

INSPECTION REPORT

NEWLANDS GIRLS' SCHOOL

Maidenhead

LEA area: Windsor and Maidenhead

Unique reference number: 110051

Headteacher: Mrs Tracey Briggs

Lead inspector: Keith Richard Simmonds

Dates of inspection: 1st - 4th November 2004

Inspection number: 268861

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Female
Number on roll:	1,129
School address:	Farm Road Maidenhead Berkshire
Postcode:	SL6 5JB
Telephone number:	(01628) 625 068
Fax number:	(01628) 675 352
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Brian Wastell
Date of previous inspection:	19 th October 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Newlands Girls' School is a comprehensive school, which has specialist status as a Technology College. It is about the same size as other secondary schools with 1129 students on roll. Its students are admitted from both the local area and further afield. The backgrounds of most students display some advantage and most parents are highly supportive of their children's education. Sixty six per cent are white British; others are mostly British Asian from Indian or Pakistani origin. Most speak English fluently but a minority do not. The percentage eligible for free school meals is below average (4.2 per cent). The percentage of girls with special educational needs is below average at seven per cent; 16 have statements. The students' attainment on entry, in Year 7, is overall average although the ability of the student cohort is biased to the above average group and is similar to that at the last inspection. As well as being a specialist status school, the school's work in sport and the arts has been recognised by the award of the Sportsmark in 2002 and the Artsmark in 2004. It takes part in Mini-Enterprise and is an active member of the area 14-19 Consortium. Newlands has a sixth form, which is similar in size to that of most secondary schools but larger than at the last inspection.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
3238	Keith Simmonds	Lead inspector	
15181	Meg Hackney	Lay inspector	
1578	Maureen Sinclair	Team inspector	Business education (Sixth form) Sociology (Sixth form)
2032	Chris Polybank	Team inspector	Music
3731	Bill Robson	Team inspector	Special educational needs (SEN)
4426	Terry Fitchett	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages French (Sixth form)
10941	Renee Robinson	Team inspector	Design and technology Information and communication technology (ICT)
14633	Jean Bannister	Team inspector	History Religious education
17530	Marie Cureton	Team inspector	English
19041	Roger Linstead	Team inspector	English as an additional language (EAL)
22042	John Challands	Team inspector	Physical education Sports studies (Sixth form)
30597	Robina Howells	Team inspector	Science
31688	Brian McGonagle	Team inspector	Art and design Citizenship
31863	Adrian Cornelius	Team inspector	Geography
32169	Bob O'Hagan	Team inspector	Mathematics

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Newlands is an effective and improving school, which has many very good features. The standards of work are above average. Girls achieve very well because of the good teaching, their own high aspirations and willingness to learn. The leadership of the new headteacher is very good. She is well supported by her senior managers. Together with the governors they have a clear vision for the school's future development. The school provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- the above average standards achieved by students across Years 7 to 11, with particular strengths in English, mathematics, German, music and religious education;
- the high quality of students' speaking and listening skills;
- students' very good attitude and engagement in their work and lessons;
- the narrow breadth and limited accreditation range of the sixth form curriculum and the limited impact of specialist Technology College status on the whole 14-19 curriculum;
- the provision of opportunities for students to use ICT and participate actively and independently in their learning is not consistent;
- the less effective use of assessment to inform students' improvement and learning in the sixth form;
- the very good support given to special educational needs students with the most significant difficulties;
- the underdeveloped role of subject leaders in the leadership of learning and the curriculum; and
- the very good range and high quality of the curriculum enrichment activities.

Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. All the key issues have been addressed but the provision for religious education in the sixth form is still not fully in place. There has been good improvement in provision for students with special educational needs (SEN) and English as an additional language (EAL). Development in information and communication technology has been effective but there is further work to do. Above average standards have been maintained across Years 7 to 11 but students' achievements in the sixth form are less effective.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Students' achievement is good. The school's performance in examinations is well above average in Year 11 and above average in the sixth form. Girls enter the school with overall average capability and are regularly leaving with standards, which show good achievement

from Year 7 to Year 11. Standards in the sixth form are lower and reflect, recognised, limitations in the curriculum and accreditation opportunities for all students. Girls achieve well in Years 7 to 9. Standards in the national tests for 14 year olds are well above average. Work seen during the inspection was above average across Years 7 to 11 and of an overall average standard in the sixth form. Particularly high standards were seen in music throughout the school and in English, mathematics and German in the main school.

Achievement for students with SEN and EAL is good, reflecting improvements since the last inspection. For those who are gifted and talented it is also good. Students from ethnic minority heritages mostly do at least as well as other students, though the standards achieved by Pakistani girls are not as high in the external examinations. The sustained good teaching is a key factor in the students' progress.

Girls' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good and sensitively promoted. Students' attitudes in lessons and to their work are very good throughout the school. Girls enjoy coming to school and engage with interest and enthusiasm in all that they do. Behaviour is a similar strength. Attendance and punctuality are good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Girls benefit from good teaching. In many lessons the teaching is very good and sometimes outstanding. The sustained quality of teaching in Year 11 is a significant factor in the students' high achievement in GCSE. Particular strength is in the teachers' high expectations of students. Students respond well to this and make good gains in their learning.

The school provides a broad and relevant curriculum, which meets the needs of most students in Years 7 to 11. The sixth form curriculum is too narrow and does not sufficiently meet the needs of all students. A very good range of high quality activities enriches the taught curriculum. Pastoral care is good. Students are valued and they are well supported. The partnership with parents and the developing links with the community are good. Links with other schools are very good.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good. Senior staff and pastoral managers are effective contributing to the school's success, though subject leaders are not consistently engaged in leading the curriculum and learning. The smooth transfer of leadership to the new headteacher has ensured that the school is now poised to improve provision in the sixth form and further develop its specialist Technology College role. Governance is good. Governors are well informed and appropriately challenge and support the achievement of high standards.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are highly positive about the school. A few thought that homework did not appropriately extend their daughters' learning. Inspectors found that homework extends the curriculum well. Reports, however, do not always clearly indicate students' strengths and weaknesses and how improvements could be made. Girls themselves are also very

positive about the school; a small number raised bullying as an issue but note that the school deals well with any incidents. Inspectors confirmed this. Students see the school as a very supportive community.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- revise the 14-19 curriculum to ensure that appropriate quality pathways to accreditation are available to meet the learning needs and desired outcomes of all students;
- to build on existing good practice to further develop students' use of ICT and participation in their learning as active and independent learners;
- further develop the role of middle managers as leaders of learning and the curriculum;
- further develop the role of specialist Technology College status to impact upon the 14-19 curriculum of the whole school;
- to build on existing good practice to ensure a consistent approach to assessment and its use to inform students' learning in all sixth form subjects;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- ensure the full provision of religious education in the sixth form.

THE SIXTH FORM AT NEWLANDS GIRLS' SCHOOL

The sixth form caters for 214 students. The courses currently provided are mostly AS and A level. The school is a partner in the local area consortium for some courses.

OVERALL EVALUATION

The sixth form is satisfactory. Standards are average overall. However some students do not make as many gains as in their main schoolwork. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Teaching is good and the cost-effectiveness of courses and the value for money provided is satisfactory.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- the above average standards achieved in English, mathematics, physical education and the GNVQ business course;
- the narrow breadth and limited accreditation range of the sixth form curriculum;
- sixth form students have very good attitudes to their work and strive hard to succeed;
- the progression of opportunities for students to participate actively and independently in their learning is underdeveloped;
- students are prepared well for higher education and careers, but initial independent guidance on the full range of opportunities after Year 11 requires development;
- the underdeveloped role of subject leaders in the leadership of learning and the curriculum; and
- the less effective use of assessment to inform students' improvement and learning in the sixth form.

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	Good. Standards in English are above average. Some outstanding teaching and learning motivates students to good levels of achievement. In French standards are average. Girls use of written language is better than their spoken.
Mathematics	Good. Standards in mathematics are above average. Students work hard and good teaching supports their own discovery and application of mathematical principles. Weaknesses in assessment act as a barrier to learning.
Humanities	Satisfactory. In history standards are in line with the students' capability and syllabus requirements, however, transition between GCSE and the AS course is not well managed. Teaching is satisfactory. In sociology standards are average. Students' achievement is good at AS level but less successful at A level. Teaching is satisfactory. Geography and Psychology were not inspected.
Visual and performing arts and media	Satisfactory. Standards in art are average. Students are articulate in discussing complex concepts and ideas. Teaching is good, however, assessment lacks rigour and is not sufficiently used to inform future learning. Music was not inspected.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Very good. Students in physical education make very good progress and achieve standards which are above average because teaching is very good and sometimes inspirational. Students are interested and keen to learn.
Business	Good. Standards are average in the A level and AVCE courses and above average in the GNVQ course. Students achieve well in relation to their prior attainment, especially in Year 12. Their positive attitudes towards studying and good, specialist teaching are key factors in their success.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Students receive good pastoral support. However, advice on the full range of opportunities beyond the school and different accreditation routes beyond Year 11 is not sufficiently independent. Attendance is not sufficiently monitored in the sixth form.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership is satisfactory and day-to-day management is good. However, the strategic development of the sixth form to meet the desired outcomes and learning needs of all students, has only recently become a focus for the school.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

They have positive views about the school. However, whilst they believe the sixth form prepares them well for their futures they would like more choice and independence in their learning opportunities.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

The school's performance in examinations is well above average in Year 11. Girls enter the school with overall average capability and are regularly leaving with standards which show sustained achievement from Year 7 to Year 11. In the sixth form, whilst standards are average overall, students do not make as many gains as in their main schoolwork.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The well above average standards in the Year 9 national tests and Year 11 external examinations.
- The high standards of work seen across Years 7 to 11, with particular strengths in English, mathematics, German, music and religious education.
- An ethos where achievement of all is valued.
- The above average standards achieved in sixth form English, mathematics, physical education and GNVQ business.
- The very high standards of the students' speaking and listening.
- The good achievement of students with special educational needs (SEN) and English as an additional language (EAL).
- The lower overall standards in the sixth form, which reflect limitations in the curriculum on offer.

Commentary

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	39.7 (38.1)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	38.3 (38.3)	35.4 (34.7)
science	36.4 (36.9)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 176 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

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	78 (69)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	98 (98)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (98)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	44.4 (42.5)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 177 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

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	97.3 (98.0)	89.4 (92.6)

Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	46.1 (49.8)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per pupil	289.2 (278.5)	258.2 (263.3)

There were 79 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

1. The school's performance in public examinations is very good. For the past three years, results have been in the upper quartile in the country for English, mathematics and science. In Year 9 in 2003, compared with the prior attainment of the pupils in primary schools, results were above average overall and well above for English. Overall standards have been well sustained and improved further from those at the last inspection.
2. The school's intake is of a full range of ability but with a bias, as in the last inspection, to the above average group. Attainment on entry is overall average, although there is wide variation in the capability of pupils, confirmed by the scores achieved by the students in cognitive tests taken during their first year in school.
3. Achievement is good from Years 7 to 9, due to good teaching and students' own interest and enjoyment in learning. In English, mathematics and science, the above average National Curriculum levels of the girls on entry are consolidated and improved upon; at the end of Year 9, they achieve very high results in the National Curriculum tests for 14 year olds. In English and mathematics, the girls do particularly well, with 73 per cent of them achieving one level higher than expected in English and 63 per cent doing so in mathematics. In lessons seen, inspectors judged that much of the work being done by Year 9 was of a well above average standard.
4. Attainment is also high in other subjects by the end of Year 9. In music, German and religious education it is particularly so. Students benefit in music from the excellent facilities and challenging composing and practical tasks they undertake. In German the teachers' effective development of writing and good insistence upon accurate pronunciation help the students to progress well and to succeed. In religious education the effective planning of lessons supports the students' achievement. By the end of Year 9, students attainment is at least in line with that expected for their age or capability in all subjects.
5. GCSE results at the end of Year 11 are well above average. In 2003, 78 per cent of the students gained five or more A* to C grades compared with 53 per cent nationally. The average points score was ten points above the national average and, in most subjects, students gained grades significantly higher than those achieved nationally. Provisional results for 2004 display a similar pattern. Particularly high results were gained in English language and literature. In most other subjects the grades gained were well above average. Since the girls entered the school with above average attainment, they achieved well to gain these results that are in the upper quartile in the country.
6. During the inspection, standards of attainment seen were well above average and achievement was good. Key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT are well developed and underpin achievement throughout the curriculum. In particular the very high standards of the students' speaking and listening enhance their ability to contribute and gain from each other in all subjects. The high standards at the end of Year 9 are successfully built on and extended by the end of Year 11. In German, geography and music, achievement is very good across Years 10 and 11; for example in geography

key physical skills in mapping are well developed through effective fieldwork. In all other subjects achievement is never less than satisfactory. The high standards are achieved as a result of the good and often very good or better teaching and also because of the school's ethos where high achievement for all is valued.

7. Students with special educational needs achieve well overall. Those with statements, visual impairment and more severe literacy difficulties make very good progress because of the very good individual tuition and support that they receive from specialist teachers and teaching assistants. Students for whom English is an additional language achieve well overall because of the good, and often very good, quality of teaching. However, the achievement of students of Pakistani cultural heritage in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory rather than good. Those EAL students at the earliest stages of learning English make very good progress because of the high quality specialist support they receive. For both students with SEN and EAL needs, their attainment and achievement is higher than at the last inspection, reflecting the school's successful improvement in these two areas.

Sixth form

8. Standards achieved in A/AS level and VCE examinations in 2003 were well above average and show a consistent trend over the last three years. The average points score of students was 30 points above the national average. Provisional results in 2004 show some decline on this position and are average overall. The sustained achievement of students up to Year 11 in the main school is not so well maintained in the sixth form. In the work seen, students' overall attainment was average and their achievement was satisfactory. The lower gains made in the sixth form reflect recognised limitations in the curriculum and the range of accreditation opportunities offered to students.
9. Many students take subjects for which their GCSE results, although very high, have not prepared them fully. Many girls take up subjects at A level, such as sociology, psychology, theatre studies and business, which they have not studied at GCSE. They usually make good progress and achieve well due to the mostly effective teaching, their own very good attitudes to learning and desire to succeed. In the subjects inspected standards were never less than average. Particular strengths were seen in: physical education, where standards were above average and students achieve very well; English where some outstanding teaching motivates students to good levels of achievement; and mathematics and GNVQ business where the students own hard work and positive attitudes to study support their achievements.
10. Students achieve overall good standards in key skills. Most have appropriate skills to enable them to cope with the demands of their courses. Students absorb information well and have a strong capacity to independently research and effectively organise their work. However, opportunities for students to do this are too few and they would like more choice and independence in their learning opportunities. Literacy skills are good and particularly the students' speaking and listening skills enhance their contributions in lessons. Mathematical skills are also good and most students cope well with the basic numeracy demands of their courses. In ICT students' overall development is satisfactory. They can effectively use computers and appropriate software to advantage in their work. However, in some subjects such as art, business

studies and sociology, limited access to ICT facilities hampers the development of their skills.

