for current Year 10 pupils who, unusually, are working to higher standards than many pupils in Year 11. For example, many project folders in graphics and food technology display high-quality work, with in-depth research and good use of ICT. In textiles, pupils produce creative and colourful work, with well-made practical outcomes. The big jump in standards at this stage is facilitated by pupils' well-developed independent working skills. These are engendered by good access to ICT and good opportunities for pupils to extend their work during lessons and at extra-curricular time. Whilst pupils make very good progress overall, achievement for a small group of pupils in Year 11 resistant materials is not as high because basic skills are underdeveloped.
116. Teaching is very good. Very good planning and organisation, supported by skilful use of new technology, enable teachers to extend pupils' knowledge and help them develop learning skills, which help them work effectively on their own. Computer-aided design and manufacturing is integrated into teaching methods and pupils are given good access to ICT equipment. They are trusted to work independently. For example, they are encouraged to use the interactive whiteboard to work out design solutions. Teachers have a good understanding of how the subject can contribute to pupils' personal development. Assessment of pupils' work is thorough and constructive advice is given on how to improve. Gifted and talented pupils, and those with special educational needs, benefit from tasks and

materials that are adapted to suit their requirements. Very good support from two technicians contributes to the effectiveness of teaching.

117. Leadership and management are very good. Schemes of work are very well planned and include strategies for developing pupils' personal qualities as well as technological ability. Teachers work well as a team, which engenders an atmosphere of progress and development. As yet, however, the full effect of early GCSE entry for current Year 10 pupils has not been fully thought through. Good links are made between pupils' work in school and the world of work.
118. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. There is better access to, and use of, ICT. Accommodation is better and there is a greater range of teaching strategies to support the improved curriculum.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

### **Art and design**

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

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

- GCSE results have been very high over several years.
- Teaching is very good and sometimes excellent.
- Pupils' achievement is high.
- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Progress for a small group of Year 9 pupils is limited by lack of full commitment to the work.

#### **Commentary**

119. For several years, pupils have gained a remarkable 100 per cent A\* to C grades in GCSE examinations and results are well above national averages. Provisional figures for 2004 indicate that this is a continuing trend.
120. In work and lessons seen, standards for pupils in Years 7 to 9 are above average, with some pupils attaining well above average. There is good progression from average standards on entry to the school and this represents very good achievement. Pupils make very good use of sketchbooks to record and develop ideas. Line and tonal work is often of high quality and, by Year 9, pupils are able to apply these with confidence and skill. Higher-attaining pupils experiment with a wide range of media and techniques and adapt artistic styles into their work. All pupils develop an understanding of how art can relate to society. The Year 9 'Life Events' project, for example, offers pupils good opportunities to explore the social conditions that gave rise to some of the greatest iconic images of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. By Year 9, most pupils have developed a mature understanding of the emotional demands of art as well as the technical skills needed to create it. The subject makes a very good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
121. Year 11 pupils are able to produce high-quality work. In some cases, work produced is exceptional and represents a very high level of technical skill, personal commitment and sophisticated understanding of artistic styles, media and techniques. The work of comparatively lower-attaining pupils is raised in quality by their involvement in an ethos of high expectation and achievement. Pupils are able to use the wide range of media and techniques encountered in Years 7 to 9 in an independent and creative way. They can research material from a range of sources, including the Internet, and form links between their own work and the artwork found in other cultures. ICT is used well and is particularly effective in the work of those pupils specialising in photography. Detailed use of sketchbooks continues to be a key factor in developing ideas and recording achievement.

122. Teaching is very good with some excellent practice. A key strength is the ability to inspire pupils with a passion for art and design. This was more evident in teaching in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9, where a small number of pupils is not fully involved with the work. Teachers plan their lessons in detail and make very good use of new technology to present information. Through constant interaction with pupils, teachers manage complex learning situations well and are good at developing pupils' independent learning skills. Assessment procedures are thorough and teachers have good understanding of how the data can be used to set targets for pupils. Relationships between pupils and teachers are very good and pupils rise to teachers' high expectations with confidence and independence. Strong teamwork supports new teachers very well. Lack of technician support is making additional demands on teachers' time.
123. Excellent leadership and management have been key factors in the department reaching and maintaining present high standards. There is a clear vision for the subject that is underpinned by a strong commitment to the value of art and design in pupils' lives. The broad curriculum allows teachers to exploit their specialist expertise. Gifted and talented pupils are identified and supported very well by a 'talented artists' programme. All pupils benefit from a good extra-curricular programme. High-quality displays contribute to the stimulating learning environment.
124. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards are higher and ICT is more fully integrated into pupils' work.

