

# INSPECTION REPORT

## THE MERIDIAN SCHOOL

Royston

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117539

Headteacher: Dr M Firth

Lead inspector: Mrs M J Kerry

Dates of inspection: 8<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> November 2004

Inspection number: 268856

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

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## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Type of school: Comprehensive  
School category: Community  
Age range of pupils: 13 - 18  
Gender of pupils: Mixed  
Number on roll: 693

School address: Garden Walk  
Royston  
Hertfordshire  
Postcode: SG8 7JH

Telephone number: (01763) 242 236  
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Appropriate authority: Hertfordshire  
Name of chair of Mrs Pat Baxter  
governors:

Date of previous 28<sup>th</sup> September 1998  
inspection:

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

The Meridian School is a mixed 13-18 community school which is also a Specialist Mathematics and Computing College. The school is smaller than average. Attainment on entry is average overall, and the full range of attainment is present. Standards of literacy are below average on entry, particularly in boys' writing. The proportion of boys and girls is roughly equal in the main school, but there are significantly more boys than girls in the sixth form. The sixth form is of average size and offers a very broad range of courses to meet local needs in the surrounding rural area. The majority of Year 11 pupils progress to the sixth form, with some going elsewhere. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is average, as is the proportion of pupils who have statements of special educational needs. The headteacher, governing body and staff strongly uphold the principle that pupils should be educated in their own community, so every effort is made to admit all pupils from partner schools. The school population is predominantly white (93 per cent) with a small number of pupils from virtually all the other ethnic groups. There are very few pupils who have English as an additional language. The school received an Achievement Award in 2003 and a Healthy Schools Award in 2004. Pupils participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
9931	Mrs M Kerry	Lead inspector	
9052	Mrs H Barter	Lay inspector	
2739	Mr I Benson	Team inspector	History Religious education post-16
4317	Mr K Madrell	Team inspector	Geography
4451	Mr R Howarth	Team inspector	Religious education 13-16 years Citizenship
12475	Mr S Johnson	Team inspector	Music
12721	Mr D Riddle	Team inspector	Design and technology
12844	Mr M Saunders	Team inspector	English
15075	Mr B Goodman-Stephens	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages English as an additional language
15590	Mrs S Slocombe	Team inspector	Physical education Special educational needs
23268	Dr K Corrigan	Team inspector	Business education
31385	Mr N Gillespie	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Chemistry post-16
31685	Mrs V Girling	Team inspector	Art and design
32169	Mr R O'Hagan	Team inspector	Mathematics
32240	Mrs G Kelsey	Team inspector	Science

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

This is an effective school which gives pupils a good quality of education. Standards in the main school are above average at the end of Year 11 and pupils' achievement is good. Teaching and learning are good and still improving. Leadership and management are very good and are bringing about very good improvement in standards. In the sixth form, students achieve well from their starting points and reach average standards. The school gives good value for money.

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

- The headteacher's very good leadership and unswerving vision of a school offering high quality education underpins school improvement work.
- The school's self-evaluation and systems for reviewing and raising performance are highly effective and are bringing about rapid improvement in standards at the end of Year 11.
- A very good quality curriculum offers all pupils the chance to succeed.
- The highly effective pastoral system and high quality progress review help to ensure that pupils' achievement is good.
- The governing body is highly effective and has excellent knowledge of the school.
- Provision is excellent in religious education and very good in business education.
- The sixth form provides a good quality of education for students.
- The achievement of pupils who are gifted and talented, although satisfactory, could be better.
- Procedures for monitoring and recording sixth form attendance are not sufficiently well organised.

The school has made very good progress since the last inspection. Standards in the main school have risen, particularly recently. Underachievement is no longer evident in the sixth form. The provision for pupils who have special educational needs is much improved, as are arrangements to develop pupils' literacy skills. The quality of teaching has improved very significantly. The curriculum is very much improved, accommodation has improved and so has provision for pupils' spiritual development. This high level of improvement has been brought about by highly effective leadership and management, which are of a much higher quality than was the case at the last inspection.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

*For Year 11, similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

**Pupils reach above average standards and achievement is good.** At the end of Year 9, after one year in the school, standards are overall in line with what is expected nationally, with test results that are well above average in mathematics, above average in science but below average in English. English results are affected by below average standards of literacy when pupils enter the school. By the end of Year 11, standards are above average, including pupils' literacy skills. Over their three years in the school, pupils make good progress and achieve well. Standards are rising rapidly at the end of Year 11 and the rate of improvement is above that achieved nationally. The school won an Achievement Award in recognition of this in 2003. Results in GCSE in 2004 are a marked improvement on those achieved in 2003. In 2003, pupils were achieving below those in similar schools, as shown in the above table. This does not represent the current level of achievement in the school, which is good in Years 10 and 11. Achievement is satisfactory in science, art, citizenship and design and technology and good in English, mathematics, information and communication technology, modern foreign languages, geography, history, music and physical education. In business education and religious education, achievement is very good.

In the sixth form, students make good progress from a broad range of starting points. In 2003, results were just below average, but they improved in 2004. Standards in sixth form work are in line with what is expected on the courses. In the subjects inspected in detail, students' achievement is satisfactory in design and technology: it is good in mathematics, English and physical education, and very good in business education, French and chemistry. Achievement is outstanding in religious education.

**Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.** Personal development is well supported by the wide range of curricular activities and by a well-planned programme of assemblies. Pupils' attitudes are good and the attitudes of sixth form students are very good. Attendance is satisfactory, but sixth form attendance is not sufficiently well recorded and tracked. Behaviour is good, although there is a minority of pupils who are challenging. The school manages such pupils very well and creates a very good ethos.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The quality of education provided is good.** Teachers are skilled at channelling pupils' energies into constructive learning. Pupils are articulate, very ready to express their views and to contribute to learning. **The quality of teaching is good in both the main school and sixth form.** Examples of very good teaching were seen in a wide range of subjects: in religious education, teaching is consistently of very high quality. There remain, however, in some subjects, instances in which teaching does not fully engage pupils in learning. Teachers give pupils and students very good guidance on how to improve their work and achievement and this guidance is excellent in religious education and business education. There is a very effective system for reviewing progress and identifying potential underachievement in good time. Pastoral care gives pupils and students very good support. The curriculum is of very good quality. In the main school a wide range of courses allows both higher and lower attaining pupils to succeed. In the sixth form, a very wide range of courses is offered to meet the needs of the local community. There is very good provision



for extra-curricular and enrichment activities. Links with the community are excellent and there is very good partnership with parents.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are very good.** The headteacher is widely respected and has a clear vision of the school providing its community with a high quality education: this inspires those who work in the school. His leadership is very good. Senior managers are very effective and have roles that use their varied strengths to the full. The rigorous arrangements for departmental review are raising standards rapidly and heads of department are effective and well supported in improving their subject areas. Improvement in design and technology is hindered by unsatisfactory arrangements for leadership and management. The governing body has excellent knowledge of the school and acts as a very challenging, but also supportive, critical friend. Its work is highly instrumental in bringing about improvement. Statutory requirements to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils are not met and there are some omissions from the reporting of examination results to parents.

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

Parents and pupils are well satisfied with the school. Sixth form students in particular are very satisfied. Throughout the school, pupils and students are very willing to contribute to wider school life and play an active part.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- Continue to improve teaching in line with the school's own improvement plans.
- Raise the achievement of pupils who are gifted and talented from satisfactory to good.
- Ensure that monitoring and recording of sixth form attendance are rigorous.
- Make suitable arrangements for the leadership of design and technology;

**and, to meet statutory requirements:**

- provide an act of collective worship daily for all pupils and students; and
- include national averages for each subject when reporting results to parents at GCSE, AS and A2.

## THE SIXTH FORM AT THE MERIDIAN SCHOOL

The sixth form is of average size and provides a very wide range of GCE A, AS level and vocational courses.

### OVERALL EVALUATION

This is an effective sixth form. A very wide range of courses and learning opportunities are provided. Standards are in line with the average and results in 2004 were better than those obtained in 2003. Teaching and learning are good and support good achievement. Students have very good attitudes to work and willingly take responsibility within school life. Robust systems are used to monitor and track students' progress in their studies and personal development. Leadership and management are very good. The sixth form provides satisfactory cost-effectiveness.

#### The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Students respond well to the good, very good and excellent teaching and learning that provides challenge and motivation and enables them to achieve well.
- Students have very good attitudes to school and to their work, willingly accept responsibility in the wider life of the school and enjoy highly positive relationships with peers and their teachers.
- A very broad curriculum, that is complemented by a wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities, provides an exceptional range of courses and learning opportunities.
- Progress in students' work and personal development is systematically monitored and tracked, by subject teachers and form tutors and demanding targets are set to support further improvement.
- Leadership and management are very good and provide a clear direction for future work.
- The school lacks detailed registers of attendance for each session.

### 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	In English provision is <b>very good</b> . Above average standards and students' high achievement are the result of very good teaching and learning. Very good leadership and good management are provided. In French provision is <b>very good</b> . Teaching and learning are very good and help students to achieve highly. Standards are average. Leadership and management are very good.
Mathematics	<b>Good</b> . Standards are average and, as a result of good teaching and learning, students achieve well. Leadership is good and management is satisfactory.

Science - chemistry	<b>Very good.</b> Teaching and learning are very good and enable students to achieve highly and reach above average standards. Leadership and management are very good.
Humanities – religious studies	<b>Excellent.</b> Outstanding teaching and learning enables students to achieve exceptionally well. Consequently, standards are very high. Leadership and management are excellent.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Design and technology provision is <b>satisfactory</b> . Teaching and learning are satisfactory and help students achieve appropriately and gain standards that are average. Management is satisfactory but, with no co-ordinator of courses, leadership is unsatisfactory.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Provision in physical education is <b>good</b> . Good teaching and learning enables students to achieve well and reach standards that are in line with the average. Leadership and management are very good.
Business	<b>Very good.</b> Standards are above average. Good teaching and learning and excellent use of assessment enable students to achieve well. Leadership and management are excellent.

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

## **ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

Students benefit enormously from the close relationships they enjoy with both subject teachers and form tutors. The process of review - in their courses and personal development - is of very good quality. Both subject teachers and form tutors provide detailed feedback to their students. Form tutors monitor and track progress and provide good opportunities for discussion and target setting. Students value the detailed marking and the written evaluation of their work and the guidance on what they need to do to improve.

Good quality individual guidance about students' aspirations and future career is readily available, from the time of application for a place in the sixth form as well as throughout Years 12 and 13.

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

The leadership and management of the sixth form are very good. The governing body takes a keen strategic interest in the role and place of the sixth form within the whole school. This provides a robust framework within which the headteacher and leadership team provide a clear direction for the ethos, values and management of this area of the school.

The headteacher, management team and head of sixth form enjoy positive relationships with form tutors and subject teachers. This ensures that leadership and management are

very good. Students greatly value the role and availability of both their tutors and subject teachers. Course leadership and management are very good and in business education and religious studies they are excellent. In design and technology, while management is satisfactory, the lack of co-ordination and monitoring means that leadership is unsatisfactory.

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

The views of students are heard and, in most cases, acted upon. They have opportunities to voice concerns, to their tutor, to the head of sixth form and to his deputy, as well as through the two students who advise the governing body on pupil-related matters. Students have very good attitudes to school and to their work. Many find the sixth form an area of the school where they give and receive respect and understanding; and this applies to both peers and adults with whom they work. They value the availability of staff to offer advice and support with work or other issues.

Some students were concerned about the quality of careers advice, before as well as since they became members of the sixth form. In some cases, however, this was because students were unaware of the various sources of advice and good opportunities to consult a specialist adviser. The high workload inevitably poses problems for some students regarding enrichment courses, especially their ability to be regular in their attendance at activities, including physical education. This is a concern to them.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS**

### **STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS**

#### **Standards achieved in subjects and courses**

Standards of attainment are in line with expectations at the end of Year 9 and above average by the end of Year 11. Pupils' achievement in the main school is good. Standards are in line with the average in the sixth form and this represents good achievement from students' starting points.

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

- Standards at the end of Year 11 are rising at a rate faster than that seen nationally.
- The good arrangements for developing pupils' literacy skills ensure that weaknesses are largely overcome by the end of Year 11.
- Pupils who have special educational needs achieve well.
- Achievement is outstanding in religious education and very good in business studies.
- Students in the sixth form achieve well from their starting points.
- The achievement of those pupils who are gifted and talented could be better.

#### **Commentary**

- Standards at the end of Year 9, after pupils have been one year in the school, are overall in line with expectations when taken across the whole curriculum. In core subjects, test results in 2003 were overall above average, with results in mathematics being well above average, those in science above average and those in English below average. Results for 2004 are likely to be similar when benchmarked against national data. The overall trend is in line with that seen nationally.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	32.5 (34.9)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	38.3 (38.8)	35.4 (34.7)
science	34.9 (35.4)	33.6 (33.3)

*There were 163 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

- Standards of attainment are above average by the end of Year 11. There are fluctuations between one year and the next, but three-year averages confirm a picture that is above average. Uncapped average points score over three years has in fact been well above average, but capped points score has not been so high. As pupils enter Year 9 with attainment that is broadly average, with below average standards of literacy, this represents good achievement over their time in school. A picture of above average standards was confirmed by the work of pupils seen in school. At the last inspection the average points score was in line with the national average and a quarter of pupils were judged to be underachieving in Years 10 and 11: the average points score (uncapped) is now well above the national average and there is no longer significant underachievement. This represents very good progress since the last inspection.
- Standards are rising rapidly at the end of Year 11 and the rate of improvement is above that seen nationally. The school won an Achievement Award in recognition of this in 2003. Results in GCSE in 2004 are a marked improvement on those achieved in 2003, with 65 per cent of pupils gaining five or more A\* to C grades and 98 per cent gaining five or more A\* to G grades.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	55 ( 63 )	52 ( 50 )
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	91 ( 92 )	91 ( 91 )
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	95 ( 95 )	96 ( 96 )
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	35.7 ( 38.1)	34.7 ( 34.8 )

4. Work seen during the inspection in class, and in looking at a sample of pupils' work, confirmed this picture. Pupils in Year 9 were generally working in line with national expectations. They were working at a level above expectations in mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT), history, music and religious education (RE). In Years 10 and 11, the standards of pupils' work were overall above national expectations, with work at a level well above expectations in mathematics and RE. There were no subjects where the work seen was below the level expected nationally. The very small number of pupils who have English as an additional language, or belong to ethnic minority groups, achieve at least as well as their peers. At the last inspection raising standards in RE and ICT were key issues for improvement. Standards are now well above average in RE, because of teaching that is of very good quality. In ICT, standards are now above average.
5. At the last inspection, pupils' standards of literacy were judged to be too low. The school has made this a major focus for improvement and has successfully raised standards of literacy. When pupils enter the school, their literacy skills are below average. This is particularly the case for boys. By the time pupils reach the end of Year 11, their levels of competence are above average. This improvement in developing literacy skills has been a significant factor in raising standards both in English and more generally across the curriculum.
6. Achievement is good in the main school and pupils make increasingly good progress in most subjects as they move through Years 9 to 11. Achievement is satisfactory in art and design, science and design and technology (DT); achievement is good in English, mathematics, ICT, citizenship, geography, history, modern foreign languages and physical education (PE). In business education, achievement is very good, and in RE it is outstanding. The school's performance against a range of very challenging targets is satisfactory.
7. Pupils who have special educational needs make good progress and achieve well. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. Information from partner schools ensures that the needs of pupils are known before entry to the school. Data from tests which pupils take shortly after their arrival at the school, confirms their learning and other needs and allows appropriate support to be put in place. Information from these tests is used to place pupils in sets containing a small number of pupils and to identify those who need individual support within larger classes. Pupils with special educational needs often achieve GCSE grades that exceed their set targets. They achieve well on a range of accredited courses designed to meet appropriately their special educational needs. Clearly written targets on individual education plans (IEPs) provide a focus for improvement and assist in measuring progress, although this information is not systematically used by teachers in their planning.
8. The achievement and progress of gifted and talented students are satisfactory. A central programme takes place outside lesson time and often outside the school day. This is very well planned and organised and provides good opportunities for gifted and talented pupils to extend and challenge their thinking. In most subject lessons,

however, there is little evidence of tasks and activities planned specifically to extend these pupils. At present, therefore, although achievement for these pupils is satisfactory, it could be better.