11. The rates of students staying on into the sixth form are good and improving. Retention of students from Year 12 into Year 13 is high and the proportion of students continuing into higher and further education is increasing.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attendance is good in Years 7 to 11 and is satisfactory in the sixth form. Punctuality is good. Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good. Overall the provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The students' very good attitudes and behaviour make a strong contribution to the standards they achieve.
- Students have a clear understanding of the school's high expectations of self-discipline.
- Students are very articulate, polite and confident and the majority show a keen desire to learn.
- The very good and constructive relationships, which are closely linked to the very positive ethos of the school, contribute well to students' confidence and self-esteem.
- Students' independent study skills are not consistently developed.
- There are not enough planned opportunities provided within subjects to encourage the spiritual awareness of all students.

Commentary

12. Most students in Years 7 to 11 have a very good attitude towards school. Many students are very confident, with a well balanced sense of self-esteem and they are very keen to be involved in the full range of activities provided. Relationships are very good between students and the staff. Students generally relate very well to others, although there are a small number of older students who have become disaffected and are, at times, reluctant to co-operate. Students in all year groups are confident to ask for help with their academic work and the majority feel there is an adult in the school they can talk to about personal difficulties. The strengths evident at the last inspection have been well maintained.
13. Behaviour is very good and the school is a very orderly and pleasant environment. Students demonstrate a strong sense of self-control as they move around the school and they are aware of the school's high expectations of them. During lessons, behaviour ranges from satisfactory to excellent and is often in response to the quality of teaching and engagement in interesting tasks. In the dining hall and during assemblies students behave very well and an orderly and quiet environment is well maintained. Students are very polite and courteous and they show respect for visitors and other adults in the school. Throughout the school there is a consistent approach to the promotion of good behaviour and self-discipline and the school deals effectively with all forms of bullying or harassment.

14. Personal development is good and the school positively encourages students of all capabilities to become mature and responsible young people. However, insufficient opportunities are provided across the curriculum for students to take responsibility for their own learning and to develop confident independent study skills. The School Council is very effective and students representing their year group take their responsibilities seriously. Most students enjoy the opportunity to join a very good range of extra-curricular activities including sports, drama, educational trips and musical productions. In Year 8 students have a good opportunity to develop new skills through their involvement in mini-enterprise projects. During lessons students work well together in groups and they develop very good social skills and an ability to share their views and ideas in a constructive and mature manner. Students with special educational needs (SEN) and English as an additional language (EAL) are very well integrated into all activities.
15. Overall, the provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Although there are some good examples of spiritual development in assemblies and subjects such as religious education, music, art and poetry linked to topics in history, opportunities are not always well planned across the curriculum to extend students' spiritual awareness and appreciation of a deeper dimension of experience. Students' moral and social education is very good and is closely linked to the ethos of the school and the positive system of rewards and commendation. In areas of the curriculum and during some form times, students discuss a good range of moral and social issues. They clearly respect the views and beliefs of others, including those of other cultures and faiths, and listen attentively to each other. Racial harmony and the students' appreciation and understanding of the cultures and beliefs of others are effectively promoted. Students develop a good awareness of their own cultural heritage through a range of visits and other activities and they learn to value the diversity of a multicultural society. During music lessons students appreciate a range of music from around the world and in religious education they develop an understanding of world religions and global cultures.
16. Overall attendance is good in Years 7 to 11 and is above the national average. Unauthorised absence is low. The majority of students are punctual in the morning and overall students arrive at lessons on time. The school has good procedures to monitor attendance and absences are followed up promptly. A significant number of students take holidays during term time including those on extended visits to their country of origin.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	5.8	School data	0.6
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.

Exclusions

17. The number of exclusions has increased during the last year but remains in line with national averages. The school works hard to prevent exclusions, which are used only as a last resort for serious behavioural problems. The new system of support, through the consortium with partner schools, is a good initiative and helps vulnerable students to remain in education during exclusions.

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British – Indian
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

Exclusions in the last school year

Number of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
685	51	2
11	0	0
54	2	0
4	0	0
4	0	0
7	0	0
2	0	0
43	0	0
76	4	0
6	0	0
8	0	0
6	0	0
5	0	0
4	0	0
8	0	0
6	0	0
188	0	0

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

Sixth form

18. Students enjoy life in the sixth form and find it interesting and rewarding. Their attitudes to work are very good, but often their dependence on teachers limits their ability to demonstrate well established independent study skills. Students' behaviour is very good and as senior students they conduct themselves in a mature and responsible manner. Students work hard and they collaborate well with each other, showing respect for different values, attitudes and beliefs. They take their responsibilities seriously and, for example, willingly act as reading mentors for students in Year 7 and Junior Sports Leaders. Students' attendance is satisfactory overall. However, attendance is not sufficiently monitored to identify patterns, which can affect achievement. In Year 13 the attendance of some students is not high enough and this has a negative impact on their work and the standards they achieve in their final examinations.

19. Most students respond enthusiastically to the good range of activities and opportunities the school has to offer. During lessons they show commitment and take pride in their work in order to achieve the best possible results. As members of the School Council students liaise closely with members of the governing body, such as helping to appoint the new headteacher and raising a number of issues for improvement to the school environment.
20. Students form very good relationships with their teachers and with one another. They are fully aware of the impact of their actions on others and they are very good role models for younger students. Students have trust and confidence in the school and in their teachers and they clearly understand what is expected of them in the sixth form. As in the main school, students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is good. Students are interested and engaged in their learning. The curriculum is good and meets the needs of most students, although provision in the sixth form is only satisfactory because of the too narrow range of accreditation opportunities to meet the needs of all students. Specialist Technology status has yet to impact upon the whole curriculum. Enrichment of the curriculum is a strength, particularly in sport and the arts. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory.

Teaching and learning

Students benefit from good teaching and progress well in their learning. Particular strengths are seen in the students' acquisition of skills and knowledge, their productivity and engagement in learning. Assessment is good overall but only satisfactory in the sixth form where students do not always know how to improve their work.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have good subject expertise and high expectations.
- Seventy eight per cent of lessons observed were good or better – 79 per cent in the sixth form.
- Girls come to school wanting to learn and to succeed.
- Literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are developed well, but teachers in some subjects find access to computers limited.
- The provision of opportunities for students to participate actively and independently in their learning is underdeveloped.
- Assessment is underdeveloped in the sixth form and students do not always know how to improve.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 155 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
7 (4.5%)	51 (32.8%)	65 (41.9%)	30 (19.4%)	2 (1.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

21. Teaching and learning are good throughout the school and this, together with the students' interest and enjoyment in learning, leads to high standards. Of the lessons seen during the inspection, only two were unsatisfactory and over a third were very good or better.
22. Teachers are mostly specialists in their field and have good subject expertise. Expectations of the capabilities of their students and the work they do are of a high standard. In a Year 7 music lesson, for example, very complicated routines on a theme of African music were carried out as students met successive challenges set by their teacher.
23. In English, teaching and learning are very good. Teachers challenge their pupils extremely well. When developing an understanding of the characters in the text 'Stone Cold' the teacher of a Year 9 class established high expectations by skilled questioning and discussion of the text. Students picked up the enthusiasm of their teacher and were able to make very perceptive explanations of the implicit meaning in the text. In mathematics, teaching and learning are good overall. Some lessons in Years 7 and 8 are excellent, for example in a Year 8 lower set lesson, on reflection and rotation, students were engrossed by the teacher's effective and stimulating use of ICT. The following paired, task, together with probing and well-targeted questions ensured that all students made excellent gains in their learning. Lessons in Years 10 and 11, whilst exhibiting many of these features, do not sufficiently make use of practical activity or develop the students' independence and responsibility for their own learning.
24. Teachers work hard to plan lessons to match the wide range of students' capability and because of this, almost all students achieve well. In some subjects, such as mathematics, students are put into sets based on prior attainment to enable planning to be precisely focused on a narrower ability range, but in many classes, the ability of the students is mixed. Teachers usually plan work, which is well matched to the needs of all in the class, including extension work for the most able. However, in both the unsatisfactory science lessons this was not the case, for example in a Year 10 class students had little real interest in a mundane written activity on properties of materials. The lack of practical activity, in a specialist laboratory, failed to challenge the students who did not achieve as well as they could. In most lessons, in Years 7 to 9 there is an appropriate emphasis on independent learning and good opportunities are given for the students to take responsibility for their own learning. This progression is not as well developed across Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form.
25. Teachers do not tolerate any behaviour which is not conducive to learning and, in almost all lessons, display good strategies for student management. Consequently, the desire most students have to succeed, their very good behaviour and the ethos of hard work present in the school ensure that almost all lessons are productive and interesting.
26. Teaching methods are good; most lessons start briskly with a well defined 'starter' activity. In the best lessons discussion and group work is effectively used, for example, students in Year 8 geography enthusiastically engaged in modelling their own industry as part of a lesson on secondary industries. Some good opportunities

are provided for practical work in design and technology, music and physical education. In a Year 7 textiles lesson students achieved well in their tie-dyeing and machine quilting because of the well applied subject expertise of the teacher. Similarly a Year 9 ICT lesson produced good critical thinking from the students as they applied the elements of a good leaflet design, which had been identified in the brisk starter to their own 'publisher' developed designs. On occasion, when teaching and learning are only satisfactory, the lesson is not moved on sufficiently in the mid-part. Students can be focused to just reading texts and, or taking notes, as in a Year 9 religious education lesson and a Year 10 history lesson.

27. The teaching and learning of literacy and ICT skills are good. For speaking and listening skills they are very good. Numeracy skills are well taught in core mathematics lessons but are only satisfactorily developed in the teaching and learning of the other subjects. There is good attention to the use of key technical vocabulary and support for writing skills in literacy. Discussion is usually well used, though opportunities are missed in science. In numeracy students make rapid gains in their mathematical competence in core mathematics lessons; however, these skills are not routinely developed in the teaching of all subjects. ICT skills are effectively taught, though some learning is restricted by limitations in the subjects' access to the ICT suites and computer facilities.
28. The teaching of students who have special educational needs is good overall. There is very good teaching of students with literacy difficulties. As a result, students make very good progress with basic literacy skills. Where students have statements they are equally well taught and sensitively supported so that they do not become dependent upon the learning support staff. Subject teachers take account of students' individual education plans (IEPs) in planning but do not always include the learning support staff; this can result in these staff being less effective in some lessons.
29. The quality of teaching for students for whom English is an additional language is good, enabling them to make good progress within the high quality of the school's overall provision. Close liaison between English and ethnic minorities achievement teachers has resulted in Pakistani EAL students achieving very good standards in the 2004 Year 9 national tests in English. However the quality of teaching and learning for EAL students in other subjects is inconsistent. They are well catered for in information and communication technology, religious education, design and technology and music. In science and history not enough help is given to EAL students to overcome difficulties in reading, vocabulary and understanding and applying new learning. EAL students report that they commonly find difficulty in these areas. In some lessons from Year 9 onwards teachers do not always ensure the full engagement of Pakistani students in new learning. This is because, at times, their quiet behaviour masks lack of understanding. They do not therefore always make enough progress in some lessons where learning depends more on listening than on speaking and doing. These issues are recognised by the school and currently there is strong involvement with a Local Authority ethnic minority achievement project for this group of students.
30. Some parents thought that their daughters are set homework that does not extend them in independent study. Inspectors found that homework was not excessive and appropriately extended the curriculum and students' learning. Overall the students' achievement was enhanced by the usually effective homework.

31. Assessment is good and enhances progress for most students. The systems for the collection and management of assessment information on students' progress and achievements are good. Data is comprehensive and easily accessible to teachers. Strong examples are seen in English and music. In these subjects there are particular strengths in the quality of the marking of students' work and the feedback they receive on how to improve. Weaknesses in the quality of marking and feedback to students are seen in science and history, in Years 7 to 9. The use of target setting, to raise standards, is effective in most subjects and students usually know their targets and what they must do to improve. Some weaknesses are evident in mathematics, where students do not always know their targets and in core physical education, where targets to support progress are not yet consistently used. Pastoral data is also kept for each student. This system is instrumental in enabling subject teachers, pastoral staff, middle and senior managers to know every student well and to monitor their achievements so that appropriate intervention can be put in place if necessary.

Sixth form

32. In the sixth form, teaching is good. Well qualified staff extend the students' learning to a high level. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen and almost half the lessons were very good or better. Overall the quality of teaching and learning was better in Year 12 than Year 13. In some Year 13 lessons the teaching can be too structured and controlled, for example in mathematics and history. As a result students do not always have the independence to develop the higher skills required to achieve the best grades in their A level courses. Students clearly find their courses and lessons enjoyable as for example in physical education and business education courses. Relationships are excellent and impact upon the way in which many students share the teachers' enthusiasm for the subject. Whilst ICT is well used in a number of areas as with French, there are occasions where the students' tasks miss opportunities for them to effectively apply ICT to their learning, as in mathematics and art.
33. Assessment in the sixth form is satisfactory. Examples of good practice were seen in music and physical education. However, weaknesses were evident in mathematics and history. In Year 13 mathematics the limited use of assessment to inform improvement was a barrier to further learning. Too often, as in history, the marking of work can put too much assumption on the students' understanding and comments are not as helpful and clear as in the main school. Similarly targets for improvement are not consistently used and students do not always know how to improve their work and achieve their full potential.

The curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory overall. In Years 7 to 11 it is broad and balanced and relevant to the needs of most students. In the sixth form it is too narrow and does not meet the needs of all students. Opportunities for enrichment through extra-curricular activities are very good. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results confirm that the curriculum is effective in meeting the needs of most students up to the end of Year 11.
- The curriculum for students with special educational needs and EAL has improved and is effective.
- The range and take-up of extra-curricular activities are very good.
- There is not yet a coherent view of the 14-19 curriculum and the range of vocational provision is limited.
- Resources for learning are generally satisfactory but some subjects lack sufficient access to ICT resources.

Commentary

34. This aspect of the school's provision is satisfactory. Until the end of Year 11 students receive their full statutory requirement. Since the last inspection omissions in religious education and ICT have been addressed, though the full provision of religious education in the sixth form is still missing. Weaknesses in the curriculum for students with special educational needs (SEN) and EAL have been very effectively acted upon and improved. Citizenship has been effectively introduced and overall provision is satisfactory.
35. The curriculum for Years 7, 8 and 9 is organised along traditional subject lines, except for information and communication technology, which is taught by an inter-disciplinary team. The current provision provides a broad and balanced curriculum during Years 7 to 9, with a second language available from Year 8. Classes in Years 7 and 8 are organised in mixed ability groups, with setting in mathematics from Year 7, modern foreign languages from Year 8 and science from Year 9. Implementation of the Key Stage 3 Strategy is effective and current development has particular reference to assessment for learning and behaviour and attendance.
36. In Years 10 and 11 girls follow mainly academic GCSE options, though some vocational foundation courses have been recently introduced, which effectively broaden the curriculum and increase its relevance to all students. They continue with the core subjects and choose from a relevant range of options. Provision is effectively planned to ensure continuity with previous years and the sixth form. However, there is not yet a coherent 14-19 view of provision and the range and continuity of vocational course options are limited. Examination results confirm that the curriculum, until the end of Year 11, is effective in meeting the needs and aspirations of most students. However, this is not so evident in the sixth form. The flexibility currently missing in the curriculum is recognised by the school. Planned development, particularly in the sixth form, will ensure that the needs of all students in the 14-19 age range will be more fully met.
37. The school provides well for students with special educational needs (SEN). A good mix of in-class support, small group and one-to-one teaching ensures that pupils' requirements are met, as outlined in their statements. In Years 10 and 11, students have good opportunities to gain entry level qualifications in several subjects in addition to GCSE. Some of these students attend the local agricultural college to study a course in skills for working life, which they enjoy as it meets their needs well. Similarly the identification and additional curriculum for EAL students has been well developed. Specific support from part-time ethnic minority teachers is well planned

and integrated with the girls' normal subject curriculum. Awareness and response to EAL needs has been effectively raised in all subject areas by good quality staff training and provision of appropriate resources. The school has also worked effectively with families and the ethnic communities to ensure that cultural traditions are not an impediment to choice and achievement of the students.