## **Drama**

Provision in drama is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is good overall, with some excellent features.
- Attainment and achievement are hampered by the lack of equipment and space for storage and small group work.
- Pupils are increasingly involved in their own learning.

### **Commentary**

125. Standards seen in lessons and the results in recent GCSE examinations are above average. The pupils who enter this course at the beginning of Year 10 represent a very wide range of ability and dramatic experience, which is overall average, so that achievement across Years 10 and 11 is good.
126. Teaching is good overall, with some excellent features. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and make clear demands for commitment from the girls to their own learning. Assessment procedures are very good. Pupils learn increasingly efficiently as the term progresses, discovering that the harder they work they more they achieve. The assessment of their work and abilities is increasingly useful to them and helps them to concentrate very closely on group relationships and the intention of the playwrights they study. '*Teechers*' by John Godber is currently making them think very hard about characterisation and how to portray it to an audience.
127. Management and leadership of the department are satisfactory. There have been many changes in the drama provision since the last inspection but the situation now is more settled. The space has been constricted but the staffing is now stabilised. The department is now poised for expansion and improvement, particularly in extra-curricular provision.

## Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good overall and GCSE results are very high.
- Pupils respond very positively.
- Accommodation is not soundproofed.
- Extra-curricular activities support learning.
- Peripatetic instrumental tutors extend pupils' musical experience.

### Commentary

128. Standards seen at the end of Year 9 are above average and pupils make good progress during their first three years in the school. Results at GCSE are very high: 48 per cent of pupils gained a pass at A\* or A and all gained between A\* and C. This represents very high achievement overall between Years 7 and 11, especially in Years 10 and 11.
129. Teaching and learning are very good. Pupils respond very positively to the rigour and challenge that results from the excellent planning and organisation. Teachers have good subject knowledge. Tasks are devised so that pupils of all abilities and levels of musical experience are enabled to work to their limits. Pupils work very well together in groups, investigating the sounds associated with African music in Year 8 and in ensemble work for examination entry in Year 11. Regular, frequent and ongoing assessment by the teachers means that everyone knows how they are getting on and what they need to do to reach the next target.
130. The leadership and management of the department are very good. Recent changes in staffing have been managed very well. The department is building on securely established and very effective systems. Staff are extending the curriculum, particularly for work in Years 7 to 9, and beginning to prepare pupils within the GCSE syllabus for work that they may choose to continue in Years 12 and 13.
131. Although the accommodation is now better than at the time of the last report, there is still no soundproofing, which makes work unnecessarily difficult for pupils and staff. Recent extension of the range of extra-curricular activities available and the extensive team of peripatetic instrumental tutors both support and extend the musical experience of these girls. However, both elements often take place at the same time and during music lessons, which disrupts some lessons. It says much for these girls and their teachers that they work so well and achieve the results they do.
132. Since the last inspection, improvement has been good in results, in teaching and in curricular development. The accommodation for music is now significantly better, but it still does not meet the needs of this successful and growing department and continues to hinder the attainment of even higher standards.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards and achievement in GCSE are very good.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Leadership and management of the department are very good.

- The department does not securely assess pupils' attainment on entry to the school or in core physical education Years 10 and 11.

## Commentary

133. Results in the 2003 GCSE examinations were well above the national average. In core physical education, standards are above average. By the end of Year 9, standards are above average. Through Years 7 to 11, pupils with special educational needs achieve at the same rate as other pupils.
134. When pupils enter the school, standards are in line with national expectations but are above average at the end of Year 9, representing good achievement. In gymnastics, for example, Year 9 pupils can use good basic technique of balance and travel in order to create a sequence. They show good tension and body control. By the end of Year 11, standards are well above average, which represents very good achievement. In GCSE, pupils are able to take responsibility for their learning. Good understanding of physical education terminology enhances their learning. They can successfully transfer very good basic techniques to the game situation. The learning of some pupils is restricted by unsatisfactory indoor facilities.
135. The quality of teaching and learning are very good. Teaching is very good in Years 7 to 9 particularly, when pupils benefit from knowledgeable teachers. Teachers target the work well to the standards pupils have reached, with pupils often working with different equipment and on different tasks in the same lesson. In Years 10 and 11, teachers' expectations are very high and targets are challenging. They share learning outcomes and use assessment as part of learning. Strategies are in place to improve the level of activity, with more time for pupils to consolidate learning.
136. There has been good improvement in procedures for assessing pupils. Pupils know which level they are working at and the department analyses data in order to assess the achievement of different groups of pupils. Assessment is used to inform planning. Data on pupils' attainment on entry to the school is not yet sufficiently comprehensive for the department to know fully the different levels that pupils have achieved.
137. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department has a vision for raising standards more quickly. She has addressed the curriculum issues raised in the previous inspection. Monitoring of teaching and learning takes place and issues are dealt with through good support within the department. A very good extra-curricular programme enhances an appropriate physical education curriculum, which has been reviewed in order to meet the needs of pupils. The school does not meet the recommended time allocation for physical education in Years 10 and 11. The department has made good progress since the last inspection.

## BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

### Work-related learning (WRL)

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils benefit from a good work experience programme and a series of events that highlight the value of WRL.
- A good programme of careers education enables all pupils to be aware of future opportunities.
- Pupils' awareness of WRL is underdeveloped in the everyday curriculum.

## Commentary

138. Elements of work-related learning are well planned and delivered by the school through its very good links with businesses and the Connexions service. All pupils in Year 10 take part in two weeks of work experience. They are encouraged to find their own placements and last year approximately one-third of them succeeded in doing so. The pupils express very positive attitudes and speak very enthusiastically about their experience. The programme is very well organised in conjunction with a wide range of local firms and agencies. For some placements, particularly those in hospitals, the school is well supported by the Education and Business Partnership in Birmingham.
139. There is a good programme of careers education for all pupils, including those in the sixth form. It is provided through personal, social and health education (PSHE) and enhanced by very good links with the Connexions service. Students in the sixth form are very appreciative of the support they receive from the school's partnership with the Connexions service and also of the help they are given with regard to their applications for higher education.
140. Developments in the work-related learning curriculum are still at an early stage but they are well managed and led. A good range of events is held to make pupils aware of the importance of work-related learning. These events include 'Women into Management Day', 'Daughters into Work Day' and 'Industry Day'. In addition, the school, with the support of a variety of business organisations, organises talks and workshops on the importance of foreign languages in the workplace, while the design and technology department relates pupils' work to industrial processes. Recognising the area as in need of development, the school has carried out an audit to assess the contribution made by a wide range of subjects to the development of work-related skills. Although most subjects do make a valid contribution to such development, there is little specific planning to make pupils more aware of the value of such work. Plans are in place to raise pupils' awareness of work-related skills and to develop them in parts of the PSHE programme, but it is too early to measure their effectiveness.
141. The provision of vocational courses is underdeveloped in the main school and in the sixth form, but pupils in the main school demonstrate very good achievement in the ICT units of GNVQ and those sixth-form students who followed AVCE courses in health and social care last year achieved well.

## PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

### Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are good.
- Procedures for assessing pupils' learning are good.
- Opportunities for active citizenship are good.
- Subjects across the curriculum do not identify opportunities for developing pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills as part of citizenship.

### Commentary

142. It is not possible to make judgements about standards or achievement. The school has very recently changed its systems for the implementation of the citizenship policy. There were no opportunities to observe the new discrete citizenship lessons during the inspection. However, pupils' participation in active citizenship, seen during the inspection, was very good.

143. Citizenship is now developed both in discrete lessons and in personal, social and health education. Good use is made of time when the timetable is suspended to allow personnel from the wider community and industry to come to talk with pupils and enable them to be involved in a range of different activities.
144. The school has developed many opportunities where pupils can explore their rights and responsibilities, especially through active participation. The school council is a powerful vehicle for the development of knowledge and understanding about responsibility and fully develops the skills of participation and communication. There is a good list of activities, which encourage real participation in community aspects.
145. Leadership and management are good. Many aspects of management are very good. The school is committed and enthusiastic about the development of citizenship. A co-ordinator supports a small team of committed teachers in developing the citizenship curriculum. The schemes of work cover a broad range of issues affecting the life of young people and meets statutory requirements. A good central resource now supports teachers with materials that can be amended to meet the needs of both the teachers and pupils. Procedures for consultation and evaluation are good. Assessment procedures include pupils' self-assessment, which is monitored by teachers. The planning team is aware of opportunities for citizenship across the curriculum. However, many staff are still unaware of how these can be developed and delivered in order to reinforce the citizenship curriculum.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

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

### *Level 3 GCE 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
English literature	18	100	99.5	27.8	46.5	78.9	86.5
French	5	100	98.8	20.0	51.5	72.0	87.6
Mathematics	6	100	97.6	33.3	59.5	73.3	91.7
Biology	10	100	96.4	40.0	39.2	74.0	78.6
Music	1	100	99.2	100	40.0	100	82.3
ICT	3	100	96.3	0.0	26.2	60.0	70.0
Business studies	13	100	98.8	15.4	39.7	76.7	87.3
Psychology	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a
Religious studies	12	100	99.1	58.3	48.0	91.7	86.4
Geography	11	100	98.0	0.0	50.3	70.9	87.7

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English literature was the focus but English language and literature was also sampled.