### Sixth form

9. The school seeks to provide a sixth form that will meet local needs in this rural area. Students have a broad range of attainment on entry and the sixth form provides courses that will allow all students to be successful. There is strong competition for the highest attaining students post-16. Some Year 11 pupils choose to continue their education at sixth form colleges, although in the last year this trend has been less marked. The breadth and range of the sixth form curriculum are major factors in ensuring the good achievement of sixth form students.
10. In 2003, results in Year 13 were just on the boundary between below average and in line with the average. Results have improved in 2004: at A2 both the overall pass rate and the proportion of passes at the higher A/B grades have improved significantly. Of the 31 courses offered in the sixth form, eight were inspected in detail, covering all but one of the nine curriculum areas. In mathematics, DT and French, students were working at a level in line with course expectations. In English, chemistry, PE and business education the standard of work seen was above expectations. In RE the work seen was of such a high standard that it exceeded course expectations. Taking into account both work seen during inspection and post-16 results which cover the full range of courses offered, standards overall are in line with expectations.
11. The achievement of sixth form students is good. The head of sixth form undertakes a rigorous analysis of performance against target grades. This shows that most students achieve their challenging target grades, although there was some underperformance in art last year. In the subjects inspected in detail, achievement was judged to be satisfactory in DT, good in English, mathematics and PE, very good in chemistry, French and business education and outstanding in RE.
12. Students with special educational needs make very good progress and achieve very well. Although support is available should they require it, most students have developed the skills and confidence to manage unaided.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	89.6 (91.4)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	22.5 (26.2)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per pupil	206.3 (229.4)	258.2 (263.3)

*There were 78 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

13. Since the last inspection there has been very good progress in raising standards particularly in:

- improving the achievement of pupils who have special educational needs;
- improving the standard of pupils' literacy skills;
- improving standards and achievement in Years 10 and 11; and
- improving standards in RE and ICT.

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

Pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are good, as is their personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects. Attitudes and behaviour in the sixth form are very good. Attendance is satisfactory.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils support a wide range of out-of-school activities and accept responsibility well.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is generally good.
- In some lessons the behaviour of a small minority of pupils is unsatisfactory.
- Any instances of bullying or racism are dealt with very effectively.
- Very good use is made of outside agencies to support behaviour management.
- There has been good improvement since the last inspection in the provision for the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The monitoring and recording of sixth form attendance are unsatisfactory.

### **Commentary**

14. The school has a clear code of conduct and behaviour which sets high expectations. Behaviour is generally good in lessons, and around the school at breaks and lunchtime. The school has well-formulated policies and practice to promote good relationships. The very few instances of racism and bullying are dealt with very effectively. Very good use is made of outside agencies to support behaviour management, and there are effective tracking systems to monitor behaviour. As a result of this, the number of exclusions is low, and every effort is made to include all pupils. Pupils themselves believe that the school gets the balance between including pupils and minimising disruption for others about right.
15. The school stimulates in pupils a desire to learn, and this is reflected in the high level of participation in the many learning activities taking place outside the school day. In most lessons attitudes are good, and sometimes they are very good. In a few lessons, the attitudes and behaviour of a small minority of pupils have a negative influence and hamper learning. This is particularly noticeable in Year 10 where there are some challenging pupils. It is also noticeable to some extent in Year 9 before pupils fully comply with the standards that the school is setting.
16. The learning support department base room provides a calm, purposeful environment in which pupils can work and learn. Before morning school a number of pupils use computer aided learning programs to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. It also provides a safe haven at lunchtime. Good relationships with support staff help to give pupils the confidence to seek assistance and to work constructively to overcome their difficulties whether in academic work or socially. The special educational needs



co-ordinator closely monitors the behaviour of pupils causing problems. Comprehensive strategies for the management of pupils with behavioural difficulties are used by staff to keep disruptions to a minimum.

17. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils has been significantly improved since the last inspection. A very detailed analysis of what the school is doing has been carried out, and this has considerably raised awareness in this area; personal development in all four aspects is now good.
18. Assemblies make a strong contribution to the pupils' spiritual development, as do many of the curriculum subjects. The RE department is outstanding in this respect, providing opportunities for reflection and appreciation of the spiritual aspects of mankind's development through the study of various world faiths. Moral issues are confronted in many subjects, as well as in the assemblies and tutor periods, and personal, social and health education. The contribution of RE is again outstanding, and includes the study of philosophy and ethics. The pupils are made well aware of the meaning of right and wrong and this is underlined by the school's behaviour policy.
19. The extensive programme of extra-curricular activities, including an annual production and many sporting activities, enhances social development. There is also a strong involvement with charity fundraising. The school council meets regularly, is respected by pupils, and gives them first-hand experience of the democratic process. All these activities provide pupils with lots of very good opportunities to take responsibility, which they do willingly and well. Cultural development is also good. It is very well promoted in English, music and RE, all of which have a strong focus on the traditions of other cultures. There is a good range of visits to theatres, concerts and galleries, visits from artists and performers, as well as a number of foreign trips each year.

## Attendance

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	7.98	School data	0.3
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

20. Pupils' attendance is satisfactory. It has gradually improved since the last inspection and is now in line with the national average. Unauthorised absences are low. However, a number of pupils continue to have term-time holidays, despite the school's discouragement, and this prevents overall attendance levels from being any higher. Punctuality is satisfactory, although a few pupils are late each day.

## Exclusions

Exclusions are used very much as a last resort. Permanent exclusions are low, and fixed period exclusions are about average for a school of this size.

***Ethnic background of pupils******Exclusions in the last school year***

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	638	25	0
White – any other White background	9	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	4	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	2	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	2	0	0
Black or Black British – African	11	0	0
Chinese	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	20	0	0

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

## **Sixth form**

21. Students have a high commitment and very positive attitudes to school and to their work. They accept that within the sixth form ethos all students need to work and get on together, provide mutual support for each other and co-operate even with those with whom they have had little contact during their time in the main school. As a result there is a coherence and clear sense of purpose within the student body, where strong and inclusive relationships with peers and tutors underpin both the formal and informal network of support for each student.
22. It is within this ethos that students are encouraged to take responsibility – for the organisation and management of their work as well as in the wider life of the school. They respond with generosity to opportunities to help and support others, both within and beyond the school participating, for example, in the Year 9 “buddy” system as well in charity work and fundraising. The importance of these responsibilities is evident in the pride and maturity shown by many students as they undertake their various roles.
23. From the evidence available in subject registers and submissions for maintenance allowances, attendance is at least satisfactory. However, the school does not currently maintain the required registers of student attendance at morning and afternoon sessions, a matter to which attention is now being given as a matter of urgency. Students are generally punctual to lessons and very active participants in their learning.

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

The quality of education provided is good. Teaching is of good quality and pupils in the main school and sixth form students learn well. They are supported by very effective pastoral and tutorial systems. Assessment is good. The curriculum provides very good opportunities and is complemented by an extensive programme of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. The school has a very good ethos and is very inclusive. The views of pupils and students are listened to and valued, and lead to constructive change if this is needed.

### **Teaching and learning**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Examples of very good teaching occur in a wide range of subjects.
- The quality of teaching has improved very significantly since the last inspection.
- Teaching in religious education is of consistently high quality.
- Pupils can be challenging, especially in Year 10; this makes strong demands on teachers to channel energies into constructive learning.
- Pupils are very ready to contribute their ideas and opinions; they are not passive learners.
- Not all teaching engages and motivates pupils sufficiently.

- Excellent use of assessment in religious education and business education enables pupils and students to achieve very highly.

## Commentary

24. The quality of teaching has improved significantly from the last inspection. There is substantially less that is unsatisfactory, and much more which is of good, very good or of excellent quality. The marked improvement in the quality of teaching is a clear driver of the improvement in standards. Teaching in religious education has improved very significantly.

### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 158 lessons*

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
5 (3%)	40 (25 %)	64 (41%)	42 (27%)	6 (3%)	1(1%)	0 (0%)

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

25. The quality of teaching is good in Year 9 and in Years 10 and 11. In the main school two thirds of the teaching observed was good or better, and a quarter was very good. None was excellent. There was some teaching that was unsatisfactory, and this was usually related to difficulties in engaging the small number of pupils who are reluctant to learn.
26. Pupils, particularly those in Year 10, can be challenging. Teachers are skilful practitioners who channel the energies of pupils into productive learning. Pupils are neither passive nor naturally quiet: they are very much active participants and they expect to be challenged and made to think. They are willing contributors to learning, and are very ready to offer opinions or ideas. When, as often happens, teachers use effective methodology to engage pupils in learning, then good gains in knowledge and understanding can be made. The ethos created in classrooms is encouraging and inclusive.
27. The quality of teaching for individual subjects ranges from satisfactory to very good. Teachers in all subjects have very good subject knowledge, which is particularly evident when teaching Years 10 and 11. In English, mathematics, ICT, business education, modern foreign languages, geography, history, music and PE, the quality of teaching is good. In science, art, DT and citizenship it is satisfactory. In RE, teaching is consistently of very good quality. Teaching and learning were also sampled in child development and personal, social and health education (PHSE). In both these areas, the teaching observed was good.
28. The teaching of pupils who have special educational needs is good. Staff from the learning support department provide helpful advice and guidance to these pupils. The learning support staff also provide subject teachers with detailed information and well-formulated advice on strategies that are useful in addressing pupils' needs.

Although targets on individual education plans (IEPs) are known to subject teachers they do not always use this information in planning their lessons. Despite this, in most subjects, work is well matched to pupils' learning requirements. However, there are some lessons where activities and tasks are not modified and adapted adequately; as a result pupils make insufficient progress. The records kept by the learning support staff on their input into lessons are not always detailed enough to provide a clear picture of the nature and success of the support provided.

29. Pupils at an early stage of English language acquisition receive support in class when required. These pupils are very actively involved in learning, and are encouraged to develop their language skills through speaking. They make good progress.
30. A member of the senior management team has recently taken on the task of co-ordinating arrangements for gifted and talented pupils. A clear rationale and good documentation underpin the work. Criteria for the identification of gifted and talented pupils have been shared with all subject departments. However the detailed arrangements to meet the needs of gifted and talented pupils are not fully implemented in subject areas. The co-ordinator is providing very good leadership and moving the process on very effectively.
31. Teachers make good use of assessment to evaluate pupils' progress and achievement, and to help them improve. In RE and business studies, the high quality assessment is extremely instrumental in raising standards and achievement. In business studies, the meticulous tracking and recording of progress informs lesson planning, and enables teachers to provide very good guidance to pupils on the choice of courses, which will meet their needs. This is a significant factor in pupils' high levels of achievement in the subject.

#### **Sixth form**

32. The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is good. As in the main school, teachers have very good subject knowledge. Three quarters of the teaching observed was good or better, and one third was very good or excellent. Five examples of excellent teaching were seen: one in English, one in media studies and three in RE. One of the lessons seen in RE is an example of outstanding practice and is included within the RE subject report. In all five lessons, excellent subject knowledge was a strong feature.
33. The sixth form offers a very wide range of courses, eight of which were inspected in detail. Teaching and learning were also sampled in order to gain wider evidence of quality across the curriculum. In the subjects inspected in detail, teaching and learning were satisfactory in DT, good in mathematics, business education and PE, very good in French, chemistry and English and outstanding in RE. Teaching and learning were sampled in a wide range of other subjects. In health and social care, leisure and recreation, biology, geography, history and ICT the teaching sampled was good. In psychology, physics, German, Spanish and music, sampled teaching was very good. In art, teaching in the one lesson observed was unsatisfactory, as students were insufficiently challenged.
34. The sampling of teaching and learning confirmed a picture of good teaching and achievement in the sixth form. Teachers are particularly skilled at adapting their

teaching to the different needs of students, some of whom are lower attaining and less confident. Assessment is used well in monitoring progress and to help students to improve, particularly in business education and RE where it is outstanding in quality, as it is in the main school.

## **The curriculum**

The curriculum is of very good quality. Provision is very broad and meets the increasingly diverse learning needs currently within the school population. An extensive programme of extra-curricular and enrichment activities greatly extends the learning opportunities provided. Accommodation is of good quality and resources make good provision to support learning.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The governing body has clear principles for the planning of a broad curriculum that is of high quality and to which all pupils will have access.
- The curriculum is of very good quality and supports progress in learning through the main school and within the sixth form.
- A broad and very popular programme of extra-curricular and enrichment activities extends pupils' learning opportunities.
- Those with a range of needs and aspirations have access to provision, both in and beyond the school, that supports and extends their opportunities to be successful learners.
- Very significant improvement has been made since the last inspection.

### **Commentary**

35. The governing body's policy embraces a number of important principles. The result is an innovative curriculum that offers a smooth transition from middle to upper school, a wide range of learning opportunities and equal access to all pupils, and a taught curriculum that is complemented by an extensive programme of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. The curriculum also reflects the school's specialist status in mathematics and computing and meets statutory requirements. The current curriculum is radically different from that reported on at the last inspection, and is now of very good quality. The school now meets the statutory requirement for RE but is still working towards that to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.
36. The provision for the National Curriculum and RE is extended in Year 9 to include two modern languages, drama, a structured approach to all aspects of technology, a modular programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship. Setting is used creatively to ensure that pupils are taught in groups appropriate to their needs. Every opportunity is taken to ensure that pupils' learning and experience in each subject enable them to make progress and achieve well.
37. For pupils in Years 10 and 11 the curriculum prepares them well for their future, whether in employment, further education or training. All pupils follow courses in English, mathematics, science, ICT, PE and RE with a highly flexible approach to option choices. There are a series of interesting and demanding combinations of courses and routes to certification. This approach allows pupils of all levels of

attainment to be challenged in their learning and achieve the level of success of which they are capable. The highest attaining pupils follow an appropriate range of courses that meet their needs and validate their success. Similarly pupils with differing interests and aspirations receive recognition of their success within vocational courses provided through strong links with the local college of further education. Within science, design and technology, modern foreign languages and geography, choices of courses have been increased.