38. Provision for girls' personal, social and health education is effective. The programme of study successfully and sensitively covers sex and relationships education and gives appropriate attention to the misuse of drugs and alcohol. The programme also effectively provides aspects of the citizenship curriculum.
39. The school is highly inclusive and ensures that the principles of equality and fairness are integral to the design of the curriculum. In most parts of the school there is appropriate access for students with physical disabilities, but not all, for example, some first floor rooms have no access for wheelchairs.
40. The school is effective in the preparation of girls for the next stage of education, training or employment. In Year 9, for example, the girls have specific careers lessons to help them to exercise responsibly, the choices they have to make for Year 10. A teacher co-ordinates provision and a personal adviser from Connexions is available for personal interviews. In Year 10 girls have good opportunities for work experience and the recent development of some Foundation courses has been positive in giving a more work related experience for some students. Overall the work related curriculum is satisfactory. Advice on opportunities beyond Year 11 is full but is not sufficiently independent of the school. Many students commented that they had chosen to stay in the school first then thought about their courses. Guidance and advice on entry to higher education at the end of Year 13 are satisfactory.
41. Extra-curricular activities and support for learning outside the school day are extensive and varied in range. Both at lunchtime and after school a large number of very high quality opportunities are available. Particular strengths are evident in music, dance and drama, and sporting activities. The library and the suite of ICT rooms offer good resources for independent learning during and after the end of the school day. Opportunities for students' intellectual, personal and cultural development are good. Enrichment visits to museums, art galleries, theatres and places of historical and geographical interest are a regular feature. Although school visits abroad feature in the school calendar, a surprising gap in the extra-curricular programme is the lack of language visits and exchanges with continental Europe.
42. The governing body and previous leadership team have been effective in developing and adapting the Year 7 to Year 9 curriculum, as with the successful implementation of initiatives within the Key Stage 3 Strategy. However, progress in the Year 10 and Year 11 curriculum and the sixth form has been more cautious. Governors have rightly identified the narrow accreditation range of the curriculum, particularly in the sixth form, as a key area for development. Under the leadership of the new headteacher effective plans are now in place to address these deficiencies. Development and use of collaborative courses with the local consortium is having an increasing impact upon the range and quality of provision. Specialist Technology College status has been effectively used to support developments within mathematics, science, ICT and design and technology. Whilst this stage of development has been

successful there is as yet little impact of specialist status as a change agent upon the whole curriculum.

43. The staff are dedicated, hard working and highly committed to the ideals of the school. Teachers are appropriately qualified and have the relevant experience to match the needs of the curriculum well. Recruitment and retention are areas of priority for the school. Overall the school's strategies are successful and retention of staff is satisfactory. In some subjects recruitment is difficult, reflecting the national position and the working context of the M4 corridor. There are a small number of overseas staff, who are effectively deployed. Many are well-qualified Australian graduates who are classified as unqualified teachers within current UK/EEC law. The school effectively supports the professional development of all teachers.
44. Accommodation is satisfactory and mostly allows the curriculum to be taught effectively. Since the last inspection, the school had benefited from many improvements, such as the recent opening of excellent new music accommodation and the development of good quality specific ICT suites. Most rooms and subject areas provide effective and stimulating learning environments. However, the large open plan art accommodation can have a negative impact upon learning when used by multiple groups of students. Displays are of a high standard and their use to celebrate girls' achievements is effective. At lunchtime the dining hall and main hall space is very cramped. In addition the quality of the toilet accommodation is a source of concern for students and some parents. Inspectors support this view and the planned and current programme of refurbishment is significantly improving the situation. Girls show good respect for the accommodation, there is little evidence of damage or graffiti and they are very tolerant of any limitations.
45. Resources are generally adequate to the needs of the curriculum. In music resources are of a very high quality, particularly those to support ICT. In most other subjects the available range of books, materials and equipment are at least sufficient to meet the curriculum needs and maintain high standards. New technologies, such as whiteboards are well used and deployed. However, insufficient use is made of these techniques in mathematics. The library has an adequate stock of books and good facilities for ICT. Although there has been significant improvement in resources and facilities for ICT access is still too limited for many subjects and this can hinder the development of the students' independence in their own learning.

Sixth form

46. The school offers students an academic curriculum with a good degree of choice. Twenty one A level courses are taught with the associated Year 12 AS courses. However, there has been little development of vocational courses, except for GNVQ business studies and work related opportunities within the sixth form are weak. This results in a relatively narrow sixth form curriculum, which does not sufficiently offer a range of learning pathways or alternative accreditation to students. Whilst for most students the curriculum meets their needs and they are successful in external examinations, there is a significant minority whose needs are currently not fully met. Effective and increasing use is being made of the local consortium to widen the provision and successful collaborative courses are run with other local schools in food technology, philosophy, photography, politics and Spanish. Although the school is

making efforts to broaden and increase the relevance of the sixth form curriculum for all students the underlying rationale for the 14-19 curriculum, at present, is unclear.

47. The range and take up of activities beyond the curriculum, in sport and in the arts, are very good. School productions in drama and music are frequent and popular. There are many opportunities in music to develop vocal and instrumental talents within and beyond the school. Similarly the sports leaders' programme offers opportunities for work with other schools and the community. Opportunities in other areas of activity are of a similar high quality. Experience outside the classroom can also be accredited through the ASDAN award programme in which all students participate. Other activities include aspects peer counselling through the 'buddy system', raising money for victims of epilepsy and involvement in events celebrating religious and cultural diversity. The Sixth Form makes a valuable contribution to the highly effective School Council, and the Sixth Form Social Committee organises a varied and successful social calendar. Careers guidance and that for entry into higher education is good. Such provision is the result of the school's good leadership and management combined with the exceptionally positive attitudes shown by the students themselves.
48. Accommodation and resourcing of the sixth form curriculum is satisfactory. As with the main school there are occasions where limited access to ICT facilities can hinder the students' independence. Few subjects have specific sixth form accommodation and most of the students' lessons occur in main school rooms.

Care, guidance and support

Standards of care, welfare and health and safety are good. Students in Years 7 to 11 receive good support, advice and guidance. Satisfactory support is provided for students in the sixth form. There are good procedures to involve students and to seek their views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are established and well monitored procedures to ensure that students work in a healthy and safe environment.
- Students readily relate to their teachers with whom they have a very good and trusting relationship.
- The school is very good at providing individual support for students through work-related learning arrangements with partner institutions.
- Induction arrangements in Year 7 and sixth form are very good and help students to settle quickly into new routines.
- Good arrangements are made for students to have a strong voice in the school, which is recognised and listened to.
- Students with special educational needs are very well supported in lessons and withdrawal areas.
- Some students in the sixth form do not feel well informed about 'A' level subjects and career pathways.

Commentary

49. The school has good procedures for ensuring the safety and wellbeing of students. The procedures have been reviewed since the last inspection and now fully meet the statutory requirements. The behaviour policy has been reviewed and is well established. Child Protection procedures meet the requirements and are well managed to ensure that all staff are aware and that issues are recorded appropriately. With the agreement of parents, students are well protected when using the Internet through the installation of efficient filters for all ICT equipment. The very good relationships and the school's caring and supportive ethos make a strong contribution to students' personal and academic development.
50. Students feel secure that the staff and especially their form tutors and heads of year, know them well as individuals. However, although assessment overall is good, some students feel that their work is not always marked helpfully to assist them to improve. Students understand the school's effective system of target setting and they are involved well in agreeing their own targets through regular discussions with their teachers. Students with personal problems, including those who have lost interest in school, are very well supported through counselling and alternative courses such as the link course with Berkshire College of Agriculture.
51. There are very good induction arrangements for students entering Year 7 including a series of visits, joint activities and shared information from primary schools. Students in Year 9 are well advised when making choices of subjects to study for GCSE examinations through consultation interviews with individual students and their parents. Very good support is provided for students with special education needs through well organised individual education plans which are well monitored. Support for those students with EAL needs is similarly effective and improved since the last inspection.
52. The majority of students value the fact that the school listens to their views and that they are given the opportunity to share their ideas to reshape the environment. The School Council is a strong student body, which is effective as a channel of communication between students, staff and governors. Students value the recent provision of a suggestion box, which is managed by sixth form students and feel that everyone has the opportunity to contribute. The Council worked closely with governors and contributed to decisions regarding the appointment of the new headteacher. Students are currently formulating ideas for the centenary celebrations and are enthusiastic about their role in the activities.

Sixth form

53. The majority of students consider that they are well supported in the sixth form, but some express the desire for a more adult environment. The form tutors and the head of year know students very well and they provide good pastoral care and encouragement for them. However, insufficient emphasis is placed on developing students' independent study skills and many rely too heavily on teachers for information. Students are well supported with up to date guidance on managing the demands of A level courses including personal and academic targets, which are reviewed regularly. Students agree that teachers are accessible to them and they receive appropriate advice and guidance for individual courses in school and link courses with the local consortium of schools. The quality of advice and support

provided for students about careers, appropriate courses and entry requirements to higher education is satisfactory. However, some students in Years 12 and 13 do not feel sufficiently well informed about careers and the subjects they should study in the sixth form or of opportunities beyond the school and this is a concern to them.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

There is a good partnership with parents who hold the school in high regard. The good links with the community and very good links with other schools and colleges enrich the curriculum and learning opportunities.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are very supportive of the work of the school and have considerable confidence in the quality of education provided.
- The school welcomes parents and encourages their involvement.
- Information for parents is improving and the recently established headteacher's surgery is proving successful.
- Reports to parents are inconsistent in the clarity of language used and the quality of clear information about progress.
- Good links with the community provide students with an additional range of learning opportunities.
- Very good links with other schools successfully enrich the curriculum.

Commentary

54. The contribution of parents to the work of the school is good and the majority of parents are very supportive and interested in their daughter's work. This has a very positive impact on students' attitudes and achievements. Parents speak positively about the school and they are happy with their daughter's achievements. The school is welcoming to parents and the new headteacher is working hard to extend the partnership still further and to ensure that parents are well informed and involved. The Parents' Society is an active group of supportive parents who regularly raise additional funds for the school and community.
55. Overall the quality of information provided for parents is satisfactory and is improving. The new headteacher has introduced a regular 'headteacher's surgery' and a considerable number of parents have already taken advantage of this to discuss their daughter's progress. Parents receive regular helpful newsletters and their opinion is often invited on such aspects as the behaviour policy review and arrangements for homework. The school encourages parents to use students' homework planners as a communication between home and school and many parents find this useful. Annual consultation evenings are well organised on a year group basis and parents are provided with a good amount of helpful and appropriate information to help them support their daughter's studies. However, some parents are critical of the school's arrangements and would like additional open evenings and opportunities during the year to discuss progress with subject tutors. Parents of students with special educational needs are involved well and invited to attend all assessment and review meetings. The school makes good arrangements to support those parents for whom English is an additional language and to ensure that communications are clear.

Throughout the school interim reports provide parents with their daughter's effort and achievement grades in each subject. Targets are regularly set for improvement. However, the inspectors agree with parents that the annual written reports are inconsistent in the quality of clear information about progress and ways to improve and that the language used may be unclear to some parents.

56. The school has good links with the community, which enrich the curriculum and establish the school's technology status in the community. The ICT facilities are in regular use by community groups, such as the U3A and Lifelong Learning and students in the sixth form often assist with the courses. The Police Youth Officer provides additional support for the PSHE and Citizenship programmes for students in Years 7 to 10. Students benefit from the well established links with industry and local businesses, which support the school well with opportunities for work experience, industrial visits and a range of sponsorships.
57. Links with other schools are very good. Through the school's partnership within the local consortium students attend additional courses and activities such as sports and 'master classes' in science and mathematics. Staff work closely together to share good practice and management groups are working to extend the provision for the whole consortium. In Year 11 individual students attend very well managed courses at the Berkshire College of Agriculture to study skills for working life. The very good primary school liaison links result in a strong transition programme including well-organised primary school activity days. The school works closely with a nearby special school and students in Years 7 and 8 respond very well to joint mathematics activities.

Sixth form

58. Good information is provided for students and their parents about the sixth form before they join. However this information, whilst offering alternatives beyond the school, can lack independence, which would allow students to make a fully informed choice on what the school and other institutions can offer beyond Year 11. The same weakness in the quality of reports exists as in the main school and the more limited use of assessment in the sixth form can hinder the understanding, for students and parents, of their progress. There are good opportunities for students to do work shadowing and to visit higher educational establishments.
59. Links with the community, such as the business activities for Year 12 students with local industry and Young Enterprise projects, provide additional opportunities to stimulate students' enquiring minds, broaden their horizons and challenge them to achieve even higher standards. Joint course provision within the consortium, which allows the girls to join boys in some lessons, is of mutual benefit to all.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management is good. The new headteacher provides very good leadership and is well supported by her senior staff. The effectiveness of management and governance of the school is good but the strategic development of the sixth form has only recently become a focus for the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The recently appointed headteacher has a clear vision for the school, which is focused on further raising standards and broadening students' experiences.
- Rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the school's work by the leadership team have contributed greatly to the achievements of students.
- The strong linkage between the school's development plan and its financial planning enables the school to ensure that its spending decisions fully benefit its students.
- Effective scrutiny by the governors ensures that strengths and weaknesses are well known and that action to secure improvement is taken.
- The role of the subject leaders as leaders of the curriculum and learning is not sufficiently developed.
- The leadership of the sixth form is too much invested in one person and has not been strategically developed.