Results in **English language and literature** were **below the national average** at A2 in 2003. In work observed, however, students' progress from GCSE was very good. One very good Year 12 lesson was observed. Students experimented by rewriting, in a variety of genres, and presenting, to

the rest of the class, the nursery rhyme *Jack and Jill*. The teacher set high expectations for the precise use of language and skilfully drew out learning points from peer assessment.

## English literature

Provision in English literature is **excellent**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is very good.
- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Standards in recent A2 examinations have been below the national average but are rising.

### Commentary

146. Standards in the work of current Year 13 students are well above average and their achievement in lessons is very good. Students make significant contributions to oral work. They express their viewpoints and ideas clearly, explaining and illustrating them with evidence. The writing of most students is evaluative and analytical. They understand the themes and narrative structure of texts. They evaluate the contemporary values that influence authors and comment astutely on how interpretations of texts change over time. For example, in a Year 13 class on *Regeneration*, students discussed the parallels between Sassoon's public opposition to the First World War and challenges to the current conflict in Iraq. Average and higher attainers write accurately and persuasively. The written work of lower-attaining students shows some flaws in expression and accuracy and their analysis of the author's use of language lacks detail. In Year 12, students make very good progress in developing analytical skills in lessons and are beginning to transfer these skills to their written work.
147. The 2003 A2 results - for a group of students with significantly different prior attainment to the current Year 13 - were below average. Although all students gained A to E passes, there were fewer of the highest grades than nationally. The school's results for 2004 show a higher proportion gaining A and B grades and good achievement considering the students' prior attainment levels. Current Year 13 work, with higher standards and even better achievement, confirms these upward trends.
148. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers are very experienced and well read. They prepare and deliver challenging material. As a result, students make very good progress in improving their skills of analysis and their argumentative writing. Challenge and high expectations are features in all lessons. The use of talk is central to all lessons as teachers extend students' communication skills and encourage them to adopt a critical approach. Learning is highly interactive, with many opportunities for whole-class and small-group discussion. Students are expected to work independently through research and delivering presentations, as well as through their note-taking and written assignments. The variety of learning activities encourages and motivates students. Students of all abilities carry out their essay work with enthusiasm and enjoyment. Marking is very good and targets set to help students improve their work are very effective. The sharing of assessment objectives clarifies for students what they have to improve to achieve their goals and teachers use written and spoken comments to clarify what each student needs to do to improve.
149. Leadership and management are excellent. Members of the department have a shared commitment to teach students a love of literature and language. Planning for success is at the heart of the department's work. Careful deliberation takes place before decisions are made. Improvement has been very good since the last inspection.



## Language and literacy across the curriculum

150. Students' communication skills in writing and speaking are above average in all sixth-form subjects. Their general expression is very clear. Research skills are very good. Many subjects expect students to give presentations. High expectations are set for coherent delivery and explanations. Students write well to communicate information, ideas and opinions to intended audiences.

## French

Provision in French is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching enables students to achieve very well.
- Students respond positively to teachers' high expectations.
- The number of students on sixth-form courses is increasing and standards are improving.

### Commentary

151. In recent years, the number of students continuing their study of French beyond Year 11 has been low. As a result, meaningful comparisons with national standards cannot be made. However, AS and A2 results do show that the achievement of students is good, although not as marked as in the main school. There is now an increasing number of students in the sixth form and work seen during the inspection indicates that standards are above average and that students achieve very well.

152. Students speak French competently. They express their opinions clearly and effectively. They have good skills in pronunciation and intonation. Year 12 students are at an early stage of their AS studies, but they are learning how to debate contemporary issues and develop appropriate language. Year 13 students routinely and confidently discuss their views on all aspects of their studies with their teacher and their fellow students. Written work is good. Students write clearly and communicate effectively on a wide range of topics. They demonstrate a good knowledge of vocabulary and a sound understanding of grammatical structures. Errors tend to occur in the use of more complex language. They sustain an argument well and express mature, well thought-out views on a variety of abstract topics, including racism, immigration, health and environmental issues.

153. The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers, some of whom are native speakers, demonstrate very high levels of competence and confidence. The extensive, almost exclusive, use of French in lessons makes few concessions to English ears. Consequently, students have very high standards to which to aspire and they develop their listening skills very well. High expectations encourage students to give of their best. Students take part readily in discussions. They develop their views well. They have good research skills and use dictionaries and reference sources effectively to supplement their learning.

154. Very good relationships between students and teachers create a positive climate for learning. Because the teachers know the students' individual strengths and weaknesses in French, students receive valuable guidance on how they can improve. They are appreciative of the good support provided.