38. The curriculum for all pupils in Years 9 to 11, to which all have equal access, is also enriched through a number of cross-curricular themes: literacy, numeracy, the application of ICT, work related learning, and PSHE, which includes careers and citizenship. Challenge is also provided for those who have English as an additional language. Provision for those pupils who have special educational needs is good: it includes booster classes in basic skills, as well as a wide range of accredited courses in Years 10 and 11. The learning support department is very well led and effectively managed.
39. The whole curriculum provides significant support for pupils' academic and personal development. This includes the wide range of extra-curricular activities and additional learning opportunities to which there are high levels of response. There is a very good level of participation in the arts and a good level of involvement in sport. In addition the students attend homework, revision and coursework clubs in many subjects. There is access to ICT facilities, opportunities to take extra GCSE subjects in after-school sessions, and a range of cultural visits and exchanges. Levels of participation in the school's drama and music productions are high and often include pupils from the partner middle schools.
40. Overall, accommodation and resources are good, although in science there are some inadequacies in practical equipment and arrangements for storage of chemicals, and the sixth form laboratory has shortcomings. The match of teachers to the curriculum is very good, and that of support staff is good. Although the school successfully recruits many good quality teachers, the appointment of a head of department for DT has proved to be more difficult; the unsatisfactory arrangements for leadership of the subject are hampering improvement in this area. The school's accommodation is now of good quality – a significant improvement since the last inspection. Accommodation is very good in mathematics, geography and business studies. In RE the very imaginative organisation of rooms creates an excellent environment for learning. Provision of learning resources is good. Across the curriculum, very good support for learning and research is provided by the well-organised library and recently established centre to promote independent learning.

## **Sixth form**

41. The post-16 curriculum is of very good quality and, as in the main school, provides a number of routes to accreditation. There are 27 courses leading to GCE AS and A-level, with the vast majority taught in school; law and electronics are successfully studied through distance learning and video-conferencing. A further four vocational courses result in accreditation at various GNVQ levels. In all, a considerable range of courses is presented to meet the needs and aspirations of local post-16 students. This provision is complemented by general studies, including units of RE, as well as a PE programme, tutorial work and a number of interesting enrichment activities, all of which provide important balance within each student's timetable. The statutory requirement, to provide a programme of RE for all students, is now met, but that for a daily act of collective worship is not yet fully met.
42. The match of teachers to the current post-16 curriculum is very good. Talented and committed subject teachers contribute greatly to the good, very good and excellent teaching that is an important feature of many courses. The quality of accommodation is very good, including the public areas of the sixth form centre. Subject accommodation is excellent in RE and very good in mathematics, modern languages and music. Resources for learning are good and provide real support for students' learning. Access to ICT in the independent learning centre ensures that students' research and preparation of class presentations and coursework are well done.

## **Care, guidance and support**

Provision for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety is very good. They are provided with very good support, advice and guidance. Pupils feel that there are very good opportunities for them to have their say about school life.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school cares very well for each individual pupil.
- Pupils' access to informed support and guidance has a very good impact on their academic achievement and personal development.
- Pupils have very good relationships with adults and know whom to turn to for help.
- Very good induction procedures for Year 9 pupils help them to settle quickly into school life.

## **Commentary**

43. The school is very caring and has a genuine concern for its pupils as individual young people. Their welfare is carefully monitored and the school works very effectively with outside support services to ensure that pupils are well cared for in all aspects of their academic and personal lives. There is very good awareness and understanding of child protection procedures. Sensitive and caring guidance is given to pupils who are suffering personal difficulties or whose challenging behaviour is likely to result in their underachievement or exclusion from school. Health and safety procedures are good and are well managed.



44. The pastoral support structure is led and managed very well. Experienced heads of year, their assistants and tutors work very effectively as teams to provide pupils with easy and regular access to very good quality advice and guidance. Through tutor consultations and a very effective system of progress review, pupils know how well they are doing and are fully involved in discussing their targets for improvement, whether academic or personal. Opportunities for pupils to explore future careers and study options in the sixth form or at other colleges are well planned.
45. Procedures for the identification and assessment of pupils with special educational needs are clear and well implemented. Records are comprehensive and accessible to staff. The procedures for the annual review of statements fully meet statutory requirements, and are attended by a high percentage of parents. The arrangements for the pupils' transfer to the school are well planned and processed, so that pupils' special needs are known and understood. Once they join the school, pupils' progress is monitored, tracked, and recorded and support staff provide effective help and guidance. Additionally, pupils may receive advice from personnel from a number of outside agencies who visit the school for this purpose.
46. Pupils have very good and positive working relationships with adults. They feel it is easy to talk to staff about their concerns and that there is always someone to listen to them. They appreciate the help available to them from sixth form students and 'buddies' as another source of support when they have worries. The school seeks and values pupils' views on a range of matters, such as how well bullying is dealt with. Pupils are very positive about the school council as a forum for sharing their views and for bringing about change.
47. New pupils in Year 9 make a very positive start to school life because of the very well established and managed induction procedures with the two middle schools. There is a very well planned programme of meetings between staff, visits for pupils and evaluation of the transfer to ensure as smooth a transition as possible. Careful planning and very good liaison between staff means that groupings are well balanced and take account of pupils' abilities, friendships and special needs. Year 9 pupils speak highly of this process and the way in which they have been helped to settle quickly.

### **Sixth form**

48. There are clear criteria for admission to the sixth form and, in individual discussion with applicants, these are flexibly interpreted to provide the most appropriate courses and support for every student. The quality of advice and guidance, on application and during both Years 12 and 13, is very good.
49. The transition from main school into the sixth form is well managed, with course sampling, induction and familiarisation taking place over a lengthy period. Everything is done to ensure that student transfer is well managed and this contributes to the high levels of course retention.
50. The regular review of students' progress in their courses and personal development is of high quality. It allows for regular and helpful feedback from subject teachers, a discussion of the outcomes of the monitoring and tracking system, and the setting of

agreed targets. This process is highly valued by students, especially the detailed written feedback on their assignments from specialist subject teachers. It is clear that targets for improvement are demanding. Concerns about achievement, attitudes or other issues affecting their progress as learners and people are systematically reviewed.

51. Students' views are heard and, when at all possible, are acted upon. The sixth form committee is an important channel for reporting and acting upon student opinion as well as providing a forum for managing the common room and the social calendar. Two sixth form students advise the governors on pupil-related matters. Governors and the school's management team are very responsive to issues raised, especially where improving the quality of support or other services to students are concerned.

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

The school has very good links with parents. Links with other schools and colleges are very good. Links with the community are excellent.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents like the school and appreciate its continued improvement.
- Senior managers have made excellent use of the recent survey of parents' views
- Partnership with other schools and colleges is very good.
- The school plays a highly important role in the local community.

## Commentary

52. Parents are pleased with all areas of the school's work. They feel that their children are happy, well taught and well cared for, and that they are learning well as a result. They are particularly positive about the enthusiastic leadership of the headteacher and the generosity of staff in giving time to support their children. Most feel well informed about what is going on and appreciate the school's efforts to improve communication with them. Parents feel that information and consultation evenings are very well organised and that staff give valuable help and advice. A high percentage of parents attend annual reviews, and come on parents' evening to discuss the targets set on individual education plans for their child. Parents say that staff are very approachable and that it is easy to discuss any concerns that they may have. Inspection evidence supports these positive views. The school is not complacent, however, and has been extremely proactive in gaining an accurate picture of parents' views, as the example of outstanding practice shows. The school challenges itself to improve and continues to seek parents' and pupils' views wherever it can.

## Example of outstanding practice

### **AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF SEEKING AND ACTING ON PARENTS' VIEWS**

A parental survey was undertaken covering all areas of the school's work. As well as evaluating how good parents thought various aspects were, the survey also identified how important each element was to parents. This enabled an analysis based on the 'gap' between expectations and fulfilment to be undertaken. The school then knew, with a good degree of precision, how satisfied parents were, and how much significance this satisfaction or dissatisfaction had for them. The really outstanding part of the work was the school's response to this survey. As well as circulating the results of the survey, a comprehensive action plan for improvement was formulated and sent to parents. The strategies included in this action plan were wide-ranging and well targeted. For example, extensive work is being done to address the concern of some parents that they do not always know how well bullying and poor behaviour is dealt with. Very good information has been given to parents on what is being done to rectify this, such as a 'Who Can Help' page on the school's website.

53. The school has very good links with its partner first and middle schools which means that pupils easily transfer through each stage of their education. Liaison with partner schools concerning pupils' special educational needs is good, with helpful information and data accompanying pupils on their transfer to the upper school. The school's specialist status has strengthened links and has provided more opportunities for pupils and staff to work together and to share experiences and expertise. The school is developing good links with North Hertfordshire College to provide some pupils with work related learning programmes.

54. Links with the community are excellent. There are extremely well managed and developed links with a wide range of local businesses, community groups, adult organisations and local industry. The school provides an excellent centre for local use, both in leisure and education, as well as working effectively in partnership with the Royston pyramid of schools. The governing body has co-optees from local industry who support the school's specialist status. Links with the wider community beyond Royston are also extensive and beneficial to pupils' learning and wider experiences.

## **Sixth form**

55. Parents' involvement in the sixth form ensures that appropriate support and encouragement are provided at home. All of the students benefit in their learning from the excellent links with the immediate and wider community, including those relationships with business associated with the school's mathematics and computing specialist status.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership and management are very good. The leadership of the headteacher is very good. The governing body is highly effective.

There is non-compliance with statutory requirements in that a daily act of collective worship is not provided for all pupils. The reporting of results to parents does not include national comparative information for subjects at GCSE, AS and A2 level.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The headteacher has a clear vision of the school providing its community with the highest quality of education; this vision inspires pupils, sixth form students and staff.
- Rigorous whole-school self-evaluation results in a well-formulated school improvement plan incorporating a wide range of strategies to raise performance.
- Highly effective departmental review by the headteacher and deputy headteacher has been a significant factor in raising standards and achievement.
- Senior managers have highly appropriate roles which use their skills to the full.
- The governing body is extremely well informed, challenging and perceptive, and governors have an excellent understanding of the school.
- Very effective arrangements for the induction and training of staff ensure that good practice is maintained and improved.
- Very good leadership and highly effective management have enabled the school to make very good progress since the last inspection.

## **Commentary**

56. The headteacher sees very clearly the responsibility laid on a school, when it is the only upper school in the town, to provide the very best quality of education for the young people of the surrounding community. This vision is clearly communicated to all those working in the school, and gives a strong and shared sense of purpose to the school's work. The headteacher is also closely involved in curriculum development, leading to a curriculum which is strongly inclusive, providing opportunities for a wide range of pupils. He gives very effective leadership in promoting pupils' personal development, as the following example of outstanding practice shows.

### Example of outstanding practice

#### **A powerful and moving assembly, led by the headteacher, faced pupils in Years 10 and 11 with a challenging dilemma, and then helped them to reflect on the meaning, purpose and effects of war**

The assembly started with a reminder of the numbers of dead in the First World War, on both the British and German sides. Pupils were invited to think about the scale of casualties by comparing the numbers involved to the numbers of themselves seated in rows in the school hall. A vivid picture of the enormity of the loss was created. Expressive readings from Wilfred Owen's *Dulce et decorum est* followed, and then pupils were invited to "do something about it" by actively remembering the sacrifice of those who had died. The focus then moved to the Second World War and the question was raised – why go to war again so soon? A contemporary newspaper account of the persecution of the Jews in 1939 answered that question and led to the main theme of the assembly: evil must be confronted but war is hell. Eyewitness accounts of soldiers who saw craters full of dead Germans reinforced the idea of hell. Then the whole experience of war was given relevance and immediacy by reading from emails sent by a former pupil of the school currently on leave from serving in Iraq. Many present knew the young man concerned personally. The obituary of another local young soldier presented the idea that "you never know what's round the corner." Then pupils were invited to take their part in the assembly, by making an act of remembrance through one minute's silent reflection. This ended with a pupil playing the last post. As they left assembly, pupils were thinking and talking about the effects of war, remembering the former pupil and reflecting on his experience. Although profoundly challenging, both morally and spiritually, the assembly had also enabled them to reach some resolution in their own minds, through their positive participation in an act of remembrance.

57. The school's self-evaluation is rigorous, and leads to a well-formulated school improvement plan, which is both comprehensive and coherent. The main improvement priorities identified on the self-evaluation form prepared for the inspection, showed the strength of the senior management team's understanding of the school's performance. There is a very good understanding of the idea that a range of interconnected strategies need to be brought to bear to raise performance and achievement, and that these need to work together consistently. Members of the senior management team are in roles which use their considerable strengths to the full, whether this is in the area of guidance and support, performance review and value added, management of specialist status or curriculum development. Responsibilities are very clear and specific, and all senior management roles are linked to specific areas of the school improvement plan. It is this coherence and consistency, combined with bringing a range of actions to bear on raising achievement, that has enabled standards at the end of Year 11 to rise as rapidly as they have recently. There is very good capacity for further improvement.

58. Another very significant factor in raising standards is the highly effective departmental review undertaken by the headteacher and deputy headteacher. This review, which is in addition to the usual review of performance by the line manager, is wide-ranging. It includes evidence from, for example, scrutiny of work in pupils' books, lesson observations, assessment records and interviews with pupils in the subject area. It results in a discussion with the head of department about strengths and areas for improvement, which is focused and based on a good range of first hand observation. The need for consistency of evaluation has been recognised and addressed through training and moderation. During this review process, and more widely, the exceptional partnership between the headteacher and deputy headteacher gives outstanding support to senior colleagues, heads of department and teaching staff in improving effectiveness.
59. Arrangements for the induction and professional development of staff are very effective. There has been quite a considerable turnover of teaching staff since the last inspection. As with other areas of the work of the senior management team, decisions about what training to offer and what support is needed, are well-founded on wide-ranging evidence. The robustness of the arrangements for professional development have been very significant in creating and maintaining a good quality classroom practice, and a high quality ethos, despite changes in staff.
60. The governing body is highly effective. Governors have an excellent understanding of the school, and are critical friends in the fullest sense of the term. They are challenging in searching out and evaluating the rationale for management decisions, and have excellent insight into what is happening in the school. They contribute high levels of personal expertise unstintingly. Members of the finance committee took firm, appropriate and timely action when they became aware of problems with budget management.

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

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,069,140	Balance from previous year	-44,190
Total expenditure	3,282,837	Balance carried forward to the next year	- 257,88 7
Expenditure per pupil	4,849		

61. Financial management is currently satisfactory. The school has a long-standing history of being in deficit, which was successfully brought under control in 2002 by stringent financial management. However, in March 2004, there was a very significant deficit once again, due to inaccuracies in budgeting. Expenditure per pupil in that year was substantially over the available income, as the financial data shows. The deficit has now been eliminated and financial systems very significantly improved. There are currently good systems of budgeting, reporting and monitoring in place. This year's expenditure is likely to be just within budget, with levels of expenditure per pupil brought back to a more typical and sustainable level. The current bursar is addressing the recommendations contained in the most recent audit report. The impact on pupils

and the local community of the additional funding generated by Specialist College status is being rigorously monitored by an assistant headteacher. The use of specialist capital funding to enhance the library and student learning centre has been very successful.