Commentary

60. The leadership of the headteacher is very good. Whilst she has only been in post for a very short time, she was a deputy in the school, prior to her appointment and has a very clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses, together with a demanding vision for its future. This is based on achieving the highest quality of outcomes for all students. There is recognition that students' views need to be listened to and that they need to be more involved in their own learning. Development of the 14-19 curriculum and particularly the sixth form is rightly seen as a priority. The value of the school's specialist status is understood and actions are in hand to expand its impact beyond the current mathematics, science, ICT and design and technology focus. Her high aspirations for the school are fully shared by the governing body and her senior staff. The leadership team of senior managers carry out their responsibilities effectively and are providing strong development of the school, whilst maintaining appropriate continuity with the past traditions.
61. Planning for the future is set out in an effective whole-school development plan. In setting appropriate priorities and targets this plan shows good linkage with financial planning. Procedures to monitor and evaluate this plan are good and effectively followed through by the leadership team. As a result appropriate action is taken to ensure continuing improvement, as with the planned development of the sixth form. The priorities of this whole-school plan are effectively reflected in most subject improvement plans, with particular strength seen in mathematics, design and technology and music. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching is regular and effective, involving all the leadership team, but less so the subject leaders, who have yet to develop a consistent focus to the leading of the curriculum and learning in their role. The specialist school development plan has provided a good model for the first stage of development. However, the overall impact of specialist status on the whole curriculum is limited and this development plan needs to take a wider perspective, for example in recognising the outstanding contribution of subject areas such as music to the students' technological capability.
62. Middle managers are an effective group but have yet to develop, particularly in the subject leader role, a consistent focus to learning and the development of the curriculum. Liaison between this group and senior managers is very good. The leadership of most subjects has improved since the last inspection and is good in

almost all. Good teamwork, a consistent view of teaching and learning and thorough curriculum planning are characteristic of the most effective subject leadership. Monitoring and evaluation procedures, together with the effective use of statistical data, are an improving aspect of subject leadership. Performance management and the continuing professional development of staff are good overall and, in the best led subjects, very well related to the raising of standards. Pastoral managers are effective and ensure that pastoral care is good. The work related provision is well managed and the school has effective links with the local Connexions service and employers. The growing involvement with and influence of the local consortium is impacting positively on this area of management.

63. The special needs co-ordinator has ensured the effective improvement of provision since the last inspection and is developing clear criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of the school's work with students with special needs. Day-to-day provision for these students is very well managed. Recording and monitoring systems effectively track the students' progress and ensure that parents, students and specialist agencies are engaged in provision, as appropriate. IEPs are well prepared and effectively used, monitored and reviewed. The work of a large team of teaching assistants is well monitored. Many are very well qualified and they develop their knowledge and skills through good training opportunities. Forward planning can be hindered because of some lack of certainty in future resources for the area.
64. The assistant headteacher responsible for EAL leads and manages the provision well. She has achieved good improvement since the last inspection. Funding for multi-ethnic work is effectively used to support extra staffing. Good liaison with ethnic minority achievement teachers makes an important contribution to the monitoring of teaching and learning and overall success of the provision. The school has accurately identified areas for continued improvement as in: the achievement of Pakistani heritage students, better progress in reading and more support for EAL students in Years 12 and 13.
65. Governance is good. Governors continue to be very supportive of the school and to monitor its actions effectively. Governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses and regularly join staff on their training days and spend time in school to keep abreast of progress. Governors have a good input into the strategic development of the school and into formulating the whole-school development plan. They carry out their statutory duties well in respect of the headteacher's performance management. Monitoring of the school's finances is very effectively carried out and governors ensure value for money, as in their close involvement in the recent excellent music accommodation, building programme. There are very good relationships between governors and the leadership team that enable frank and open discussions to take place. Governors comply with all statutory requirements, except for the omission of the reporting of the effectiveness of special educational needs provision in their annual report to parents and the provision of religious education in the sixth form.
66. The school's status as a specialist school gives it additional funding for staff and curriculum development. Specialist school funding has been effectively used in achieving the targets and outcomes detailed in the specific specialist status development plan. However, for specialist status to impact more fully on the whole school and for the school to recognise the quality of its work in areas such as music,

this plan requires a wider perspective than its current focus to mathematics, science, ICT and design and technology.

67. The school has effective procedures to ensure the appropriate recruitment, retention and induction of staff. There is a good balance between new and more experienced staff and staff deployment has been well managed. The initial teacher training opportunities offered are very good and trainees make a valuable contribution to the school. The school has put effective measures in place to implement the government's Workload Agreement.

Sixth form

68. Leadership of the sixth form is satisfactory and day-to-day management is good. The head of sixth form is well established and committed to doing the best for all students. Data is effectively used to analyse performance and there is a sound understanding of the quality of teaching and learning. However, overall assessment of students' progress is a weakness and comprehensive data, in relation to students desired outcomes and learning needs, is not routinely used to determine the pattern of provision. Too much is invested in the role of one person and insufficient use is made of the sixth form tutors in student development and mentoring and, for example in the completion of the annual UCAS forms for university entrance. The weakness in the strategic leadership of the sixth form is recognised by the leadership team and governors. The further raising of sixth form standards and its development is a key focus for the school.

Financial information

69. The school's finances are well managed. The leadership team and governors receive clear, up to date financial monitoring information from the bursar. Spending decisions made by the governors are clearly related to priorities for improvement and benefits for pupils. The school has responded very positively to national initiatives to relieve teachers of the administrative burden and they are, therefore, able to concentrate more on their core function. The school last received an auditors' report from the Local Education Authority in 2003 and has fully acted on the recommendations made. Due regard is paid to the principles of best value. The budget balance carried forward in March 2004 represented six per cent of the school's total income. This was appropriately allocated in relation to support for the recently opened music provision, planned refurbishment of toilet accommodation and sixth form development. The school currently anticipates a small surplus on its revenue budget for the current financial year, which represents a prudent contingency.
70. The school makes very good use of specific grants and additional funding as in the development of the new music accommodation and ICT facilities. It uses its funding for special educational needs appropriately and gets good value from the work of the special needs co-ordinators and learning support assistants. Funding, from the school's involvement in the National Strategies for Literacy, Numeracy and Key Stage 3, has been used prudently.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	3,778,704
Total expenditure	3,555,736
Expenditure per pupil	3,244

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	131,556
Balance carried forward to the next year	222,968

71. The main aids to students' achievement are: the students' own high level of self-motivation and high quality behaviour; the high expectations of staff and the overall good teaching and learning; the very good leadership of the headteacher backed by the able leadership team and effective governors' scrutiny. The main barriers to raising achievement further are the narrow sixth form curriculum and its continuity across the 14-19 age range, assessment in the sixth form, the development of students' participation as active and independent learners and the development of the subject leaders' role in leading learning and the curriculum. Taking into account the funding received by the school, the social and economic backgrounds of students and the overall high quality of education provided, the school provides good value for money.

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 **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Standards are very high and continue to rise.
- The curriculum is very good and serves the needs of all students.
- The subject is well led and managed.
- There has been a very good level of improvement since the last inspection.
- There are not always enough opportunities to fully support independent learning by using ICT.

Commentary

72. In the 2003 national tests for Year 9, 73 per cent of students gained Level 6 and above, well above the national average. This was a substantial increase on the standards achieved at the last inspection and represents a very good level of achievement for all groups of students. The three year trend of results shows improvement at well above the national average. Provisional results are only slightly below this in 2004. The current attainment of students in Years 7, 8 and 9 is also well above expectation. This is because they make very good progress and achieve well in response to some very good teaching. Those students with SEN and those with EAL support make similar good progress for their capabilities. Students from ethnic minority heritages mostly do at least as well as other students. The broad subject curriculum, which is rich in drama, novels and poetry enhances their progress. Very good opportunities to speak up and be heard in lessons help self-confident speech and students readily develop skills of oral collaboration, which help them to learn. They quickly develop the capacity to read text closely, helping them to become discerning and, at times, voracious readers. Students have some opportunities to present their work in striking and original ways, using word processing, but there are not enough opportunities to use ICT for stylistic exploration and collaborative work and this is a barrier to the independent learning of some higher achieving students.
73. In 2003, students' performance in GCSE English was well above the national average in the proportion of A* to C grades obtained for girls and all students. In English literature, for which almost all students are routinely entered, the proportion of students achieving grades A* to C has improved greatly since the last inspection and is now significantly above the national average. Results this year were slightly lower in both subjects but still above the national average. In drama and in media studies, the proportion of students achieving grades A* to C was significantly above the national average, with media studies results showing a particular improvement in 2004. The proportion of students achieving grades A* to G in all subjects is consistently 100 per

cent and the three year trends for all subjects show improvement above that nationally.

74. The current attainment of students in Years 10 and 11 is well above the expectation for their age. All groups of students, including those from ethnic minority heritages, make good progress. Their achievement in speaking and listening, where they respond very well to the excellent opportunities that they are given to improvise dramatic scenes in class, is well above average. Students demonstrate confident insights into dramatists' techniques on these occasions, which help their skills of literary analysis. This was particularly evident in a lesson in which groups of students presented scripted performances of 'An Inspector Calls' using a variety of dramatic devices, which the rest of the class successfully identified. In drama, students identify and use a range of rehearsal techniques, which further help their analytical studies. In media studies, highly competent skills of analysis inform the very high standards of work seen. Students are given very good opportunities in English, both in lessons and for homework, to write in a variety of styles and for specific purposes. Independent writing of a very high quality has been successfully entered for national competitions. Students do not, however, have the continuous access to computers, which would allow them to experiment independently with style, research more widely and exchange ideas more readily. The lack of interactive whiteboards in classrooms is a barrier to independent learning in all years.
75. Teaching is very good. Teachers of English, media studies and drama work well as a team and effectively share best practice, which keeps the quality of teaching high. Their excellent knowledge of text, techniques and examination requirements allows lessons to challenge students. This extends their knowledge whether in the analysis of film, Shakespeare, or interpretation of plays such as 'Blue Remembered Hills' for scripted performance. Students rise to the challenge and in consequence they learn very well. Lessons are very well planned. Students readily engage in activities which match their capabilities very well. The very good teaching effectively extends the higher attaining students, whilst well supporting those with particular learning needs, for example those students for whom English is an additional language or those who have special educational needs. Students are co-operative, interested and eager to learn. Very good ensemble work, a key area of attainment in drama, where students take direction very well is an effective feature of the lessons. The capacity of some students to successfully study English literature and media in the limited time available to English is a strong feature of their commitment to learning and their capacity to learn independently.
76. The subject is very well managed and effectively led. There is an absolute commitment to the raising of standards. There is clear strategic vision on how this can be brought about. All staff are clear about their roles, responsibilities and personal objectives. Staff have very good access to guidance and relevant support so their skills are well developed and deployed to best effect. The subject welcomes student teachers and assimilates external views on its work from a local university department, which leads to mutual benefits and an enriching exchange of ideas. The subject leader is aware of the need to develop detailed lesson planning further to help consistency in delivery and the curriculum. This is being tackled effectively. There are clear lines of responsibility to drama and media, which ensure students' success in these subjects. There is a continuing capacity to effect change successfully. It is

entirely fitting that the Local Education Authority uses the subject as a model of practice and that some of the teachers lecture, on occasion, in a local university department of education.

77. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. The subject has tackled the issues of the last inspection systematically and with vigour. There is now sufficient time for all aspects of the curriculum. Students now read widely in all years. Students who speak English as an additional language and those with special educational needs are now well provided for in lessons and make effective progress. The high standards of teaching, monitoring, extra-curricular activities and management described in the last report have been fully maintained. Standards continue to rise.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

78. Literacy across the school is good and supports learning well. Provision is, however, not systematically applied across all subjects. Speaking and listening are very good, help students to learn and are a strength of the school. Listening skills are very good in all subjects. Confident speech enables students to ask searching questions in lessons such as citizenship. In music, history, business studies and sociology students show in their extensive oral contributions to lessons that they have assimilated an effective technical vocabulary. Students' discussion was of a particularly high standard when they were observed during the inspection discussing identity and self in a lesson in art and design. In English, there is successful use of role-play and discussion. Students relish the cut and thrust of debate. Opportunities for questioning and argument are, however, missed in science. Students rarely have the confidence to initiate the foreign language in speaking when studying French and German, which is a weakness. Students know how to vary the way they speak in different social situations. They collaborate efficiently, listening to others' opinions and present their own views confidently and appropriately. There are many good opportunities for public performance. Students are encouraged to read around the subject they study and many indeed read very widely, although a few do not read much beyond the texts presented to them in lessons. Writing serves students' learning well. They are given prompts and "scaffolds" in a variety of subjects and spelling and grammar are specifically taught. In English, where systematic redrafting is key to some high standards in students' writing they are aware of how they can increase the formality of their writing. Students write well in design and technology and ICT, although their spelling is not always corrected. There is good evidence of extended writing in Years 10 and 11 in modern foreign languages. Essay work and writing in music is of a high order, illustrated by strikingly effective use of music vocabulary. Critical writing of an analytic nature is developing well.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is consistently good with some very good features.
- Students achieve well in both languages and make very good progress in German.

- Standards are above and often well above average in French and German.
- Management and leadership of the subject are good.
- Students are not always confident enough to initiate discussion in the foreign language.
- There are insufficient extra-curricular opportunities to broaden the students' foreign language experience.

Commentary

79. By the end of Year 9 students' attainment is above average in French and often well above average in German. Students read well and have a very good grasp of grammar. Their comprehension and listening skills are already at a high level. Written work is usually very accurate and students speak with good pronunciation. Consequently, students at this stage are achieving very well, borne out by the large percentage of students reaching and exceeding national expectation levels at the end of Year 9. By the end of Year 11 these high standards are maintained in French and German. In 2003 GCSE results in both French and German were well above the national averages with 73 per cent of students in French and 70 per cent of students in German achieving grades A* to C. in both subjects 100 per cent of the students entered achieved an A* to G grade. The three year trend of results shows a steady rise in standards, which has continued in 2004. The 2004 unvalidated GCSE results show a substantial percentage of A* and A grades in French and well above average grades in German. Students in Years 10 and 11 have a wide vocabulary and are able to apply correctly, grammatical structures including a range of tenses. Written language is very accurate and includes extended writing using complex language. Whereas students pronounce the language well they are less confident to initiate the foreign language or to ask questions without prompting. Students continue to make good or very good progress because of their positive response to the high expectations of their teachers. In all years the achievement of students with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language is good. Higher attaining students are well extended particularly in Year 11 as shown in the improving A* and A grades at GCSE.
80. Teaching is good with some very good features in both French and German. Without exception teachers have established very warm relationships with their classes and they build on students' commitment to learning to ensure that they make very good progress. Teachers mark work regularly providing helpful commentary and they are consistent in their assessment to ensure that students know how well they are doing and what they should do to improve. In most lessons teachers use the foreign language appropriately for instruction and students have no problems in coping with this, though in a minority of cases there is some unnecessary use of English. All lessons are very well structured and pace is always brisk. In the best lessons the variety of activities, including paired or group work, together with very clear presentation, using a range of visual or aural stimuli, including the use of ICT, holds students' interest from the beginning and engenders very good response. In, for example, a Year 11 German class students responded particularly well to a barrage of challenging questions on the theme of holidays and travel using correct past tenses and word order, being able to clearly explain the underlying grammatical rules and confidently using extended language with reference to previously learned material. Students' attitudes to learning are always very positive, behaviour is usually

exemplary and they are rarely inattentive. This has a major impact on the development of students' comprehension skills because they listen carefully for meaning. Students are, however, occasionally too passive and tend to be reluctant to use the foreign language for their own purposes whilst teachers do not sufficiently challenge students' over-reliance upon their teachers or the textbook.