155. Very good leadership and management are bringing about good improvements in standards. A very high level of collaboration among the four teachers ensures that the very well planned scheme of work is executed consistently. Enthusiasm and commitment motivate students to work productively. There has been good improvement since the last inspection when this department was already effective.

## MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results in recent years indicate that students have not performed as well as they should have done.
- The students enjoy their mathematics because of good teaching in lessons from well-qualified and experienced teachers.
- Whilst marking and day-to-day assessment are good, the use of medium-term assessments and target-setting has not been good enough to raise standards above their current satisfactory level.

### Commentary

156. A2 results were below the national average in 2003 and in 2004. The students' performance, compared with their predicted grades, show that most performed at or below expected levels, hence achievement in each of these years was unsatisfactory. AS results were well below average in 2002 since when the number of students claiming their award at this level, rather than wait an A2 qualification, has been too low to make reliable comparisons with national standards.
157. The standard of work seen during the inspection was broadly in line with that seen nationally. That of Year 13 students shows potential between grade B and grade D. It has been decided that these students should enter for A2 level presenting for four core modules in pure mathematics and one module in each of statistics and mechanics. Currently, they are studying mechanics and pure mathematics modules. In mechanics, all students show a reasonable grasp of how to resolve forces, but are less secure when having to do so in more complicated problems with a combination of difficulties, such as when one object pulls another up a slope by a string over a pulley. In pure mathematics, higher attainers can cope with the co-ordinate geometry of straight line and circle, including finding the equation of the normal to a tangent of a circle. All have a secure grasp of basic calculus. At AS level, standards are stronger, although still broadly in line with national norms. Here, higher attainers show a good grasp of the work covered on surds and indices, whilst lower attainers have more difficulty rationalising fractions. In statistics, they have made a good start with work on histograms and stem and leaf diagrams.
158. Overall teaching is satisfactory and students' learning and progress are also satisfactory. Teachers are well qualified. Teaching is good and sometimes very good, with learning well supported by lessons that are challenging, well prepared and very well presented. Good use is often made of interactive whiteboards. Constructive marking, both by teachers and by the students themselves, also helps progress. Assessment arrangements are not effective enough, however. For example, students do not begin to self-evaluate their work to examination standards early enough, nor is there sufficient shorter-term testing to ensure effective learning. Targets set are long term and not specific enough to encourage students to understand clearly where they are making mistakes or how long it takes them to solve a problem. They are not being given enough incentive to commit essential pieces of knowledge and technique to memory to enable them to tackle examination questions quickly enough.
159. Nevertheless, students show very positive attitudes to their work and try hard. They enjoy their mathematics and speak very highly of their teachers. In particular, they are grateful for the extra help, freely given, outside lessons whenever they are in difficulties. Folders are, for the most part, well kept and filled with carefully marked work. Year 12 students take particular pleasure in the variety of approaches to the subject offered by having three different teachers. They are made aware of course requirements, but the programme of study lacks detail on when topics are to be covered and what the arrangements are for their assessment.

160. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Improvement since the time of the previous inspection is satisfactory, with larger numbers studying the subject and standards about the same. The recently appointed head of department recognises what needs to be improved and the department has the capacity to ensure that it does so.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

161. Students' mathematical skills applied to the curriculum in general are very good. They can interpret graphs and data in context, in French, for example, when dealing with road safety, and in business studies, when handling profit and loss and cash flow forecasts. There are no arrangements across the curriculum to enhance numerical skills, but this does not result in any loss of access to the curriculum.

## **SCIENCE**

### **Biology**

Provision in biology is **good**.

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

- Very good teaching is resulting in rising standards and better achievement.
- Large numbers of students are opting to take AS level and a high proportion is carrying on to A2 level.
- Standards in the most recent examinations have been below the national averages and some students have not achieved satisfactorily.
- The subject is well led and management systems are very good.
- Curricular provision is very good.

#### **Commentary**

162. Results in 2003 at A2 were broadly average; for several years previously results have been higher. The 2003 results showed unsatisfactory achievement overall, with a third of students underperforming. Results in 2004 were similar to those of 2003; the proportion of higher grades was slightly lower but almost all passed. Achievement was again less than satisfactory. However, current standards in Year 13 indicate that students are achieving well and all the evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that standards are rising. All the students in the present Year 13 classes are in line to pass and a significant proportion are working at levels that should lead to a higher grade. All, for example, have made a very good start to their coursework and are achieving well. Provided the present rates of progress are maintained, results in 2005 should be close to the national average, and should show satisfactory achievement.
163. In Year 12, 33 students have embarked on the AS level course. All have made a good start to their studies and are achieving standards that at least match expectations based on their performance at GCSE. Students observed revising work on the ultra structure of cells displayed an impressive knowledge of a difficult part of the syllabus. In another set, students showed very good study skills when independently constructing a diagram to show the links between different sections of information learned in previous lessons.
164. Teaching is very good, based on excellent subject mastery and an infectious enthusiasm for biology that is inspiring many students. Teachers fully understand syllabus requirements and can guide students well in their coursework, with the result that they routinely gain full marks. All teachers enjoy excellent relationships with their students; this facilitates adventurous teaching methods and allows a high level of challenge. Weaknesses in some students'

