

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **LARKMEAD SCHOOL**

Abingdon

LEA area: Oxfordshire

Unique reference number: 123255

Headteacher: Mr Richard Bysouth

Lead inspector: Dr David Benstock

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

Inspection number: 268846

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11 to 18 years
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	944
School address:	Faringdon Road Abingdon Oxfordshire
Postcode:	OX14 1RF
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Dr James Tweed
Date of previous inspection:	21 <sup>st</sup> September 1998

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Larkmead is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive school. It is average in size. The number on roll is 944, including 106 students in the Sixth Form. The number of students who leave or join the school at other than the usual time is about average. The school is situated in the town of Abingdon in Oxfordshire, close to two other secondary maintained schools and two large independent schools. There is considerable competition therefore for parental choice. Larkmead has been awarded the status of Specialist Arts College, has received an achievement award and has gained 'Investors in People' accreditation. The Sixth Form is part of the 16:19 Abingdon Partnership, a consortium of three schools and a college of further education. The school has designated provision for students with physical disability or hearing impairment. The socio-economic background of students reflects a mixed range of family circumstances, including low unemployment but modest income, and a higher than average proportion of families from areas of social deprivation in the town. Overall, the socio-economic background of students is below average. The majority of students have White British heritage; a very small number have Asian, Black African or Black Caribbean background. The percentage of students whose home language is not English is low. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The percentage of students identified as having special educational needs and the percentage with a statement of special educational need are in line with the national averages. The majority of statements relate to social, emotional and behavioural problems, dyslexia or hearing impairment. Standards on entry to the school are well below average. Attainment on entry to the Sixth Form is below average.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
20243	David Benstock	<i>Lead inspector</i>	
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8756	Pat Hanage	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics
3958	Maureen Cawdron	<i>Team inspector</i>	English
23188	Jenny Maunder	<i>Team inspector</i>	Science Biology (Sixth Form)
27226	Brian Emery	<i>Team inspector</i>	Special educational needs
15051	Lynne Kauffman	<i>Team inspector</i>	Information and communication technology
18888	Jan Boulton	<i>Team inspector</i>	Physical education
23544	Gair Hedley	<i>Team inspector</i>	Design and technology Art and design
11975	Thelma McIntosh-Clark	<i>Team inspector</i>	Drama (Sixth Form)
31705	John Mason	<i>Team inspector</i>	Music
27226	Richard Cribb	<i>Team inspector</i>	Citizenship Work-related learning
31218	Tom Allen	<i>Team inspector</i>	Geography
19152	Richard Merryfield	<i>Team inspector</i>	History
2494	Michael Newton	<i>Team inspector</i>	Religious education
31332	John Marshall	<i>Team inspector</i>	Modern foreign languages English as an additional language
10060	David Gutmann	<i>Team inspector</i>	Business education (Sixth Form)

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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **OVERALL EVALUATION**

**Larkmead is a good school** with a good Sixth Form. It gives good value for money. Standards are broadly average and students achieve well. Students with special educational needs (SEN) achieve very well. Attitudes, values and personal development, including students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. The school provides a good quality of education. Teaching and learning are good in all years. Leadership and management overall are good. Governance is satisfactory. Governors support the school very well but a number of statutory requirements are not met.

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

- Overall achievement is very good in history, music and religious education.
- Strong relationships with teachers encourage students to learn well and participate fully in school life.
- The leadership of the headteacher and the overall leadership of the Sixth Form are very good.
- Provision for students with SEN is very good.
- Unsatisfactory attendance is affecting the achievement of a significant minority of students.
- Girls' achievement exceeds that of boys in aspects of English, information and communication technology (ICT), art, and design and music.
- The curriculum offers a good range of options in Years 10 and 11 to meet the needs of students. Extra-curricular opportunities and enrichment are very good.
- Provision in citizenship is not adequately monitored and the time allocation for the subject is insufficient. Students' progress in the subject is not reported to parents.

Since the last inspection, school improvement has been good. Most curriculum issues raised at the time have been addressed. Professional development is now central to strategic planning, and spiritual awareness is much more a feature of assemblies, religious education and other subjects. Attendance remains a concern; punctuality to lessons has improved but is still an issue, and neither the daily act of collective worship throughout the school nor religious education in the Sixth Form yet meet statutory requirements. Results overall in Year 9 national tests for English, mathematics and science have risen in line with national trends. The trend in average GCSE points score has been below that found nationally, but over the past three years the percentage of students gaining 5 or more grades A\*-C has remained average and the percentage of students gaining 5 or more pass grades has risen. Sixth Form results have remained broadly average over recent years. Teaching has remained good. A wider range of vocational options in the curriculum is offered.

### **STANDARDS ACHIEVED**

**The achievement of students overall in the school is good.** It is good at all stages and in nearly all subjects. Achievement is very good overall in religious education, history and music. It is very good in religious education and history in Years 10 and 11, and in music in Years 7 to 9. Students with SEN generally achieve very well, as a result of the very good support they receive. National test results for core subjects overall in Year 9 were below average in 2004. GCSE results overall were average. Overall, standards seen are below average in Years 7 to 9, but they reflect good achievement from entry. Standards currently seen in Years 10 and 11 are average, and they also reflect good achievement from Year 9. Standards in the Sixth Form are average and represent good achievement for the students concerned.

Performance compared with:		All schools			Similar schools
		2002	2003	2004	2004
Year 11	*GCSE/GNVQ examinations	D	D	C	A
Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	C	C	C	

*Key: A - well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E – well below average.*

*\*Based on capped average points scores at GCSE (eight best subjects). For Year 11, similar schools are those whose students attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

**Students' attitudes, values and personal qualities overall are good.** There is a good ethos for learning in the school. **Students' overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.** Students behave well and have good attitudes to learning. Relationships between students and between students and teachers are very good. Procedures for dealing with any bullying or other harassment are excellent. Despite very good procedures to promote good attendance, levels remain below average. Punctuality at the start of the day is a concern and is often caused by delays in bus transport.

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION

**The overall quality of education is good.** Teaching and learning in the school are good overall. They are good throughout Years 7 to 11 and in the Sixth Form. Strong features include teachers' expertise and planning, engagement of students in their learning, and challenging work to match the needs of all students, including those with SEN. The quality and range of courses in the curriculum are good overall, though the time allocated for citizenship and personal, social and health education (PSHE) is too short. Provision for careers guidance, however, is very good. Extra-curricular activities and opportunities for enrichment are also very good. Support and guidance for students are good and there are satisfactory arrangements for care and welfare. Partnerships with parents are satisfactory and links with the community and other schools are very good.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

**Leadership and management of the school overall are good.** The leadership of the headteacher is very good and makes a significant impact on the school's development. The leadership of key staff is good, but that in design and technology is unsatisfactory. Governance is satisfactory. The governing body provides good support and commitment. Overall management is good. Financial management is very good. Statutory requirements are not met in provision for citizenship, governors' involvement in child protection arrangements, information provided for parents in the prospectus, provision for a daily act of collective worship throughout the school, and religious education in the Sixth Form.

## PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are very pleased with the school and the range of opportunities. They say that teaching and care are good. There are a few concerns about the level of information they receive on their children's progress and the school in general. The inspection team agrees with these views. Students agree strongly that teaching is good and say that they are expected to work hard.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- Raise the level of attendance.
- Raise the achievement of boys to match that of girls in all subjects.
- Increase the weekly time allocation for PSHE and citizenship and ensure that provision is monitored to make sure the programmes are taught as planned.

**And to meet statutory requirements**

- Provide a daily act of collective worship throughout the school and religious education for the Sixth Form in accordance with the locally Agreed Syllabus.
- Ensure that the National Curriculum is fulfilled in citizenship and that students' progress is reported as required to parents.
- Ensure the involvement of a designated governor in child protection.
- Ensure that all statutory information is provided for parents in the prospectus.

## **SIXTH FORM**

### **OVERALL EVALUATION**

**The Sixth Form is good, with very good features.** It is cost effective. The Sixth Form is an integral part of the school but, as part of the 16:19 consortium arrangements with two other schools and a college of further education, it enables students to have a very good choice of academic and vocational courses. Opportunities for enrichment are very good. Courses taught at Larkmead are essentially GCE advanced level on behalf of the Abingdon Partnership, and attract students from all the institutions involved. Overall, standards of work are broadly average and achievement of students is good. Examination results have remained close to average over the past three years. Comparisons with national averages for individual subjects are limited in validity as the number of students in classes is relatively small, but in general the examination performance of male students has been higher than that of female students. Teaching and learning in the Sixth Form are good, and students show very good attitudes to their studies. Students benefit from the very good links with the community.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The 16:19 Abingdon Partnership consortium offers very wide opportunities for students' choice of subject and course.
- Leadership and management in the Sixth Form are very good, resulting in very clear progression and growth.
- Achievement of students in mathematics and history is very good.
- Opportunities for enrichment in the performing arts and other areas are very good, though the number taking part at lunchtime is often affected by the need to travel to another institution.
- There is no provision for religious education and insufficient arrangements for collective worship, resulting in a breach of statutory requirements.
- Preparation for higher education and careers is very good, and excellent support is given to students new to the school.



## 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	Provision in <b>English literature is good</b> . Teachers have considerable expertise, and students achieve well because they receive good teaching, though independent learning is underdeveloped. <b>English language</b> was sampled. Teaching and learning were satisfactory.
Mathematics	Provision in <b>mathematics is very good</b> . Students achieve very well as a result of consistently good teaching and students' very positive attitudes. The subject is very well led and managed.
Science	Provision in <b>biology is satisfactory</b> . Examination results at A level have fallen over recent years but achievement of current students is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory but insufficient use is made of ICT. Leadership of the subject is satisfactory.
Information and communication technology	Provision in <b>ICT is good</b> . Close collaboration across the consortium, and good teaching enables students to achieve well. Leadership and management are good.
Humanities	Provision in <b>history is very good</b> . Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching, and standards are above average. The subject is very well led and managed.
Visual and performing arts and media	Provision in <b>theatre studies is very good</b> . Standards seen are average, reflecting good achievement overall. Teaching and learning are very good; assessment is very effective. Leadership of the subject is very good.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Provision in <b>A level physical education is good</b> . Although examination results have been below average, current standards are average. Teaching and learning are good and ICT is used particularly well. There is little provision made for core physical education in the Sixth Form. Leadership and management are satisfactory.
Business	Provision in <b>business studies is good</b> . Standards attained by current students are average. Good teaching has led to good achievement. Leadership and management are good.
General education	<b>Provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE)</b> is made in the designated tutorial session. From work seen, the quality of teaching and learning on study skills <b>is good</b> . Very good support is being given to prepare students for higher education.
<i>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'.</i>	

## ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

The care and welfare of students in the Sixth Form are good. Provision for support, advice and guidance is very good. Teachers have very good relationships with the students and the well-structured tutorial system ensures that tutors monitor students' progress carefully. The provision of information about careers and higher education opportunities is very good. As the school is in the consortium, some of the students taught in the Sixth Form are new to the school and excellent induction processes ensure that they are given the necessary support. All students, including those with SEN, those with English as an additional language, and the gifted and talented, are supported very well.

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

The leadership and management in the Sixth Form are very good. The head of Sixth Form has a very good sense of purpose and understanding of the needs of the students. The day-to-day management of the Sixth Form is very good. Very good management arrangements are made across the consortium to develop the curriculum and provide parents with assessment information. Examination performance data is used well to set targets for students and assess progress against predictions. Finances are very well managed and as a result the Sixth Form is cost effective.

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

All the students responding to the questionnaire or who were interviewed were very supportive of the Sixth Form. They are very happy at the school. The majority find the work challenging and praise the teaching. Some students are unhappy with the extent of extra-curricular opportunities, though this area of provision was found to be generally very good. The extent to which students can take part is inhibited by the need to move between institutions at lunchtime. Most students feel the Sixth Form and the school as a whole are well run.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

#### Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Overall, standards in Year 9 are below average, but achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good as standards were well below average when students first came to the school. Standards are average in Year 11 and these students are also achieving well in light of their attainment on entry into the GCSE courses. Standards are average in Year 13 of the Sixth Form and this represents good achievement, as the overall attainment of these students on entry to the Sixth Form was below average.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards overall rise steadily, from being well below average on entry in Year 7 to below average at the end of Year 9, and then to being broadly average at the end of Year 11.
- Achievement of students is good throughout the school.
- Boys currently do not achieve as well as girls in Years 10 and 11 in several subjects, including English.
- Girls' overall results at GCSE were significantly better than those of boys in 2004.
- Achievement in the Sixth Form is good as a result of good teaching and students' very positive attitudes.
- All students with SEN, including those with physical disability or hearing impairment, achieve very well as a result of the strong level of support.
- Opportunities for independent learning in the Sixth Form in English literature, ICT and biology are not greatly evident.

#### Commentary

1. In the National Curriculum tests for Year 9 in 2004, the overall performance of students, as measured by their average point score, was below the national average. These students entered the school with overall attainment well below the average in the National Curriculum tests taken in Year 6, and this indicates good progress in Years 7 to 9 in English, mathematics and science. The average point scores in English and science were close to the national average and below average in mathematics.

2. The overall performance of Year 9 students in 2004 was well above average, compared with the results in schools where the prior attainment in national tests fell into a broadly similar range to that of Larkmead students. In mathematics and science, results were very high compared with the results in these similar schools, and in English they were well above. Since the last inspection the overall performance measured by the average point score has risen at a rate broadly in line with the national trend. Notably, English results had fallen from 2000 to 2002, levelled in 2003 and risen significantly in 2004.

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

<b>Standards in:</b>	<b>School results</b>	<b>National results</b>
English	33.0 (31.2)	33.3 (33.4)
Mathematics	34.5 (34.9)	35.5 (35.4)
Science	32.9 (33.0)	33.1 (33.6)

*There were 178 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

3. In the GCSE examinations in 2004, attainment was in line with the national average on the basis of 'capped' average point scores (i.e. for the best eight subjects taken). Attainment based on comparison with all other schools, taking account of vocational GCSE-equivalent qualifications, was below national average. The percentage of students gaining five or more A\*-C grades was below

the national average. In 2004 the average GCSE point score was well above average when compared with that of schools where the attainment in Year 9 was in a similar range. From data provided by the school, GCSE results for girls, in particular the percentage gaining five or more grades A\*-C, were significantly higher than for boys. This is a concern identified by the school.

4. The overall trend in the average point score since 2000 has been below the national trend, although there have been variations year to year. The percentage of students gaining five or more GCSE grades A\*-C has been below average for several years, but the percentage gaining five or more grades A\*-G has risen considerably.

5. The governing body set challenging targets for 2004. These were exceeded in Year 9 in mathematics, were narrowly missed in English but not reached in science. Targets for overall attainment in GCSE were not met, although the target for the percentage of students gaining at least one GCSE pass at A\*-G was exceeded.