81. The subject is well managed and organised and the subject leader is a good role model to her colleagues. Recent analysis of results has led to the setting of rigorous targets for further improvement. The subject leader has begun to create a strong and coherent team of teachers who effectively share practice through their shared lesson planning and assessment of their students. More could, however, be done to enhance the profile of modern languages and to provide more extra-curricular opportunities to broaden students' language experience of the foreign language through links, visits and exchanges.
82. Since the last inspection improvement has been good. The quality of teaching is improved, there is increased use of ICT in lessons and there is an upward trend in standards, both at the end of Year 9 and in the GCSE examinations for Year 11.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well and standards are high.
- Leadership is articulated through an eloquent vision and ambitious plans.
- Assessment does not fully exploit the contribution students can make to directing their own learning.
- Well qualified teachers build effective mathematical imagination and self-confidence in their students.

Commentary

83. Students' achievement during the first three years is good and, by Year 9, standards are well above the expected level. Test results have been improving steadily for four years. Students continue to achieve well during Years 10 and 11. In 2004, GCSE results were even higher than in 2003, when they were well above average. Students' current written work reflects a similar picture of added value. They are less confident in data handling but their facility with algebra is particularly well developed from an early stage, providing a good foundation for advanced study. Achievement is better in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11. Students in Years 7 to 9 regularly investigate mathematical patterns for themselves but the most talented students are not always stretched enough by suitably challenging work. The subject is inclusive: students from various ethnic backgrounds and those with special educational needs achieve similarly well, benefiting from teaching assistants' skilled support.
84. Teaching and learning are good. They are better in Years 7 to 9 where some lessons are excellent. Expectations of learning are high, teachers use probing questioning to extend students' understanding in carefully planned lessons. In Years 7 and 8 they

use the CAME method to instil mathematical thinking skills and a willingness to conjecture. Regular homework extends learning. Students have very good attitudes towards the subject and their self-confidence is built strongly through a combination of challenge, praise and encouragement. There are not enough opportunities for practical, independent and collaborative learning or for discussion in Years 10 and 11. The teachers have very good subject knowledge and where shortages call for teaching by non-specialists, they are well deployed and make a valuable contribution. Students have their own textbooks but otherwise, resources are not widely exploited to aid teaching or learning and ICT is still not used extensively.

85. The use of assessment is satisfactory overall. Students' work is marked conscientiously and they all have long-term targets but most are not sufficiently aware of what level they have reached or what short-term targets would help them to improve their work.
86. Leadership is very good. The subject leader has ambitious plans and an eloquent vision of the future. A unity of purpose and a determination to succeed permeate the team she is developing and she presents a very good role model for staff and students. An imaginative community project has been introduced in which Year 7 and Year 8 students work alongside same age students from a local special school. Management is good. Very good documentation is backed by good organisation. Self-evaluation is strong and perceptive and there is a good subject development plan. Arrangements for systematic monitoring and sharing good practice are at an embryonic stage.
87. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The assets identified then remain strong, including standards, teaching, homework, student attitudes and work ethos. Students now conduct more open-ended mathematical investigations and teachers have begun to use ICT to support learning, but the power of assessment, to enhance learning, is still not being fully exploited.

Mathematics across the curriculum

88. Students' competence in mathematics is very good overall. This reflects their success in core mathematics lessons and their own mature approach to the use of mathematics. In some subjects such as geography and science mathematical skills and techniques are given appropriate emphasis. For example students collect, analyse and interpret numerical data applying their work to graphical presentations or appropriate calculations. However, in too many subjects students only use and apply their mathematical skills at a routine level and occasionally the techniques used do not follow consistent practice. The outcomes of the subject audit of 2002 and subsequent staff training have not been effectively monitored and coherently developed and currently the development of students' overall mathematical competence is too focused within mathematics itself.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results and Year 9 test results are well above average.
- Students work hard and want to learn.
- Leadership is good and has a focus to raising standards.
- The enforcement of safety practices is not consistent.
- Short term planning and assessment processes are not rigorous enough to improve the quality of learning.
- The staff development programme is not planned with sufficient rigour to improve the quality of teaching.

Commentary

89. Test results at the end of Year 9, in 2003, were well above average and have improved steadily since the last inspection. The three year trend of improvement is above that nationally. Results fell slightly in 2004 but are still above average. GCSE results in 2003 and provisional results for 2004 are well above average. Again the three year trend over time is above that nationally. These standards indicate sustained good achievement across Years 7 to 11. In all Years the attainment of students with special educational needs is appropriate for their capabilities. Students from ethnic minority heritages mostly do at least as well as other students.
90. The standard of work seen in Years 7 to 9 is above average. The students gain confidence and effectively develop their knowledge, understanding and skills across the range of National Curriculum topics. They enjoy experimenting and successfully acquire scientific methods of recording. The neat work in the students' books shows the pride they take in their work. The standard of work seen in Years 10 and 11 is above average. All students follow the GCSE double-award course. Selected classes are studying the Applied Science GCSE course, which links science to the world of work. In both courses, there is an effective balance of theory and practical work. The students display a keen interest in science and develop confidence in organising their own investigations, following correct scientific procedures. Most students display a mature attitude presenting their work to a high standard.
91. Lower attaining students, including those with special educational needs, benefit from being taught in small groups and, where teaching is good they make good progress especially when supported by teaching assistants. On occasions the work set is not sufficiently innovative or structured to motivate the students or to enable their progress. Higher attaining students, including the gifted and talented, pursue more challenging work but this programme has yet to be fully implemented. In Years 7 and 8 some teachers do not plan lessons with sufficient rigour to address the needs of the most or least able students.
92. Teaching is good overall. Some teaching is very good but, in a minority of lessons, it is unsatisfactory. Good lessons begin with activities to reinforce earlier learning or to focus on new work that matches the students' abilities and challenges them to ensure they achieve the lessons' aims. In very good lessons, planning is meticulous, expectations are high, teacher and student relationships are strong and teachers are skilful in eliciting the students' thought processes to ensure maximum learning. These teachers assess the students' progress continuously and adjust questions, explanations and activities to match the learning styles of individuals. They provide

extra help or challenge where needed. Praise is effectively used, which encourages the students to work hard and enjoy learning. Where lessons are unsatisfactory progress is limited, because activities are not well matched to the students' learning needs and teachers do not check students' level of understanding. The marking of students' work varies in quality. In some books, teachers have corrected work and added comments to advise and encourage the students. There are references to National Curriculum levels and targets to challenge the students. Other books have little or no marking to help students to improve their learning. As with marking the emphasis on safety in lessons can be insufficiently consistent and some teachers do not enforce for example the goggles-wearing rule for experiments.

93. Work in biology contributes to students' personal development. Opportunities to address students' spiritual and cultural development are sometimes missed because they are not identified in planning. The department enriches the curriculum with a science club, revision lessons and visits to local industries, but there are infrequent visits to field study centres and museums. Teachers help students' literacy and numeracy development but do not take enough advantage of their advanced speaking skills to encourage debating or student-delivered lessons. Most students manage algebra and graph work well but those who have difficulties are not given enough chance to practise calculations or to use computers to help them manage data.
94. The leadership and management of the subject are good. In recent years there have been staffing difficulties and it is admirable that high standards have been sustained. The subject leader is supportive and encourages new and established teachers to support each other and share their expertise. Test data is effectively analysed to identify areas needing improvement. These priorities are set out in the satisfactory subject development plan. Appropriate schemes of work are in place but systematic short-term planning is not. The development of monitoring and staff performance management, to help teachers to focus on factors that will improve the quality of learning, are recognised priorities. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.
95. The new laboratories provide good flexible workspaces. However there is inadequate storage space for pupils' bags and coats. The subject leader has been advised that, in the interest of safety, until this problem is addressed students' belongings must be stored in selected dedicated areas of the laboratories. Chemicals are now stored safely but there is a lack of storage space for equipment and a consequent lack of orderliness in the prep-rooms.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good leadership and good teaching encourage students to achieve well.
- Students' attitudes are very good and teachers ensure a constructive environment in which to learn.
- There is excellent use of ICT to support learning and this is raising achievement.
- Students with special educational needs achieve well.

- Time in the core programme in Years 10 and 11 is restricted and does not allow students to attain a full GCSE in ICT.
- The use of ICT across subjects of the curriculum does not consistently enhance learning and achievement.

Commentary

96. Students enter the school with a wide range of skills in using ICT. Overall, attainment at the beginning of Year 7 is average but by Year 9 attainment is above average.
97. In 2003 students were entered for the first time for the GCSE short course in ICT. Results for students achieving grades A* to C were below average. Provisional results for 2004 show a significant improvement for those achieving grades A* to C.
98. Standards of work seen in Year 9 are above average and all groups of students are achieving well. The success of the recently introduced support for ICT assessment and evaluation of students' work, as part of the Key Stage 3 Strategy, helps them take responsibility for their learning and ensures that teaching effectively matches their needs. Students are very confident and keen to use ICT. They navigate successfully within the Internet and combine text, images, desktop publishing and data handling to illustrate the findings of their research. They are particularly adept at using the teacher produced task sheets installed on the computer to help improve learning. Higher attaining students work quickly and confidently, follow instructions well and evaluate their work regularly. Good literacy and numerical skills help progress. Students with special educational needs achieve well and they express pride in their work. The minority ethnic students have a good command of English and work well on computers.
99. In the GCSE classes students are confident and work independently, using a range of software including desktop publishing and use of database to simulate business practice. A Year 11 group built very effective relational databases on a topic of their own choice as part of their GCSE course. They work hard and show high levels of knowledge and skill. Attitudes to the subject are very good throughout the school. Students develop and apply their skills further through activities such as extended writing for coursework projects. Achievement is good throughout Years 10 and 11 and standards are rising.
100. Teaching and learning are good, with some very good features. In the best lessons the use of a data projector has a very positive effect on students' learning because basic knowledge and skills are taught quickly and efficiently to the whole class. The specialist teachers have very good subject knowledge, are up to date, explain new work very well and engage the interest of the students. Lessons are well organised, with good use of on screen teacher task sheets. Co-operative work is encouraged and ensures that students' are actively involved. Effective organisation, as with clear seating plans also enhances the students' learning. There is a brisk pace to lessons and effective summing up to reinforce what has been achieved. Teachers ensure that students with special educational needs are well supported and keep up with the class. Regular marking of students' work and effective teacher comments are well recorded on the subject assessment system and available for all to see and use.

101. Good leadership and management enhance the specialist subject provision. Standards have risen because the curriculum has improved significantly in Years 7 to 9, meeting the needs of all students. Effective use of the school's specialist technology status has assisted this improvement, however, use of the short course GCSE, as the only Year 11 accreditation, does not meet the needs of the majority of students.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

102. Students' overall competence in ICT is good, although it is only satisfactory in the sixth form, where sufficient access to facilities can be an issue in some subjects. However improvement since the last inspection has been good and the students' ICT competence is now effectively developed in a number of subject areas. ICT is well used in music, where provision is excellent and use of computers is having an extremely beneficial impact on the standards of composing especially with GCSE groups. Geography uses ICT simulation software very well. For example, with Year 9 students, ICT is used to test hypothesis against current events such as illustrating the effects of natural hazards like earthquakes. In design and technology some worthwhile use is made of computer-aided design to present graphics. The Internet is well used in most subjects, with students effectively analysing and presenting resultant research findings. In supporting teaching and the students' learning ICT is becoming effectively used for example interactive whiteboards and computerised projectors are used effectively to present information to students in ICT lessons. The computer rooms and the library provide good opportunities for students to use computers outside lessons when they can independently develop their computer skills and have access to the Internet.
103. Whilst much has been achieved there is still further work to do. Most students are competent users of ICT, however teachers are not yet consistently recognising or building upon these skills to extend the students' independence and ability to take responsibility for their own learning across the curriculum. Similarly whilst good practice exists the use of ICT techniques as a routine aid to teaching and learning is still being developed.
104. ICT is a recognised area for continued improvement at a whole school level, as in the co-ordination of ICT across the curriculum and in specific subjects such as English, science, mathematics and physical education. Although computer resources have improved significantly since the last inspection, the ratio of computers to students is still slightly below the national average and these subjects have limited access to appropriate ICT facilities.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The good subject knowledge of teachers and their effective sharing of good practice ensure good teaching.
- Very good relationships with students and their positive attitudes are enhanced by the high quality of the learning environment in all subject classrooms.
- A good field studies programme, utilising both the local area and visits to other areas of the United Kingdom, enhances the students' achievement.
- Strategies used to support the learning of students with SEN, EAL and those who are gifted and talented are not sufficiently developed and understood in all lessons.
- Although some good practice exists the access to ICT facilities and the appropriate training for subject staff are underdeveloped.

Commentary

105. Standards are above average. Teacher assessment for 2003, in Year 9, showed 90 per cent of students achieving the expectation for their age, which is well above average for the subject. Over time the subject displays sustained high standards and teacher assessments in 2004 are of a similar level to those in 2003. Standards in GCSE at the end of Year 11 are also above the national averages, with 75 per cent of students achieving grades A* to C in 2003 and a pleasing 97 per cent achieving grades A* to G. As yet unvalidated 2004 results show considerable improvement with 88 per cent of students achieving grades A* to C. This reflects the effectiveness of targeted support by the subject teachers to those borderline students during Year 11. GCSE results at grades A* to C have been well above the national performance for the subject over a three year period. Higher attaining students achieve at the appropriate level because the well structured teaching and effective assessment extends their learning. The subject is inclusive: students from various ethnic backgrounds and those with special educational needs achieve similarly well, benefiting from good teaching.
106. In the work seen students' attainment in Years 7 to 9 is above the expectation for their age and their achievement is good. In Years 10 to 11 attainment is well above average and students' achievement is very good. Over Years 7 to 9, students develop a good understanding of geographical skills, issues and the location of places. Their written work shows great care and effort. Mapping skills are well developed. In all years the local area is used very effectively to allow students to understand the main factors behind the growth of settlements and industry. Year 10 and 11 students enjoy the subject and make good use of their literacy and numeracy skills, particularly in well presented coursework, which is often of a high standard. Field study work is very effective and similarly enjoyed. Its high quality supports the students' achievement. On occasions students' work requires them to be too passive and they can lack sufficient opportunities to work independently and take full responsibility for their learning.
107. Teaching and learning are good across Years 7 to 11, with many examples of very good practice. Teacher and student relationships are a strength of the subject, creating a most positive learning environment. For example in Year 8 lively discussion and effective collaborative work on secondary industries enhanced the students' achievement. In Year 9 students were very well stimulated and engaged in their learning when they tested a hypothesis relating to global locations of earthquakes and volcanoes. Well structured planning and policy documents effectively support the organisation of teaching. Good assessment of progress and effective marking of work

positively support the students' learning and achievement. Although the interactive whiteboard is effectively used, more limited access to student ICT facilities and the need for additional staff training constrain the subject's full use of ICT in its teaching.

108. Leadership is satisfactory and day-to-day management is good. Following problems with staff retention in recent years the subject leader has now established a purposeful ethos and developing focus to learning and raising standards. Subject documentation has been effectively revised. Accommodation is good and display is well used to enhance the students' learning. Resources are satisfactory overall but those for ICT require further development and student access.
109. Improvement since the last inspection has been good with a continued rise in standards and the development of an effective subject team. The need to exploit the developing focus to learning fully, particularly in raising the achievement of students with EAL and special educational needs and in the ICT aspects of the subject, are recognised.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at the end of Year 9 and GCSE in Year 11 are above average.
- Students make good progress in their learning from Year 7 to Year 11.
- Where students are active in their learning their achievement is enhanced.
- Some students with EAL underachieve.
- Assessment and the quality marking of work is patchy and undervalued by some teachers.