motivation or capabilities have sometimes resulted in learning being less effective than the quality of teaching indicates it should be.

165. The subject is well led and management systems are very good. The work of the three teachers who share classes is well co-ordinated so that students receive a coherent learning experience. Assessment of students' progress is very good. The detailed study guides which teachers have produced for each part of the syllabus provide effective support and encourage independent learning.
166. The timetable allows the large number of students in Year 12 to be taught in two parallel sets. This has enabled the department to group students according to their strengths as learners and teach them appropriately.
167. Since the last inspection there has been satisfactory improvement and the potential for further gains is good.

## **Psychology**

Provision in psychology is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very good teaching is resulting in rising standards.
- Students are achieving well.
- Leadership and management are excellent.
- A significant number of students are opting to take the AS level course and carrying on to A2 level.
- The equipment available for using ICT is inadequate.

### **Commentary**

168. In 2003, A2 results were below the national average, but almost all students gained a pass grade and some the higher grades A or B. Comparison of these results with students' prior attainment at GCSE showed that most had matched and many had exceeded expectations. Overall, this represents good achievement. Results in 2004 were better than in 2003. The proportion gaining higher grades was larger and no students failed.
169. Observation of lessons, examination of students' files and internal test records indicate that good achievement is being maintained. Students in Year 13, for example, displayed high-level skills in researching the various explanations of the significance of dreams.
170. Large numbers are taking the AS level examination. The proportion gaining the higher grades is rising steadily. The proportion failing is reducing and is much smaller than that seen in many schools. There are currently 42 students taking AS level and at this early stage of the course, all are making a good start to the work. For example, students displayed a very good grasp of the major theories that attempt to explain abnormal behaviour and were able to evaluate research with rigour and confidence. Morale is high, students are enjoying this new subject and all are achieving at least satisfactorily.
171. Teaching and learning are very good. The one, well-qualified teacher has an excellent mastery of the subject and the requirements of the syllabus. Teaching methods employed emphasise active and independent learning. This approach is much appreciated by students, who recognise and value the trust placed in them. Relationships with students are excellent. The teacher has achieved a fine balance between treating students as young adults and recognising their needs as relatively unsophisticated learners. Assessment of progress is very good and students are given clear guidance about how to improve their work.

172. Leadership and management are excellent. All aspects of the provision are administered very effectively and efficiently. Although well resourced in most respects, there is no dedicated ICT equipment for this subject. This limits the use of this valuable aid to learning. The single teacher receives very good support from senior management and through professional links with local schools, colleges and universities.
173. An unusually high proportion of students, over 80 per cent, continue on from AS to A2 level. An increasing number are being accepted onto degree level courses in psychology.
174. Over the last three years, there has been steady improvement in the provision for this relatively new subject. The potential for further gains is very good. Psychology is an increasingly successful and valuable addition to the school's post-16 curriculum.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)**

Provision in information and communication technology is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are average.
- The results of last year's AS examinations were lower than they should have been.
- The quality of teaching is now good.
- Attitudes to learning are good.
- Resources for learning are good.

### **Commentary**

175. The grades attained by students in A2 courses have been around the national average over a period of years. The standards of attainment in the current Year 13 are average.
176. Students produce clear specifications for the ICT systems they develop in their coursework. The documentation they produce for their notional clients is very clear and shows good understanding of the needs of users. The systems they develop are sound working systems, although their testing strategies are sometimes vague and incomplete. Students gain a sound understanding of ICT training strategies in commercial organisations. Results in one unit of last year's AS examination were overall lower than the other two units, depressing the overall outcome and leading to unsatisfactory achievement. The recent appointment of an experienced and dedicated subject leader has led to substantial improvement in teaching and learning and achievement is now good in Year 13.
177. Teaching is good. Teachers have enthusiasm for the subject and convey this well to students, engaging and motivating them. They use question and answer well to test understanding and to encourage extended responses. Teachers make themselves available for advice and support outside timetabled lessons, especially important for Year 13 students, most of whom need extra time to make up for poor results in one unit. Teachers' teaching styles vary, offering effective training programmes in software and individual support for coursework, as well as giving informative presentations on areas of knowledge and understanding required by the syllabus. An example of good practice is the copying by students of presentation slides that can be used for annotation to clarify points and subsequently for revision purposes. Subject knowledge is good.
178. Leadership and management are good. The improvement since the last inspection has been very good. AS and A2 examination courses have been successfully introduced. Resources are now good.