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

	<b>School results</b>	<b>National results</b>
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	43 (43)	52 (52)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	89 (83)	89 (88)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	97 (93)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	38.7 (36.5)	41.4 (40.6)
Capped Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	32.8 (30.8)	34.9 (34.7)

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

#### **GCSE & Equivalent Qualifications**

	<b>School results</b>	<b>National results</b>
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	43	52
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	91	89
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	97	96
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	318.7	340.3
Capped Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	269.4	282.8

*There were 201 students in the year group. In the upper table only GCSE and GNVQ awards are counted. In the lower table the percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in vocational GCSE double awards, short courses and GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

6. In the work seen in lessons and from the evidence of students' writing, standards are below average in Years 7 to 9. Achievement overall in Year 7 to 9, where standards on entry to the school were well below average, is good. Achievement is good in most subjects, and very good in music. It is satisfactory in design and technology, modern languages and citizenship.

7. In Years 10 and 11 standards of students' work seen are broadly average. Achievement is good, considering the students' attainment at the start of the GCSE courses. It is good in most subjects and very good in history and religious education. It is satisfactory in design and technology, science, French and citizenship. Achievement in the small samples of drama and leisure and tourism, observed in Years 10 or 11, was also very good overall.

8. From observation of lessons and scrutiny of students' work, there is some evidence of variation in achievement of boys and girls. Boys do not achieve as well as girls in English, ICT, art and design and music. One reason seen in English is the weakness in the writing skills of lower attaining boys, and in ICT the commitment of boys to finishing tasks. This gap between the achievement of boys and girls reflects the much lower performance of boys in the GCSE examinations last year.

9. The achievement of students with SEN is very good. Their literacy and communication skills improve greatly, giving them increased access to the wider curriculum. Achievement of students on School Action Plus is particularly good. Gifted and talented students in general achieve as well as all other students in their year groups. Students who are from minority ethnic backgrounds and those very few with English as an additional language (EAL) achieve as well as others.

10. Overall, students have average literacy skills and use these to support learning in subjects. Speaking and listening skills are well developed. Reading and writing are satisfactory, but the weak writing skills of some lower-attaining students hinder their progress. Students have satisfactory levels of competence in numeracy and these help them progress in subjects such as science, ICT and design and technology. Students use ICT satisfactorily in general to enhance their learning. ICT is used particularly well in modern languages and geography.

### Sixth Form

11. In 2004 the overall performance of students in GCE A/AS examinations was broadly in line with the national average, although the average point score per student was numerically lower than the national figure. However, because subject groups are small in size, statistical comparisons with national averages are not totally reliable. Since attainment of these students on entry to the Sixth Form was well below average their achievement was very good. The results for male students were above average and for female students they were in line. The results have been similarly close to average over the past three years and there is no discernible trend. The proportion of students gaining grades A or B was also in line with average in 2004 but this was an improvement compared with 2003.

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

	<b>School results</b>	<b>National results</b>
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	91.4 (94.7)	92.3 (92.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	33.8 (30.3)	36.2 (35.6)
Average point score per student	244.8 (234.0)	265.2 (258.2)

*There were 31 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

12. Standards of work seen during the inspection in the eight focus subjects are variable, but overall are average, reflecting examination performance. Standards are above average in mathematics and history. They are below average in biology. However, groups are small and standards reflect the individual abilities of students.

13. Overall, students in the Sixth Form achieve well. From work seen in lessons and students' writing, achievement is very good in mathematics and history, satisfactory in biology and good in the other focus subjects. Male and female students achieve equally well in the Sixth Form from the evidence available. In English literature, ICT and biology, teachers do not ensure that students' skills of independent learning are well enough developed.

14. There are too few students with SEN in the Sixth Form to make it possible to judge their achievement specifically. Gifted and talented students achieve as well as others overall, with a good number of opportunities provided for challenge. They achieve better than others in physical education often through very good enrichment and encouragement.

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

15. Attendance is well below the national median in the main school, with unauthorised absence well above. Lateness to school is common, but timekeeping depends often on contract buses. Attendance is good in the Sixth Form. Students' attitudes, behaviour and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good overall in the main school and very good in the Sixth Form.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attitudes and behaviour are good, often very good, in the main school; they are very good in the Sixth Form.
- Attendance in the main school was poor last year. Punctuality has improved but remains unsatisfactory at the start of the day. However, the school promotes attendance very well. Most parents try to ensure that students attend regularly.
- Students' moral and social development is very good and their spiritual and cultural development good. However, the school still does not meet the statutory requirements for collective worship.
- The school promotes very good relationships between students, and procedures to combat bullying or other forms of harassment are excellent.
- Students willingly accept the many opportunities offered to take on extra responsibility.

## Commentary

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.8	School data	2.8
National data	6.9	National data	1.1

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

16. Attendance in the main school during the year 2003/4 was well below the national median, and unauthorised absence was well above. However, in the first half of the current year attendance has improved by about one per cent and is now broadly in line with the median. Unauthorised absence remains too high, in spite of the school's very good measures to promote regular attendance. Many measures are in place to promote attendance, including the 'Stepping Stones' sanctuary, which gives support to a few students who have a history of being 'school refusers', and the active involvement of the LEA educational welfare officer. Rigorous records are kept and excuses are not accepted. Most parents are assiduous in trying to ensure that their children attend regularly and on time. Nevertheless, a considerable number of students have been absent without authorisation at least once. A small minority have more frequent absence. This level of absenteeism affects continuity of learning and has an impact on achievement.

17. Behaviour in the classroom and round the school is predominantly good, and often very good. It is very good in lessons in Years 7 to 9, and in the Sixth Form; although good in Years 10 and 11, some instances of poorer behaviour are noted in mathematics, science, ICT and design and technology. Attitudes to work are good in the main school, and very good in the Sixth Form. They are good in Years 10 and 11. The school has strong and effective measures for promoting good behaviour and preventing exclusion, including the 'Stepping Stones' project mentioned above. These are generally successful; last year about three-quarters of fixed period exclusions were for a single offence, with only a handful of boys re-offending and no one excluded permanently.

## Exclusions

### *Ethnic background of students*

### *Exclusions in the last school year*

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	652	10	0
White – Irish	1	0	0
White – any other White background	11	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	8	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	3	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	1	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	0	0	0
Black or Black British – African	2	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	3	0	0
Chinese	0	0	0
Any other ethnic group	2	0	0
Parent preferred not to say/information not obtained	255	31	0

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

18. The school's high expectations, together with good teaching and a friendly atmosphere, stimulate in students a desire to learn and to play an active part in school life and its very wide range of extra-curricular activities. The measures in force to deal with untoward behaviour also ensure that students are as nearly as possible free from bullying or racial harassment. As a result, relationships throughout the school are very good and students are confident in their own abilities. They take on responsibility willingly, but there are not enough opportunities for Year 11 students. In their questionnaire answers, students showed some concerns over standards of behaviour. However, subsequent interviews with students and the inspectors' own observations indicated that this concern was exaggerated. Those students interviewed were articulate and confident and were very positive about the school and its effect on their lives.

19. Students with SEN are very positive, and their attitudes and behaviour in learning support lessons are very good. They engage well with the teaching, are co-operative, and value the support the department gives them. Teachers' expectations are high and students respond well.

20. Students' level of awareness of spiritual issues is good. There has been a significant improvement in the provision for spiritual development since the last inspection, when it was judged unsatisfactory. Although religious education remains the main area where there is regular reflection on personal values and beliefs, more general opportunities were seen in subjects such as English, art, dance, history and music. Assemblies are worthwhile occasions and provide further opportunities for reflection and for strengthening the school's own ethos. They do not, however, meet requirements as acts of worship.

21. Students show a very high level of respect for the feelings and views of others, as seen, for example, in the integration of the small minority of students from other cultures. High levels of empathy were seen in lessons dealing with sensitive issues such as segregation and the impact of war. Many subjects, as well as assemblies, contribute well to students' development of moral values. In such subjects as music, religious education and sport, students work collaboratively and show very good levels of respect for each other. Teachers take the opportunity to discuss moral issues with students, such as was seen in a science lesson on gene therapy.

22. Opportunities for social development are very good. There is a wide range of social events in school, particularly the fund-raising for charity, drama productions and the host of educational visits, all of which help students to develop skills for living in a community. On special occasion days the students take responsibility for planning, welcoming visitors and providing general help. Students are very willing to take on responsibility. The 'buddy' system enables all students during their school life to act as mentors for a younger student. The school council contributes to shaping the community for the good of all. The highly positive ethos of the school fosters respect for others and a willingness to share ideas.

23. The school provides good opportunities for cultural development. All subjects of the curriculum contribute to students' knowledge and understanding of other cultures, particularly in geography and religious education, where topics include aspects of life and different life styles in countries round the world. Workshops provide first-hand experience of Indian art and Japanese pottery, and visits to museums extend the students' knowledge through a range of artefacts. Assemblies play an important part in fostering respect for differences and recognition of similarities. The learning resource centre contains a wide range of materials representing different cultures. The opportunities for studying and discussing the multicultural nature of life in the British Isles are less well developed.

### **Sixth Form**

24. Attendance and punctuality in the Sixth Form are both good. The school's recording and monitoring system, which is integrated with that of its three partner schools, is very efficient and effective in tracking an individual's performance.

25. Attitudes to study and behaviour are very good, making a significant contribution to achievement. Relationships with staff and between students are very positive, resulting in a very happy and productive environment for learning.

26. In the Sixth Form, students take a very active interest in school life and are enthusiastic about the many activities available. They shoulder their many responsibilities willingly and experience no harassment.

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

The overall quality of education is good. Teaching and learning overall in the school are good. The school provides very good extra-curricular activities and opportunities for enrichment. There are satisfactory arrangements for the care and welfare of students. Support and guidance are good. Partnerships with parents are satisfactory and very good links are established with the community and with other schools.

#### **Teaching and learning**

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good overall. It is good in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11. It is good in the Sixth Form resulting in good achievement in all sections of the school. Assessment procedures are thorough, and used well to support learning in all years. Assessment is good in the Sixth Form.

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

- Good teaching and learning lead to good achievement and also good relationships between teachers and students.
- The teaching of all students who have SEN is very good.
- The overall quality of teaching in history and religious education in the Sixth Form is very good, especially in teachers' high expectations and planning stimulating work to meet students' needs; teaching is also very good in theatre studies and history.



- Achievement in design and technology is affected by limited planning and by inadequate challenge and the engagement of students.
- Good marking and target-setting help students to know how they are doing and how to improve.
- Assessment information is used very well to identify individual learning needs.

## Commentary

27. Overall, teaching and learning are good in all stages of the school, including the Sixth Form, and this is a major factor in the students' good achievement. During the inspection, 146 lessons were observed. Approximately three-quarters were good or better and one-third were very good or excellent. The proportion of very good teaching was greater in Years 7 to 9. Five lessons were excellent and five lessons were unsatisfactory. Excellent lessons were seen in history, geography, religious education and leisure and tourism. They were stimulating, showed a high degree of planning and developed excellent relationships between students and the teacher. Excellent examples of independent learning were seen in leisure and tourism. Unsatisfactory lessons were seen in French, mathematics and design and technology. One of the unsatisfactory lessons seen was in the Sixth Form, in biology. In most cases, this was because there was weak planning, unclear objectives, slow pace, and low levels of interest shown by students.

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 146 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
5 (3%)	47 (33%)	57 (39%)	32 (22%)	5 (3%)	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 were seen.*

28. In the teaching there is a good level of consistency between year groups and subjects. A significant strength in the teaching is the extent to which most teachers plan and prepare good lessons to meet the needs of all students, including those with special needs or more limited literacy skills. Teachers have a high level of expertise and use this well to extend and challenge students of all ages. Students are generally engaged very well in the lessons because teachers use a good variety of techniques, involve students and develop encouraging relationships.

29. Teaching and learning in history and religious education in Years 7 to 11 are very good. They are very good also in music in Years 7 to 9. Teachers in these subjects plan the lessons with great care, produce challenging work and engage students in interesting activities. Teaching is satisfactory in design and technology, French and citizenship. It is good in science in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. In design and technology, and to a lesser extent French, the planning and level of challenge are limited, and teaching method fails to generate any real degree of enthusiasm. In citizenship the lack of curriculum time affects the quality of teaching. Good use is made of the National Strategies for teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 in English and mathematics. It is satisfactory in science but in some lessons there is limited use of the plenary session.

30. Behaviour in lessons is generally managed well. In some subjects, notably history, English, geography, religious education and music, this aspect is very good. Homework is good overall and provides valuable extension work. Opportunities for challenging homework are too often missed in mathematics, science, design and technology and ICT.

31. Teaching and learning for special needs students are very good. Skilled, knowledgeable and sensitive teachers and teaching assistants bring the best out in these students. Expectation and challenge are high. Teaching within the provision for SEN is very good, particularly in respect of students with hearing impairment. Individual education plans (IEPs) are of good quality. As a result of very good teaching, students with a wide range of needs learn very well. Gifted and talented students often have helpful thought-provoking extension work to respond to their abilities, particularly in mathematics, ICT, music, physical education and history. There is a lack of appropriate challenge in art and design and science lessons.

32. The school makes good use of assessment information to identify students' individual needs when they enter the school and to ensure that every student is given appropriate support and placed in a suitable set. By the end of Year 7 all students have targets in the core subjects, based on analysis of performance data. Targets agreed by departments in other subjects supplement the targets in the core. In Years 10 and 11, overall subject targets are set, based on careful analysis of students' progress in all subjects in Years 7 to 9. Students are very well aware of their targets and find the regular progress reviews very helpful, although in Years 7 to 9 they wish these were more frequent than once a year.

33. Procedures for monitoring progress are good, but vary between subjects. Where there is very good practice, such as in geography, history or music, clear marking includes commentaries on work to guide students' improvement. Furthermore, standards of work are well referenced against National Curriculum criteria so that students know how well they are doing, and assessments made by students of their own and others' work encourage them to reflect well on how to improve of their own accord. Teaching styles also promote oral feedback from students so that work in class can be paced to match the level of understanding the students show. Assessment in citizenship is not yet sufficiently established and is currently, therefore, unsatisfactory.

34. Arrangements for assessment of students with SEN are very thorough, informing the quality of individual educational plans and responding to individual needs very well. Marking is very thoughtful and supportive. Systems for using information to develop individual plans for gifted and talented students are less well developed.

35. One aspect of assessment practice causes confusion. Some subjects, for example ICT, use the school's internal attainment scale in Years 7 to 9, which is the opposite way round to the conventional National Curriculum levels. This has been raised as a concern by some parents, and it undermines continuity of practice where primary schools have the national levels in assessment. The school has a good awareness of the strengths of its assessment practice and is committed to addressing weaknesses, sharing best practice and developing greater consistency between the subjects.

## **Sixth Form**

36. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall in the Sixth Form. In most subjects students are well motivated and show high levels of motivation. Students appreciate the value of the 16:19 Abingdon Partnership and work well with students from other schools. Teachers have a strong command of their subjects and use this to extend students' learning. Teachers form very good relationships with students and encourage active participation. They also make good, and often very good, use of homework.

37. Eight subjects were inspected in full as a focus in the Sixth Form. Teaching and learning in history and drama are very good. They are satisfactory in biology, and in the other focus subjects, namely mathematics, ICT, physical education and business studies, they are good.

38. Procedures for assessment and its use are good overall. Teachers hold considerable information about their students, which helps them to support their learning. Marking is thorough and is especially good in history, where commentaries, often up to one page in length, guide students' endeavours to improve. Students know how well they are doing to meet their targets, which are well set. References to target and examination criteria are particularly strong in drama. Good oral feedback in class supports progress in most subjects. There is no uniform approach to assessment across all the subjects in the consortium.