Commentary

110. Standards are above average overall and achievement is good. At the end of Year 9 students now perform at above average levels. Those who took GCSE in Year 11 reached standards well above the national averages for grades A* to C in 2003. For those achieving grades A* to G results are in line with those nationally. Provisional GCSE results for 2004 were in line with those for 2003. Most higher attaining students achieve appropriate levels, but for some the lack of consistency in the marking of their work can hinder their progress. Similarly some EAL students and students from ethnic minority backgrounds can underachieve because the limited feedback on their work does not help them to fully grasp the more difficult concepts, as in the appropriate use of technical vocabulary for evaluation. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.
111. Standards seen during the inspection were above average, showing good coverage of the National Curriculum. Students develop understanding and knowledge, they learn to write concisely about change and continuity and give a variety of opinions. Students speak and listen to each other considerately and keep notes efficiently. In Years 10 and 11 students reach high standards in the Schools' History Project GCSE, especially in coursework, where they develop good ICT skills.

112. Students enter the school with above average attainment and progress well. Year 7 and 8 students are eager to learn and ask shrewd questions about complex issues, such as the conflict between Protestant and Catholic ideas in the mid-Tudor period. A gap develops in Year 9 between those who choose the subject for GCSE and those who find it difficult to understand modern affairs and show less interest than their peers. Those who study GCSE enjoy the variety of topics they cover and most work well to meet examination requirements. The very good student attitudes are a strength. However, where students are too passive in their learning they lack confidence in their own judgements. Where the teacher effectively builds upon their positive attitudes, so that they are active and independent in their work, their confidence and levels of achievement grow.
113. Teaching and learning are good overall, with some very good and some only satisfactory outcomes. All teachers are committed specialists. Where teaching is very good students make rapid gains in comprehending concepts, for example the introduction of the Feudal System after the Norman Conquest. Strengths include the subject enthusiasm younger students develop and the very good preparation for GCSE. The Year 9 experience of learning is patchy and there is no link to the discrete citizenship lessons students also experience in Year 9. The main weakness is the lack of consistency in marking and assessment in Years 7 to 9, which can leave students unsure about how they can improve their work. This limited feedback to students can have a particular effect on EAL students who find it difficult to use technical language for evaluation and, despite making successful progress, can still underachieve.
114. The subject is in a transitional phase under a newly appointed subject leader, who has identified the priorities but not yet had time to initiate change. Leadership is satisfactory. Management is good particularly for the GCSE courses. The subject has shown satisfactory improvement since the last inspection, especially in the improvement in the standards reached at the end of Year 9.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The high standards achieved in the new short course GCSE in 2004.
- Good schemes of work are well taught and assessed.
- Students' attitudes are very good, showing sensitivity to the diversity of religious experience in the local area and in the school.
- Literacy and ICT skills are effectively developed.
- Not all lessons are taught in the well resourced specialist religious education rooms.

Commentary

115. Standards are well above average. At the end of Year 9 students have covered the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus and have mastered religious language well. They are beginning to show that they can learn from religions as well as about them. All students now take a short course religious studies GCSE. Results in 2003 were in line

with the national average for grades A* to C but provisional results in 2004 are improved and well above average. Standards seen during the inspection were well above average. In Years 7 to 9 students can use ICT to support their own questionnaires on religious attitudes. They gain in confidence through aids to literacy and learn how to develop evaluation techniques. For the short course they are encouraged to sharpen their skills at answering questions briefly and to the point. The subject is inclusive: students from various ethnic backgrounds, EAL students and those with special educational needs make good progress for their capabilities and achieve appropriate levels.

116. Achievement is good. Students enter the school with overall average skills in English and acquire good understanding and knowledge. They listen sensitively to each other and value the contributions made by all religions, as well as humanist views about society. They develop good technical language for the GCSE short course and can give a variety of opinions supported by evidence, for example in their coursework on religion in the media.
117. Teaching and learning are good. Strengths include a curriculum which covers three religions in depth, Christianity, Buddhism and Islam, as well as ranging over key elements of all the major religions. The GCSE course is well suited to the prior learning of the students. The more able develop into thoughtful and philosophical young people through the effective leadership and expertise of the specialist teachers. There is currently no progression into sixth form study. Non-specialist staff are well used, contributing their teaching experience to support the good lesson plans provided for them. Familiarity with ICT helps the majority of students to structure their responses. The subject makes good contributions to students' personal development and citizenship. The gifted and talented are well supported to follow their interests, for example in linking art to religious experience. Assessment is relevant and comprehensive and the range of resources used is good.
118. Leadership and management are good. Development since the last inspection has been well led, strengthening the subject and improving its value in the school. The recent introduction of a compulsory short course GCSE has been well managed, ensuring that all students are able to study the Agreed Syllabus in sufficient depth up to the age of sixteen. Improvement since the last inspection has been good but there is still a need to address the statutory provision for religious education for students in the sixth form.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Well above average standards achieved by the end of Year 11.
- Good teaching and learning that encourages high levels of understanding and good standards of practical work.
- Students' very good behaviour and attitudes support their achievement.

- Some unsuitable accommodation, as at the last inspection, can limit achievement.
- The subject's technical assistance is insufficient.
- The students' use of CAD/CAM and ICT skills is underdeveloped.

Commentary

119. The proportion of students achieving GCSE grades A* to C in 2003 was above average. This represents good improvement over the last three years. A very high percentage of students are entered for design and technology examinations, well above that found nationally. 2004 provisional results in resistant materials show significant improvement. For all aspects of the subject the unvalidated 2004 GCSE results display continued improvement. EAL students and students with special educational needs achieve levels appropriate to their capabilities. Students from ethnic minority heritages do at least as well as other students and in textiles, where their cultural heritage is valued in their designs and products, some achieve very high levels.
120. On entry, in Year 7, students' attainment is as expected for their age. Standards of work seen in Year 9 are above average. Achievement is, therefore, good from Year 7 to Year 9. Students start to make good progress almost immediately on entry to the school and respond well to the high expectations of their teachers. This was well illustrated in a Year 7 textile lesson with engrossed students working hard on individually designed tie-dye cushions. As students' skills develop they take more part in the design process. They use sketching and annotation well to show how their design ideas develop. Practical work is particularly well done, with students showing good use of tools and equipment and adhering well to health and safety practices.
121. Standards of work seen in Year 11 are well above average, which represents good progress from Year 9. Good quality work exists in all material areas, but particularly in textiles and food, where teaching expertise ensures that students of all capabilities are challenged and coached to reach their target grades. The portfolio presentations for GCSE show attention to detail and very good understanding and use of the course criteria. Good use is made of ICT for research. Higher attaining students are skilled users of ICT, manipulating images and text, though use of CAD-CAM is not seen in coursework. Oral work shows good understanding of technical terms and key words.
122. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Each teacher has commitment and expertise. In the best lessons students are clear about what they will learn, are specifically praised, are challenged to work quickly, engage in a variety of activities and are required to work co-operatively with others. In these circumstances behaviour and attitudes are very positive. Time is well used in the majority of lessons and pace and challenges are regular features of the work. Teachers mark work so students know how well they are doing.
123. This subject is well led and managed, ensuring good improvement since the last inspection. There is a shared focus on teamwork, including the full involvement of the technical staff, which supports continued improvement and high standards. Although there are issues around staffing in the subject, present standards are not adversely affected. As at the last inspection, a number of lessons are taught in non-

specialist and unsuitable rooms. Some of the accommodation is not spacious enough for the large group sizes and there is insufficient technical support for the subject.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students make good progress from Year 7 to the end of Year 9.
- Teachers possess good subject knowledge and are well informed.
- The standard of work produced in Years 10 and 11 is in line with national expectations.
- Opportunities for producing images through the use of ICT are limited.
- Assessing, recording and tracking systems lack rigour.
- The open plan studio space has an adverse impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

Commentary

124. Attainment on entry to Year 7 is below national expectations. In the initial stages, drawing, painting and craft skills are underdeveloped. However, most students enjoy the subject and work with reasonable concentration to develop their basic skills. This improvement is continued throughout Year 8 and, by Year 9, most are producing work of a standard that is in line with national expectations. Progress from the start of Year 7 to Year 9 is effective and students' achievement is good.
125. In the 2003 GCSE examination, attainment of the highest grades, A* to C was in line with the national average when compared with similar schools and well above when compared with all schools. These students performed better in their other school subjects than in art and design. There has been some slight improvement in the number of students achieving the highest grades in the provisional results of the 2004 GCSE examination. Students with special educational needs are well assimilated into teaching groups and make good progress. Achievement is satisfactory throughout Years 10 and 11. Most students work well, to broaden their knowledge and deepen their understanding of art and design concepts. They apply themselves readily to the set tasks and are reasonably productive. Students in Years 10 and 11 work with greater concentration to improve the quality of their ideas and concepts and to develop their skills in drawing, painting and craftwork.
126. Teaching is good overall. Teachers are well informed and possess good subject knowledge. Planning is carried out thoroughly and organisation during lessons is good. Management of student behaviour is good, which is of crucial importance where three classes are often taught concurrently in this open plan environment. Teachers have high expectations that students will work to the best of their ability, but there is some inconsistency in the setting and marking of homework across the subject. Schemes of work are satisfactory, but in need of regular review to ensure that the subject is keeping abreast with changes to the examination syllabuses. There

are some weaknesses in teachers' assessments, which are overly generous at the end of Year 9.

127. Leadership is good and management satisfactory. The subject leader has a clear vision of how she would like to see the subject develop and many of her ideas are outlined in the effective development plan. She provides a good role model for both staff and students alike. Organisation of the subject, within the present accommodation constraints, is good and the subject leader is well aware of the disadvantages of such arrangements. Students' work is regularly assessed on an informal basis, but assessing, recording and tracking systems are lacking in rigour, which impacts on the quality of feedback provided for students.
128. Accommodation is satisfactory in terms of working space, but the present open plan layout of the single art studio undoubtedly has an adverse impact on teaching, learning and standards of students' work. Resources are adequate within the context of a largely traditional model of the curriculum, one that places emphasis on drawing, painting and craft skills, but the current provision of computers, digital cameras, appropriate software packages, scanners and printers means that there are limited opportunities for students to produce digital images. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are very high.
- Outstanding extra-curricular activities inspire students to achieve very high standards in performing.
- Excellent accommodation and ICT resources provide an exciting focus for students' musical aspirations.
- Composing with notational software is a very strong feature of students' work, especially in Year 11.

Commentary

129. By the end of Year 9 standards are well above average. This represents good achievement for students, including those with special needs and those with English as an additional language, as standards on entry to the school are above the national expectation. Students are very familiar with the signs and vocabulary of music and their oral confidence and singing are very good. Their excellent music capability is shown by their performance on keyboards, which is well above national expectations. High numbers of students have an instrumental experience and are developing well as performers. The development of students' musical skills is particularly evident in Year 9 where all students can play a 12-bar blues sequence with real confidence.
130. GCSE results by the end of Year 11 have been consistently very high with 100 per cent A* to C grades and many students gaining A* grades. Most students in the current Year 11 have developed a good level of keyboard expertise and standards of

composing, with music technology, are well above national expectation. In Years 10 and 11 students are familiar with the latest version of Sibelius software. Year 10 composing standards are very good. Overall composition work shows real flair and maturity and a full familiarity with staff notation that is unusually well developed when compared with many other schools. The subject has encouraged its students to comment critically and in an informed way on pieces composed in class and they write fluently about musical matters. Singing expertise is evident in class as well as in the excellent choirs. Higher attaining students do well, with some outstanding accomplishment in composing and performing being shown by Year 11.

131. The quality of teaching is consistently very good. All teachers have excellent musicianship and a very strong subject knowledge. Where teaching is excellent several Year 11 students display a depth of musical knowledge that is impressive in relation to the national expectations. Teachers are dedicated and enthusiastic and their teaching skills promote a high level of learning. Lessons have very good structure and pace and good use is made of starter activities to engage students and plenaries which draw together well the main learning points. Teachers encourage the use of whiteboards, which help students to focus their learning. Excellent relationships promote high standards of behaviour and concentration, which result in very good composing and performing activities. Rehearsals are particularly well directed. Demonstrations of good playing technique are a regular feature of the well taught instrumental lessons. Work is effectively marked so that students are helped to understand how they may improve and to measure their performance against the national expectations.
132. Leadership is excellent and management is very good. The subject is very well organised and has a wide range of outstanding extra-curricular activities, including several choral and instrumental ensembles that are of extremely high quality and capable of giving performances of rare excellence and beauty. The school's production of the musical *Guys and Dolls* is a very good illustration of the students' collective and individual music and acting capabilities. Accommodation is outstanding and the resourcing of the main music room, with its many computer stations, is a model of good practice in the application of ICT. Numbers learning instruments (33 per cent of the school population) have been well maintained since the last inspection. The school has enhanced its reputation for musical excellence in the wider community. Overall there has been very good improvement since the last inspection.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good and sometimes very good quality teaching and learning results in good student progress.
- Very good relationships between students and with members of staff make a significant contribution to the quality of learning.
- Students achieve consistently good GCSE results.
- A very good range of activities and after school support enriches the curriculum.

- The time allocated for physical education for students in Years 10 and 11 is insufficient to cover the National Curriculum in appropriate depth.
- In core lessons assessment does not contribute sufficiently to the students' progress.

Commentary

133. In the 2003 and 2004 teachers' assessments of students at the end of Year 9, results were above the national average.
134. GCSE results in 2003 were well above the national average and students achieved better results in physical education than in most of their other subjects. Provisional results in 2004 were disappointing, as many students did not achieve their predicted grades, although most achieved as well in physical education as they did in their other subjects.
135. Standards shown by students by Year 9 are just above average. This represents good progress overall during their first three years in the school, given the average standards on entry in Year 7. During Years 7 to 9 students apply many of the appropriate techniques and skills to gymnastics and dance, where standards are average. Most students can apply sound body tension to a range of gymnastic movements and are able to develop a simple routine, although the overall quality of movement is below average. Basic skills in netball and hockey are just above the national expectation, though some students achieve standards that are well above.
136. Students' standards in Years 10 and 11 are above average, although, in a GCSE practical lesson skills and technique in netball were well above average. Students were able to effectively evaluate performance to improve technique. Evidence from GCSE coursework indicates standards that are above the national average. Students have a good understanding of many aspects of the course, including physiology and anatomy and the principles of training. They are beginning to apply this knowledge to practical situations. The ability of all students to observe and analyse performance is less secure, although, when it is used it is effective in improving performance. Although opportunities to develop planning skills were evident in gymnastics and dance lessons opportunities were missed in most games lessons. Most students have a good understanding of the need for a range of warm up activities before physical exercise, although the importance of exercise to the development of physical fitness is rarely emphasised. The subject is inclusive: students from various ethnic heritages and EAL students do at least as well as others and achieve appropriate levels for their capabilities. Students with special educational needs are well supported and make the same progress as other students. Higher attaining and talented students are effectively extended both in the GCSE course and through the competitive games and extra-curricular activities programme. A good start has been made in Year 10 to allow all students to participate in the Junior Sports Leaders Award.
137. The quality of teaching and learning was good and sometimes very good. A secure knowledge of the subject is regularly conveyed to students through perceptive observation of performance, appropriate intervention and good teacher directed question and answer sessions. Thorough planning, incorporating varied teaching strategies and an appropriate sequence of activities, involving both individual and collaborative learning, are regular and effective features. In a very good GCSE

practical lesson, when students were asked to devise their own strategies for developing attacking moves in netball, these features of teaching were very successfully applied. As a result the students made very good progress. However, in games lessons not enough time is spent on developing basic skills. Discipline and class management is good. Relationships between staff and students are generally very good and students respond with enthusiasm to most lessons. Assessment of performance by teachers in the best lessons is used to enhance teaching but, even in some of these lessons, individual students are only rarely set clear targets for improvement. In the minority of lessons, where teaching was not so good, there were limited strategies for engaging students. In several lessons not enough was expected of the higher attaining students. The recording of assessment does not yet involve students in setting their own targets in most lessons and is not contributing to their progress. However, marking of GCSE theory work is very thorough and is providing appropriate information to help students make good progress. Most GCSE students are aware of how well they are performing related to GCSE assessment criteria. ICT is rarely used and opportunities are missed in the GCSE course to extend the students' learning. The school competes very successfully with other schools in a range of sports. Extra-curricular activities are of a high quality and successfully enrich the class experience for all students.

138. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The day-to-day organisation of the subject is very good and all teachers set very good role models. The subject leader effectively leads a very hard working team, who all make successful contributions to the subject's development. The opportunities for monitoring teaching and learning and for sharing good practice are still developing and have not yet been successful in encouraging a consistent approach to teaching across the subject. Development planning has many good aspects but does not identify specific responsibilities, which can hinder the tracking of outcomes. Lessons in Year 11 have insufficient time to cover the National Curriculum in appropriate depth and to ensure appropriate progress in all activities. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Management of the subject is now good and achievement in all years is good.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school has produced a good citizenship development plan.
- Students are given ample opportunity to develop greater understanding of their roles and responsibilities as citizens.
- Some subject areas do not make the citizenship component of lessons explicit.
- Systems for assessing, tracking and recording students' progress are lacking in rigour.

Commentary

139. The school has carried out a good audit in which each subject identified opportunities for citizenship from within their own areas of learning. Opportunities were also

identified in Thought for the Day, assemblies, election of form leaders and school council elections. At present however, some subject areas are not making sufficiently explicit those opportunities for citizenship that occur naturally within lessons.

140. The school has also produced an adequate policy statement on the teaching of citizenship across all subjects. It clearly states that citizenship is the responsibility of all who operate within the school and members of the wider community. In drawing up this document, the school consulted students who serve on the school council, governors, parents, staff and the leadership team. The declared aims are to help students become informed, thoughtful and responsible citizens who are aware of their responsibilities as well as their rights. There is a comprehensive documentation containing the personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship schemes of work. For example in Year 9 students are asked to investigate the rights of children internationally and to examine the economic conditions under which many children in the developing world work.
141. The quality of teaching and learning in citizenship in some subjects is good and students are encouraged to investigate moral, social and political issues. In Years 10 and 11, they are introduced to financial management and to key financial terms such as APR, to the use of credit cards and the nature of bank charges and loans from various companies. This gives them a solid understanding of how the economy functions, how financial services operate and the rights and responsibilities of consumers, employees and employers. In health and social care, they learn about their social responsibilities as parents, through developing awareness of the effects of alcohol on the unborn child. In other subjects, such as music, teachers encourage genuine democratic thinking by providing students with opportunities for working as a member of a team, for adopting leadership and co-operative roles, as both audience and performer. They develop respect for one another and for the achievements of others through composition and performance. Geography makes a major contribution to citizenship and in Year 7 students conduct local shopping surveys and investigate the creation of litter in local parks. Students in Year 8 look at the environment and at the impact of global warming and de-forestation on the planet. Older students investigate relief operations after earthquakes and floods and in the sixth form students examine globalisation issues, tourism and coastal management. However, some subjects do not do enough to make opportunities for citizenship sufficiently explicit during lessons. Systems for assessing, tracking and recording achievement in citizenship lack rigour at present.
142. The school council is an effective body, which enables students to make recommendations upon which the school acts. Several students were involved in the recent interviewing process prior to the appointment of the new headteacher and presently they are involved in ongoing discussions about proposed changes to the school uniform. All students in the school have access to suggestion boxes and in addition they can come to representatives of the School Council and make their own suggestions about changes they would like to see in the school. This process ensures that all students can take part in whole school activities and develop greater understanding of the democratic process.

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	3	100.0	83.8	0.0	27.8	36.7	32.5
Biology	11	90.9	67.0	0.0	11.3	23.6	21.3
Business studies	2	100.0	77.5	50.0	17.6	45.0	27.0
Chemistry	9	77.8	75.3	22.2	15.7	27.8	25.4
Communication studies	1	100.0	88.0	100.0	27.4	50.0	33.8
Drama	1	100.0	88.5	0.0	22.3	40.0	32.2
English literature	4	100.0	86.9	0.0	20.3	35.0	30.9
French	5	100.0	77.6	20.0	17.9	28.0	27.1
Geography	1	100.0	76.5	100.0	24.0	50.0	28.6
German	1	100.0	82.8	100.0	19.5	50.0	29.2
History	4	100.0	81.8	0.0	21.8	37.5	29.2
Mathematics	7	100.0	67.0	57.1	19.1	45.7	24.4
Music	2	100.0	89.7	50.0	24.2	45.0	32.7
Other social studies	7	71.4	72.3	14.3	19.4	25.7	25.8
Physics	1	100.0	79.4	0.0	22.6	30.0	29.1
Sociology	5	60.0	73.3	20.0	20.5	26.0	26.4
Sports/PE studies	1	100.0	78.5	100.0	19.5	60.0	27.5

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	13	100.0	98.6	23.1	50.2	73.8	87.5
Biology	26	100.0	96.4	46.2	39.2	86.2	78.6
Business studies	15	93.3	98.7	40.0	36.8	78.7	80.1
Chemistry	15	100.0	97.6	66.7	49.0	93.3	84.9
Communication studies	15	100.0	99.4	66.7	37.8	90.7	82.1
Drama	8	100.0	99.5	37.5	40.1	80.0	83.6
English literature	18	100.0	99.5	44.4	46.5	88.9	86.5

French	3	100.0	98.8	66.7	51.5	93.3	87.6
Design and technology	5	100.0	97.8	60.0	35.0	88.0	77.9
Geography	4	100.0	98.7	75.0	44.5	100.0	84.0
German	3	100.0	98.4	33.3	47.9	80.0	84.8
History	26	100.0	99.0	50.0	44.6	90.0	84.6
Mathematics	6	100.0	96.7	83.3	55.6	113.3	88.8
Music	4	100.0	98.8	75.0	38.9	110.0	81.1
Other languages	1	100.0	96.9	100.0	64.5	120.0	93.8
Other social studies	29	100.0	97.4	58.6	42.7	89.7	81.8
Physics	4	100.0	96.7	75.0	44.6	100.0	81.7
Sociology	17	100.0	98.2	47.1	44.3	83.5	83.6
Sports/PE studies	14	100.0	98.0	78.6	30.9	105.7	75.2

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English was inspected in full and the work of communication studies was sampled. Two lessons were seen in each of Year 12 and 13 and the students' work was scrutinised.

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A level results are above the national average.
- Teaching is very good.
- Students make very good progress in Year 13.
- Students overall achievement is good.

Commentary

143. A level results in English literature were above the national average in 2003 and have improved further this year. A/S level results are broadly in line with the national average and have been maintained at this level over the past four years as numbers taking the course have more than doubled.
144. Students in Year 12 achieve very well in response to some high quality teaching. In a lesson on 'Hamlet' groups of students produced freeze-frames of their idea of madness, which they were able to justify. They annotated a passage from Burton's 'Anatomy of Melancholy' to come to independent conclusions on the nature of the Elizabethan idea of madness and, in classroom debate, engaged productively with the conundrum "Is Hamlet mad?" In their study of Act 1 scene ii, their ability to identify the comic implications of wordplay and metaphor in the context of tragedy helped them to address the theme of spying in the play and encouraged independent and analytical thought and some challenging further reading. The standard of work and the students' achievement in this lesson indicate that the subject is successfully challenging previous only satisfactory achievement, through high quality teaching and

learning. In their study of the literature of the First World War in Year 13, students again achieved well as they began to appreciate the influence of one text on another. They were able to extract links to other texts of the same genre. In one lesson, students used sophisticated concepts of diction and syntax effectively to inform a very good standard of analysis.

145. Teaching is very good. Students learn well and often very well as a result. The erudite approach of teachers, noted in the last inspection, continues to influence students' learning positively and encourages their self-motivation. The use of high quality and well adapted resources further helps students to learn. The very high level of expectation elicits a very good response in all lessons. Explicit links with other subjects extend students' intellectual capacity and encourages them to support their learning with additional reading.
146. Marking and assessment are good and leave students in no doubt as to what they must do to achieve the highest grades. Independent work in both Years 12 and 13 is being very well addressed by teaching, which fosters students' interest in more extensive reading and writing.
147. The subject is very well led and managed. There is a strong commitment to building on what has been achieved and improving standards further. There has been a good level of improvement in standards since the last inspection, particularly at A level. The subject is becoming much more popular and very few drop out.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

148. Students' English language and literacy skills are well above average. They write fluently and accurately, organising their ideas coherently. They read independently following their own lines of enquiry and making their own notes. Speaking and discussion skills are particularly well developed. Students use the appropriate vocabulary of the subjects they are studying and are able to argue a point of view clearly, or present an extended explanation.

Communication studies

149. Work in communication studies was sampled. Standards are above average. Two lessons were seen in each of Years 12 and 13, in which very good teaching and learning enabled students to achieve very well. Teaching showed excellent knowledge. There was high expectation, amply realised by the students and very good support for both their collaborative and independent learning. In the Year 13 lesson, the very high level of engagement of students in debate on issues surrounding box office preference for American films informed their very high level of achievement. In the Year 12 lesson, students' usage of correct media language to describe key concepts helped them to achieve a very good understanding of codes and conventions of genre.

Modern foreign languages

French was inspected in full and German sampled in one lesson in each of Years 12 and 13. The written work of students was scrutinised. Standards attained are average and teaching and learning are good. Students' attitudes to learning are very good.

French

Provision in French is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good or very good.
- Improving standards in Year 12 French and in Year 13 German.
- Students have a sound grasp of grammar and strong comprehension and writing skills.
- Limited confidence of students to speak using extended language.
- Insufficient opportunities for students to experience the language beyond the school.

Commentary

150. French was the main focus of the inspection but German was also sampled in both Year 12 and Year 13. The 2003 results for A level French were above the national average and all students entered achieved at least a grade within the A to E range. Although the entry was small there was an overall improvement from the 2002 results. Provisional results in 2004 are similar to those in 2003. In German the 2003 results for students achieving grades A to B were below the national average, but all students achieved a grade within the A to E range. Students taking German attain at least average standards. Improvement in the provisional 2004 A level results reflects this, with a significant group of students achieving above average standards. Teaching of German is good and often very good because teachers are enthusiastic and have a strong subject knowledge.
151. Standards in French are generally in line with average expectations, but achievement is better in Year 12 than in Year 13. Without exception students have a solid understanding of grammar but show more variability in their spoken accuracy. Higher attaining students show considerable confidence in expressing their views and they usually speak with very good levels of pronunciation, but many students are too limited in their oral responses and rarely ask questions in the foreign language. Listening and reading skills are, however, strong and students can confidently extract meaning from unknown text and are diligent in building up and applying new vocabulary. In a Year 12 lesson on the French education system, students were able to rationalise arguments from core text and produce cogent conclusions using topic-specific language to express their ideas. Achievement of students is usually good and occasionally very good in Year 12 because of their willingness to assimilate new language and structures. Written language is invariably accurate overall and higher attaining students show a willingness and capability to use complex structures with a good breadth of vocabulary.
152. Teaching is good and often very good. Lessons are very well planned using a range of high quality documents, supportive TV/video and 'PowerPoint' presentation. Teachers are very competent linguists and are enthusiastic in their presentation, building upon the very positive attitudes of the students whilst recognising the varying

strengths of their students in their questioning. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and exclusively in French and students have no difficulty in coping with language spoken at near-native speed.

153. Leadership and management of both French and German are good. The sixth form programme has undergone recent review by the new subject leader and her colleagues to ensure that teaching and learning are more closely focused upon the examination requirements and this is bearing fruit in the improving standards, particularly in Year 12. The schemes of work are detailed and the shared teaching results in confident planning and teaching of all the elements of the AS and A level courses. However, the limited opportunities for foreign visits and student exchange, as part of the subject provision, give students insufficient opportunities to develop and experience the language beyond the school.
154. Since the last inspection improvement has been satisfactory, standards continue to be at or slightly above average and there has been improvement in the quality of teaching.

MATHEMATICS

The school offers AS and A2 level courses in mathematics, which together make up the A Level. Year 13 are following the old syllabus and have been able to take modules in pure mathematics, statistics and mechanics but not discrete mathematics. Year 12 students are following the new syllabus, with pure mathematics and mechanics only offered this year. The school plans to restore statistics as an AS option from next year. Advanced level further mathematics is not available. A one year GCSE programme is also provided for other students who have not previously attained grade C or above. All of these courses were included in the inspection.

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching helps students, particularly the more talented, to achieve well.
- Students are encouraged to discover, select and apply mathematical principles for themselves.
- The pace of lessons is brisk, students work hard and good use of computer technology speeds up laborious tasks.
- In Year 13, the organisation of students' folders and the teachers' use of assessment to spur learning are weak, acting as a barrier to learning.

Commentary

155. The prior attainment of students joining AS and A Level courses is above average. Overall, standards are above average. In 2003, A Level results were well above average and AS results were above average. Provisional results in 2004 were less good and the work of Year 13 students, seen during the inspection, was average; Year 12 AS work was above average. Achievement is satisfactory, but better in Year 12 than in Year 13. More talented students make better progress than lower attaining students. Students' knowledge and skills are strongest in mechanics. In the GCSE

group, standards observed were below average but students' achievement is satisfactory.

156. Teaching and learning are good. An emphasis on discovering mathematical principles for themselves enables students to gain a deeper understanding and appropriate selection of procedures. Well qualified teachers know the students well, they are very encouraging and give clear explanations and valuable individual support when students encounter problems. Lessons usually move at a brisk pace, students work hard and they speak highly of their teachers. Computers and graphical calculators are used well to speed up laborious tasks and to help students to model their hypotheses. Where teaching is only satisfactory the range of teaching methods can be restricted, with few opportunities for independent research, collaborative investigation or class discussion. In these lessons teachers make little use of teaching aids beyond textbooks and whiteboards.
157. The use of assessment is unsatisfactory because too often students do not have a clear understanding of what they have achieved or what they must do to improve. Practice is not sufficiently matched to the needs of individual students. Where students are less confident, particularly in Year 13, this acts as a barrier to better learning. Students make few notes in pure mathematics, their folders based only on worked examples and exercises. These folders are not well organised to provide a source for revision. They receive little guidance on folder organisation or revision techniques. Marking is accurate and in Year 12 provides helpful annotation with comments.
158. Leadership is good and management is satisfactory. The subject leader provides a good strategic steer and careful thought has been given to planning for the new syllabuses. Staff deployment shows good planning, effectively exploiting the distinctive strengths of team members. Monitoring performance, reviewing data and taking action are satisfactory but using information to inform planning and developing quality assurance procedures as part of a self-evaluation routine require, recognised, further work.
159. At the time of the last inspection, standards were average and students' achievement satisfactory. There has been good improvement since then: the subject is more popular, the AS course has been introduced and standards have risen.