### **Sixth form**

62. The arrangements for leadership and management reflect the great importance that the governors place on the role of the sixth form within a whole school context. The headteacher and leadership team provide a clear direction for the ethos, values and management of this cost-effective area.
63. The positive approach adopted by senior managers and the head of sixth form to working with form tutors and subject teachers ensures that leadership and management are of very good quality. Form tutors enjoy strong support from the head of sixth form and his deputy. The day-to-day managers of the sixth form and the students highly value the tutors' role. The tutors' accessibility and positive relationships with their groups are key features of the approach taken in the monitoring and support they provide. Within subjects and courses, leadership and management are very good, and provide a clear direction for their work.
64. The governors have decided to allow a modest subsidy of the sixth form from the main school budget. This is in order to maintain a broad curriculum provision for this rural community, and to attract viable numbers of students to the sixth form as a whole in the face of strong competition. The headteacher seeks to ensure that courses are provided at the minimum cost consistent with quality. The school has been innovative in seeking cost-effective ways of putting on courses, through taking advantage of the use of e-learning, for example. The sixth form is offering a good quality of education to its students and, in these unusual circumstances, allowing a subsidy is a justifiable strategic decision.

### **Statutory requirements**

65. Although a daily act of collective worship is not provided for all pupils, there is a regular programme of well-planned assemblies for different year groups. Some of these assemblies are of excellent quality, and make a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual development. Statutory requirements are met in full for the provision of religious education, including that for sixth form students. Religious education makes a very powerful contribution to developing pupils' and students' spiritual awareness and understanding. Spiritual development is good. The headteacher and governing body should continue their efforts to meet in full statutory requirements for the provision of a daily act of collective worship for all pupils and students.

### **Work-related Learning (WRL)**

66. The quality of provision for WRL is good and has a positive impact on pupils' achievement and personal development. Statutory requirements are met. The well-established work experience programme provides good opportunities for pupils to evaluate their placements, and to use their experiences when considering decisions regarding their future. Links with local businesses are very good and have been



strengthened through the school's specialist status. Links with North Hertfordshire College are developing well. Pupils attending the college's vocational courses are positive about the opportunity to learn practical skills, such as motor mechanics and hairdressing, in preparation for the world of work. Although a co-ordinator of WRL has yet to be appointed, senior managers have begun to assess learning opportunities across subjects, for example through a Leisure and Tourism unit in English, and to raise the status of WRL across the curriculum. Business education and ICT very effectively provide pupils with the concepts and skills necessary for the workplace.

## 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

- Lessons are well planned to encourage pupils' interest and motivation.
- Assessment is used well by most teachers to show pupils how to improve their work.
- Recent GCSE results show that pupils respond well to good teaching and the range of choice within provision for English.
- Boys' achievement is well below girls' in Year 9.
- Because of staffing difficulties, some pupils do not benefit from specialist teaching.

##### Commentary

67. Pupils' standards of literacy when they enter the school are below average, particularly for boys. Standards in tests taken in 2003 at the end of Year 9 (after one year in the school) were below average too, and poor in comparison to similar schools. The proportion of students gaining A\* to C grades in GCSE examinations was above average in 2003 with girls doing particularly well. This shows that over Years 9 to 11 students make good progress overall and achieve well. Results in 2004 showed a drop in boys' standards at the end of Year 9, but substantial improvement in boys' results at GCSE. This is a picture which shows the positive impact of teaching over time, for both boys and girls. The inspection confirmed this.
68. Teaching in Years 9 to 11 is good overall. Although one poor lesson was seen, six out of ten were good or better. These lessons were characterised by careful planning, tight timing, alert attention to pupils' individual needs, and positive relationships. For example, a lesson on *Romeo and Juliet* was successful, in spite of a degree of resistance from some unmotivated boys, because the teacher was well organised, properly assertive, and confident in her knowledge and intentions. A good working atmosphere was skilfully created, and the majority of pupils did work which both satisfied and stretched them. In the lesson which was poor, planning and timing were weak, and the work was pitched at too low a level. The department's approach to marking and assessment is another positive feature of generally good teaching. Praise for what pupils do well is accompanied in most teachers' marking by clear indications of what to do to improve. Pupils respond positively and raise their standard of achievement as a consequence.
69. The head of department is an outstanding teacher and provides a very good model of committed and energetic practice. Very good leadership results in a strong team ethos and an innovative curriculum. The development of media studies and drama within the department's work significantly improves pupils' choice and motivation, and looks particularly towards offering boys courses of study that will foster their

achievement. The management of the department is good. Staff are deployed according to their strengths. There is good support for newly qualified teachers, who are already making an impressive contribution to the department's success. There is still some work to do in making the best practice in teaching and assessment entirely general, and in planning to demonstrably extend potentially high attaining students.

70. Work in English has to be seen in the context of some pupils (particularly boys) arriving with histories of underachievement. This highlights the strong progress that pupils make from an initially low base. Staffing problems also contribute to the challenge of moving pupils forward during their first year in the school, because not all pupils are taught by specialists. These factors (staffing and low attainment in Year 9) are the reasons why provision for English cannot be said to be better than good.
71. Recent results have significantly improved. So has the provision for literacy development, which was a weakness at the last inspection, and which is helping to address the comparatively low attainment of boys in their early years at the school. Generally high standards of teaching and learning, and the use of assessment to promote progress, are now strengths in the department's work. There is an impressively broad curriculum. Therefore there has been good improvement since the last inspection.

## **Drama**

72. Drama was sampled as part of the inspection. The subject operates in a carousel arrangement with PSHE in Year 9. This means that all pupils have experience of drama in their first year, but there is a loss of continuity which hinders the consistent development of drama concepts and skills. In GCSE examinations in 2003 results were well below average. In 2004 there was substantial improvement. In the two lessons observed the quality of teaching was good and very good. This indicates that the newly qualified teachers contributing to the drama curriculum are in a good position to continue to improve standards. The subject makes a major contribution to pupils' extra-curricular opportunities with a programme of theatre visits and regular school shows.

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

73. Because pupils enter the school with below average skills (particularly boys), a focus on literacy is a major element in the school development plan. The newly appointed co-ordinator is reviewing practice across departments, and there is a current school-wide emphasis on structuring and developing extended writing. The library makes a significant contribution to reading development. Provision for improving literacy is judged to be good in most departments. Only in art is it considered unsatisfactory. Standards are average by the end of Year 9 and above average in Years 10 and 11, an indication of the success of the school's strategies for improvement.

## **Modern foreign languages**

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

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The very good tracking of pupils' attainment and achievement play a significant part in helping pupils achieve above average standards at GCSE in French, German and Spanish.
- Teachers' very good subject knowledge and very good linguistic skills result in very good development of listening and speaking.
- Information and communication technology is used effectively by teachers and pupils to enhance teaching and learning.
- Some pupils are disaffected even at the beginning of Year 9 and make little effort to progress in French.

## Commentary

74. Results in teacher assessments in 2003 in French were in line with what is expected nationally at the end of Year 9, for both boys and girls. In 2004, the number of pupils reaching the expected level or above increased significantly. In GCSE French in 2003, results were above the national average. In 2004, GCSE results in French were considerably higher, and most pupils achieved or improved on their target grades. In GCSE German in 2003, results were below the national average, but the pupils were from lower sets. In 2004, the number of pupils achieving grades A\* to C in German more than doubled and nearly all pupils achieved or improved on their target grades. In 2003, GCSE Spanish results were well above the national average. No pupils took Spanish GCSE in 2004. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls at the end of Year 9 or the end of Year 11.
75. When pupils join the school in Year 9, they are attaining average standards in French. Many Year 9 pupils write and speak confidently when using familiar structures and vocabulary, and can express their opinion on prepared topics. Pupils generally have good listening skills. Pupils' pronunciation varies from very anglicised to very accurate. High attaining pupils have a good awareness of basic grammar and can use past, present and future tenses accurately with known verbs. They are also adept at writing more complex sentences using connectives and time markers. Pupils with special educational needs follow lessons in French well and produce accurate written and spoken work when well supported. They copy words and short phrases accurately. The written work of most pupils is well presented.
76. The higher and middle attaining pupils who take Spanish, make a very good start to the subject. Their written work consolidates the oral work in class very well. All pupils copy words, phrases and short dialogues accurately and present their work well. They generally pronounce known vocabulary well. The above standards represent good achievement in French and Spanish in Year 9.
77. Standards of work in French are above average in Years 10 and 11. In Year 11, higher and middle attaining pupils produce work of GCSE A\* to C grade standard. Generally pupils have a good understanding of what they hear, and their pronunciation is good. Lower attaining pupils can say three or four sentences in sequence, when well prepared. Some lower attaining boys have a limited vocabulary base and a poor grasp of basic structures, however. The spoken language of some higher attaining pupils is good. They speak about topics at length and use different tenses. They also express their opinions and can articulate advantages and disadvantages. Many pupils write

accurate essays, dialogues and letters on GCSE topics. Overall, pupils' achievement in French by the end of Year 11 is good.

78. Standards of work in Spanish are above average in Year 11. Most pupils have very good listening skills, and their pronunciation and intonation are above average, They speak accurately and with confidence when using familiar vocabulary in well-known contexts. They write accurately and at length, and show a good command of basic tenses and structures. This represents very good achievement, since pupils do not start Spanish until Year 9. Standards in Year 10 German are average. Pupils' written work is well presented and contains examples of different tenses and time markers. In lessons, some pupils are able to improve the quality of a piece of writing to obtain higher GCSE grades. This represents good achievement.
79. Teaching and learning in French and Spanish in Year 9 are good. In Years 10 and 11 teaching and learning in French are good and very good in Spanish. The teaching and learning of German in Year 10 is also good. A key factor contributing to this positive picture is the teachers' very good knowledge of National Curriculum requirements and GCSE criteria. Their very good linguistic skills in two or more languages also result in very good development of listening and speaking in all three languages. Additionally pupils have ample opportunities to listen to recorded texts.
80. Most pupils respond with enthusiasm when lessons have good pace and are clearly structured. The use of ICT, and motivating activities and materials in many lessons, results in very effective presentation, practice and consolidation of language. Most pupils also learn effectively in pairs or groups. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and give good advice on how to improve, and they write encouraging comments. Pupils also learn well because of the very good relationships between teachers and pupils. Occasionally some pupils in Year 9 do not concentrate sufficiently on their work and make little progress in French. Additionally a few boys in the Year 10 German class do not complete homework tasks and waste time in lessons.
81. The head of department leads and manages the department well. All members of the department work very well as a team, and strive hard to share materials and ideas and to achieve agreed objectives. The departmental development plan has been carefully formulated, the schemes of work are thorough, and the handbook is both comprehensive and succinct. The monitoring of teaching, learning, achievement and standards is very effective. The department now benefits from much improved accommodation and resources. The quality of display in the department is very good. This all impacts very positively on learning. Visits to France, Spain and Germany motivate pupils and raise standards.
82. Improvement since the last inspection is good. The schemes of work are more detailed, assessment is now very effective, standards are higher in French and the high standards in German have been maintained. Additionally, Spanish has been added to the curriculum.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are high, teaching is good and almost all pupils achieve well.
- This is an improving department, spurred on by the subject's specialist status.
- There is not enough planning to ensure effective contributions to other subjects such as literacy, ICT and citizenship.

## Commentary

83. On entry to the school, pupils' mathematical knowledge and understanding are above national expectations. By the end of Year 9, test results are well above the expected level. In 2003, GCSE results were well above average, and they improved further in 2004. Levels of achievement are good for both boys and girls. Pupils make faster progress in Years 10 and 11 than in Year 9, but the most talented are not always stretched enough with challenging tasks. Pupils' current work reflects a similar picture of good added value in mathematics. They are least confident in data handling, but their facility with algebra is particularly well developed, providing a good foundation for advanced study. The department is inclusive; pupils from various ethnic backgrounds and those with special educational needs achieve similarly well, benefiting from small classes and the skilled support of teaching assistants.
84. Teaching and learning are good, but better in Years 10 and 11 than in Year 9, where less experienced teachers sometimes repeat middle school work unnecessarily. High staff turnover in recent years has depressed the achievement of some pupils, but the department now has a more settled team of specialists. With high expectations, teachers use questioning to extend pupils' understanding in carefully planned, well paced lessons. Regular homework reinforces and extends learning. Sometimes, however, pupils experience a limited range of teaching styles with insufficient opportunity to conjecture and to discuss. Pupils have good literacy skills and very good attitudes towards the subject, and their self-confidence is built strongly through a combination of challenge, praise and encouragement. Specialist status has provided fine accommodation and much better resources. Some teachers make effective use of interactive whiteboards as a teaching aid, but better resources are not used as extensively as they could be to boost learning, particularly among lower attainers. There are not enough opportunities for independent and collaborative learning, and insufficient attention is given, in planning and in lessons, to further strengthening pupils' knowledge and skills in literacy, ICT and citizenship.
85. Teachers use assessment satisfactorily. Pupils' work is marked conscientiously and they have long-term targets to aim for, but only a minority of teachers provide clear guidance on how to improve in the short term.
86. In Year 11, the highest attaining pupils are able to take GCSE Statistics and an AS level module alongside GCSE Mathematics. This is very good preparation for a range of A-level subjects. However, this group contains a fairly wide range of mathematical ability, and this arrangement holds back the achievement of some of the most gifted pupils. Although the rest of the year group is arranged in two bands based on combined performance in English and mathematics, this does not act as a barrier to good achievement.

87. Leadership is good. The head of department has high expectations and has built a strong team characterised by unity of purpose and a determination to succeed. Management is very good. Good documentation is backed by good organisation. There is a comprehensive system for tracking pupils' progress, and performance data are thoroughly scrutinised to identify strengths and weaknesses. There are extensive monitoring procedures, but the outcomes are not yet informing planning and prioritisation sufficiently.
88. Improvement has been very good since the last inspection. The department has maintained its position as the best performing of the core subjects, by improving the quality of teaching and raising pupils' achievement still further. Specialist college status has spurred further innovations. There are several mathematics-related clubs, extra lessons to boost performance in examinations and some imaginative links with other local schools.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

89. Pupils' mathematical skills develop well in their core mathematics lessons, and so they are able to participate fully in other subjects. Levels of competence are above average in Year 9, and well above average in Years 10 and 11. The school has agreed a good policy to encourage the further development of mathematics through all subjects. It includes indications of when topics are covered in mathematics lessons, and their connections to the National Curriculum in Year 9. An audit of provision in subjects was completed last year, but the results have not been collated to identify strengths and weaknesses, nor has a plan for further development been drafted yet. Provision for developing mathematical skills is good in science, history, geography and business studies but does not feature strongly in the teaching of other subjects, even though plans for numeracy can be found in schemes of work. Monitoring of this area of the school's work is not sufficient to ensure that the well-formulated policy has the necessary impact.

## **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good leadership and management are building team effectiveness and providing clear direction for development, following a period of difficulty in staffing.
- The introduction of new courses offers a significantly wider choice of qualifications for 16 year olds, bringing more relevance and breadth to the curriculum.
- Sharing of good practice between teachers is addressing the need to provide pupils with a wider range of learning opportunities.
- Progress towards targets is not monitored sufficiently effectively, and intervention strategies are not yet well enough implemented, to ensure achievement reflects prior attainment.
- Renewed liaison with the feeder schools is beginning to identify the needs of Year 9 students on transfer, in order to build effectively on earlier learning, but is not yet strong enough.