## **The curriculum**

39. The curriculum is good overall. It is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, good in Years 10 and 11 and very good in the Sixth Form. There is a very good range of enrichment opportunities. The school has a good match of teachers to its needs. Resources and accommodation are satisfactory overall and good in the Sixth Form.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good opportunities, academic and vocational, are provided to meet the needs of students.
- Provision for all students with SEN is very good.
- Opportunities for enrichment and extra-curricular activities are very good.
- The allocation of time for citizenship is too low, and the inclusion of citizenship topics across the subjects of the curriculum is not monitored well enough to ensure that National Curriculum requirements are fulfilled.
- The short length of lessons has a negative impact on achievement, particularly in physical education.
- The 16:19 Abingdon Partnership provides an extensive and wide choice of options for students in the Sixth Form.
- Overall, preparation for employment and higher education is very good.

### **Commentary**

40. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. The school offers the expected range of subjects. The National Curriculum is enhanced by separate lessons for drama. In modern languages German is being phased out and is currently taught only in Year 9. French is taught throughout.

41. The duration of the timetabled period, which is 50 or 45 minutes depending on time of day, does not suit some subjects, such as physical education. Single periods are too short and double periods are too long. The effect is that the pace of learning is reduced and use of time is inefficient. Time allocated for ICT in Year 9 – one lesson per fortnight – is too little to develop skills effectively. More time for ICT is allocated in Years 7 and 8. Time allotted citizenship is also very low since one period, reduced in length to 40 minutes, is timetabled to include careers, work-related learning (WRL) and PSHE. Although aspects of citizenship and WRL are featured within other subject programmes of study, there is no monitoring to establish if citizenship is being taught as planned, so it is doubtful that statutory requirements are being met. A number of students with SEN in Year 7 are withdrawn from certain subjects – science, geography – for literacy support. Whilst this is valuable for literacy development it means that lessons in these other subjects are missed, which results in lack of continuity of learning.

42. In Years 10 and 11 the curriculum is good. A good range of GCSE and an increasing number of vocational courses are offered to meet the needs of students. Design and technology is now an option. Not all students take a modern language, since the vocational options in art and design and leisure and tourism require longer time than normal. The school is, however, responding to the students' preferences. A group of forty students have the opportunity to take a national vocational qualification (NVQ) course one morning per week at the local college. Options include engineering, wood occupations, and childcare, and the provision has been successful in raising the overall motivation and performance of the students concerned. A further small group is on the Young Engineering Apprenticeship scheme at college, missing two days per week at school, but gaining NVQ level 2 qualifications.

43. Overall provision for careers guidance and preparation for employment is very good and meets statutory requirements. In Years 10 and 11 the timetabled PSHE lessons, although short, are more often concerned with careers than other aspects. The facilities and resources are very well organised and made available in the resource centre. Good links with the Connexions service enable students to have interviews.

44. The curriculum for special needs is very good. Additional lessons are arranged to support students with particular needs, for example in physical education. Subject teachers request and receive additional support from the learning support department and individual students attend tutorials in the department, where they receive help with particular areas of the curriculum they find difficulty with. Because of the high level of support, students with special needs have access to a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum.

45. The curriculum gives good opportunities for extending the learning and experiences of gifted and talented students. For example in physical education a wide range of sporting activities helps students to join outside clubs and to compete at district and county level. Students are encouraged to attend special activities, which stimulate their learning further. For example, Year 11 students attended a gifted and talented seminar where a series of lectures encouraged them to think divergently. A few subjects are making better provision than others for gifted and talented students. Provision is very good in music, physical education, English, art and business studies. Provision for the very few students with English as an additional language is good in that, where required, resources are made available and additional support is given by the teacher.

46. An extensive and varied range of activities, which enrich students' experience, enhances the curriculum. At lunchtimes and after school, a high percentage become involved in a diversity of clubs, sporting and musical activities for students of all ages. For students with literacy, numeracy and ICT difficulties, extra classes are held after school, and 'booster' classes are run prior to the GCSE examinations. The day-by-day curriculum is enriched by regular visits to art galleries and theatres and by visits from artists, writers, and representatives from other faiths. There are annual ski trips and visits to France and Germany. Residential weeks for students in Years 7, 8 and 9 greatly improve students' independence and sense of self-esteem. A minority of students at risk of developing disaffected attitudes attend the local education authority (LEA) 'DJ Mix' scheme, which takes place on school premises. In response to 'World Challenge', students from Year 11 and the Sixth Form went to Zambia. To do so each had to raise a significant part of the cost by individual effort. Annually, virtually all students take part in Activities Week. The school regularly presents a full-scale musical production in which local instrumentalists take part. Large sums are raised in response to charitable appeals.

47. The school has had little opportunity to develop its performing and visual arts college status since its bid was accepted towards the end of the last school year. However, it has made satisfactory progress overall, with attention so far being upon the three focus subjects of art and design, dance and drama. The vocational GCSE in art and design has started successfully and a greater emphasis on three-dimensional work addresses students' preferences well. The purchase of a stock of digital cameras has led to the first cross-curricular initiatives. There is good provision for dance for both boys and girls, but only when a specialist teacher is appointed in September 2005 will certificated courses run. Drama is undergoing major change, with the objective of strengthening links with adult drama groups in the town. The confident performance of *Oklahoma!* during the inspection illustrated that strong links with other arts are being created. Workshops by outside artists have become established in all three focus areas, and increasingly students visit artists at work and in performance. Links with the community and museums – 'Modern Art, Oxford', for example – and links with feeder primary schools are developing well. As yet, there is only incidental evidence of the three focus subjects having an influence on teaching style and content in other areas of the curriculum.

48. Overall, the accommodation is satisfactory. All staff have their own teaching room and most faculties have adjacent rooms. The purpose-built music suite provides an excellent acoustic, spacious accommodation, separate practice rooms, and very good soundproofing, and it is well maintained. Accommodation for English, physical education, geography and ICT is good overall. On the other hand, the accommodation for science is unsatisfactory and this has a negative impact on teaching and learning. Religious education is taught in out-of-date accommodation, which is due for immediate replacement. It lacks adequate storage and display space. There is good access for students with disability because there are suitable ramps and lifts. Although sports hall and gym facilities are good, they are some distance apart. There is a large open space for sports and

recreation, which makes it possible for a wide range of opportunities to be made available to students.

49. Accommodation in the learning support department is very good and resources are good. Resources for teaching and learning are good overall and meet curricular needs. They are very good in music, particularly in respect of having one room fully equipped with ICT, and this is contributing well to improved standards. Resources for learning are good overall in history, geography, religious education, design and technology, art, physical education, and are satisfactory in others. There are now sufficient textbooks in most subjects other than science, design and technology, English and, in some year groups, in religious education. There has been good improvement in ICT facilities overall. The learning resource centre provides an attractive environment for students.

50. The number of well-qualified teaching staff matches the needs of the curriculum in most subjects. Physical education is an exception, where long-term staff illness has affected the deployment and has had to be resolved by the teachers taking on extra commitment, as suitable cover has not been available. Recruitment difficulties have also been experienced in design and technology, in ICT and in science, where, for example, supply teachers have been needed for extended periods. Support staff are in place where required. In the special needs department, support staffing is well qualified to meet student need. Technical support in subjects such as ICT and science is at an adequate level and is provided by staff who are well qualified or experienced. Temporary teachers who are on supply to the school are very effective and well prepared.

### **Sixth Form**

51. As noted earlier, the school is a member of the Sixth Form consortium known as 16:19 Abingdon Partnership, which involves three secondary schools and a college of further education. There is a very wide choice of subjects, including many vocational options, and they are available in any combination. Students registered at Larkmead, however, only take academic courses leading to AS/A level qualifications. Students opting for a vocational course are enrolled at the college but may come to Larkmead for an academic subject. The schools and college are quite close together geographically, so that travelling time is not an issue. Students have the opportunity to attend college on Wednesday afternoons to do physical education but there is no provision for this in the school. The recently acquired performing and visual arts college status is beginning to have an impact on the Sixth Form curriculum, but progress is slow. Religious education is not provided in the Sixth Form, which constitutes a breach of the statutory requirement for schools.

52. Enrichment in the Sixth Form is very good. Students regularly work with younger pupils, providing effective role models, and were recent winners of the Diana, Princess of Wales award for their highly effective anti-bullying scheme. Many are involved with the school's musical production, although fewer than might be expected take part in sporting activities. Participation in extra-curricular activities is affected by the need for some students to travel at lunchtime to other schools or college in the consortium. There is a programme of links with Oxford Brookes University, visits abroad, and visits to galleries and theatres in which the majority take part. Sixth-form students also organise the Christmas ball and the leavers' ball, take total responsibility for the highly successful pantomime each year and oversee the school's charity fund-raising campaigns.

53. Accommodation and resources in the Sixth Form are good. There is a large common room and good facilities for study, although there is a need for some refurbishment. Access to ICT is easy and the careers resources are extensive. The learning resource centre provides a good environment to develop independent learning. The match of teachers to needs of the Sixth Form subjects is very good. Staff are highly qualified and experienced.

## Care, guidance and support

The school cares for its students well and provides good levels of support, advice and guidance, which are based on the monitoring of progress. However, the school has recognised that some aspects of health and safety need improvement. The school regularly consults students and acts on their views.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Proper child protection measures are in place, but some minor statutory requirements are not met.
- The school is kept clean. Satisfactory health and safety procedures are generally in place, though there are some weaknesses.
- Staff provide good support, advice and guidance, based on their detailed knowledge of individuals and on the school's assessment systems.
- The school includes all students equally in its care provision and very effectively supports students with diverse situations and different backgrounds.
- The school consults students extensively and acts on their suggestions.

## Commentary

54. Child protection practices are up to date and in line with those laid down by the local Area Child Protection Committee. Staff know what to do and new staff are trained soon after arrival. However, statutory requirements are not yet fully met in that the governing body is not yet sufficiently involved, though it has plans to meet them in the short term. Liaison with most outside agencies is particularly close and effective.

55. Students and staff work in a clean environment which is predominantly healthy, safe and secure, with many strong features. The health and safety co-ordinator has had professional safety training. A revised draft health and safety policy is ready for governor approval. Medical arrangements are good. Fire drills are carried out each term and access to the Internet is strictly controlled. Testing of equipment is regular and up to date. However, two detailed external health and safety inspections carried out recently have revealed deficiencies, and the school is now well advanced in devising action plans for rectifying them. In particular it recognises that it needs to place a much stronger emphasis on preparing risk assessments and on using them as a matter of daily routine. It is also taking urgent action to identify and dispose of surplus, out-of-date chemicals. Other plans for improvement in the short term include training more first aiders and involving an external consultant in regular health and safety inspections. The school is currently taking action on one or two other minor health and safety points noted during the inspection.

56. Students are highly valued and both they and their parents recognise that teachers treat them fairly and help under-performers, especially those who have difficulty in conforming. The induction arrangements for new students are very good.

57. Staff all know their students exceptionally well, and there is always at least one member with whom students feel they can develop a thoroughly trusting relationship.

58. The school consults very well with students and acts on their advice. Issues related to the quality of the environment and concerns about teaching are fed back to appropriate staff. A new type of student survey, with benchmarked answers, is being introduced this year. All concerned see this consultation as worthwhile.

59. Students know they have good access to support, advice and guidance. The school has a coherent system of year and form tutors and has recently extended its mentoring scheme to cover all years in the main school. Whole-school assessment data is well used to identify underachievement, though the time designated for mentors to do this is inadequate. Target setting is inconsistent across subjects; it is most effective in music and least effective in design and technology and ICT.

60. All students are treated equally. There is very good provision of care, for example in the 'Stepping Stones' unit, for those who are vulnerable, at risk or have concerns about school. The school is careful to recognise the circumstances of students from difficult social background or who are from refugee and asylum seeker families. There is very good support in this way for SEN students, in particular those with hearing impairment. Staff are experienced and have appropriate resources to help students in class or in the specialist provision. The learning support department provides very good support and guidance to all students with special needs. Students willingly attend at lunchtimes and after school for extra help. They have very good relationships with staff.

### **Sixth Form**

61. The good level of care continues seamlessly into the Sixth Form. Students have regular and very good continued support from tutors and the head of Sixth Form. Excellent support is given to students who have joined the school through the consortium or are new to the school. Opportunities for Sixth Form students to take responsibilities are extensive. They are consulted very well through the school council and have their own annual questionnaire. All students have good access to careers and higher education resources in a dedicated part of the learning resource centre. This includes designated ICT access. The overall guidance on careers is very good. Support and guidance for Sixth Form students is enhanced through regular monitoring of progress. Target setting is good and is most effective in theatre studies and history.

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

Links with parents are satisfactory overall, but support from a significant number of parents for their children's education is unsatisfactory. Links with the local community are very good. Those with other schools and colleges are very good overall, and excellent in the Sixth Form.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The quality of information provided to parents about the school is good.
- Reports on students' progress, although improved since last inspection, are not consistently informative for all subjects in terms of detail on standards.
- The contribution of a significant number of parents to support their children's learning is unsatisfactory.
- Links with the local community are extensive, varied and very valuable both to students and the community.
- The joint 16:19 education partnership in the town is excellent in widening the provision for all Sixth Formers.

### **Commentary**

62. The prospectus is very informative and helpful, but in several minor respects it does not meet statutory requirements. The governors' annual report to parents is good and meets statutory requirements. The fortnightly newsletter is lively and interesting. Induction information and arrangements for parents of new students are also of high quality, and policies are available on request. However, parents do not receive a school calendar or an outline of their child's projected curriculum. The interim student report gives grades for effort and achievement reasonably effectively and highlights any concerns early. The main annual report is better than at the time of the last inspection and is appreciated by parents, but still does not fully meet statutory

requirements. It is good at establishing the student's own views on progress, but not all teachers seem to act on them. Furthermore, many teachers do not set out in sufficient detail what students know, can do and understand, though some reporting in music is good in this respect. The school's Internet website is satisfactory.

63. Arrangements for consulting parents are generally satisfactory, and good in the case of parents with children in Year 7 and students with statements of SEN. The school offers parents formal information and informal social meetings, at which turnout is satisfactory. Few parents help with trips or sports fixtures. Overall, parents' contribution to their children's learning at school and at home is satisfactory, but relatively few parents are greatly involved with their children's education, and a significant number do not fulfil their obligation to monitor their children's work through the student planner. There is no longer a parents-teacher association. Appropriate staff are available for individual parental consultation at short notice. Most parents appreciate what the school does for their children and support the school on behaviour matters. As a result there are few complaints, and the school has a very effective system for dealing with these when they arise.

64. Links with the community are very strong. The school works closely with professionals in the local education authority and with the community and uses them most effectively as critical friends. Students gain substantially from the school's very wide range of external cultural, artistic and sporting connections and from taking part in local events and competitions. The school recently won the national Diana Memorial Award for peer mentoring. The school actively and effectively encourages students to give of themselves through support for Third World school projects notably in Zambia, and in community service and local charity work. Contacts with the local press are strong, as are those with local television and radio: there was recently a substantial item on local television praising the school's efforts to help a Sri Lankan school devastated by the tsunami disaster. There are very useful links with local industry and commerce, which did much to support the school's application for specialist status. All these activities comprehensively extend students' range of personal experience and increase their sense of worth.