Mathematics across the curriculum

160. Generally, students have good mathematical skills to meet the varied needs of subjects they choose to follow in the sixth form. There is no organised provision within the school for students not taking AS mathematics to develop it further as a key skill. Those who have not obtained grade C at GCSE are advised to follow a one-year GCSE course for three hours per week. This works well for students following the Intermediate GNVQ Business Studies course, but it does not receive sufficient priority in the timetabling process, with the result that most of those following A level courses who need to improve their mathematical skills are unable to attend the lessons. No cross-curricular audit of mathematical provision has been completed, but the inspection found that there are good opportunities in many sixth form subjects,

notably geography, business, science, information and communication technology and sports.

HUMANITIES

History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers are specialists with good subject knowledge and expertise in the sixteenth century and twentieth century options of the AS and A Level courses.
- Students find the gap between Early Modern Britain and Cold War USA study challenging.
- The transition from a Schools' Council based GCSE to traditional AS is not well managed and students do not always know what they need to do to improve their performance.
- Students overall lack the confidence to lead in argument, or put opinions forward.

Commentary

161. Standards were above average in the 2003 examinations at A Level. They were higher in 2003 than 2002. In 2003 a large number of students failed to achieve a grade in AS level at the first sitting and consequently dropped the subject in Year 13. Nearly all students enter the sixth form with at least a grade C in history, but a few begin the subject without prior study. Provisional results in 2004 showed a decline in overall performance although the percentage of A and B grades was above the national average.
162. Standards seen during the inspection were just above national expectations. The sixteenth century British options present greater problems, particularly in language. Students find the transition to AS level difficult, because of the type of GCSE they have studied. Achievement is satisfactory, with two thirds of the lessons seen showing progress in learning in line with the students' capacity. Their skills at evaluation and investigating sources from the early modern period are less well developed than the construction of short structured responses in American history.
163. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, but the wide and very differing range of learning experiences can lead to insecurity and lack of confidence for some students. Skills in coursework have been well developed but not so much the students' capacity to evaluate and to respond independently. In some lessons students are not drawn into making judgements, but are taught in a too directed way. As a result many lack the confidence to lead in argument, or put opinions forward. These lessons too often make use of routine tasks. Valuable time to progress the students' learning and understanding can be wasted. In better lessons they are introduced to the variety of historical opinion and helped to structure their responses to meet the course assessment criteria fully, for example on Kennedy's domestic agenda and the obstacles raised by the American system of government. Assessment is not consistently used to improve students' achievement constructively. Too often it

lacks rigour or, as with some marking, assumes that the student will understand without appropriate explanation of what has been achieved or what must be done to improve.

164. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The recently appointed subject leader has identified the need to focus on sixth form teaching and assessment. Students' views are not currently canvassed. Many do not know what is required for some papers, or how they can improve their work. Coursework is well managed, fully meeting examination requirements. Resources are not broad enough; library books, covering the topics of the A level, which stopped in 2001, predominate and periodicals are not available for student use. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory with some raising of standards in examination performance.

Sociology

Provision in sociology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Above average standards in the AS level examinations.
- Students' interest in and enjoyment of the subject.
- The newly appointed subject leader has vision and the organisational skills to raise the quality of provision to a higher level but the leadership and management are currently unsatisfactory.
- The focus on conceptual understanding is not sufficient in the learning programme.
- ICT and other resources are not widely used to enhance the teaching.

Commentary

165. Results in the 2003 AS examinations were in line with the national average for students achieving A to B grades but below for those achieving A to E grades. The three year trend of results is variable from above average to in line with the national average, though the entry numbers are very small in each year. Provisional results in 2004 are similar to 2003. Students' progress, when measured against their prior knowledge and individual capabilities, is at least satisfactory and sometimes good. The current Year 12 students are achieving well and their work on methodology indicates that attainment is high. Results in the A level examination improved significantly in 2003 and were in line with the national average for those students achieving grades A to B. All students entered achieved a grade in the range A to E. Provisional results for 2004 are slightly lower than in 2003. The current Year 13 have begun the second year of their studies with a solid base of facts but at this point in the academic year they have yet to make the leap to a good appreciation of an holistic view of the subject. Progress and attainment are satisfactory.
166. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Students find the subject interesting and would recommend it to their peers. Good discussions occur in lessons but more could be done to promote understanding through the fine-tuning of the meaning of key words such as evaluation. Students are taught to have a good regard for statistics, effectively using data to underpin their written arguments. The effective analysis and graphical presentation of data makes a satisfactory contribution to their numeracy

skills. The concepts studied and the challenge of the students' tasks supports their learning and effectively develops their moral, social and cultural understanding. The Year 12 lesson seen and the students' work display a brisk pace of learning and a very good grounding in methodology. Good learning is also evident in tasks where the effect of socialisation on gender roles was explored. Students are engaged by the effective use of current material and the teachers' wide subject expertise. Good relationships engender a learning partnership. There was no unsatisfactory teaching. However, a Year 13 class would have achieved more if there had been a stronger focus on testing their ability to relate a range of theories to an analysis of the effects of the media on stereotyping.

167. A new subject leader has only just been appointed. Other staff changes mean that the subject is building relationships within a new team. Some staff are new to teaching within the English school system. Senior managers have established an effective support network that includes the local authority advisers to overcome these problems. The subject lacks detailed documentation and resources. Access to ICT is limited.
168. Leadership and management are currently unsatisfactory. The newness of the team has not yet allowed the establishment of effective monitoring and self-review. Currently these aspects are supported by senior managers. However, the subject leader has a clear vision and strong organisational skills. All staff are committed to raising standards and there is a good capacity to secure improvement. No judgement can be made on improvement since the last inspection, as the subject was not taught at that time.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and design was inspected and the work of theatre studies was sampled. One lesson in each of Years 12 and 13 was seen and the students' work was scrutinised.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are articulate and have the capacity for discussing complex concepts and ideas.
- Students work with good concentration to acquire new knowledge and to develop their skills.
- Teachers possess good subject knowledge and provide good advice and support.
- The systems for assessing, recording and tracking students' progress lack rigour.
- The single art studio is noisy which has an adverse impact on private, reflective study.
- The provision of ICT is inadequate to meet the course needs and demands of students.

Commentary

169. In the AS level examination in 2003, the number of students achieving grades A to B was in line with the national average. In the 2004 provisional results this figure rose and attainment was above the national average. In the A level examination in 2003, the number of students achieving grades A to B was below the national average; provisional results for 2004 show improvement. The standard of work seen during the inspection is now in line with national expectations, due mainly to the emphasis teachers now place on the need for students to improve their thinking and conceptual skills.
170. Students in Year 12 make good progress. They are highly motivated and work in a concentrated manner to acquire knowledge, understanding and to develop their skills in drawing and painting. They are articulate and capable of discussing complex concepts and ideas. The studies in their visual diaries show growing self-confidence in the way that they set about carrying out research to develop these ideas. In Year 13 students work hard to develop their knowledge, understanding and improve their technical skills. They are beginning to demonstrate the self-confidence required to work from their own concepts, attitudes and belief systems. They investigate thoroughly the work of artists such as Henry Moore and then use this information to inform their own work. The standard of work that they produce is broadly in line with national expectations. Achievement across Year 12 to Year 13 is satisfactory.
171. Teaching is good at this level. Teachers are well informed, possess good subject knowledge and are familiar with the AS and A2 level syllabus specifications. They are therefore well placed to provide good advice and support for their students. Very good relationships exist between teachers and students, who are effectively encouraged to develop their capacity for working independently. They actively analyse their own work and that of other artists and successfully evaluate the quality of their own research. Teachers set challenging targets for students, who respond well and resolve problems largely unaided. Work is assessed informally on an ongoing basis and oral feedback provided regularly for students.
172. Leadership is good and management satisfactory. The subject leader has a very clear idea of how she would like to see the subject develop. She has a good understanding of the requirements of the AS and A2 level examination and provides good advice and guidance for students. Although informal assessment takes place regularly, more formal assessment, recording and tracking systems are lacking in rigour.
173. Accommodation is unsatisfactory, as students are obliged to work in one single large studio space that is not suitable for quiet, reflective work at this level; disruptive noise from other classes interferes with concentrated working by the sixth form students. Resources are just adequate, but limited ICT resources mean that the students have few opportunities to produce images using computers, digital cameras, scanners and printers. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

Theatre studies

174. Work in theatre studies was sampled. Standards observed suggest that students should reach, or slightly exceed the national average by the time of their examination at the end of next year. In their study of 'Our Country's Good' students rapidly engaged with the text. In their run through of the opening scenes of the play they

showed a mature perception of the characters and the relationships between them. They made valid comparisons between Wertebaker and Brecht. Techniques of dramatic presentation, ensemble work and self-evaluation were positive factors in their performance. Skills of textual analysis, however, were not so well developed. The good teaching in this lesson, allied to very high expectation and competent direction, ensured a high level of achievement.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The attitude of students and the relationship between students and staff are very good and are significant factors in the students' very good learning.
- Very good and some excellent teaching ensures very good achievement for students of all abilities.
- There are not enough opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning and to develop their personal research skills.

Commentary

175. In the A level examinations in 2003 the percentage of A to B grades was well above the national average and the percentage of students achieving A to E grades was above the national average. Although the 2004 provisional results are not so good, most students achieved their predicted grades and performed as well or better in physical education than they did in their other A level subjects. In 2003 only one student was entered for the AS examination and achieved a pass in the A to B grade range.
176. Current standards of work are above average and often exceed those expected, based on the students' prior attainment at GCSE. Written work for the majority of students illustrates a good understanding of the subject and key concepts. Students' notes are comprehensive, well organised and provide an effective research and revision tool. There are very good notes on exercise physiology and very good application to practical situations in sport. Students' very good application of their knowledge to practical sporting situations is a key feature of much of the written work. Opportunities for students to illustrate that they can effectively apply their knowledge and understanding to examination questions are underdeveloped. Similarly the students' limited access to ICT facilities can also limit their achievement.
177. Teaching is very good and occasionally excellent. Students learn very well as a result. In the best teaching seen good planning, appropriately varied teaching methods, excellent and well applied subject expertise together with very good relationships with the students were key features. Teachers' good exposition and thorough question and answer sessions make a significant contribution to the students' progress. There are

restricted opportunities for students to work independently and to take responsibility for their own learning. However, in the lessons observed this did not affect the quality of learning as teachers effectively engaged students with their enthusiasm and the demanding range of activities. This was a feature of an excellent lesson in Year 12 on biomechanics where a very enthusiastic and knowledgeable teacher successfully used a range of teaching methods, visual aids and excellent questioning. This ensured that students of all capabilities developed an impressive understanding of some very difficult concepts. Students learn very well in all lessons. They are co-operative, attentive, work productively and respond well to the supportive teaching and different learning styles they experience. They work well in groups, support each other and listen well to each other's ideas. All are confident in offering their own ideas, although they would benefit from being given more responsibility for their own investigations.

178. The subject leadership and management are good. Day-to-day organisation is good and there is a clear commitment to improving standards, which is exemplified by targets set for students' achievement. Very thorough marking, which clearly identifies how students can improve, also supports the standards being achieved. However, the subject development plan does not identify in enough detail the priorities for improvement in the sixth form. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. The maintenance of very good teaching and learning has sustained the well above average standards.

BUSINESS

A range of business studies courses is offered in the sixth form, which effectively meets the interests and aptitudes of all students. The A level course was inspected in depth but the GNVQ and AVCE courses were only sampled. Students on all the courses praised the teachers' subject expertise and willingness to help them out of normal teaching time.

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well in relation to their prior attainment, especially in Year 12.
- Student's positive attitudes are an important factor in their success.

- Teaching and learning are good, with students benefiting from the strong subject expertise of a specialist staff team.
- Textbooks and other teaching materials are good, but there is unsatisfactory access to and use of ICT.
- Schemes of work do not sufficiently cover references to work related learning.

Commentary

179. A level results in 2003 were in line with the national average. This was an improvement from a below average position in 2002. Provisional results for 2004 show continued improvement. Standards seen during the inspection are broadly average, although the attainment of Year 12 students is higher. The AS results in 2003 were above the national average, though the number of students entered was very small. Similar results are indicated in 2004. Students, from a range of ethnic backgrounds enter the sixth form with no prior knowledge of the subject and achieve well in comparison with their overall prior attainment at GCSE. They have positive attitudes to their study and this is a major factor in their success. A good range of visits and involvement in activities, such as business challenges, enhances the students' understanding and subject skills. The lack of access to ICT facilities, which are essential for the development of independent learning, can hinder this aspect of the students' achievement. However students make overall good progress and achieve well.
180. Teaching and learning are good and, on occasions, very good. A Year 12 class showed detailed understanding of the relationship between the various elements of marketing. They benefited from the teachers' skilled debriefing of a case study that they had completed, with precise references to the criteria that determine the examination grades. All lessons were at least satisfactory but learning, especially in Year 13, would have been better if there had been more consistent reference to underlying theories. A strong focus in the teaching, on communication and the role of finance, promotes literacy and numeracy development well. Assessment is good and both the teachers' feedback to students in lessons and the marking of their work is helpful in setting clear targets for improvement. Three quarters of the Year 13 students intend to continue their business studies at university and hardly anyone leaves the courses before taking an examination.
181. There is an acting subject leader who is maintaining the previous good leadership and management. A strong team of specialist teachers are committed to high standards and improvement. The effective plans for future development reflect a good capacity to improve. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory. However, whilst the range of textbooks and other learning materials is good, including well researched references to web sites, there is very limited access to ICT facilities. It is not possible to make a judgement about improvement since the previous inspection as A level business studies was not taught then.

GNVQ Business studies

182. Sixth formers can take the Foundation or Intermediate award. They are very pleased with this course and obtain good results. Students achieve very well compared to

their examination results at the end of Year 11. Very good teaching, together with the students' well developed organisational skills and positive attitude to work, supports their very good achievement. A significant group continue their studies and successfully complete the advanced level VCE course. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

AVCE Business studies

183. VCE results in 2003 were below the national average. In recent years, standards reached in examinations have varied, ranging from average to below average. However, when compared with the students' prior attainment on entry to the sixth form this represents good achievement. Only two lessons were observed. These indicate very good progress and teaching in Year 12, with students reaching high standards. In a Year 13 lesson students lacked a precise focus on the techniques required for successful evaluation and were not yet reaching the depth of understanding required against the higher grade criteria of the syllabus.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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