## Commentary

90. Overall standards of attainment in GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11 are above average when compared with schools nationally. Taking all GCSE courses into account, the proportions of pupils gaining high grade passes in a science qualification in 2004 was slightly lower than in the previous two years. The proportion of pupils achieving the highest grades is less than the national average, and girls slightly outperform boys. There has been a similar situation over the last three years. A significant number of pupils in Year 11 attain grades in science below those attained in other subjects.
91. In the 2004 National Curriculum tests, results at the end of Year 9 are likely to be well above average compared with all schools nationally. This high level of performance has been maintained over the past few years, but there has been no improvement in the proportion of pupils attaining Level 5 or above for the last two years. The comparative performance of girls and boys has varied from year to year. Standards of attainment by the end of Year 9 in comparison with schools in similar circumstances are well below average
92. Achievement throughout Years 9 to 11 is satisfactory, and better than that indicated by past test results. In the lessons seen during the inspection, and in the work sampled, achievement is limited by the range of teaching styles, particularly for the higher attaining pupils. Pupils are not given sufficient opportunities for individual open-ended learning to provide them with appropriate challenges for their ability. Much of the work seen is based on tasks designed to record facts or answer simple questions. This results in the higher order skills of evaluating, analysing or interpreting being underdeveloped. Where teachers engage students in investigative or more challenging tasks, increased involvement in learning raises achievement. This is increasingly happening as a result of the leadership of the new head of department. In some lessons there is a high expectation of pace, and targeted questioning challenges students to develop their knowledge and understanding. In other lessons, teachers still engage students in largely passive tasks which do not adequately allow them to achieve their potential.
93. Opportunities to engage in practical activities in Year 9 are limited. This depresses achievement in coursework in Years 10 and 11, when pupils are required to employ well-practised investigative skills. The need to improve achievement has been identified by the department as a target in the departmental development plan. A programme of study designed to develop investigative skills has been introduced in the latter stages of Year 9, which should lead to enhanced achievement in Years 10 and 11 over time. Pupils have well developed numeracy skills and, given the opportunity, use them well to enhance the quality of their work. Underdeveloped literacy skills are being addressed by making scientific vocabulary more accessible.
94. The quality of teaching and learning in all years is satisfactory. In some lessons teachers provide repetitive tasks that do not capture students` imagination or interest. Other lessons provide stimulating and challenging learning opportunities, and these are welcomed by pupils, although their skills of working collaboratively and with self-discipline are underdeveloped. The lack of motivation in some pupils, resulting



from their previous learning experiences, is beginning to be addressed by better planning for participation in learning. There is a real commitment to share good practice through lesson observations and regular exchange between teachers, and this is extending the range of learning opportunities offered to all pupils. More innovative styles of teaching are being introduced, supported by recently revised schemes of work. New appointments and responsibility structures are enhancing this development. This is making an increased demand on resources, particularly practical equipment, some of which is inadequate.

95. Pupils are increasingly being involved in the assessment processes in place in the department. They comment on the presentation of the work of their peers, and evaluate their own performance in tests and examinations. This will allow teachers to focus their marking on comments relating to strengths and weaknesses in the achievement of targets. This practice is currently inconsistent, and consequently some pupils are not sufficiently supported in the achievement of learning targets.
96. New leadership and management in the department are good. There is a clear focus on appropriate short and longer-term goals. Staffing difficulties have been overcome, although a legacy remains in the attitudes of some pupils. Performance review of the department is regarded as constructive, and departmental development plans correctly identify key elements for improvement. A wider range of courses leading to qualifications for 16 year olds has been offered, with pupils now having choice between traditional and vocational routes. Indications are that these courses are providing greater motivation, and will lead to higher levels of achievement. Initiatives to improve the transition, and consequent achievement, of pupils from partner schools into Year 9 have begun to be implemented. Recent appointments and new management responsibilities have resulted in a more cohesive team, and this is beginning to benefit learning. The staff team are energetically and enthusiastically working together to redress barriers to improvement. The ongoing support offered by senior management is of good quality, and appreciated by the department. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Specialist school status has led to very good improvement since the previous inspection.
- The very good leadership has vision and focus for raising standards.
- Pupils in Year 9 are not fully aware of their progress because assessment is not informative enough.
- The extensive network of computers is reliable due to very good technician support.

### **Commentary**

97. Teachers' assessments of pupils' standards at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were above average, and there was a similar picture in 2004. There has been very good improvement in GCSE results in 2004 from previous years. These results are now

likely to be above the national average, and represent very good achievement for this group of pupils, because they did not have the advantage of taught ICT lessons when they were in Year 9. Standards seen in lessons in the main school are above those expected nationally. Achievement is generally good because most pupils do better than expected, given their prior attainment. Pupils studying the AS level course in Year 10 have very high achievement.

98. Teaching and learning are both good. Lessons are planned very well, and teachers have very good subject knowledge. Pupils' attitudes are generally good and very good in Year 9. They develop ICT skills readily and are keen to explore ideas further, particularly in the programming of control environments. Homework adds valuable opportunities to extend learning. Pupils are engaged in interesting activities, and are sufficiently challenged to enable all of them, including those with special educational needs, to succeed in learning well. Teachers use ICT very well when preparing lesson resources, and provide a good model for pupils to follow. Assessment and monitoring of pupils' work are very good, but pupils in Year 9 are not aware of the levels they are working at in their day-to-day ICT activities. Teachers give generously of their time running a wide variety of clubs and extension lessons.
99. Very good leadership and vision have enabled the area to develop rapidly, especially through the specialist ICT school status. Management of ICT teaching and technical support is very good. Teachers are constantly striving to improve standards. The department regularly reviews its performance and encourages teachers to attend further development courses. The innovative addition of new courses in Year 10 ensures that all pupils' needs are catered for. The head of department works tirelessly and is an excellent role model for other teachers in her department.
100. Accommodation is good. Rooms are light and spacious and there are very good wall displays. However, lack of air conditioning units means that some rooms get too hot and uncomfortable when all the computers are switched on. Resources are very good. The ICT suites are well equipped with modern computers, and there is a very good range of software. The technicians and network co-ordinator are highly valued. They rapidly respond to problems and ensure that the computer network is reliable.
101. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. Standards have improved because the equipment and number of ICT suites are far better, and there is a wide and varied curriculum for all pupils. ICT skills are now above average.

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

102. Provision in ICT across the curriculum is good. The school endeavours to make full use of its ICT facilities by encouraging pupils to use them in timetabled lessons, the Learn Centre and in homework. This is raising pupils' ICT skills, which are now exceeding national expectations. ICT is used particularly well in religious education, business studies, geography and for pupils who have special educational needs. Art, however, has yet to utilise ICT opportunities more effectively, and computer aided design and manufacture is only in its early stages in design and technology.

### **HUMANITIES**

## Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good, and standards are above average by the end of Year 11.
- Teachers use their good knowledge of the subject to make learning interesting.
- Very good accommodation and resources enable pupils to learn well.
- The writing of average and lower attaining pupils in Year 9 is weak.
- Teaching strategies do not always address the needs of all learners.

### Commentary

103. Standards in the current Year 9 are average. This represents satisfactory achievement for pupils, including those with special educational needs. Pupils of all abilities demonstrate satisfactory factual knowledge of both human and physical geography. Lower attaining pupils have a less well developed understanding of climate and the presentation of their diagram work is notably weaker. Pupils' map skills and the use of atlases are satisfactory. The writing of higher attaining pupils is good: they use a variety of approaches to describe and explain their work. However, the writing of average and lower attaining pupils is weaker, especially in the use of geographical language and in their ability to explain processes.
104. In 2003, GCSE results were above average. In 2004, results improved still further, continuing a pattern of steady improvement since the last inspection. Virtually every pupil secured a GCSE pass, with over two thirds at grades A\* to C. Overall, the performance of girls has been better than boys.
105. Standards in the current Year 11 are above average. There is good achievement by pupils who opt for geography. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject and of the examination requirements and this enables pupils to achieve well. Pupils have a good understanding of topics such as glaciation and population. Pupils develop good enquiry skills and can apply these successfully to studies of the local environment. Coursework is good; assignments are well structured and show good use and interpretation of data. Many pupils demonstrate good use and application of computer skills to enhance their work through word processing, graphics and Internet research.
106. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers are enthusiastic and committed, and use a range of effective approaches in the classroom. Resources, including Power Point, are used effectively to make lessons interesting and to help pupils consolidate what they have learned. However, teachers do not always use strategies that meet the needs of all learners. Lower attaining pupils, especially in Year 9, need more support with writing. Across all years, there are insufficient extension activities for the more able pupils. Assessment procedures are good, pupils' work is marked accurately and there is good guidance on what they need to do to improve. The management of pupils' behaviour is good, relationships in the classroom are good and pupils display positive attitudes to their work.

107. The leadership and management of geography are good. There are good procedures in place to monitor and evaluate the work of the department. Strong departmental teamwork is helping to improve teaching and learning. Teaching staff are well qualified; accommodation and learning resources are of very good quality and meet the needs of the curriculum well. Geography is now taught in new accommodation, where rooms are suited and there is a very pleasant environment for learning. There is a very good range of textbooks, atlases and video material. Good use is made of computers. The curriculum is good; the breadth of the curriculum has been enhanced with an additional GCSE course for pupils in Years 10 and 11 aimed at providing a more appropriate course of study for lower attaining pupils. There is good residential fieldwork for pupils in Year 10 which supports them well with their coursework. However, there is no fieldwork for pupils in Year 9.
108. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Teaching has improved and this has led to improvements in the GCSE results which are now above average.

## History

Provision in history is **good**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and learning enable pupils to achieve well, so that standards are above expectations by the end of Year 9, and well above average by the end of Year 11.
- Leadership and management of the subject are good.
- The marking of pupils' work is of variable quality, especially in relation to literacy.
- When expectations are unclear and challenging behaviour is not well managed, the pace of learning and achievement of other pupils is affected.

## Commentary

109. Pupils enter the school with varying levels of attainment in the subject and respond well to specialist teaching. As they move through Year 9, they further develop knowledge, understanding and skills so that, by the end of the year, standards are above the expectation for those gaining National Curriculum Level 5 or above, and well above for those gaining Level 6 and above. Work seen and lessons observed reflect these results. They show that all pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve well and refine their skills of source analysis, and gain knowledge and understanding of key developments in 19th century medical research and the contributory social and environmental factors that affect public health.
110. By the end of Year 11, standards are well above the national average. In the 2003 GCSE examinations the proportions of pupils gaining A\* and A grades, as well as A\* to C grades are well above national averages. Lessons and work seen broadly reflect these results. As they move through Years 10 and 11, pupils gain a secure understanding of life in England in the middle ages, the history of medicine, and settlement in the United States of America, which form three of their GCSE areas of study. Their skills of source analysis, and the use of first and second hand evidence,

improve significantly following their visit and in depth study of Framlingham Castle. Their achievement is good.

111. Standards of literacy, numeracy and application of ICT progress well as pupils move through Years 9 to 11. Most pupils are able to use technical terms in appropriate contexts, have a secure grasp of chronology, and use ICT with both care and ingenuity for research purposes.
112. The quality of teaching is good; none of the teaching seen was less than satisfactory. Where teaching is well planned and has clear learning intentions and expectations of pupils, the well-structured learning tasks promote good achievement. A range of teaching and learning methods motivates and challenges pupils to ask and answer questions, investigate and research aspects of the topic, and explore causes and consequences of actions and events. However, in some lessons where expectations are unclear, challenging pupils, whose behaviour is not well managed, prevent others from learning and achieving high standards. On some other occasions, teaching lacks energy and pace that will maintain the involvement of all in the learning, as well as provide challenge, especially for the higher attaining pupils.
113. Leadership and management are good. There is a clear rationale for the department's work and a development plan and schemes of work to support the planning of teaching and learning. The marking of pupils' work varies in quality and not all teachers give sufficient attention to the accuracy of syntax and spelling. Where marking is detailed, clear guidance is provided so that pupils know what they have to do to improve their work. The monitoring of pupils' attainment and progress is well done. The curriculum is well planned and meets statutory requirements. Satisfactory improvement has been made since the last inspection.

## **Religious education**

Provision in religious education is **excellent**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Excellent leadership and management are key factors in the high standards achieved.
- Excellent procedures for assessment and tracking of progress make a significant contribution to pupils' achieving well above average results in GCSE.
- The high expectations, excellent subject expertise, and the enthusiasm of the teachers ensure that pupils achieve very well.

### **Commentary**

114. The attainment of pupils at the end of Year 9 is above the level expected by the Locally Agreed Syllabus for religious education. Pupils of all abilities reach the expected level and the majority exceed it. Lower attaining pupils do particularly well in reaching the necessary level in a short space of time. Pupils in Year 9 readily identify examples of suffering in the world, and explain how these affect human lives. Many go beyond offering examples, such as war, by recognising that prejudice, discrimination, belief and behaviour can also be the causes of suffering. Pupils know, understand and can explain orally, and in written form, how beliefs affect actions. The

standards attained at the end of Year 9 reflect good achievement for all pupils of all levels of attainment.

115. In 2003, GCSE results in the religious education short course were well above the national average. In 2004, results are again likely to be well above the national average. These results were also those showing the highest value-added in the school, with 59 per cent of pupils exceeding their target grades. Pupils of all levels of attainment, in both Years 10 and 11, engage very well in discussion of religious beliefs and philosophical ideas. Year 10 pupils know the relevance of the Resurrection to Christians, and demonstrate their good understanding of the Christian concept of the soul. Year 11 pupils use evaluative language very effectively when discussing the persecution of the Jews and the wider implications of religious and social prejudice. The standards reached by pupils in the GCSE short course, with the majority attaining above their target grades, represent excellent achievement.
116. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Pupils' learning benefits from excellent planning, high expectations and challenge. Targeted questioning demonstrates teachers' excellent subject knowledge. Excellent assessment practice results from teachers acting on assessment data, tracking the progress of individual pupils, addressing their learning needs, informing them of ways in which they can improve, and jointly setting challenging targets. Very effective relationships and management of learning are key factors in the very good provision for lower attaining pupils and those who have special educational needs. The subject makes a very good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, with a particularly significant impact on spiritual awareness through the use of thought provoking learning activities. Attitudes to the subject are very good, and reflected in the fact that 16 students have currently chosen to be taught the GCSE religious studies full course in their own time after school.
117. Subject leadership and management are excellent. The head of department has made an outstanding contribution to raising standards in religious education through high aspirations, innovative methods, excellent subject expertise, vision and dedication. The head of department and her specialist colleague make an excellent team. They know how to ensure that pupils learn, and what pupils need to know and understand in order to achieve the highest standards. The specialist teaching room is an excellent support to teaching and learning with its 'thinking area' and displays. Religious education was a failing subject at the last inspection but has made outstanding progress. Improvement since the last inspection is excellent.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **Design and technology**

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

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

- Food technology results for 2004 are likely to be above average.
- Pupils use their ICT skills well in food technology.
- The marking and assessment of pupils' work is good.

- The lack of a head of department has had a detrimental effect on the work of the department.
- There has been a lack of effective monitoring of pupils' work on some examination courses.