65. The provision the school has made for gifted and talented students extends into the community. One particularly successful art project for Year 9 students links with two other schools and with an artist in residence and the local museum. Parents have been included in the identification of gifted and talented students. They are encouraged to enrol their children with the national academy for gifted and talented students and to encourage them to attend holiday courses.

66. Through playing a leading role in the Abingdon Partnership the school has exceptionally close relations with other local schools and colleges. This enables it to develop really effective joint arrangements for curricular support in primary schools, and subsequently for transfer of students to secondary school. The school is closely involved in local initiatives to provide additional support to vulnerable teenagers and their families. It is also an important provider of training for teachers and for classroom assistants, especially in the field of supporting deaf students.

### **Sixth Form**

67. Links with the community are also very good in the Sixth Form. Many of the main school activities involve Sixth Form students. Excellent, integrated management arrangements are in place for the Sixth Form through the 16:19 Abingdon Partnership. Arrangements for involvement with Universities and higher education are also of very high quality, and jointly organised.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

The overall leadership and management of the school are good. The leadership of the headteacher is very good. He has a clear understanding of the needs of the school and focuses on areas for improvement. Overall leadership by key staff, including heads of department, is good and is focused on raising students' achievement. Overall management of the school is good.



Governors are committed, have a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, and provide a very good level of support. However, they have not ensured that a number of statutory requirements are met, and governance overall is satisfactory.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The very good leadership of the headteacher has helped bring about significant improvements in standards and provision.
- The leadership and management of the Sixth Form are very good.
- Although governance of the school is satisfactory overall, the governing body fails to ensure that all statutory requirements are met.
- Key staff are hardworking and focused on raising achievement; they are very committed to inclusion and to providing for the needs of all students.
- The school's self-evaluation is very effective and with the good use of performance data it shapes school development.
- Financial management is very good and the Sixth Form is cost effective.
- Management of provision in design and technology is unsatisfactory.

### **Commentary**

68. Leadership and management of the school are good overall. The leadership of the headteacher is very good. He has a clear vision and high aspirations for the school. The leadership team is currently going through a period of transition following the retirement of a long-standing deputy, the appointment of a business manager and the pending retirement of the headteacher and an assistant headteacher. This transition is being managed very effectively to ensure continuity and development. The leadership of heads of department is good overall, with examples of very good leadership in mathematics, geography, history, religious education and drama. It is very good in the provision for SEN. Leadership is satisfactory in science, citizenship and design and technology.

69. The governance of the school is satisfactory. Governors are very committed and supportive. They have a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and make a good contribution to shaping its future direction. However, they have not ensured that religious education is provided in the Sixth Form or that all students experience a daily act of collective worship. The requirement to report on students' attainment in citizenship is not being met, and the prospectus does not contain all required statutory information. Specifically, information is not given on the destinations of leavers, absence rates and parents' right to withdraw their children from religious education. Also governors are not sufficiently involved in child protection arrangements to fully meet statutory requirements.

70. The management of the school is good. The school's self-evaluation is very effective and this is informed by a good pattern of lesson observation and regular faculty reviews. The school has a good system for collecting and analysing performance data. This analysis is well used to review the progress of different groups of students and to set targets that are both realistic and aspirational. Performance data is carefully analysed to monitor subjects and to compare progress of students at different stages of the school with that expected nationally or in similar schools. Management in most departments is at least satisfactory, but it is unsatisfactory in design and technology. The analysis is used well to evaluate the curriculum and contributes to good improvement planning.

71. Leadership and management of SEN are very good. They are highly organised, with a deep understanding of issues. Very skilled teaching, good monitoring and very effective management of statutory requirements mean that the learning support department is very effective. Provision for those identified as gifted and talented, although good overall, lacks the same level of management focus. There is no overall co-ordinator, and inconsistency in provision exists between departments, although some very good opportunities are provided in music, physical education, English, art and business studies. The headteacher is taking direct management responsibility at present and the learning resource centre manager is taking an active and leading role.

72. Performance management is used well to bring about improvements in the classroom. This takes account of the focus on teaching and learning in the school improvement plan and recent training to enhance teaching styles. All staff new to the school have a good induction package. A recent report from 'Investors in People' identified improvements required in feedback, which have now been integrated into the process. Good continuing professional development procedures respond both to whole-school needs and to those of individual staff. A very good newsletter keeps all staff in touch with professional development opportunities. The school is used regularly by Initial Teacher Trainers. The provision has been rated 'world class' by one university. The school works tirelessly to ensure that the impact on learning is minimal in areas where staffing has been difficult through illness or maternity cover. The school has not yet completed the 'Well Being Review' to assess the impact of teachers' workload on their performance.

73. The school has very good processes for ensuring that funds are matched to educational priorities. Governors have the opportunity to be involved in planning from the earliest stages. These plans ensure that the school is well placed to meet known developments. A good example is the way in which the new business manager is managing workforce reform.

74. The budget is carefully monitored, and the governors' finance committee play their part in this process. The business manager is taking a rigorous approach to agreeing new contracts to ensure that goods and services meet the school's requirements and that they are obtained at the best price. The school meets the principles of best value very well.

75. The school provides good value for money because students achieve well, while costs are broadly average.

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

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,464,906.00	Balance from previous year	48,735.00
Total expenditure	3,392,760.00	Balance carried forward to the next	120,881.00
Expenditure per student	3,480.00		

**Sixth Form**

76. The leadership and management in the Sixth Form are very good. The head of Sixth Form has clarity of vision for the sustained growth and development of the Sixth Form. He provides very good leadership. The day-to-day management of the Sixth Form is very good, with staff having clear, delegated responsibilities. Very good arrangements with the partner schools and the college in the 16:19 Abingdon Partnership are in place. Staffing costs and income are balanced through the integrated management of the 16:19 Partnership, and overall the school ensures that the Sixth Form is cost effective.

## **OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES**

### **WORK-RELATED LEARNING**

Provision in WRL is **good**.

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

- The excellent provision of courses linked to the further education college has greatly developed students' awareness of the world of work.
- The work experience programme is well organised and all students in Year 10 benefit considerably from their work placements.
- Very good careers education helps students understand the world of work well.
- The increasing opportunities for vocational courses are very popular and students are very positive about taking part in work-related studies.

#### **Commentary**

77. Year 10 and 11 students' standards of work in work-related studies are generally average. They achieve well, given that many begin their NVQ or vocational GCSE courses with below average attainment.

78. Teaching and learning are good. Where the teaching observed was specifically relevant to learning about the world of work, students learned well. This was because they were well taught. Their teachers planned well and showed students how the topics being studied linked to real working practices.

79. The excellent opportunities provided through the linked courses based at the local further education college are particularly popular with students. They are extremely positive about being given the chance to explore work that is both practical and relevant to their interests. The majority see their course as very helpful in guiding them towards career opportunities. The vocational GCSEs in art and design and leisure and tourism are well designed to develop students' awareness of working practices.

80. Work experience involves students in realistic decision-making and problem-solving experiences that are faced in the business world. Students' understanding of the nature of business and industry is also strengthened by the good work experience scheme. Students are prepared well, write curriculum vitae and take part in trial interviews. In addition, they complete a diary during their placement and evaluate their performance well on their return to school. The very good support and guidance for students moving on to the next stage of education is a strong feature of the school's teaching and advisory work.

81. Leadership and management of WRL are very good and the school has taken the further implementation of WRL very seriously. There is clear vision and real commitment to developing opportunities for all students in younger year groups. Teachers receive on-going training. Very effective links have already been established between the relevant school co-ordinators, the Connexions service and a variety of outside agencies. Furthermore, strategic planning is effective and, because the school has undertaken detailed audits of the provision for WRL across both the formal and informal curriculum, plans for improvement are already at an advanced stage. Work-related learning is, therefore, well placed for further success.

82. Careers education is very good and offers students comprehensive advice on progression into modern apprenticeships and employment, in addition to further and higher education. As a result, students in all years achieve well. Their understanding of their own skills and achievements in work placements shows the success of this programme. The specialist advice from teachers and Connexions staff is of a very good quality, and the achievement of the growing number of students following vocational courses is very good.

## **SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS PROVISION**

Provision for students with SEN relating to physical disability or hearing impairment is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students' achievements are very good.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- The provision is very well led and managed.
- Teaching assistants (TAs) and communicators make a very good contribution to students' success.

### **Commentary**

83. The very good provision means that all students with physical disability or hearing impairment achieve very well across all subjects, make very good progress, and are able to maintain access to a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum.

84. Students are supported in several ways: in lessons across the curriculum by specialist TAs, and sometimes by communicators, and in one-to-one teaching, which takes place in the specialist accommodation. Throughout the school, teachers' work has to ensure that all students are fully included in lessons and this, along with the good support they receive from TAs, means that they achieve very well in a wide range of different subjects.

85. Most students are integrated into mainstream classes, but where deemed necessary there is very good provision through individual tuition. Sensitive and knowledgeable teachers of the deaf work extremely successfully in supporting students in particular areas of the curriculum they may be finding difficult. Very good teaching and learning were observed in one-to-one sessions supporting mathematics, English, geography and religious education. Because the specialist teachers are very skilled and trained, they are sensitive to the students' needs and very successfully give students confidence and reassurance, which in turn has a positive impact on their achievement.

86. The provision is very well led and managed by the teachers in charge. Systems for monitoring and assessment are highly organised. Staff, including TAs, work well together and students appreciate the welcoming and supportive ethos that has been generated. The accommodation is bright and attractive and resources are good.

## **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 **good**.

#### **MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES**

- Good teaching enables most students to learn well, although there are inconsistencies in the quality of marking of students' work.
- Results in the Year 9 national tests have improved, and in 2004 were well above average compared with those of similar schools.
- Students with SEN achieve very well, as they receive skilled careful teaching in specialised groups.
- Boys do not achieve as well as girls in Years 10 to 11.
- Good, supportive leadership has created a committed, cohesive team of teachers and introduced an innovative development of links with primary schools.
- Monitoring of teaching, whilst satisfactory, is not sufficiently rigorous.
- Opportunities to develop writing skills, although good in English, history, religious education and music, are missed in most other subjects.

#### **COMMENTARY**

87. Results in the Year 9 national tests in 2004 were broadly average, an improvement on those in 2003 and well above average compared with those of similar schools. The proportion of students gaining higher levels was above the national average, and very high compared with similar schools. Results have fluctuated since 2000, but have risen overall in line with the national trend. Overall, girls perform better than boys.

88. Standards seen during the inspection confirm this picture. Students are articulate speakers, and, by the end of Year 9, many produce lively writing, mature analysis and interesting personal responses to reading. The standard of presentation of some weaker students is low, and poorly formed handwriting impairs their capacity to produce fluent written work.

89. Results in GCSE English in 2004 were below average. They were, however, an improvement on those in 2003 and well above average compared with those of similar schools. Girls performed considerably better than boys. Girls' results exceeded the national average for girls, but the gap between boys' and girls' performance is much wider than that seen nationally. The GCSE English literature results in 2004 were above average, reflecting the selected entry for this examination. Standards seen during the inspection were below average. While students in high sets produce coherent, logical writing showing a capacity to sustain an argument in depth, many weaker students write in an inappropriate over-colloquial style. Although they often have sound understanding, expression is frequently clumsy and their writing is inaccurate.

90. Overall achievement from Year 7 to Year 11 is good. In Years 7 to 9 students achieve well, from below average attainment in English on entry, because of the successful implementation of the National Strategy. Teachers' planning has improved and students' learning benefits from lessons conducted at a brisk pace. Students in the current Year 11 are achieving well, having started their GCSE course with well below average standards. They learn well as a result of teachers' sound subject knowledge and examination expertise. Boys achieve less well than girls in Years 10 and 11

mainly because their writing is not of a high enough standard to meet the increased demands of examination work. The quality of their contribution in lessons, however, is frequently good. Students with SEN achieve very well, particularly when they are in small classes with a skilled teacher. Those who have English as an additional language achieve in line with their peers. Gifted and talented students also achieve well, gaining very good results in both the Year 9 tests and GCSE English literature.

91. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Teachers' effective classroom management, together with the good relations established, mean that students are usually well focused and productive in class. The most successful lessons are those in which teachers' high expectations and challenging questions develop students' understanding and extend their thinking. Teachers are skilled at adapting their approach and materials to suit the varying learning needs of different groups. In too many lessons, however, the timing is weak, so that rushed endings mean that learning is not effectively consolidated. While most marking is detailed and helpful, there are some inconsistencies. In Years 7 to 9 some marking is not sufficiently analytical, while targets are not always shown clearly in older students' work.

92. Leadership and management are good. The head of faculty is a good role model and her clear, supportive approach has created a cohesive, committed team. Thorough assessment practices include an effective system for tracking individual achievement. Good, innovative approaches have fostered beneficial links with primary schools. The development plan identifies appropriate priorities, including raising the achievement of boys. Several strategies have already been introduced, but more effective measures are needed. Sound monitoring procedures are in place but are not always sufficiently rigorous to ensure consistency in teachers' practices. Issues from the previous inspection have been resolved, and improvement overall is good.

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

93. Standards of literacy across the curriculum are in line with expectations, and sufficient to support learning in most subjects. Students' speaking and listening skills are good, developed well in English, history and drama. Reading and research skills are satisfactory overall. There is no consistent approach to the encouragement of higher standards of writing, and only a few departments correct spelling, punctuation and grammar. Opportunities for developing extended writing are limited to work in history, religious education music and English.

94. Across the curriculum there is considerable variation in the extent to which the promotion of literacy in planning and teaching is seen as a priority. There is a strong emphasis in history and religious education, as well as in English, but little provision in science, and no clear strategy in physical education. This lack of a whole-school approach is not helped by the temporary absence of the school's literacy co-ordinator.

### **Modern foreign languages**

#### **French and German**

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

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

- Standards of speaking and listening are unsatisfactory because the techniques for teaching them are not well enough developed.
- The teaching of reading skills and the standards reached are good.
- Good and sometimes imaginative use is made of ICT.
- Tasks set are not always sufficiently challenging for the most able students.

## Commentary

95. In 2004, GCSE results in French were well below the national average and below those of the previous year. Results in German were in line with the national average but again below those of the previous year.

96. In Years 7 to 11, standards in German are above the national average, whilst those for French are below. In German, in particular, the highest-attaining students write accurately and idiomatically because considerable attention is given to developing the skill. Standards are not as high in French, though they are still above average for the most able. In both languages, students are able to interpret and extract information from detailed texts. Standards of speaking and listening are weak, particularly in French. Pronunciation and intonation are generally poor and students are not good at asking questions or taking part in meaningful exchanges in the foreign language.

97. Achievement overall in modern languages is satisfactory. It is good in German and satisfactory in French. The attainment of boys is lower than that of girls, in line with the national picture, but boys' results are generally better in German than in French. Students with SEN and higher-attaining students achieve in line with their abilities. A small group of the most able students, taught outside the timetable, took GCSE a year early and achieved excellent results

98. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory; it is better in German than in French. All teachers have a good command of the language taught and have good techniques for the teaching of reading and writing, resulting in good standards in these skills. Speaking skills are not as well taught and many students lack confidence. Good use is made of ICT, and well-designed power point presentations made a considerable impact on students' motivation and learning. For the most part, all students are set the same task, and whilst lower-attaining students receive good support, the tasks do not challenge sufficiently the most able.