## Information and communication technology across the curriculum

179. The provision of cross-curricular ICT for post-16 students is good. It is used well by a number of subjects to enhance learning. These include modern foreign languages, design and technology and art and design. Students have good access to computers for research and to complete coursework.

## HUMANITIES

### Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership, management and teamwork result in well-planned and diverse learning.
- Very good teaching and positive teacher-student relationships result in rapidly improving standards.
- There are good assessment procedures, with joint target-setting between staff and students based on students' prior attainment.
- Standards are enhanced by the support given by teachers to students in organising their work and developing their literacy skills and examination techniques.
- Fieldwork opportunities and extended assignments develop research and independent learning skills and give students wide opportunities for the use of ICT.

#### Commentary

180. Results in the GCE AS examinations in 2003 were average overall but the proportion of students attaining the higher grades A and B was below average. Results at A2 were also average for all grades, but no students attained grades A or B. In relation to students' attainment when they joined the course, this represents satisfactory achievement.

181. The work of students in the current Year 13 is above average and their achievement is very good. This is a big improvement over the examination results of previous years and represents the work the department has done to improve students' independent learning skills. Students confidently describe and account for a range of human and physical environmental systems, processes and patterns. They have developed the skill of independent study, for instance, in researching processes of urban decay. In undertaking this work and also during their residential fieldwork, they have learnt to identify, select and collect evidence from primary and secondary sources, to evaluate it intelligently and draw conclusions.

182. Teaching and learning are very good and, along with very positive teacher-student relationships, result in rapidly improving standards. Teachers have very secure subject knowledge, set clear objectives at the start of lessons, are generous with their praise and demonstrate a good sense of humour. Teachers emphasise the development of geographical vocabulary and general literacy skills, and this has a significant impact on standards. Lessons proceed at a rapid pace and embody a wide range of teaching techniques. Pair and group work aid the development of oral skills.

183. Leadership and management are very good. There is a strong focus on raising standards. The head of department leads a team of committed and experienced teachers whose skills are used to maximum effect. The department uses assessment records analytically to set targets, support students and guide them through the courses. Forward planning underpins the way in which the department is run. There is, however, scope for improvement in relation to developing an induction programme for Year 12 and providing more enrichment activities.

184. Improvements since the last inspection have been good. Standards have been sustained since the last inspection. There is now a wider range of provision that prepares students well for the study of geography in higher education.

### **Religious studies**

Provision in religious studies is **excellent**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is excellent.
- Examination results are outstanding.
- Leadership and management are of the highest quality.
- The curriculum provides high academic challenge, and is excellent.
- Provision for non-examination students meets requirements.

### **Commentary**

185. The attainment of students in Years 12 and 13 is very high. Examination results for AS and A2 are outstanding and have been steadily improving. Students make outstanding progress and excellent achievement.

186. The quality of teaching is excellent. Teachers consistently provide outstanding opportunities for learning. For example, in two excellent Year 12 lessons, students were led in first-rate debates, gave their own PowerPoint presentations and displayed exceptional knowledge and understanding. It is clear that they are very well read and taught. Their outstanding grasp of the set topics in philosophy of religion is due to high-quality work as early as Year 9, which is systematically built upon in Years 10 and 11. The result is lively debates and essays in Years 12 and 13. Students display a thorough insight into the background, authors and philosophical arguments of the course.

187. Analysis of Year 13 work and observation of lessons shows that high-quality provision has been offered throughout the sixth form and that Year 13 students are benefiting from such outstanding teaching. Their preparation for A2 examinations is very carefully planned, monitored and assessed. Everyone knows exactly where they stand, and what they must do next. The challenge is consistently very high.

188. Leadership and management are excellent. Systematic planning, the provision of high-order notes, handouts and bibliographies all display excellent organisation and thought. The two tutors work very well together, complement one another, and ensure very high levels of success amongst the students. The curriculum is excellent and provides students with wide-ranging experiences and opportunities. They therefore follow their set themes with academic rigour and commitment. For those students who do not take examination courses, provision is made in all modules of general studies for a religious studies element. This meets the statutory requirements and is good provision.