## Commentary

118. By the end of Year 9, standards of work of boys and girls are at the levels expected nationally, which represents satisfactory achievement from their starting points. Teacher assessments show a decline in the percentage of pupils attaining the higher levels, and that girls' work is of a higher standard than boys'. No higher quality work was seen during the inspection. Pupils of all levels of competence have satisfactory practical skills, and can apply general ICT skills to support their work, but they have insufficient knowledge of how to use computer aided design and manufacture. Pupils have insufficient skills in developing their own product design ideas. Those with lower levels of competence do not always show the necessary links between stages in the design process.
119. The 2003 GCSE examination results were close to the national average, but with significant differences between the specialist options. The results for 2004 were better than those for 2003, but results in resistant materials were significantly lower than those in other areas. Food technology results are likely to be above the national average in 2004. Overall, there has been a rising trend in results that has kept pace with the national average. Boys' results were below those of girls, but this was not evident in work seen during the inspection. In Years 10 and 11, pupils use their ICT skills well in food technology, to use a nutritional analysis program when developing recipes, for example. As in Year 9, pupils have insufficient skills in the use of computer aided design and manufacture, and lower attaining pupils do not always provide sufficiently detailed drawings from which to work.
120. Pupils have satisfactory attitudes to learning, which contributes to their satisfactory achievement. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported by class teachers and other support staff, which enables them to achieve as well as other pupils.
121. Teaching and learning are both satisfactory, with some that are good in Year 9 and Years 10 and 11. This is an improvement since the previous inspection. In the best lessons, teachers' good subject knowledge is used well to extend pupils' understanding, for example, when using questions to review and reinforce work. Lesson planning in Year 9 does not offer opportunities for more competent or talented pupils to work at higher levels. Marking and assessment of all pupils' work is good, indicating how they can improve.
122. Day-to-day management of the department is satisfactory. However, despite efforts by the school management, the school has been unable to appoint a head of department, or sufficient specialist staff. This has led to leadership being unsatisfactory, as various important issues have not been addressed. For example, the decline in higher level work by the end of Year 9 has not been acted upon, and work in some of the examination classes has not been effectively monitored. The school has only recently obtained facilities for computer aided design and manufacture, the lack of which has previously had a negative effect on pupils'

attainment. A significant number of pupils In Year 11 were unable to follow a design and technology option to examination level because of lack of staff. Accommodation is satisfactory overall. That for food technology is very good and the department's ICT suite is very well used to support pupils' learning.

123. Teaching has improved since the last inspection when much of it was unsatisfactory, there was a lack of rigour in maintaining progress and an inability to sustain responsible working attitudes in the workshops. GCSE results show an improving trend, with some good achievement on all three short courses in 2004. Pupils' practical skills, which were weak at the last inspection, are now satisfactory. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

### **Art and design**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Relationships are good and teachers know and care for students well.
- Planning of lessons is not detailed enough to ensure that pupils of all abilities have sufficient challenge.
- Drawing skills are taught well.
- Computers and three-dimensional materials are used, but not enough.



## Commentary

124. Pupils in Year 9 are working at a standard in line with the national expectation, and their achievement is satisfactory. Pupils in Year 11 are working at a standard that is about average. The percentage of grades from A\* to C at GCSE in 2004 is likely to be below the national average, having been around average in the previous four years. In 2003, although girls' results were above average overall, girls did not do as well in art as they did in other subjects. In 2004 however, girls' achievement improved and both boys and girls achieved as well in art as they did in other subjects that they took, although results overall were lower than in 2003.
125. Higher attaining pupils draw well in all years, with some very good use of tone to show form and texture. Some higher attaining pupils in Year 11 have used silk painting very effectively to interpret the theme 'Water'. Generally, pupils' technical skills are more developed than their knowledge and understanding. Work using computers and three-dimensional materials is underdeveloped. Art is a popular choice for GCSE and appeals to the full ability range. Most pupils achieve their target grades but a proportion of them, across the full range of attainment, do not. Many of the more challenging pupils are managed well and are successful in completing the GCSE course.
126. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. Relationships and the quality of care are good, and have a positive effect on pupils, particularly the more challenging. Procedures for assessment and the monitoring of progress are good, but are not used enough to inform planning. Planning for lessons is not in sufficient depth and detail to provide challenge to all levels of attainment, and this is a major factor in pupils failing to reach their target grades. There is insufficient focus on learning outcomes to make lesson introductions, question and explanation and plenary sessions fully effective. Many middle and lower attaining pupils are comfortable to rely on the teacher, but some higher attaining pupils feel that they would like the greater degree of control of their work that more focused planning and the sharing of aims and objectives would allow.
127. Leadership is satisfactory and management is good. Systems for monitoring progress are thorough, and there is good liaison with partner schools. Forward planning identifies appropriate priorities although not in the detail needed to raise standards and give challenge to all pupils. Schemes of work are not detailed enough to ensure consistent delivery across the department. The department makes a good contribution to the cultural development of pupils through the study of artists' work both here and abroad. Trips to local and national galleries inspire and inform pupils' work. There are opportunities to attend workshops outside lesson time. Resources are adequate for the current curriculum, but will not support further development in work using computers, printmaking and sculptural materials. Teaching staff have heavy teaching commitments, and there is no technician support. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

## Music

Provision in music is **good**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well, and GCSE results are well above average.
- The quality and range of the extra-curricular activities are very good.
- Marking is thorough, detailed and helps pupils to improve.
- Progress in some Year 9 lessons is hampered by the unsatisfactory attitudes of a small minority of pupils.
- Lessons are well planned and make very good use of resources.
- Schemes of work require more detail of actual skills to be taught at the various stages.

## Commentary

128. Standards of attainment are above expectations in Year 9 and in Years 10 and 11. GCSE results have been consistently well above average in recent years. In work seen in Years 10 and 11, standards are above expectations, with a substantial proportion of pupils performing at high grade levels. The pupils' compositions are well structured harmonically with well shaped melodies. Their listening responses are good; they can identify differences in the characteristics of various musical genres. When singing and playing there is good sensitivity to style and idiom.
129. In Year 9 standards are above average. The pupils' compositions have well shaped melodies with a good feel for tonality; they exploit different textures well. There is effective use of modern compositional devices such as minimalism. Performances are fluent showing good keyboard skills and they keep well in time together in ensembles.
130. Pupils in all years achieve well. Higher attaining and gifted and talented pupils take advantage of the extra opportunities offered in lessons and extra-curricular activities. Pupils with special educational needs also do well and make good progress. They are helped by a good level of individual attention from the teachers. There are no significant differences in the performance of boys and girls.
131. Teaching and learning are good in Year 9 and in Years 10 and 11. Both the class and instrumental teachers have very good subject knowledge and use it effectively. Lessons are well planned with very good use of resources. The tasks set allow the pupils to perform at different levels, but could sometimes be better adapted to meet the needs of differing groups of pupils. Some lessons in Year 9 suffer from a lack of pace, as a result of the teacher having to deal with a minority of pupils showing unsatisfactory attitudes. Marking is very detailed and thorough and informs pupils well about how to improve; however there is insufficient information on how they are doing in relation to national standards. There is good use of ICT in Years 10 and 11 but insufficient in Year 9 due to lack of equipment. Relationships with pupils are very good, and this leads to good involvement of pupils in the very good range of extra-curricular activities and instrumental teaching.
132. Leadership and management are good. The head of department provides a very good role model. There is good monitoring of how well the pupils are doing. Instrumental teaching and extra-curricular work are well co-ordinated. Schemes of work provide for effective coverage of the National Curriculum but have insufficient

detail on the actual skills to be taught at the various stages. The department makes a very strong contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils, both through work in class and through the extra-curricular activities. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Management has improved. The take-up for GCSE is significantly higher. Standards of attainment have improved.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

### **Physical education**

Provision in physical education is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Leadership and management are very good.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge, expertise, and enthusiasm.
- There is insufficient focus on improving the standards of pupils who do not study for GCSE.
- Monitoring and assessment procedures are very good.
- There is a lack of formal accreditation for Year 11 pupils not studying for GCSE.

### **Commentary**

133. On entry to Year 9, pupils have varied experiences of physical activities and games. In response to effective teaching, they make good progress and achieve well. In team games, such as hockey, football, and netball, they begin learning the skills and tactics required to play games with confidence and enjoyment. In swimming, most pupils improve in technique, strength, and stamina. At the end of Year 9 standards are in line with expectations overall, and above expectations for a number of pupils. In 2004, the GCSE results for pupils in Year 11 were good, and exceeded the national average, with 100 per cent of pupils achieving A\*-G grades. Pupils choosing to study physical education for GCSE present a wide range of both physical and academic abilities. Staff have therefore introduced a range of strategies, such as study skills and a revision guide available on CD-ROM, to assist pupils in improving their work. Staff monitor pupils' coursework closely, identifying areas of difficulty, and ensuring that work is completed on time. The standards of pupils who do not take GCSE are average. In Year 11 they have some choice of the physical activities and games in which they participate. This maintains their interest and motivation and most make good progress and achieve well. Although some pupils receive in-school recognition of their achievements, there is no external accreditation for the efforts of pupils who are not studying for GCSE.

134. The curriculum and schemes of work are well planned to meet the needs of the pupils. They have the opportunity to experience a variety of physical activities and games, and benefit from being taught by specialist subject teachers, who have high levels of expertise and enthusiasm. Good indoor and outdoor facilities, including an indoor heated swimming pool, enable physical activities and games to take place simultaneously. Plans are in hand to remedy the poor condition of the changing rooms.

135. The quality of teaching and its impact on learning are good. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Most lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and are carefully planned so that skills and knowledge are developed logically. Lesson objectives are clear in the majority of lessons, and shared with the pupils, so that they understand what is expected of them. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are enthusiastic in their delivery, passing this enthusiasm to their classes. Levels of pupil participation are high. In some lessons there are not enough opportunities, such as leading warm up activities, for pupils to exercise responsibility. Occasionally insufficient time is spent on encouraging pupils to develop the skills, strategies and techniques that would allow them to reach a higher standard. The teachers give freely of their time both at lunchtime and after school to provide a variety of well attended physical activities and games. The department, through its very good assessment procedures, monitors, tracks, and records pupils' progress very effectively.
136. The leadership of the department is very good, with the head of department providing clear educational direction. She gives good support to members of the department, by sharing her expertise and offering sound advice and guidance. Management is very effective. The teachers work well together, and co-operate closely with the head of department in organising and managing the tasks necessary for the smooth running of the department. Regular departmental reviews provide a systematic way in which improvements required in the subject are identified, targeted and addressed, and in which good practice can be recognised. Improvement since the last inspection is good. All the areas identified for improvement in the previous report have been addressed.

## **BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES**

### **Business education**

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

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- The outstanding leadership and management of the subject are characterised by high expectations, very effective teamwork and meticulous planning.
- Procedures for tracking and analysing pupils' progress and attainment are excellent.
- The extensive range of business courses enables pupils of all levels of attainment to achieve very well.
- The comprehensive support for learning and access to teachers is very much appreciated by all pupils.
- Whilst classroom teaching is good, it is less effective when it is not authoritative, and learning outcomes are not made explicit and used to check progress and understanding.

## Commentary

137. Pupils achieve very well on a comprehensive range of business courses that cater for all levels of attainment. Results are improving on all of the courses each year. A major factor in this drive for success is the excellent leadership and management of the department, which support and inspire pupils of all aptitudes to fulfil their potential.
138. In 2003, 92 per cent of GCSE business pupils gained A\*-C grades, which is well above the national average of 55 per cent. This improved to 96 per cent in 2004, with an impressive 30 per cent of pupils gaining A\* or A grades. The higher attaining pupils take an additional GCSE in business and communications with similar success, where 97 per cent gained A\*-C grades in 2004. In another GCSE business course offered for the lower attaining pupils, based on office applications, 56 per cent gained A\*-C in 2004, around the national average for all pupils.
139. The department is also characterised by innovative curriculum planning. Pupils for whom the GCSE is not appropriate are offered a range of relevant courses, including word processing and key skills, again resulting in very good achievement. The work of current pupils is above expectations overall, representing very good achievement. For some outstanding pupils, their understanding and use of business terminology are excellent, as is their use of a range of computer software to illustrate and support their work, for example in designing a working website for businesses.
140. Teaching and learning are good overall with some excellent features. All teachers have a secure knowledge of the subject, are very well prepared, and provide feedback on pupils' work which is thorough, and details exactly what pupils need to do to improve. Relationships are generally good, and pupils have a positive attitude to the subject and fully appreciate the support and access to teachers in the department. For example, in a very good Year 11 business and communications lesson, the informative and challenging teaching and expert support created a pleasant but productive learning environment, in which pupils were able to evaluate each other's work. The enthusiastic teaching of a good Year 10 lesson ensured that the whole class developed their understanding of business organisation structures. Teaching is less effective where it is not authoritative, and learning outcomes are not made explicit, shared with pupils and used to evaluate the success of the lesson.

Assessment of pupils' work is excellent, with meticulous recording and tracking of pupils' progress and attainment. This then informs curriculum and lesson planning, and provides valuable information on the choice of course for pupils, particularly the lower attaining.

141. The outstanding head of department has a clear vision for developing the department and effectively manages and evaluates the work of the specialist staff teaching the courses. The excellent ethos of the department, where support for the learning of all pupils is extensive and much appreciated, is shared by all. The dedicated business area is very well resourced with computers and enhanced with displays of pupils' work. The range of additional activities, including business trips, links with local businesses, pupil certificates for hard work and internally run businesses and competitions, all provide an environment which stimulates and rewards pupils for their endeavours. The department also makes a significant contribution to the school's cross-curricular themes, which include the promotion of work-based learning, citizenship and the development of very good computer skills. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

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

Personal, social and health education (PHSE) was sampled.

142. The programme for PSHE includes taught lessons in Year 9 and structured tutorial sessions in Years 9, 10 and 11. Two Year 9 lessons were sampled, plus nine tutorial sessions covering Years 9 to 11. In tutorials, some pupils in Year 9 were working on personal goals, and some on bullying. In Year 10, some pupils were working on organisation and self-management, including the management of money, and some were considering the dangers of Internet chat rooms. In Year 11, some pupils were learning about contraception, and others about stress.
143. The strength of the programme is in discussion, which is usually well promoted by teachers, despite the short period of time available. Pupils put forward their views effectively, and show a good understanding of concepts and issues. In the Year 11 tutorial on contraception, pupils discussed the issues seriously and sensibly as they worked through a test which recapped information studied previously. In the Year 11 session on stress, the teacher used good prompts, which engendered an animated discussion in which pupils were closely engaged. Both these sessions provided good opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills, as well as PSHE knowledge and understanding.
144. Some aspects of the programme are not sufficiently challenging. The PSHE booklets give a good structure to lessons, but the written tasks are too low level for many pupils. Whilst there is a focus on key skills such as literacy, the limited nature of written activities does not allow pupils to improve their skills. In one Year 10 session on self-management, no teaching was offered and pupils worked with varying degrees of commitment on a module concerned with self-organisation. In Year 9 sessions, pupils tended to behave in an immature manner, with concentration which dissipated easily, and a tendency to break into chat not related to the work in hand. This behaviour was related to low-level tasks; in discussion pupils concentrated well and participated readily.