99. Assessment procedures are good and are related to National Curriculum and GCSE criteria, so that students know how well they are doing. Currently, the interval between assessments is too long and intermediate tests would be helpful. The best marking, particularly in Years 10 and 11, is analytical and indicates how students' work can be improved; lower down the school, the standard of marking is less consistent and is sometimes limited to a brief comment.

100. The quality of leadership and management is good. The head of department leads by example; she supports individual teachers and is building a cohesive team. Documentation and schemes of work are good, and much improved since the last inspection; teaching and learning are monitored regularly and assessment data is used to guide future planning. After a period of instability, caused by staffing difficulties, standards are beginning to rise and improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

## MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good and lead to good achievement.
- Leadership and management are very good and the curriculum is very well matched to students' prior attainment.
- Most students enjoy mathematics and work hard but the behaviour of a small number, mainly boys, is slowing their own learning, and sometimes that of others.
- Students do not use ICT consistently enough as a tool for learning.

## Commentary

101. Students' attainment in mathematics on entry to the school in Year 7 is well below average. Standards reached in the 2004 Year 9 national tests were below national averages. GCSE results in 2004 were in line with national averages. Results in Year 9 tests and at GCSE were very high compared with those of similar schools. Girls do a little better than boys in the test and examinations results, reflecting their higher attainment on entry to Year 7.

102. Standards of work seen in Year 9 are below national averages, and in Year 11 they are average. Achievement in Years 7 to 11 is good. There is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls. Students with SEN achieve as well as others as a result of well-planned teaching and effective support from teaching assistants. Gifted and talented students also achieve well. They work at an appropriately high level. For example, a small proportion of students are taking GCSE a year early and the highest attainers in Year 11 are studying additional mathematics after school.

103. The cumulative effect of good teaching, and a curriculum very well matched to students' prior attainment, are key factors in the steady progress made. Students acquire a wide range of mathematical techniques. They can explain why they chose certain methods, and this emphasis on communication skills helps them to consolidate their understanding. Higher attainers develop much better analytical and algebraic skills than other students. Lower attainers have a secure foundation in basic mathematics but find it difficult to apply these skills to questions involving several steps in finding a solution.

104. Most students work hard and their positive attitudes to mathematics are shown in the presentation of their written work and their lively participation in lessons. The National Numeracy Strategy for Years 7 to 9 has had a strong effect on improving the range of activities and methods used to help students to learn and achieve.

105. Teaching and learning are good overall, and about a quarter of lessons seen were very good. In the best lessons, a thought-provoking starting activity focuses students' thinking on mathematics, a good springboard for the rest of the time. Teaching methods are very closely matched to the particular needs of each group. For example, more visual methods, including good use of colour, were effective in helping lower-attaining Year 11 students to learn well. Teaching and learning were unsatisfactory in one lesson when the behaviour of a small number of boys disrupted the learning of others. Where teaching was satisfactory, but not better, there was occasionally low-level disruption from a small number of students, or the pace of the learning was too slow at times.

106. A wide range of extra-curricular activities, such as after-school classes and mathematics competitions, help students to improve their work and their enjoyment of mathematics.

107. Problems with access to computers have restricted the consistent use of ICT for all students. When they do work with ICT, students enjoy it and it enhances their learning. The department recognises this is a priority for development.

108. The very good leadership and management of the head of the department are shown in the very well planned curriculum and the hard work of a cohesive, specialist team of teachers. Performance data is analysed very well to track individual and group progress and to identify areas for improvement.

109. Progress since the previous inspection is good. Positive features from the previous report have been maintained and there has been a big, and consistent, improvement in achievement in comparison to that of students in similar schools.



## **Mathematics across the curriculum**

110. Students' mathematical skills are satisfactory and help them to make progress in other subjects. In science they can carry out necessary calculations, and draw and interpret graphs. In design and technology they have reasonably accurate skills in drawing and measuring, and can use formulae accurately. Similarly, in ICT, students are competent in data handling and use formulae well, for example in spreadsheets. Students' skills are well used in geography, as they can draw to scale and can analyse data, for example for climate or population statistics.

## **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good teaching in Years 7 to 9 motivates students to achieve well.
- Students with SEN achieve very well as a result of the very good support they receive.
- Achievement is not as good in Years 10 and 11 as it is in Years 7 to 9.
- Monitoring is not rigorous enough to ensure consistency of teaching, marking and assessment.
- Investigative skills are not as good as students' scientific knowledge and understanding.
- There is not enough use of ICT to support teaching and learning.

### **Commentary**

111. In 2004, results in the national tests taken in Year 9 were average. They were very high when compared with those of similar schools based on prior attainment. Compared to students' well below average attainment on entry these represent very good achievement. Between 2000 and 2004, results have fluctuated slightly from year to year. The trend in performance has been broadly in line with national trend in terms of average point score. GCSE results, based on average point score in 2004, were average but the percentage of students gaining grades A\*-C was below national average. The proportion of students achieving A\*-C grades has dropped over the last three years. Results in the Year 9 tests were better than those for mathematics, but not as good as those in English. However, in Year 11 the GCSE results were better than those in English and broadly similar to those in mathematics.

112. Currently, standards seen in Year 9 and in Year 11 are not quite as high as those indicated by the test and examination results in 2004, and are below average. Achievement is good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Achievement is not as good as in Years 7 to 9, owing mainly to a lack of rigour in teaching. In the earlier years students enjoy their science and are well motivated. In later years they display less positive attitudes and consequently make less progress. There is no significant variation in the achievement of boys and girls.

113. Overall, students' practical and individual investigative skills are not as strong as their work in the knowledge-based areas of science. This is because, in most lessons, students have too few opportunities to make their own predictions based on scientific knowledge and understanding. They seldom plan their own practical investigation from which they can evaluate the results and draw conclusions.

114. Throughout Years 7 to 11, students with SEN achieve very well. This is because teachers and learning support assistants work well together to ensure that the work not only matches their capabilities and interests but also challenges them. Higher-attaining students in most top sets make at least satisfactory progress. Teachers do not always provide work of sufficient challenge to extend these students fully. In all years there are too few opportunities for students to research

information, think critically about what they are doing, and produce original extended writing. As a result, they often give answers lacking in depth and understanding. This issue is being addressed in Years 10 and 11 by the introduction of whole day sessions devoted to practical coursework tasks.

115. Teaching and learning overall are satisfactory. The quality of teaching is good in Years 7 to 9, although it lacks consistency because not all teachers make effective use of the National Science Strategy. Teaching is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. The difference in the quality of teaching between lessons produces a marked difference in students' response to learning. Where the quality of learning is good, particularly in Years 7 to 9, it is because students behave very well, work hard and productively, and use their competent skills in literacy and numeracy to support their work. Teachers generally plan and structure their lessons well. In the most effective lessons, they sustain pace and excitement throughout, keeping students motivated and focused on their work. They use good starter activities to settle students and to engage their interest quickly. Students are aware of what they are going to learn and why, from the outset. They have an interesting main activity and are involved actively in practical work. For example, in a Year 7 lesson on applications of chromatography, students were able to simulate the identification of a criminal who had forged a cheque. In some lessons, plenaries are used less effectively than starter and main activities. This is because they rarely involve all students or inform the teacher quickly about what has been learned. As a result, students do not always consolidate their work as well as they could. In some lessons, the range of learning is narrow, and students find the work dull and the pace of learning too slow.

116. An analysis of students' work in all years indicated that most teachers mark work frequently and in encouraging ways. However, they rarely give students a clear enough indication of how well they are progressing, and what they need to do in order to improve. The best practice gives students cause for thought in encouraging further progress and checks that comments have been acted upon. Good relationships between teachers and students and among the students create a climate of co-operation that enhances learning.

117. The quality of teaching is not as good as it was at the last inspection, and standards in GCSE have dropped. Efforts are being made to reverse the trend. Leadership is satisfactory and good management of the department shows the capacity and commitment to achieve this. Staff work closely as a team, and all share a similar commitment to improving standards. There has been difficulty over recruitment of suitably qualified teachers recently. As a result, continuity of learning for some students has been interrupted. This has led to some of the decline in standards. There are good systems in place for tracking students' attainment and setting targets. However, these are not currently being used effectively enough to raise standards. Departmental monitoring of teaching is established but is not rigorous enough to ensure that teaching and learning are more consistently good and to promote the sharing of the good practice that exists in the department. There is not enough use of ICT in lesson planning or teaching, which further impedes the development of investigative skills, knowledge and understanding. There are deficiencies in laboratory accommodation, which restrict the amount of practical work that students can do.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

Provision in ICT is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good links to primary schools establish students' competence on entry to the school.
- A lack of curriculum time in Year 9 impedes students' application of computer skills.
- Extra-curricular ICT is popular with students.
- Boys' achievement is below that of girls.
- Improvement in computer hardware, peripherals and good technical support is helping to raise standards.
- Relationships are good in lessons, and students support each other well to aid understanding.

## **Commentary**

118. GCSE results in 2004 were below national average. Students complete a short course unless they are identified as more able, when a full course is offered in Year 11. Three students completed the full course in 2004 and gained grades B or C.

119. In Year 7 students have benefited from the Oxfordshire transition model: an ICT module started in Year 6 is completed in Year 7, making a smooth transition to secondary ICT. Students' ICT skills are well below expectation at this stage. Boys' performance is weaker than that of girls. Good planning and specific skills taught in Years 7 to 9 help students to improve. At the end of Year 9 they have reached competence that is below average but represents good achievement. Unfortunately the curriculum time for ICT in Year 9 is about one third less than national expectation, which has a negative impact on achievement. Students are skilled at using email, spreadsheets, word processing and desktop publishing to improve their communication. They do not have enough experience of using computers to control light, sound and movement. Students are very clear about the impact of computers on their lives. The regular use of computers at break, lunch and after school is evidence of students' interest in the subject. They have very effective support from the learning resource centre manager. Special needs students have access to specific programmes that allow good opportunities for them to practise literacy skills through ICT. More able students have good opportunities for extension work in lessons.

120. In Years 10 and 11 a short course in ICT is offered; this can be converted to the full course if students show potential. Standards seen are below average but achievement from the start of the course is good. During Year 10, students enhance the skills required for the GCSE but many struggle with annotating their work to show their thinking processes during the development of their project. They evaluate well but do not see the need to involve the 'end user' in their evaluation, thus missing opportunities to gain marks by showing how they meet client need. The moderator's report from 2004 also highlights these areas. Boys' achievement is significantly below that of girls. Boys do not attach enough importance to matching the examination criterion. Often, their work is not complete on time or is rushed, and they fail to use their client's comments on layout of work to identify improvement, for example the poster and flier work in Year 11.

121. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9; in Years 10 and 11 boys' immature behaviour often leads to a lapse in learning. Generally, teachers use the school behaviour policy effectively. Resources are used well. Homework is a feature of most lessons and is used well to extend learning; the library gives good support to students without home computers. Relationships are good and peer support in lessons helps students to clarify their understanding. Teachers value the students' feedback and use it to help future planning. Most teachers in the ICT department have responsibilities in other subjects, so ICT is not their main priority. This has an impact on teaching and learning, and results in inconsistent marking, assessment and record keeping.

122. There is good and enthusiastic leadership, which promotes the subject well. The head of department has worked hard to create a good team from non-specialists. Good performance management and professional development are in place. Two experienced team members, the network manager and technician, are working hard at enhancing the network and peripherals so that ICT contributes effectively to teaching and learning across the school. There is a good action plan as a result of the completed audit. Management overall is satisfactory. There are no formal meetings of the department to allow delegation of responsibility or aid management and dissemination of policies and good practice. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

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

123. Overall, students' ICT skills are average in the main school. Considerable improvement in computers and peripherals has improved the opportunities for students to apply ICT to identify or solve problems. The ICT audit identifies that ICT is used in planning for all subjects. Some areas of the curriculum have made greater strides than others, as teachers' confidence and an improved

network has encouraged the use of computers. In physical education ICT is embedded in the curriculum planning. Students make very good use of word processing and desktop publishing to develop their response to training for their particular sport. In practical lessons the video camera is used effectively to capture performance and share this as a technique for analysing and improving skills. Modern languages and geography make good use of ICT specifically for class interaction and researching techniques. The technical support team is used well and the learning resource centre is used significantly by students in breaks, lunchtimes and after school for homework and to improve skills. Parents have been involved in the 'Acceptable Use of the Internet' policy, and the network manager monitors the policy.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **Geography**

Provision in geography is **good**.

#### **MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES**

- Standards and achievement are good overall as a result of good teaching.
- The department has established good international links.
- Good use is made of ICT.
- Cross-curricular links are strong.
- Fieldwork opportunities in Years 7 to 9 are limited.
- There is some inconsistency in marking to improve literacy skills.

#### **COMMENTARY**

124. In the 2004 GCSE examinations the percentage of students achieving grades A\* to C was above the national average. A significant proportion of students achieved results above their predicted grades, which indicates good achievement. This is because of the good teaching and support which they receive. The 2004 results show a significant increase over the past three years. The standard of work seen during the inspection in the case of students in Years 10 and 11 is above the national average, and achievement is good. Students use computers competently to enhance their learning.

125. The attainment of students on entry in Year 7 is below average. On the evidence of lesson observations and scrutiny of students' work, the standard achieved in Years 7 to 9 is in line with national expectations, indicating good achievement. Students with SEN and those with English as an additional language also make good progress and achieve as well as other students, because of the good support they receive during lessons and outside normal curriculum time. In a lesson on the use of Ordnance Survey maps, students with SEN demonstrated exceptional skills in tracing a complex route, giving six figure grid references and using map symbols very effectively.

126. The quality of both teaching and learning is good, with some examples of very good and excellent teaching. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed during the inspection. The good subject knowledge of the teachers is used effectively to challenge the thinking skills of the students. However, marking does not always pay enough attention to the standard of literacy needed for the best results. Easy access to a computer suite permits regular use of ICT to enhance teaching and learning. The students use multimedia presentations to demonstrate their good level of independent learning. Very good relationships between staff and students encourage positive attitudes, respect and enthusiasm for learning. A wide range of teaching styles and resources is used to meet the differing needs of all students. The enthusiasm of the staff, very good management skills and a sense of humour create a very good atmosphere for learning. This is well illustrated by students' response: 'We enjoy learning because the lessons are interesting.'

127. The quality of leadership and management is very good. The head of department has a very clear vision for achieving high standards of attainment. She is an excellent role model of dedication and commitment to the education of youngsters for the real world of today. The commendable efforts made by all in school to organise £7000 in fund-raising for the Tsunami appeal received national recognition. Students are given many opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and citizenship education. Links with Sri Lanka and Japan help to reinforce academic learning. The high quality of displays, including up-to-date work on current affairs, makes a stimulating learning environment. Although the older students benefit from residential fieldwork and some introductory work is done in the local environment, overall fieldwork experience is limited for students in Years 7 to 9.

128. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. The standard of attainment of students has risen significantly over the past three years. Schemes of work have been revised to meet the needs and interests of the students with the introduction of units on the geography of fashion and the geography of sport. A change of examination boards also reflects the changing interests of the students. Improved assessment procedures for data analysis result in realistic targets in order to raise standards. Resources have been increased and updated. The cross-curricular links established with art, design and technology, history, religious education and ICT emphasise the holistic nature of education. Visitors, for example from the Japanese embassy, together with day workshops and practical support for countries in Africa, help to broaden the students' experience of learning for life.

## **History**

Provision in history is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The very good teaching leads to very good achievement in Years 10 and 11.
- Skilled classroom management sets high expectations, to which students respond very positively.
- The very good leadership underpins students' achievement.

## **Commentary**

129. Results in the GCSE examinations have fluctuated in recent years but have mainly been close to or below average. In 2004 the proportion of students gaining grades A\* to C was also below average. There was significantly less difference between the performance of boys and girls than is the case nationally.

130. Standards of work in Year 9 are in line with expectations, and students of all attainment levels, including those with SEN, achieve well. The majority of students enter school with below average literacy levels, and although these improve during Years 7 to 9 the errors in the technical accuracy of their writing mar the work of too many. They do, however, complete convincing accounts of why reform proceeded so slowly in 19<sup>th</sup> century England, and comment knowledgeably on the reliability and usefulness of sources.

131. In Year 11 standards are above expectations, indicating considerable improvement over results in 2004. Achievement is very good as a result of the very good teaching at this stage. Lower attaining students carry out well-argued analyses of the role of appeasement in explaining the causes of the Second World War, although a few are insecure about the meaning of some subject-specific terminology. Higher attaining students interpret and explain sources very perceptively in test papers. They undertake very detailed post-examination reviews leading to individual target setting, which develops their independence in learning well.

132. Teaching is very good. Teachers deploy excellent classroom management skills, with clear and consistent expectations about attitudes and behaviour. Questioning is very well used to explore, expand and challenge students' knowledge, resulting in very good learning. Briskly paced and very well planned lessons regularly feature discussion, which enables students to test and extend their understanding. Students' workbooks are monitored regularly and clear targets for improvement set, although the lack of marks means that students are less well informed than they might be about how their work compares to standards nationally. Work seen indicated that there had been relatively few opportunities for computer-based lessons, although contribution to the development of ICT skills is incorporated in planning.

133. The subject is very well led and management is good. The head of faculty has a clear vision for future development and is well supported by a very strong team who collaborate very closely. There is scope for improving some aspects of management, such as the departmental handbook and the format of the schemes of work, but improvement since the last inspection has been good.

## **Religious education**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- GCSE results are well above national and school averages and reflect the very good achievement shown by the students.
- The quality of teaching overall is very good and fully engages students in their learning.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to students' personal development.
- The accommodation continues to restrict the subject's ability to reach its full potential.

### **Commentary**

134. Students enter the school with below average attainment, but during Years 7 to 9 they make good progress, achieve well, and reach standards that are broadly in line with the expectations of the Oxfordshire Agreed Syllabus. They develop a sound knowledge of the key beliefs of Christianity and other world religions and are able to use accurate terminology to describe different beliefs and practices. They learn to understand the implications of belief on attitudes and behaviour and have good opportunities to reflect on their own values and beliefs. The subject makes a very good contribution to their personal development. By Year 9 they show increasing awareness of the impact of religion on wider issues, such as the media.

135. All students in Years 10 and 11 follow either a short or full GCSE course. The majority sit the examination. In spite of the fact that the time allocation for these studies is below recommendations, attainment is very high and results have improved over recent years. In 2004 all students gained a pass grade, and the percentage gaining grades A\*-C was well above national averages and better than for most other subjects in the school. Overall, the work seen during inspection is above average and achievement is very good. The course material is well chosen and students show a very positive attitude. They work hard, and although many have relatively weak literacy skills they are well supported. Notably, those with SEN make very good progress.

136. The quality of teaching and learning overall is very good. It is sometimes excellent and never less than good. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic and this helps motivate students. Lessons are thoroughly planned, with a range of activities that capture students' interests. Students participate well in lessons. They respond positively to the teachers' very good questioning and work well individually or in pairs on the tasks set. Lessons give good support to students' literacy skills, preparing them well for assessment tasks and examinations. On occasions, not enough time is given to reinforcing their learning. Homework builds successfully on the lessons by providing students with the opportunities to reflect and apply their knowledge.

137. The leadership of the subject is very good, with a strong focus on improvement. Management is good. Assessment, which was a weakness at the last inspection, is now one of the department's strengths. The use of ICT has also improved, but access to resources is limited. Accommodation remains a limiting factor to improvement but the department is shortly to move into new rooms. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **Design and technology**

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

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

- Students go about their work with enthusiasm, but occasional poor behaviour occurs because teaching strategies do not stimulate learning.
- Most practical activities engage students well.
- The direction of the department is not clearly articulated.
- Teaching and learning strategies are not fully explored.

## **COMMENTARY**

138. Attainment on entry is well below expectations. By the end of Year 9 the standards of work seen are below expectations. For lower ability students and those with SEN, the work set is appropriate for their needs, ensuring they make sound progress. When working with resistant materials, students make interesting mechanical toys some of which are finished to a good standard.

139. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is generally satisfactory as a result of the measured learning opportunities offered. Occasionally, poor behaviour limits progress and results in a tense atmosphere. Boys achieve equally as well as girls; gifted and talented students have some opportunities to tackle more complex tasks.

140. In Year 11 standards of work seen are below expectations. Long-term absence of staff has contributed to this. Nevertheless, students have a sound grasp of what they have to do to achieve, and they are self-motivated and very well behaved. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory overall. Students with SEN are given appropriate support. There are very few more able students. Therefore, achievement overall in design and technology is satisfactory.

141. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory overall. A number of lessons observed were delivered with a very strict code of behaviour to prevent low-level disruption. This strategy proved successful in the main but there were some occasions when poor behaviour threatened to disrupt the lesson. In these situations learning does take place but opportunities to work beyond this are limited. Interesting visual images are not used; the pace of the lessons does not change and there is little variety in learning styles. In some lessons students have the opportunity to work with industrial equipment. This is clearly enjoyed by those who have such opportunity. In lessons involving the design of toys, using cams and cranks, there is a more relaxed approach. The assessment of work is sound. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory overall. Students are given clear instructions that enable them to make appropriate progress. Work is well structured. Because of the ability range of the students who opt for the subject, content is orientated towards the middle to lower bands. Students' work is generally well laid out, some being comprehensive in its content and neatly presented, but much of it is not very visual in nature. Ideas are at times underdeveloped.

142. The department works well together. There is a supportive atmosphere generated by a caring leader. However, there is not enough clarity of vision to counter the low levels of attainment and overall leadership is satisfactory. Management is unsatisfactory. The curriculum does not sufficiently offer the vocational aspects of the subject, nor does it encourage a range of teaching styles that would engage and challenge students. The department handbook has not been updated for some time. Lesson observations are not monitored systematically to inform good practice, and data is not analysed effectively to inform progress. The planning of the department's work is therefore not consistently managed. The lack of progress over recent years in securing a satisfactory working environment has undoubtedly contributed to this picture.

143. Since the last inspection improvement has been unsatisfactory. GCSE results have declined and are now below national averages in all subject areas, although achievement based on standards on entry is satisfactory overall. Development of the curriculum has been minimal. The school meets all statutory requirements for the subject. Accommodation is being refurbished.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

Art and design and music were inspected in depth and drama was sampled. Two lessons of **drama** were seen. In one lesson, in Year 9, standards were average, and teaching and learning were good. In a lesson seen in Year 10, standards were above average, and very good teaching, with a wide range of imaginative ideas, was resulting in very good achievement. In this lesson students' attitudes were excellent.

### **Art and design**

Provision in art is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There is an energetic approach to many aspects of the work of the department, and this has a wider impact within the school and local community.
- Teaching is good because lessons are well structured, with engaging demonstrations and interesting topics.
- The use of sketchbooks is good and forms an important part of the learning process.
- There is a clear vision for the future development of the subject within the life of the school
- The department develops very good resources which support teaching and learning.
- The standard of work of the boys is generally lower than that of girls because they are less motivated and have weaker drawing skills.

### **Commentary**

144. By the end of Year 9 the standards of work seen in art are in line with expectations. Students are able to explore ideas and make detailed notes, interpreting ideas in their sketchbooks through a series of drawings. They organise their ideas to inform the next stages of their work. They compose images and use paint, completing their work with reasonable accuracy. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good because the nature of the work being set is both engaging and accessible; teaching and learning are effective, and students feel relaxed and are happy at their work. Students with SEN are well supported and make good progress.

145. Results in GCSE in 2004 were slightly above the national average. Standards of work seen in Years 10 and 11 are in line with expectations. Although the range of ability is broad, the most able students work to a good standard. Girls generally work to a higher standard than boys, who work too slowly, lack some control in the application of colour and have limited graphic skills. Most students apply paint in a controlled way; they are able to blend colour and vary its saturation with good effects. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good overall because students have a clear understanding of what they have to achieve. They have good work habits that have been



developed through effective teaching and learning strategies. Students with SEN are well supported and achieve well according to ability. Gifted and talented students, although working well, do not have sufficient challenge. Achievement overall in art and design is good.

146. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 is good overall. Introductions to lessons enthuse and engage students. Teachers use demonstrations in most lessons to explain processes and techniques; they show their own work based on the project, which excites and motivates the younger students and encourages them to try harder. Often, the work of other students is used as an example of good practice and the class responds well to this approach. There are strong links to literacy in much of the class work. One topic starts with work in the students' English lesson and leads to a ceramic sculpture; another results in a drawing of a fantastic creature. Much of this experience leads students to develop a very keen imagination and originality in their work.

147. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 is good overall. Teachers equip students with the ability to develop their ideas in a consistent way through the very regular use of their sketchbooks. Most students are aware of the four learning objectives and structure their work accordingly. Teacher demonstrations are very informative and clearly show students how to apply a range of media. Students respond with interest, ask appropriate questions, and behave very well.

148. Leadership is good. The head of department works with energy, uses data to analyse performance and gives direction to the teachers' work. Programmes of study change to reflect the interests of the teachers but are based on a well thought through structure. Members of the team share their ideas regularly. The department also has an important role to play in the school's specialist college status. It makes a significant contribution to the development of this provision and has set itself challenging targets in order to achieve its objectives. The planning of the department's work is carried out well through a team approach.

149. Management is good. The department handbook is a well-presented document and clearly shows pride in what the staff are doing. There are clear descriptions of the programmes of study, with even greater detail contained within the teachers' working copy. This is further supplemented by many visuals and examples of work produced for each module of work. Lesson resource files are extensive, as are the extra-curricular portfolio and the sample portfolio of students' work. The monitoring of teaching and learning is good. Good effective training has been given to staff in the monitoring of teaching. Communication to staff is very good; there are regular meetings which invariably have productive outcomes, and the development of provision is clearly identified within the action plan for the specialist college status.

150. Since the last inspection the department has made good progress. Knowledge of the work of other artists has been developed and is fully integrated into all project work. The use of sketchbooks is a main strategy for the development of ideas and helps to give greater continuity to students' experience of the subject. Teaching is good and topics are appropriate for all age groups. The introduction of a vocational GCSE has increased the capacity of the department to deliver relevant programmes to a wider group of students.

## **Music**

Provision in music is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very methodical teaching ensures that students achieve very well in Years 7 to 9.
- Curricular time in Years 7 to 9, which exceeds that recommended nationally, contributes to better achievement in these years than in Years 10 and 11.
- Girls achieve better than boys in Years 10 and 11.
- Students' very good attitudes to work raise the level of commitment and enthusiasm.
- A good range of extra-curricular opportunities extends provision for the more ambitious.
- Assessment is used very well to help students know how to improve.

## Commentary

151. In 2004 too few students took GCSE to make possible a reliable comparison with national information, but results were similar to those of previous years, being broadly average.

152. Students achieve very well through Years 7 to 9 to reach average standards by the end of Year 9. Given the mix of ability of students opting for music in Year 10, students achieve well to reach average standards by the end of Year 11. Students compose well, using ICT, although quality varies widely. Higher attaining students are able performers. Lower attaining students apply their well-acquired knowledge inconsistently in creative and analytical contexts. Students enjoy music and, on the whole, have very good attitudes to their work. The achievement of students with SEN is similar to that of their peers: they are very well supported through setting arrangements, sensitive yet challenging teaching, and good deployment of support assistants. In Years 7 to 9 there is no significant variation in achievement between boys and girls, although girls undertake investigative homework with more relish. In Years 10 and 11, girls achieve better than boys: they have a greater sense of urgency in completing coursework and better exploit the wider performing opportunities offered. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds also achieve very well overall, as do the few with English as an additional language.

153. Teaching and learning are very good in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11, being overall very good. Very effective planning and sequencing of lessons and homework secure good continuity of learning. Teachers give very clear explanations, routines and expectations of work and behaviour to keep students well focused. Students learn better in Years 7 to 9, as setting arrangements create classes with narrower ranges of ability, and time allotted to music is relatively generous. Exploitation of the excellent accommodation and very good resources is especially effective in these lower years. Some classes use ICT very well, such as when composing riffs and chord sequences in Year 8, but, as teachers have varying levels of expertise, ICT is inconsistently applied. Singing is underdeveloped. Assessment practice is very good. Discussion in class is very well used to establish what students know and to guide their understanding. Marking is thorough, with useful comments to help students improve. In practical work students know at what level they are working and what they have to do to aspire higher. Aspects of literacy are very well taught and most students express themselves well on the musical topics studied.

154. The department is well led and managed. Good teamwork has secured improvement in teaching and assessment styles, although there are still some inconsistencies between teachers. Instrumental teachers are well supported, and a range of stimulating extra-curricular activities, such as the production *Oklahoma!*, challenge talented students well. While the department has improved well since the last inspection, further improvement is limited by lack of focus in some departmental documentation.

## Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average and students achieve well.
- Teaching is good and leads to effective learning.
- A very good range and number of extra-curricular activities enhances motivation.
- Very positive attitudes and very good relationships of students with their teachers encourage enthusiastic learning.
- The short fifty-minute lesson hinders students' progress.

## **Commentary**

155. Students' standards on entry to the school in Year 7 are mostly average. By the end of Year 9, students attain above average standards in most activities. Their achievement is good because they respond well to the specialist teaching and facilities. They are enthusiastic and enjoy their lessons. Boys in Year 8 have good hockey skills, and girls in Year 9 have quickly adopted the new skills involved in football. The strength of students' attainment lies in their performance skills. Standards in compulsory core practical physical education lessons in Years 10 and 11 are above average and achievement is good. Students maintain their level of practical skills and build their organisational and evaluative skills in their sports education lessons.

156. GCSE results have risen over time and in 2004 results were above average. Girls attain better in the theory examination and boys in the practical aspects of the course. Present GCSE students produce good quality written work and have very competent practical expertise, for example in netball. Their standards are above average and their achievement is good. Their personal exercise portfolios are of a high standard and show very good ICT skills. As part of the wide range of extra-curricular activities, a few individuals and teams achieve very high standards in district and county competitions. These talented students benefit greatly from the very good opportunities made available to them.