189. There has been very good improvement since the last report, especially in the results of examinations. Overall, the examination course is exemplary in organisation and implementation. It offers academic excellence, and the students benefit greatly from the expertise of the staff. Relationships between staff and students are very good and contribute much to the success of the subject.

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

### **Drama**

The courses in AS and A2 are run jointly with students from Kings Norton Boys' School in the girls' school building, which currently has inadequate space and facilities. There have been several staff changes in recent years together with a reduction in space. Results have been below average.

### **Music**

Provision for music in the sixth form is good, but results do not yet reflect the hard work of students and teachers. Teaching is rigorous, challenging and extremely well informed. As a result, students are taking a more active part in their own learning and recognising the need for their own research, as well as responding to the tasks set for examination purposes. All students are able performers and represent a very strong musical force within the school. The recent development of a student taking string session rehearsals, very efficiently, together with others taking a substantial part in the orchestras and choirs, will undoubtedly lead to a major expansion in the musical experience of all pupils and students.

### **Media studies**

Media studies was sampled. One excellent Year 13 lesson was observed. After group discussion of what constituted British Cinema, students watched and analysed the opening scenes of *A Taste of Honey*. The teacher set high expectations for the precise use of language and skilfully drew out learning points from the discussion. Students used technical language with assurance and accuracy. These very positive features match the outstanding A2 results the subject produces each year. Take-up is substantial, standards are very high and pupils' achievement is amongst the best in the sixth form and excellent by national standards.

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

One lesson was sampled in **physical education**. Standards were above average because of good teaching. All students are achieving well.

## **BUSINESS**

### **Business studies**

Provision in business studies is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Results at A2 level in 2004 were in line with national averages.
- Standards of work seen in Year 13 are above national levels.
- Year 12 students are already demonstrating confidence in applying theory.
- Some students' progress is hampered by a lack of wider reading.
- Teaching is very good and draws on expert subject knowledge.
- Leadership is very good and management is good.
- Accommodation and access to ICT are unsatisfactory.

### **Commentary**

190. Results at A2 level in 2004 were in line with national averages. In the current Year 13, a small number of higher-attaining students reach standards well above national norms in their understanding of the central ideas of business and finance, particularly of concepts involved in industrial democracy. However, most students attain standards that are above national



averages. Relative weaknesses are the interpretation and analysis of data and the application of theories to case studies.

191. Students' achievement is good but it is restricted by their lack of wider and in-depth reading around the subject. This is too often a concomitant of a high level of involvement in outside interests.
192. Year 12 students already demonstrate standards above national norms and potential for even higher attainment. They show growing skills and confidence in analysing and evaluating business concepts and theories, and handle and interpret data with increasing confidence. For example, students effectively analyse the impact of external factors on the lifecycle of certain products and evaluate how these affect a firm's competitiveness. From a relatively low basis of knowledge and understanding of the subject at entry to the sixth form, achievement is good overall.
193. Teaching is very good overall. The best lessons are typified by teachers' expert subject knowledge, which underpins discussion and lends clarity to their explanations. Lessons are carefully planned, and effective use is made of case studies and other activities to allow students to apply and extend their learning. Students are very well supported academically. However, a tendency for teachers to provide too much such help hinders the development of students' independent learning. Progress is best where students apply their own assessment and evaluative criteria to their work.
194. Students' learning is good overall. Attitudes are generally mature and interest is sustained. Higher-attaining students maintain intellectual rigour and show evidence of wider reading. However, many students are happy to be passive recipients rather than active participants in their own learning.
195. Management is good. Management of some key aspects of the department are very good, particularly the good use of formal assessment and marking. However, there are contributory aspects that have not yet been so well managed by the school: accommodation is unsatisfactory, in terms of both size of rooms and adequacy of appropriate specialist accommodation; insufficient access to ICT and professional software has an adverse effect on learning; and links with business are not yet sufficiently comprehensive to give opportunities for visits out and visitors into school. These factors militate against the creation of a business and enterprise environment that would encourage students to engage in activities such as 'pro- share' competitions and Young Enterprise.
196. Leadership of the subject is very good. The head of department is aware of current strengths and weaknesses of the provision. He has a clear strategic vision for the subject's future that addresses the areas for improvement and builds on the current strengths. The head of department is a very good example of commitment to the highest standards.
197. No comment can be given on progress since the previous inspection because there was little specific comment about business studies in that report.

## 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>1</b>
Pupils' achievement	3	1
<b>Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities</b>		<b>2</b>
Attendance	2	2
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	2	2
How well pupils learn	3	2
The quality of assessment	4	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	3	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		2
Accommodation and resources	4	4
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		2
The quality of the school's links with the community	1	1
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	2
<b>The leadership and management of the school</b>		<b>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).*