145. In the two lessons of PSHE observed in Year 9, teaching and learning were good and very good. In one lesson on sex education, the teacher established ground rules for this sensitive topic very effectively, and made good use of friendship groupings to promote discussion, so that pupils felt comfortable to talk. Both lessons brought together very successfully learning about sexual relationships, and the effects of drugs and alcohol. This was done in the context of how friends could help and support each other, as well as where professional advice and help could be sought. Teaching and learning made a strong contribution to moral and social education.

## **Citizenship**

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- A wide range of good teaching materials supports pupils' learning, but the materials do not always provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to demonstrate and record their learning against the full range of citizenship expectations.
- Good leadership and management have established the subject.
- Coverage of the citizenship programme of study is not yet embedded in all subject areas, or being taught as intended.

## **Commentary**

146. Standards at the end of Year 9 are in line with national expectations. Pupils demonstrate satisfactory knowledge and understanding of topical events and discuss confidently issues of being responsible citizens. Most pupils can provide a good justification for their personal opinions about problems in the world such as war, and most take an active part in school based activities. Achievement is satisfactory.

147. At the end of Year 11, standards are above national expectations. Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of topical events and rights and responsibilities. Year 10 pupils think about and describe pertinent examples of racism, genocide and discrimination on a national and international scale, including South Korea, Iraq and the Nazis persecution of Jews. Year 11 pupils evaluate information very well, and consider different ways in which solutions might be found to problems. Most pupils make good or very good quality contributions to discussion. Achievement was satisfactory in the lessons seen, but was frequently limited by the shortage of time in tutor periods to reinforce the learning.

148. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. A wide range of good teaching material supports the tutor-based lessons. This material is developing the pupils' ability to be informed citizens. However, the teaching booklets, particularly in Year 9, restrict opportunities for pupils to give extended expression in a written form to their knowledge and understanding of the particular issues studied. Pupils' self-assessment, whilst useful in evaluating what is covered, is not sufficiently focused on measuring progress and understanding against the citizenship expectations and programme of study.

149. Leadership and management are good. The co-ordinator's enthusiasm, commitment and good management have led to the successful promotion and establishment of the subject. There is good identification of the areas for continued improvement, including assessment, the use of homework and the improvement of the teaching of citizenship in those subject areas that are not yet covering what is expected. Through the topics covered and the teaching methods, the subject makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Citizenship was not inspected at the last inspection.



## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

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

### *Level 3 GCE AS level courses*

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	6	100	80.1	33.3	23.7	33.3	29.9
Biology	4	50	65.2	0	11.1	10	20.6
Business studies	5	80	76.4	20	16.3	28	26.2
Chemistry	1	100	72.7	0	13.9	20	24.1
Communication studies	5	60	86.4	20	23.8	24	32
Drama	1	100	86.5	0	19.6	30	30.6
English/English language	4	100	82.9	25	17.5	32.5	28.7
English Literature	3	100	85.9	0	19.1	26.7	30.2
French	2	100	78.2	0	18.9	25	27.6
Design and technology	2	100	74.9	0	15.1	30	25.3
General Studies	1	0	73.9	0	17.8	0	25.7
Geography	1	100	74.3	100	19.8	50	26.5
German	2	50	81.5	0	19.3	10	28.9
History	1	0	80.7	0	19.5	0	28.6
Information technology	9	66.7	67	11.1	10.09	24.4	21.4
Mathematics	6	66.7	61.9	0	17.1	21.7	22.1
Music	1	100	86.5	0	21.4	40	30.7
Other languages	1	100	82.6	0	42.9	40	36.2
Other sciences	8	25	71.4	0	15.8	5	24.3
Other social studies	3	66.7	69.7	66.7	16.7	33.3	24.1
Physics	6	50	68.6	0	14.4	13.3	22.7
Religious studies	2	100	80.2	50	22.6	50	29.8
Spanish	1	100	78.5	100	17.7	50	27.3
Sports/PE studies	1	100	73.2	0	11.4	30	23.1

Note: AS results listed here are those “cached in” and may differ from those referred to in subject paragraphs, where inspectors take account of the full range of AS results.

### ***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	9	100	98.6	11.1	50.2	51.1	87.5
Biology	9	88.9	96.4	44.4	39.2	66.7	78.6
Business studies	12	100	98.7	25	36.8	71.7	80.1
Chemistry	7	100	97.6	57.1	49	85.7	84.9
Communication studies	23	100	99.4	17.4	37.8	69.6	82.1
English/English language	8	100	99.4	12.5	36.3	72.5	80.9
English Literature	10	100	99.5	20	46.5	76	86.5
French	5	100	98.8	20	51.5	76	87.6
Design and technology	10	100	97.8	20	35	74	77.9
General studies	7	85.7	94.7	0	31	48.6	73.1
Geography	5	80	98.7	0	44.5	48	84
German	2	100	98.4	0	47.9	60	84.8
History	6	100	99	16.7	44.6	73.3	84.6
Information technology	14	85.7	95.6	21.4	24.6	52.9	69.5
Mathematics	11	90.9	96.7	36.4	55.6	76.4	88.8
Music	3	100	98.8	33.3	38.9	73.3	81.1
Other languages	1	100	96.9	100	64.5	120	93.8
Other social sciences	15	100	97.3	40	41.5	80	80.3
Physics	7	85.7	96.7	42.9	44.6	71.4	81.7
Religious studies	10	100	98.8	90	46.7	108	85.6
Spanish	1	100	98.3	100	50.2	100	86.9
Sports/PE studies	11	100	98	27.3	30.9	74.5	75.2
Business VCE	9	100	65	0	14.6	55.6	60.1
Health and social care VCE	10	100	67.7	0	14.5	60	63.5
Leisure and recreation VCE	8	100	62.9	0	10.2	55	57.9

### ***Level 2 vocational qualifications***

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business studies Intermediate	3	100	N/a*	0	N/a	0	N/a
Health and social care Intermediate	1	100	N/a*	0	N/a	0	N/a

\*Note: The percentage of students nationally aged 16-18 obtaining Level 2 Intermediate vocational qualifications was 80 per cent.

## **ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

The inspection focus in this area was on English and French. However, work was also sampled in German and Spanish.

### **English**

Provision in English is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching of high quality leads students to enjoy the subject and to make very good progress.
- Teachers know their subject and their students very well.
- The broad curriculum permits students to make choices which closely match their interests and aptitudes.

### **Commentary**

150. GCE A level results in 2003 were below average for language and literature, and well below average in media studies examinations. In 2004 however, substantial improvement saw two thirds of candidates achieving A and B grades in both language and literature, and half achieving A and B grades for media. This indicates above average attainment and very good achievement because many students did better than might have been expected from their prior attainment.
151. Work seen during the inspection confirmed this picture of improving achievement. Though some groups are small, and some students lack confidence, the approaches adopted by teachers develop students' abilities and interest by carefully supported challenge. Expectations are high. Students are consistently required to discuss and present their interpretations of a variety of texts; active learning encourages both independence and co-operation. Writing shows similar signs of growing understanding and confidence. It covers a range from autobiography and narrative to critical commentary and comparison. Creative and analytical skills are therefore fostered, and promoted further by close marking which clearly indicates how to improve. Students recognise that they are well taught. They appreciate the teachers' ready availability and the evident concern for their academic and personal welfare.
152. Five lessons were observed during the inspection. One was good, two were very good, and two were outstanding. This explains why students in the recent past have consistently done better than their earlier performances would suggest. In a combined English and literature lesson, for example, a remarkable sequence of activities had students reading and commenting critically on each other's writing, modelling an effective opening to a Chaucer essay, analysing a newspaper article, and applying the emerging linguistic concepts to a Stevie Smith poem. What could have been fragmentary and rushed turned out to be coherent and illuminating because of the teacher's remarkable management, complete intellectual grasp of the subject, and alertness to the needs and potential of the participants.
153. Leadership is very good. The head of department's own teaching is inspirational. There is a clear focus across the board on providing students with manageable but

demanding intellectual challenge. The development of the sixth form curriculum has been very well managed to give a range of courses (language, literature, media and theatre studies) to match students' interests and capabilities.

154. Improved results, the high standards of teaching and learning, and the range of courses on offer: these features show that improvement since the last inspection has been good.

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

155. The majority of students have good language and literacy skills which support successful learning in their sixth form courses. No subject gives less than satisfactory attention to literacy development. In English, design and technology, business education, and modern foreign languages, inspectors noted good support for the language demands of the subject, through planned opportunities for discussion and close attention to the development of extended writing. Provision for literacy development in religious education is very good, resulting in discussion and writing of outstanding quality.

### **Modern foreign languages**

156. One lesson of Year 12 **German** was sampled. The teacher's very good subject knowledge and linguistic skills helped develop students' oral and aural skills. Very positive relationships enabled students to work well together. The teaching, learning and achievement were very good and standards were in line with expectations.
157. One lesson of **Spanish** was sampled in Year 13. Lesson planning was very good and up-to-date resources helped to motivate students. The lesson was conducted in very fluent Spanish. This contributed to raising the standard of speaking and listening, extended students' knowledge of grammar and very effectively developed their vocabulary. The teaching, learning and achievement were very good. The standard of listening, speaking and reading was above average.

### **French**

Provision in French is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The teachers have very good subject knowledge and linguistic skills, which result in students developing above average listening skills.
- Relationships are very good and as a result there is a very positive learning environment.
- Teaching strategies are imaginative and stimulating and develop students' confidence in speaking in front of an audience.

### **Commentary**

158. Over recent years, students have consistently attained pass grades in GCE A-level French. In 2003 all students again passed and in 2004 similar standards were achieved, when all students reached or surpassed their personal targets.
159. Standards overall in lessons and in written work are in line with expectations. Listening and reading skills are well developed. In Years 12 and 13, students cope very well with lessons conducted entirely in French and read up-to-date material on contemporary issues when given appropriate guidance and support. After skilful presentation and practise of new language, students in Years 12 and 13 speak confidently and with fluency. Some make good quality presentations using Power Point. Students are, in general, more hesitant, however, when asked to make impromptu comments or respond to unprepared questions. Both Year 12 and Year 13 students produce a wide range of well-presented written work. The quality of this work is very variable, however. Some produce accurate essays containing complex structures and appropriate vocabulary, but the work of other students contains many errors in basic grammar. Since the department has an inclusive policy regarding entry to the AS course, the above standards represent very good achievement in relation to students' prior attainment.
160. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and linguistic skills. The teaching is creative and imaginative. Students work very well in groups and pairs to brainstorm and practise oral work. Teachers and students make very good use of information technology to enhance teaching and learning. The quality of assessment in the classroom and of written work is very good and helps students to improve standards. Relationships between students and with the teachers are very good: humour is frequently used to motivate and encourage students to achieve their full potential. Students are hard working and have a positive attitude to work.
161. The leadership and management of French are very good. Teachers work very well together. The schemes of work and departmental documents are very comprehensive. Assessment is very effective in helping students improve the quality of their work.
162. Improvement since the last inspection is good since the teaching, learning and achievement are now very good and students consistently meet or exceed their targets.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The subject is popular and achievement is good.
- Teachers' pre-eminent subject knowledge and high expectations enable students to succeed.
- Assessment is used well to track the progress of individuals but less talented students do not receive the help and guidance that would help them excel.
- Students hardly ever use computers or graphic calculators in lessons.

## Commentary

163. At the end of Year 11, some of the most able mathematicians choose to transfer to other sixth forms. Consequently, the prior attainment of students joining sixth form mathematics courses is below what might usually be seen, although it is better among the minority of girls who choose mathematics.
164. Standards are average. In 2003 GCE AS results were well below average; in 2004 they were much better. GCE A-level results were average in both years. The small number who choose to study the further mathematics course attain above average results.
165. Students' achievement is good. Whether male or female, the most talented students make most progress, and those doing further mathematics achieve particularly well. A similar picture of average standards and good achievement, best in further mathematics, was witnessed during the inspection. Students' knowledge and skills are strongest in decision and pure mathematics; they do less well in mechanics.
166. Teaching and learning are good, and often very good in further mathematics. Teachers' extensive subject knowledge is a real and distinctive asset to this specialist college. Teachers use a varied range of teaching methods to engage students, and the pace is vigorous, particularly in the GCE A2 course and further mathematics. Lessons are well planned. Teachers prepare good learning resources and they use probing questioning to challenge students to think for themselves. They provide support, tailored to individual needs, and the students speak highly of their teachers. However, students rarely make notes for themselves and their folders are not well organised to provide good support for future revision. They receive little guidance about this, and it acts as a barrier to higher achievement among the less talented. Students hardly ever use computers or graphical calculators to help them to discover patterns for themselves and to hypothesise and model their ideas.
167. The use of assessment is good. Marking is accurate and thorough except in further mathematics. Students' progress is tracked carefully and they have clear and appropriate targets on which to focus. In some modules they receive good guidance regularly on how to improve, but in others it is scant. Those who experience difficulties with the subject feel the greatest impact of this inconsistency of guidance on what they need to do to improve their work.
168. Leadership is good and management satisfactory. Aspirations are high and teachers collaborate well. The emphasis has been on popularising the subject and strengthening the range of options, such as further mathematics. There is a comprehensive system for tracking students' progress, but available data are not scrutinised rigorously enough to identify priorities for further development, and the work of the team is not being systematically and regularly monitored.
169. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. It is remarkable that mathematics has become the second most popular subject in Year 12. GCE A-level further mathematics and GCE AS level mathematics have been introduced and up-to-date schemes of work have been drafted to help guide the large number of talented teachers who contribute to the sixth form courses.

## Mathematics across the curriculum

170. There is no organised provision for students to strengthen their mathematical understanding as a key skill for all. The GCSE retake course only attracted two pupils this year. There are 15 other Year 12 students who do not yet have a higher grade in GCSE mathematics. Most of them are taking intermediate level courses. The school does not actively guide these students to take the course. Nevertheless, most sixth form students' mathematical skills are strong, and present no barrier to learning in other subjects and there are good opportunities for students to practise their mathematical skills in several subjects, notably physics, chemistry and business studies.

## SCIENCE

The inspection focus in this area was on chemistry. However, work was sampled in biology and physics. A Year 12 **biology** lesson was sampled. Teaching and learning were good and enabled students to achieve well. In a Year 13 **physics** lesson the very good teaching and learning enabled students to achieve high levels of knowledge and understanding. In both lessons students had very positive attitudes to their work.

### Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **very good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are highly motivated and want to do their best.
- Very good leadership and teaching have led to good improvements since the previous inspection.
- Unsatisfactory accommodation in chemical storage and laboratory facilities limits students' investigation work.

### Commentary

171. Standards are above the national average. Numbers studying for GCE A-level examinations in previous years have been small. In 2003, results were above average and reflect the standards seen in lessons. Achievement is very good because students take responsibility for their own learning and do much better than would be expected. Students build very good practical skills; they instinctively work with health and safety as a prime consideration.

172. Teaching and learning are both very good. Teachers have an expert knowledge of the subject and the examination syllabus. Students have very good attitudes to learning, and there is high motivation and challenge in lessons. Teachers inspire students to do well in chemistry through enthusiasm, interesting activities and visits to places of scientific interest. Where students are fully involved in the learning they progress rapidly and are more challenged. However, in a few lessons, teachers use a lecturing style of teaching and students are more passive than active learners. Knowledge and understanding are reinforced and extended by thoughtful homework assignments.



Students are encouraged to use their ICT skills to enhance the presentation of their coursework, which they do very well.