157. The overall good achievement of students is directly attributable to consistently good teaching and learning. Teachers have high expectations and provide very challenging and progressive tasks, which improve students' practical skills. Tasks which help students develop their evaluative skills are not taught as frequently because the very short lesson time restricts the variety of opportunities teachers are able to provide. Teachers' subject expertise is very good and allows them to provide high quality demonstrations on which students model their skills. The ICT manager is very helpful when teachers use the video camera in lessons. As a consequence, students significantly improve their movement techniques after viewing their performance and receiving feedback from their teachers. Key words are displayed around the department but teachers do not promote literacy skills regularly, because the very short fifty-minute lesson restricts the range of activities teachers can cover. Good support is given for students with SEN, either by specialist staff or by the physical education teachers themselves.

158. The head of faculty provides an enthusiastic role model and leads and manages the department well. Monitoring of teaching is mostly informal but the newly qualified teacher last year was very well supported by formal observations. The long-term absence of one member of the department has been dealt with very well. However, staffing is unsatisfactory and is restricting curriculum development. Good improvements have been made since the previous inspection. These include improved GCSE results, very good provision for extra-curricular activities, and the good assessment procedures, which include students' completion of self-assessment portfolios.

## **BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES**

There were no focus subjects in this area. Business studies and leisure and tourism were sampled.

### **Business studies**

159. Results in GCSE examinations in business studies in 2004, as in 2003, were in line with those of schools nationally and with how well students did in most other subjects in the school. Two business studies lessons were sampled during the inspection. Teaching and learning were good overall. Teachers' clear lesson objectives resulted in Year 11 students gaining above average knowledge of marketing strategies. They explored business functions well in groups when designing posters for examination revision. They used ICT for coursework projects effectively. Students in Years 10 and 11 show good attitudes to the subject as a result of teachers' very good subject knowledge and firm but friendly relationships. Most students achieve well.

## **Leisure and tourism**

160. Three lessons were seen in leisure and tourism in Years 10 and 11. Standards were below average but represented very good achievement from a low point of entry to the course. The quality of teaching was very good overall and one lesson was excellent. Very good opportunities were given for independent learning and very good relationships contributed to the learning.

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

Personal, social and health education (PSHE) was sampled. Citizenship was inspected in full.

161. Students' personal and social skills around the school are good. For students entering the school in Year 7, there is a well-organised induction in which older students support the younger ones very well. Year 7 students commented favourably on this and on the role of Sixth Form students in counselling work. Good organisation ensures that in Years 7 to 11 students are taught at the appropriate time those major areas that they will need to consider as they mature. For younger students there are themes such as bullying, hygiene and relationships, which are well taught. As students get older, sexual and drug-related issues are thoroughly addressed. The work of tutors and outside speakers is well planned to cover topics that are very relevant to teenagers, such as sexual responsibility, drug-awareness, the effects of alcohol and healthy living. All students have good access to activities designed to develop them spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. Those who have SEN take a full part in all aspects of the programme. However, the amount of time available in tutor lessons is insufficient to develop all aspects of the programme of study effectively, and the tutor periods at the start of the day are not always used well to support this work.

### **Citizenship**

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The opportunities for learning about being a good citizen are well identified in each subject, but students are not always informed that their lesson has a citizenship aspect.
- Students' fund-raising efforts for the Tsunami appeal are an exemplar of their caring nature and their good citizenship.
- The student council is developing well and giving students opportunities to put forward ideas on how their school is run.
- There is not enough curriculum time at present to teach citizenship within the tutorial period.
- Assessment of students' citizenship awareness and skills is insufficient, and the requirement to report on progress and achievement at the end of Year 9 has not been met.

### **Commentary**

162. Standards of work in Years 7 to 9 are below average and remain so in Years 10 and 11. This mainly results from the limited time available in the week for the subject.

163. Students in all years have a basic understanding of their rights and responsibilities in their school community, but their understanding of political and international issues is generally below expectation for their age. However, the excellent response to the Tsunami appeal does show that there is a strong understanding of aspects of good and active citizenship. The achievement of students, including those with SEN, is therefore satisfactory overall.

164. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. When teachers include citizenship aspects within their subject lessons, they often do this well. Such work is particularly strong in history, religious education and English. Excellent teaching about civil rights in America helped a group of Year 9 history students debate the moral and cultural issues related to racism, and they learned

exceptionally well. Work on issues that students face in their daily lives, particularly bullying, sexual matters, drug awareness and rights and responsibilities, are well taught by their tutors. However, there was little evidence of debate, work on political structures and worldwide issues in students' progress folders.

165. Opportunities to link work to citizenship were often missed in subject lessons and students were not always told when they were exploring issues related to the citizenship curriculum. This comes about because there is not enough monitoring of when and what citizenship work is done in each subject, even though teachers have clearly identified the opportunities to contribute to students' citizenship education.

166. Leadership and management of citizenship are now satisfactory. The newly developed structures for citizenship work are based on good practice and careful planning by the new subject leader. The recent audit identifies how the curriculum in Years 7 to 11 covers each area outlined in the National Curriculum document. Responsible action by students is often very good, as seen in the Zambia trip, the Duke of Edinburgh Award service and the counselling and buddy systems. The school council is developing well and is giving students a say in the life of their school. Membership of the Valley of the White Horse youth parliament by gifted students is very good. However, there is no structure to ensure that all students have such opportunities at present, because the monitoring does not check on students' involvement sufficiently. At present, the amount of time available in tutor sessions for citizenship work is insufficient, because PSHE, WRL and careers work are also taught in these sessions. The quality of teaching in the tutor period is monitored satisfactorily by heads of year, but they do not carry out scrutiny of students' progress folders with sufficient rigour. Although self-assessment is well used in annual reviews, the marking of students' progress folders is seldom done. Reporting at the end of Year 9 did not take place in 2004 as statutorily required, but is planned for the end of the current year.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, eight subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school. The school belongs to a consortium of three schools and an FE college.

The table below shows entry and performance information for just the Year 13 students registered at Larkmead School and the courses completed in 2004 (unvalidated data as given in PANDA 2004).

### Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	3	100	78.3	33.3	21.6	36.7	28.5
Biology	9	33.3	63.5	0	10.4	7.8	19.8
Business studies	3	33.3	75.3	0	15.4	10.0	25.7
Chemistry	6	33.3	70.3	0	13.2	10.0	23.0
Communication studies	4	100	87.2	50.0	24.9	45.0	32.8
Economics	1	100	71.6	0	18.6	40.0	25.8
English literature	5	100	86.2	0	17.4	34.0	29.7
Design and technology	1	100	72.6	0	13.9	20.0	24.3
Geography	3	66.7	75.5	0	20.4	13.3	27.0
German	1	100	81.6	100	18.8	50.0	28.8
History	6	100	82.2	66.7	20.8	46.7	29.2
Information technology	1	100	66.6	0	8.8	20.0	20.6
Mathematics	9	88.9	59.9	22.2	14.1	30.0	20.5
Other social studies	7	71.4	67.8	0	15.1	18.6	23.2
Physics	1	0	66.4	0	14.8	0	22.4
Sociology	1	100	72.1	100	19.6	50.0	25.9
Sports/physical education studies	1	100	72.2	0	11.8	30.0	22.8

### Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	6	100	98.3	33.3	50.2	86.7	87.1
Biology	4	100	96.6	25.0	40.0	75.0	79.3
Business studies	8	100	98.9	12.5	39.4	65.0	81.8
Chemistry	5	100	97.7	60.0	50.0	88.0	85.7
Communication studies	2	100	99.2	100	40.4	110.0	83.5
Drama	3	100	99.6	0	42.8	73.3	85.1
English literature	10	100	99.4	40.0	44.9	70.0	85.5
Geography	5	100	98.8	40.0	46.4	84.0	85.2
History	4	100	99.0	75.0	45.6	100.0	85.1
Information technology	3	100	96.3	33.3	25.7	60.0	71.1
Mathematics	4	100	96.8	75.0	56.6	105.0	89.5
Music	1	100	98.2	100	37.1	120.0	79.5
Psychology	9	100	97.4	44.4	44.2	82.2	82.5
Physics	7	85.7	96.7	28.6	45.3	65.7	82.6
Sociology	3	100	98.5	66.7	45.3	93.3	84.6
Sports/physical education studies	4	100	97.8	25.0	30.9	80.0	75.4

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus subject was English literature. **English language** was lightly sampled. This is a new course, which started in September 2004. Students appreciate the opportunity the course offers to incorporate their own linguistic experiences, and recruitment is healthy. Standards are in line with expectations. Teachers' planning is thorough, and teaching and learning in the two lessons observed were satisfactory.

### English literature

Provision in A level English literature is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching, including teachers' very good subject knowledge, has helped students to be absorbed in the subject and to achieve well.
- A level literature is a popular course, with good levels of recruitment and retention.
- Teachers do not develop students' independent learning skills or do enough to overcome some students' reluctance to contribute in class.

### Commentary

167. Although A level results in 2004 were well below average, standards in the current Year 12 and 13 are in line with expectations. Results have varied considerably, reflecting partly a difference in intake; there is no discernible trend. Students in Year 12 show a perceptive personal response to literature. Most have a developing confidence in their own critical judgements, although weaker students frequently provide description rather than analysis in their essays. High-attaining students in Year 13 are capable of clear expression, and show excellent understanding and coherent analysis. A few students lack the skills of independent learning; notes taken in class do not reflect higher-level skills, so, for example, are rarely consolidated or re-organised. Many students are passive learners in class: they seldom question or challenge what they hear and are reluctant to contribute to class debate beyond the level of answering teachers' questions.

168. Students nevertheless achieve well overall from a below-average attainment on entry to the course. Good achievement is reflected in the fact that the majority of students in both Year 12 and Year 13 have met or exceeded their targets. More girls than boys take the course, but boys achieve relatively well, frequently gaining higher grades. The challenging intellectual demands of A level literature provide a good opportunity for gifted and talent students to achieve well.

169. Teaching and learning are good overall. Students are engaged by their teachers' enthusiasm and very good subject knowledge; they appreciate their teachers' clear exposition and wide-ranging literary references. Assessment practices are good: students are fully aware of the assessment objectives in all aspects of the course. Teachers' high expectations are seen in helpful analytical marking and detailed annotation of essays, and students are shown many pointers for improvement. Extensive background materials are provided to broaden students' literary experiences, but teachers do not do enough to develop students' independent learning skills. Students are diligent in class, but tend to be over-reliant on their teachers' materials.

170. Leadership and management are good, with many of the strengths seen in the main school. Leadership is supportive and the head of faculty has encouraged and enabled staff to adapt to change. She is a good role model, and monitoring of teaching through observation is sound. More rigorous monitoring of students' files is needed, so that students can be helped to consolidate their notes and take more responsibility for their own learning.

171. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Teachers have adapted successfully to the new specifications, and students continue to achieve well. The course has maintained a good level of popularity, recruitment and retention, and student choices have been widened by the introduction of A level English language.

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

172. Students' standards of literacy across the curriculum are in line with expectations, and generally support their learning in the focus subjects. Standards in discussion and presentation are mainly good, with the skill of formal presentation developed well in mathematics, business education, sports studies and theatre studies. Students improve their reading skills in English and history, and have many opportunities for research in other courses. There is greater variation in the standards of writing. They are good in history, and developed well in English, but note taking is weak in business education and ICT. While most departments recognise the importance of promoting literacy at an appropriate level for their subject, there is no planned development in biology.

## **MATHEMATICS**

The focus of the inspection was on AS and A level courses in mathematics.

### **Mathematics**

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

## **MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES**

- Students achieve very well, as a result of consistently good teaching and learning and very positive attitudes to work.
- Leadership and management are very good and the curriculum is very well matched to students' prior attainment.
- Students reach above and sometimes well above average standards in their work.
- The retention rates in mathematics in both Years 12 and 13 are very good.

### **Commentary**

173. Students' standards on entry to Year 12 are generally below average. Standards reached in Year 13 in A level examinations fluctuate from year to year, depending on the ability of each cohort. In 2004 all four students passed at A level, three of them at the highest grade. Results are usually very much better than those predicted from GCSE performance.

174. The work seen during the inspection in Year 13 was above average, with higher attaining students reaching high standards. Work seen in Year 12 was well above average, with over half the students working at a high level. The difference was due to the different prior attainment profile of the two cohorts.

175. Higher attaining students show a high level of analytical thinking and can choose appropriately from a wide knowledge of different methods to solve problems. For example, they can quickly decide which statistical distribution best represented a 'real-life' problem, and analyse the strengths and weaknesses of their choice. Lower-attaining students can use standard procedures well, for example integrating and differentiating a range of polynomials. They find it harder to apply their skills to unfamiliar situations or more complex ones. For example, a few students found it difficult to express a function in the form of partial fractions then to carry on using the results to integrate it.



176. In both Years 12 and 13 students' achievement is very good overall. This is due to the cumulative effect of consistently good teaching and learning, students' hard work and very positive attitudes to mathematics. There is no significant difference in achievement by gender. Students, rightly, feel that their mathematics curriculum in Year 11 provided them with a very good foundation for their work post-16. They were thus able to cope effectively with Advanced Subsidiary (AS) work in Year 12. One result of this well-planned transition to post -16 studies is the very good retention rate.

177. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teaching is knowledgeable, well structured, and sets high expectations in terms of the quality and quantity of work expected from students. In the best teaching, a lively approach and very good mix of individual, small group and whole-class activities increase students' participation in discussion. This results in very good learning. Assessment of work is good, so students know how well they are doing. Regular end-of-topic tests help teachers to track progress and students to see where they may need additional help. Students said there was always a member of staff available to help them outside their mathematics lessons. Teachers prepare their students very well for external assessment, as demonstrated by the recently received AS and A level module results.

178. Leadership and management are very good. The different mathematical pathways are very well planned for different groups of students, and the consortium extends choice. Co-ordination of the consortium's mathematical programme is very good. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

179. Students' mathematical skills are satisfactory and contribute to their progress in other subjects. Students can analyse the impact of different investment decisions in business studies, coping well with the necessary calculations. They can interpret data given in tabular or graphical format in science and also present their own results in graphical form.

## **SCIENCE**

The focus subject was biology.

### **Biology**

Provision in biology is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- A level results have fallen over the past three years and were well below average in 2004.
- Teachers use their good knowledge to plan lessons well.
- Good relationships between the teachers and students enable good constructive discussion to help understanding.
- Monitoring of teaching is not rigorous enough to ensure consistency of teaching and learning.
- Insufficient use is made of ICT to enhance learning.

### **Commentary**

180. A level results in 2004 were well below average and represented unsatisfactory achievement when compared with students' attainment on entry to the course. Over the past three years results have declined steadily in terms of average point score per student. AS results in 2004 were below average, which is indicative of improvement. The number of students taking biology to A2 level has declined over recent years. However, the number of students in the current AS course has increased this year. The rate of retention is satisfactory.

181. Current standards in Year 12 are below average. Attainment on entry to the course is below average, so achievement, at this stage, is satisfactory overall for students of all capabilities. In one lesson seen, most students acquired the understanding to be able to explain satisfactorily the co-ordination of responses to external stimuli and the basic parts of the central nervous system. By the end of the lesson they were able to compare differences between motor, sensory and intermediate neurones. In Year 13, standards are below average and achievement is also satisfactory.

182. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Teaching is mostly satisfactory, but one unsatisfactory lesson was seen during the inspection. Teachers use their good knowledge to plan carefully structured lessons. They make sure that students understand what they are to achieve in a given lesson. They also check throughout lessons that students have understood their work. Good relationships allow students and teachers to work well together both in and out of lessons. However, teachers do not use a wide enough range of teaching methods to involve students more proactively in their own learning. In most lessons, the teacher spends too long talking, so students have little time to explore their own understanding fully. There is little use of ICT for research, for data analysis or for developing techniques in data logging. Students say they find the course interesting, however, and relevant to their needs. Most produce a reasonably comprehensive set of course notes, which contribute well to their learning. Assessment is regular and students know how well they are doing, but they display little real understanding of how they can improve.

183. Satisfactory leadership provides a sense of direction, good team spirit and a commitment to raise standards. Standards, teaching and achievement have fallen since the last inspection. At that time teaching quality and achievement were reported to be very good in the Sixth Form science generally. Results in biology at A level have declined in the past three years. One reason is that staff recruitment has been difficult. Improvement since the last inspection is therefore unsatisfactory. Management is good in many ways. Schemes of work are supportive. Performance data is scrutinised well to set targets and track students' progress. Suitable priorities have been identified for development to improve the quality of provision. Performance management is in place, and there is monitoring of teaching and marking to ensure consistency and raise standards further, but it is not rigorous enough.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

The focus of the inspection was on AS and A level ICT.

Provision in ICT is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students see ICT as a career route, so are driven to achieve well.
- Students use the examination board criteria well to judge their progress.
- Note-taking skills and wider reading are underdeveloped.
- Teachers and students make effective use of email for exchanging assignments and assessment.

### **Commentary**

184. At present teaching is shared in both Years 12 and 13 with other partner schools in the consortium. The numbers of students on the course are small, making national statistical analysis difficult. However, numbers are increasing and the retention rate to the course is good. Larkmead students opt for ICT from a limiting background of a short course GCSE, and standards on entry to

the Sixth Form are below average. The average A level point scores of the three students from Larkmead entered in 2004 were below average. AS results overall for the group, including students from other institutions in the consortium in 2004, were broadly average, but there were no A/B grades. The results were an improvement on those of the previous year.

185. Standards of work seen in Year 12 are average. Students have a keen attitude to their work and some aspire to go on to ICT at university. Their achievement is good. Girls' achievement is better than boys', partly because they have a greater capacity for independent learning. Students have become more proficient at using examination criteria to judge their own work and decide where modification is needed. However, their depth of knowledge is an issue, as most students research from textbooks or the Internet but do not take enough opportunities to share information, or actively plan the research for greatest efficiency of time. An effective use of email to communicate assessment and moderation is helping students to respond quickly to marking and therefore to be more focused on improvement. In Year 13, standards are average and achievement is good. Students are showing an increasing confidence with a wider range of software. They are using database packages and macros, but understanding is limited by a lack of opportunity to shadow how real organisations use ICT to solve problems. A lack of note-taking skills and of wider reading around the ICT concepts has a negative impact on the breadth of knowledge acquired.

186. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers work collaboratively across the three schools of the consortium, which enhances planning. Teachers and technical support have a good command of the subject and personal experience in commerce or the ICT industry, which enhances students' learning. The style of teaching encourages independent learning so students are able to work at their own rate. Relationships are good and students have confidence in asking for help where they do not understand new concepts: this is particularly important for those coming from a short course background. Students make good use of the learning resource centre, which contains a dedicated Sixth Form ICT suite and a small, but useful, book resource. Teachers' one-to-one feedback at the workstation challenges students' thinking, and many report that this approach is useful to their personal development in ICT. Peer evaluation is not used enough to encourage students to look at a critical path analysis of their planning.

187. Leadership and management of the course are good. There is a clear vision for raising achievement. The development plan is carefully considered. The close collaboration between the teachers involved in ICT within the consortium, backed up by regular line managers' meetings, effectively tracks development of the subject and progress of the students across the consortium. Monitoring of teaching takes place on a regular cycle. Resources are good and are shared. The learning resource centre is an important part of the shared resource, as is the effective input from the technical support. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

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

188. Students in the Sixth Form have a good level of competence in using ICT. This is enhanced by the readily available dedicated access to computers in the learning resource centre. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well across most subjects. From the evidence in the focus subjects, use of ICT is a particular strength in physical education, where visually stimulating material involves students very well in their own self-evaluation. Opportunities to use ICT are less frequent in biology and business studies.

### **HUMANITIES**

The focus subject was history. **Geography** was sampled. One lesson of A level geography was seen in Year 12. Teaching and learning were satisfactory and students were very keen to learn. Overall standards seen were broadly average.

## History

Provision in history is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well in relation to their attainment on entry.
- Consistently very strong teaching results in very good learning.
- Very good classroom relationships underpin achievement.
- Students do not read as widely round the subject as they should.

### Commentary

189. Results in the Advanced Supplementary (AS) and A level examinations have been above average in the two most recent years, although the relatively small numbers involved make national comparisons somewhat tentative. Male and female students achieved equally well.

190. Standards seen are above expectations. Attainment on entry to the course is below average and achievement is very good. Year 12 students have well-developed source analysis and interpretation skills, although many do not routinely refer to provenance in evaluating reliability. They individually research topics such as aspects of Nazi domestic policy, which are presented to the whole class, giving them greater confidence in their communication skills. Higher attaining students make extended oral contributions in which they articulate and substantiate their views very convincingly. Year 13 students make very good use of grids and tables in summarising the most significant aspects of Russian rulers from Alexander III to Stalin. They undertake research well in individual coursework and justify and refine their understanding in paired, group and class discussion, which is a regular feature of lessons. Higher attaining students especially make very detailed notes and use colour and highlighters well to interpret and classify information. However, students of all attainment levels could read more widely to extend their general and specific historical knowledge.

191. Teaching and learning are consistently very good. Teachers have very detailed subject knowledge and plan their lessons to include a strong emphasis on independence in learning. Assessment is very thorough. Very good classroom relationships mean that students accept responsibility for their own progress and learn very well as a result. Challenging learning objectives are set to which students respond very positively, although lower attaining students are less confident and articulate in their oral contributions. Teachers conduct lessons at a brisk pace and present material with energy, so that students remain well focused throughout the lesson. Students greatly appreciate the detailed diagnostic comment on their work, which offers them much valuable advice on how to improve.

192. The subject is very well led and well managed. Teachers co-operate very closely and ensure that students are well versed in examination skills and able to meet requirements. There is a good range of textbooks and appropriate periodicals which support learning well. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

## ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

No lessons were observed in this area during the inspection.

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

The focus subject was theatre studies.

### **Theatre studies**

Provision in theatre studies is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students achieve well as a result of very good teaching and a very effective assessment system.
- Subject expertise is high.
- There is a very good enrichment programme, which helps students to increase their knowledge of theatrical repertoire and to improve their critical abilities.
- The superficial commitment of a minority of students adversely affects the achievement of others.

### **Commentary**

193. In the A level examinations in 2004, results were broadly average, reflecting individual capabilities. Of the small number who entered, one student obtained a higher-grade pass. Results were also average in the AS examinations in 2004. Most grades were in the C-D range, but one was unclassified

194. In Years 12 and 13, standards seen are average, reflecting recent examination results, and students achieve well, both in lessons and throughout the course. Their overall attainment on entry is below average, and a small number of students start the course in Year 12 with no previous experience. Although individually many students have a limited vocal range and an inhibited range of gesture and body language, they are familiar with the wide range of performing skills essential to the interpretation of character. They work together well, and improve in response to critical evaluation of one another. However, a minority do not recognise the importance of reliable attendance and full commitment, and jeopardise the overall standards of achievement. Most students are conscientious and produce extensive research on historical and social issues exposed in plays such as 'Our Country's Good' and 'The Three Sisters'. However, they have difficulty in describing the theatrical devices which will ensure that the author's intentions are clearly communicated to the audience.

195. Most students learn very well in lessons and, despite some lack of commitment of the minority which can affect all students, they make good progress because teaching is very good. The head of department, who teaches all the Sixth Form work, has a high level of expertise. Learning objectives are always clear, and lessons are planned to ensure that students' improvement is systematic. Although many students have difficulty with the technique of essay writing, which has a negative effect on their achievement, this skill improves in response to the well-focused marking system. Students' performing skills are assessed very well on a day-by-day basis, and written work is carefully annotated so that they know how to improve. In addition, regular individual tutorial sessions take place after school hours. Evaluation of attainment is clearly and firmly underpinned by examination criteria. In work seen during the inspection there were very good examples of significant improvement in essay technique as a result of meticulous marking, model answers and the essay frameworks which students had followed. In conversation, students were enthusiastic in their appreciation of the level of commitment and support that is available from teachers.

196. Leadership is very good. The head of department has a very clear vision for development and understands the needs of students very well. Management of the subject is good. The AS and A2 courses are systematically planned and taught. However, the accommodation and resources are limited and do not yet provide facilities reflecting the school's recently acquired status as a 'Performing and Visual Arts College'. The range of enrichment opportunities is very good. Regular

visits to professional productions encourage students to become familiar with current developments in the theatrical world, and to develop their critical and analytical skills. Most theatre studies students are involved in the annual musical production and each year they also present a workshop exhibition of their examination pieces. There are frequent opportunities for contact with professional actors through master classes and visiting actors. There is a shortage of suitable reference texts in the school library.

197. Standards of attainment have risen since the previous inspection, and students continue to achieve well. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

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

The focus subject was A level physical education.

### **Physical education**

Provision in physical education is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students achieve well in relation to their GCSE results.
- Teaching is good and teachers use interesting ways to help students progress.
- Students are very positive about the courses and they have very good relationships with their teachers.
- Results are not analysed in enough detail to identify areas needing improvement.
- There is no allocated time for all Sixth Form students to participate in physical education.

### **Commentary**

198. A level results in 2004 were below average and three of the five students did not achieve as well as predicted. However, results in previous years were average and represented good achievement. In 2004, problems with staffing led to a lack of continuity in the delivery of the courses. AS results for all students entered in 2004, including one from Larkmead, were below average. One third of the A level course is taught at another school in the consortium.

199. The standards seen in Years 12 and 13 are broadly average. Most students enter the courses with modest GCSE results and a few students have no previous examination experience in the subject. From this below average starting base they achieve well. Many students play sport to a high standard, have very good relationships with their teachers, and spend time in the department helping staff with younger students. Their positive attitudes and involvement help them to achieve well. Year 13 students are confident when working independently and support one another well when presenting their research.

200. Teaching is good, with some very good features, and this results in good learning. The best lessons are well prepared, with a range of activities that challenge students of all abilities. Very good links are made between practical elements and the theoretical aspects. One lesson set a series of practical experiments that helped students to a thorough understand of reaction time. In a less successful lesson, the teacher allowed students to present their research in a way that lacked clarity and this hindered the learning of others in the group. Homework is used well to help students experience examination questions and to prepare for new topics. Teachers use ICT very well to present visually stimulating material and to involve students in their own analysis and evaluation of movement. The increased use of ICT in lessons has improved the way topics are taught and has had a positive effect on students' learning.

201. The head of faculty leads and manages the examination courses satisfactorily. Responsibility has been recently delegated to another teacher in the department but this role is not yet developed. Teachers have attended professional development courses relating to the examinations and are an enthusiastic but inexperienced team. Record keeping is good but results and assessment data are not sufficiently analysed to establish students' achievement in each unit and to improve curriculum planning. Good improvements have been made, as the AS and A2 courses introduced since last inspection are now well established. The number of students entering the courses is increasing each year. Students report how much they value the courses, for example because they provide an accredited link to their proposed careers in sports science. It is disappointing with such talented students that the school does not provide the time for organised Sixth Form lessons for all students.

## **BUSINESS**

The focus subject was business studies.

### **Business studies**

Provision in business studies is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers have very good subject expertise, and students achieve well.
- Most students have good attitudes to work; some make good use of part-time jobs to enrich their coursework.
- Courses are well managed, but links with real businesses are underdeveloped.
- Year 12 students gain good enterprise skills from making and selling their own products through Young Enterprise.
- Students do not use ICT enough in lessons.

### **Commentary**

202. Standards in A level business courses (AS and A2 level) are average overall. In 2004, the eight A2 business students gained grades below the national average, with few top grades. Results in 2003 were better but valid national comparisons are not possible because of small entry numbers. AS students attained grades that were average in 2004, similar to those of 2003. Most students on AS and A2 achieved well when results are related to their GCSE standards on entry. Several achieved better than predicted.

203. Standards on entry to the course reflect the experience and ability of the individuals. However, current AS and A2 students are achieving well in lessons and coursework in relation to their standards on entry. Inspection evidence shows that standards attained by students meet national expectations, due to good teaching. Year 12 AS level students make and sell products locally in a successful Young Enterprise company, and gain good attitudes to work. In written work, they apply motivational theories well to firms' recruitment procedures. Year 13 students calculate well the financial ratios and rates of return on investment. Literacy standards are satisfactory.

204. Teaching and learning are good overall. The small sample of lessons seen demonstrated teachers' very good relationships with students, very good expertise and high expectations. Teachers' assess students' progress on all courses well, so students know how to improve. This helps students achieve well, sometimes above predictions, because teachers support individuals effectively and use timed essay questions frequently. Information and communication technology (ICT) is not used sufficiently to enhance the learning. Most students improve learning and attitudes well through practical projects such as Young Enterprise. Some weaker students find learning difficult when they have to make frequent notes in class without applying concepts fully in group discussion.

205. The subject is well led and managed overall, currently within the design and technology department. Staff are experienced and committed, track students' progress well and encourage them to learn independently. Performance data is well documented but needs further use to improve planning. Some links have been established with local businesses, but they are underdeveloped. Improvement since the last inspection cannot be judged as the subject had only just begun. There is good capacity to improve further by increasing the availability and use of ICT in lessons, short-term targets for students, and links with local business.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

There were no focus subjects in this area.

## **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES**

### **Personal, social and health education (PSHE)**

206. There is a strong programme of PSHE for all students. They each have at least one tutorial session per week. Sessions have included work on issues relating to sex, drugs and alcohol awareness. Preparation for safe driving is seen as a major feature in the programme. Study skills are well taught and all students receive very good support for university applications or progression into further education or careers. Several students take on work placements during Year 12 and many help younger students as NSPCC trained counsellors or as reading buddies. There is a strong charity focus and funds raised for Jeans for Genes, Red Nose Day and the Tsunami appeal are examples of this.



## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
<b>The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
How inclusive the school is		2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3	3
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	3	3
<b>Overall standards achieved</b>		<b>3</b>
Pupils' achievement	3	3
<b>Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities</b>		<b>3</b>
Attendance	3	5
Attitudes	2	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		3
<b>The quality of education provided by the school</b>		<b>3</b>
The quality of teaching	3	3
How well pupils learn	3	3
The quality of assessment	3	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	2	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		2
Accommodation and resources	3	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		4
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		4
The quality of the school's links with the community	2	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	1	2
<b>The leadership and management of the school</b>		<b>3</b>
The governance of the school	4	4
The leadership of the headteacher		2
The leadership of other key staff	2	3
The effectiveness of management	2	3

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