173. Leadership and management are very good. The quality of leadership, which was a weakness at the previous inspection, is now very good. The head of department has very good vision for improving standards and has succeeded in increasing the popularity of the subject in the sixth form. There is a very good team spirit; teachers work together well, building good learning resources. Teachers regularly attend examination meetings and are always striving to improve students' progress through good monitoring and assessment procedures.
174. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. The preparation room does not have enough suitable storage space to store chemicals and equipment. The sixth form laboratory has insufficient taps and poorly located gas and electrical points. This limits the number of individual student investigations particularly when reflux condensers are required. Laboratory resources are satisfactory. The equipment is sufficient to meet most needs, but there are too few electronic balances to promote rapid pace in lessons where students are required to weigh chemicals.
175. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. The number of students electing to study chemistry in the sixth form is rising rapidly and leadership is now very good. Standards are beginning to rise and are now above national expectations.

#### **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

176. There was no inspection focus in this area. However work was sampled and three lessons were observed in: Year 12 diploma in digital applications; Year 12 GNVQ foundation level ICT; and Year 13 GCE A-level computing. Teaching and learning were good in all three lessons and ensured that students achieved well. Learning in the Year 12 GNVQ lesson made good use of ICT to develop work related activities. In the three lessons seen, students' attitudes to work were good.

#### **HUMANITIES**

177. The inspection focus in this area was on religious studies. However, work in geography, history and psychology was also sampled.
178. The good teaching and learning in a Year 13 geography lesson enabled students to achieve good levels of understanding about eco-systems and reach standards that were above average.
179. In a Year 13 history lesson, teaching and learning were good and enabled students to develop good levels of understanding of the significance of Lenin's return to Petrograd in 1917 and the impact of the April Theses.
180. Students in the Year 13 psychology class were observed exploring human relationships and considering how to measure a phenomenon such as "love". The very good teaching was well planned and the rapid pace of learning ensured that students remained focused and achieved highly. Their responses to questions showed a high degree of maturity, especially in their understanding of ethical issues.

181. GCE A-level law is taught through distance learning and the use of a video conferencing link between students and their tutor. No work was sampled, but results for A2 in 2004 were scrutinised. These showed achievement against targets was satisfactory. In the current AS course, all students are working at or above their targets.

## **Religious studies**

Provision in religious studies is **excellent**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Outstanding teaching and learning enable students to reach very high standards in external examinations as well as in class and homework assignments.
- Teachers' exceptional subject knowledge is skilfully used to plan teaching and learning, and is shared enthusiastically with students in all lessons.
- Excellent leadership and management provide a clear direction for the department's work.
- Detailed marking, and monitoring and tracking of students' progress, provide excellent feedback and help all learners to improve the quality and standard of their work.
- Students are highly committed to learning, have very positive attitudes to work, respond keenly to high expectations and receive excellent support for their personal development.

## **Commentary**

182. Students of religious studies experience an ethos where learning has no boundaries. They are challenged by a detailed study of the beliefs, values and responses of adherents, exploring profound questions that impinge on them in life and death. Teachers have very high expectations of their students. They provide significant opportunities for them to acquire knowledge, and make rapid progress in gaining understanding and skills. Students achieve outstandingly well and, in relation to national comparators, reach very high standards in GCE AS and A-level examinations, with most of them exceeding their target grades. Similar standards are also achieved in class and homework assignments.

183. All students have appropriate GCSE grades so that, when they enter Year 12, they respond well to the challenge in learning, for example, what it means to be a Hindu, and grapple with key concepts within the philosophy of religion course. The systematic, and often innovative, approach to learning ensures that levels of understanding beyond those required by the course are achieved. For example, in a philosophy lesson, Year 12 students were able to undertake a role-play activity to explore the similarities and differences between the views of Aristotle and Plato on reality, God, and the soul. In Year 13, students continue to grow in knowledge, understanding and skills as they eagerly study Buddhist concepts such as 'emptiness'.

#### Example of outstanding practice

**A highly innovative approach to exploring the differences between the writings of Aristotle and Plato, through the use of role-play, enabled Year 12 students to challenge their own understanding as well as that of their peers.**

The Year 12 challenge was: with basic knowledge and understanding of Aristotle's and Plato's views on reality, God and the soul, develop a role-play script in partnership with another student of an encounter and discussion between the two men.

The pairs worked exceptionally well: their individual contributions to script discussions were of a very high order. The presentations, with one partner playing Aristotle, the other Plato, were exceptional. Throughout the presentation of this imaginary encounter students were in role as well as in costume. Each role-play was a well-judged mixture of commitment and intellectual rigour laced with the irony and humour of dialogues on the *Agora*. The work showed very high levels of understanding and exceptional insight. The detailed analysis of each role-play, by peers and the teacher, provoked even further discussion and questions concerning the meaning and intentions of the philosophers' work.

The skilful lesson planning ensured that each student's interpretation of Aristotle's and Plato's views was challenged, by their role-play partner as well as within the post-presentation analysis. As a result, the extent of their knowledge and understanding was raised to even higher levels. The lesson's approach captured the excitement and enormous satisfaction of learning, as well as the challenge of exploring the fundamental differences in the teachings of the two philosophers, and their contribution to understanding key concepts within the philosophy of religion.

184. In their written and oral work students develop higher order thinking and writing skills in presenting arguments, supported by scholarly views and evidence, in response to very demanding questions and assignments. Students' thoughtful responses are accompanied by impressive displays of their depth of knowledge and understanding as they analyse, for instance, the views of Price and Hick on life after death and eschatological verification.

185. Excellent teaching and learning provide challenge throughout each lesson. The characteristics of the teaching include:

- the use of outstanding subject knowledge and scholarship in lesson planning and teaching;
- the rapid pace of learning, the high degree of challenge and the encouragement provided which enable all to achieve very highly;

- the use of open questions, well designed tasks and activities which ensure that students acquire a significant depth of understanding; and
- innovative approaches to learning which nurture curiosity, offer excitement and provide insights into life changing questions as students search for meaning.

186. Students' high level of involvement in learning is recognised, valued and rewarded. Work is thoroughly marked, assessed and progress is monitored to enable learners to identify points for further improvement.

187. Leadership and management of the area are excellent. Planning of the course and the further development of the subject are of a high quality. Staff and resources are extremely well matched to the current high quality provision. Students are extremely well served by this wholly inclusive department; they value greatly the excellent and supportive relationships provided. Improvement since the last inspection is excellent, as in the main school.

## **ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING**

The focus in this area was on design and technology, resistant materials. Provision is also made for food technology, and for some students to study GCE A-level electronics through distance learning and the use of a video conferencing link to their tutor.

### **Design and technology**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers have good subject knowledge in most areas, which they employ very effectively.
- Students have good ICT skills which they employ well.
- Assessment of students' work is good.
- Examination results for AS level were poor in 2004.
- Students have insufficient skills in the use of computer aided design and manufacture.

### **Commentary**

188. At GCE A-level, examination results over the past three years have been consistently in line with the average, with all students obtaining pass grades. Girls' results were lower than boys' in 2003. At GCE AS level there has been a decline in results over three years, with those in 2004 being poor. Boys' results were lower than girls' in 2004. At both levels work seen during the inspection was in line with expectations, and achievement satisfactory. No difference between boys' and girls' work was evident during the inspection.

189. Students with higher levels of competence have a good understanding of the stages in the design process. Where students study real life design situations, this leads to good motivation. Some students do not take account of the wider implications of design. For example, when analysing a pair of scissors no reference was made to

anthropometrics, or relevant body measurements of likely users. Students have good general information and communication technology skills, which are well used, for example, for research and for the use of digital images to support their work. However they have insufficient skills in the use of computer aided design and manufacture, as facilities for these have only recently been obtained. Students with lower levels of competence do not take sufficient care with the presentation of their work.

190. Teaching and learning are both satisfactory, an improvement since the last inspection. Teachers generally have good subject knowledge, which they employ very effectively, particularly when working with individual students. However, there is a lack of specialist knowledge related to product analysis, which was a factor in the poor GCE AS level results in 2004. Teaching is less successful where students are not focused on their work and the teacher has no strategies to remedy this.
191. Management of the courses is satisfactory, with the teaching staff adopting a collegiate approach. Leadership is unsatisfactory as the lack of a head of department meant that inadequate monitoring of the GCE AS level students' work contributed to the poor examination results in 2004. The curriculum is satisfactory.
192. At the last inspection, there had been no recent A-level candidates, and progress in learning was slow, with insufficient written work and a lack of individual monitoring by teachers. Teaching and learning and achievement have improved, assessment is now good, and there are now A-level courses in resistant materials, food technology and electronics. Although there are still weaknesses, improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

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

193. There was no detailed inspection focus in the area. Work in GCE A-level media studies is reported within English. However work was also sampled in art and music. Two lessons of GCE A-level **art** were observed. In the Year 13 lesson, teaching and learning were satisfactory and enabled students to achieve appropriately. In the Year 12 lesson, teaching and learning were unsatisfactory and achievement was inadequate. This was because of insufficient demand in the teaching that hindered students from taking responsibility in developing their independent responses to the lesson theme.
194. In the Year 12 GCE A-level **music** lesson observed, very good, well-planned and skilful teaching provided challenge as students worked on their analysis in detail of one movement from a Haydn symphony. Their learning was rapid and levels of achievement were high. Students have very good relationships with their teacher and each other, and bring very positive attitudes to their work.

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

The inspection focus in this curriculum area was on physical education. However, work was also sampled in leisure and recreation. In the two lessons of AVCE **leisure and recreation** the teaching and learning were good in one and satisfactory in the other. Students achieved appropriately and had very good attitudes to their work.

## Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very good leadership and management are characterised by high aspirations, very good planning and effective deployment of teachers.
- Good teaching from subject specialists, and students' positive attitudes, ensure that they achieve well.
- The arrangements for assessing and evaluating student attainment and progress are extensive.
- There is no dedicated classroom for teaching theory lessons.

### Commentary

195. Results for sports studies at GCE A and AS levels are around the national average but the department ensures that virtually all students gain at least a pass grade. There was an improvement in students' GCE AS level performance in 2004. These results represent good achievement with students consistently achieving grades at least as good as their target grades. Current students' work is above average, with students in both year groups able to use and understand the technical language of sports studies with confidence. The current Year 12 group have a very good grasp of the requirements of the qualification and are able to lead and evaluate practical performance with authority. All students appreciate the support and access to teachers, and the very good stock of resources to support their learning.
196. Teaching overall is good, with teachers demonstrating very good subject knowledge and awareness of the demands of the syllabus. Particularly effective aspects of teaching include knowledgeable presentation of the subject content, very good planning and structure, and having clear learning intentions that are explicitly stated and used to evaluate students' understanding. Where learning outcomes are not planned and shared with students, the students' understanding of the lesson content and their progress become uncertain. All lessons are characterised by very good student-teacher relationships and positive student attitudes to their learning. In a very well taught Year 13 lesson on energy systems, specialist material was authoritatively presented; very good use was also made throughout the lesson, by teacher and students, of technical anatomical and physiological terminology. In a good and well-planned Year 12 practical lesson focused on the development and evaluation of netball skills, the teacher gave every opportunity for students to lead the drills and evaluate their own and others' performance.
197. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The highly effective head of department ensures that the course is very well planned, staff are effectively deployed and monitored and the performance of students is tracked and evaluated to ensure that all are achieving as well as they should. Whilst the facilities for practical sessions are very good, there is no dedicated sports studies classroom. This means there is not an appropriate learning environment for students' theoretical work where display could support learning. For students not studying PE there is a timetabled

session available for them but unfortunately not all are free at this time to use the very good facilities on offer. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

## **BUSINESS**

### **Business education**

The provision for business education is **very good**.

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

- The outstanding leadership and management of the subject are characterised by high expectations, very effective teamwork and meticulous planning.
- Procedures for tracking and analysing students' progress and attainment are excellent, and highly effective in raising achievement.
- The comprehensive support for learning and access to teachers are highly regarded by students.
- Marking of work is positive and thorough and clearly states what students need to do to improve.
- Whilst classroom teaching is good, it is less effective when it is not authoritative and stimulating.

#### **Commentary**

198. Students achieve very well on all of the business courses offered in Years 12 and 13. The highly effective head of department ensures that a suitable business course is available which matches the needs of all students, and that there is a clear progression route from Year 11 into the sixth form.
199. For the vocational courses, there is a consistent 100 per cent pass rate, with very good performance in 2004. The department also runs a number of one-year GNVQ courses with similar success. Whilst attainment in 2003 for the business GCE A-level was around the national average, this represented good achievement for students, many of whom had relatively low starting points. Significantly all managed to gain at least a pass. A-level results in 2004 were an improvement on the year before. AS results show good achievement. Current students, who cover a wide range of ability across the courses, are demonstrating above average attainment and very good achievement. The highest attaining students can correctly define and apply difficult business terminology such as the marketing mix, financial ratios and labour turnover rates.
200. The quality of teaching and learning are good overall; there are also some excellent features. All teachers have a secure knowledge of the subject, are very well prepared and provide thorough and expert feedback on students' work. This is so particularly on the vocational courses, where the comments are clearly matched to the assessment criteria, ensuring that students know exactly what they need to do to improve their work. Relationships between students and teachers are generally good, but less so where the teaching is not sufficiently stimulating. For example, in a Year 13 GCE lesson on liquidity ratios, a lack of pace and engagement of students did not

provide a stimulating environment for all, although the majority did develop a satisfactory understanding of their use and how they are calculated. However, where the Year 13 lesson on critical path analysis was taught enthusiastically, using appropriate examples, all students made good progress in understanding this difficult concept. Further improvement can be made to teaching by ensuring learning outcomes are explicit, and used to evaluate students' understanding and the success of the lesson. The patient and expert individual feedback observed on the GNVQ and VCE courses ensures students achieve very well on these courses. Assessment and the tracking of students' attainment and progress are excellent. These are accompanied by comprehensive support and guidance, particularly out of lessons, and are key factors in ensuring that all pupils can achieve their full potential.

201. Leadership and management are excellent. There is a clear vision for developing the department and the range of courses available for students, providing an appropriate progression route for all, and maintaining an ethos for learning which embraces all students whatever their level of attainment. The 'open door' policy for providing support for students complements the excellent detailed written feedback on written assignments. The dedicated teaching area provides an excellent ethos for business learning, and the outstanding resources, computers and business links are much appreciated by students, and further inspire them to fulfil their potential. The department also makes a significant contribution to cross-curricular themes; students' ICT skills are very good. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

202. There was no detailed inspection focus in this area. However, work was sampled in the AVCE health and social care course. In both lessons observed the teaching and learning were good and ensured that students achieved well. Students' attitudes to work and to their learning were good.

## **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES**

203. There was no focus in this area or specific provision available to observe during the inspection period.



## 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	2
Cost-effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	4	3
<b>Overall standards achieved</b>		<b>3</b>
Pupils' achievement	3	3
<b>Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities (ethos)</b>		<b>2</b>
Attendance	4	4
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	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		2
Accommodation and resources	2	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		2
The quality of the school's links with the community	1	1
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	2
<b>The leadership and management of the school</b>		<b>2</b>

The governance of the school	2	2
The leadership of the headteacher		2
The leadership of other key staff	2	2
The effectiveness of management	2	2

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