

INSPECTION REPORT

NORTHGATE HIGH SCHOOL

Ipswich

LEA area: Suffolk

Unique reference number: 124840

Headteacher: Mr N R Watts

Lead inspector: Roy Hedge

Dates of inspection: 22 – 26 November 2004

Inspection number: 2628866

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Type of school: | Comprehensive |
| School category: | Community |
| Age range of pupils: | 11 – 18 |
| Gender of pupils: | Mixed |
| Number on roll: | 1657 |
| School address: | Sidegate Lane West Ipswich Suffolk |
| Postcode: | IP4 3DL |
| Telephone number: | 01473 210123 |
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| Appropriate authority: | Governing body |
| Name of chair of governors: | Mrs Kate Helleur |
| Date of previous inspection: | February 1999 |

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The school is a mixed comprehensive of 1657 pupils (which is above average), with a sixth form of 525 students. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is average. Standards on entry to the school and the sixth form are above average. About one pupil in five is of minority ethnic heritage which is above average though very few are at an early stage of English language acquisition. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below average. The school is designated as a specialist college for languages. It has been awarded Investor in People and Leading Edge status and has a Schools Achievement Award. The school is about the same size as it was at the previous inspection.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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| 9424 | J Cassidy | Lay inspector | |
| 30702 | P Bowyer | Team inspector | Mathematics |
| 11044 | J Hedge | Team inspector | English literature Special educational needs |
| 21837 | C Peet | Team inspector | English English language |
| 308512 | M Bailey | Team inspector | Physics Chemistry |
| 33211 | G Abel | Team inspector | Science |
| 11969 | J Hardy | Team inspector | Information and communication technology (ICT) |
| 17015 | L Denholm | Team inspector | ICT (sixth form) |
| 31034 | N Zanker | Team inspector | Design and technology |
| 29972 | J Webster | Team inspector | Geography |
| 4355 | F Earle | Team inspector | Religious education History (sixth form) |
| 31129 | J Pickering | Team inspector | Art and design |
| 27665 | A Lees | Team inspector | citizenship, music |
| 20287 | D Harris | Team inspector | Modern foreign languages |
| 32606 | V Derwas | Team inspector | History |
| 3162 | P O'Neill | Team inspector | Physical education Religious education (sixth form) |
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a very good school giving very good value for money. Pupils **achieve very well** in their earlier years in the school and in Years 10 and 11. Standards are **well above average** at the end of Year 9, by the end of Year 11 and in the sixth form. The provision the school makes, including the quality of teaching is **very good**. Leadership is **excellent** and management is **very good**.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Pupils achieve very well because teaching is very good. Only in ICT in Years 10 and 11 is achievement not good enough because too little time is spent on it.
- Sixth form provision is excellent.
- Pupils' personal development is very good because of excellent opportunities to take part in activities beyond the normal curriculum and the excellent care and support they receive.
- Leadership is excellent and management is very good. As a result, Northgate is a lively, sophisticated school in which aspirations are high and learning flourishes.
- The school has excellent links with other local schools and colleges and the community in general.

The school has made **good improvement** since the last inspection. Standards have risen even further, especially in the sixth form. Teaching is better. Most issues raised in the last report have been effectively addressed though standards in ICT are still not high enough. The use of assessment data and target setting are much improved and standards of literacy and numeracy are very good.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Pupils achieve very well mostly because teaching is **very good**. **At the end of Year 9 standards are well above average.** Overall, Year 9 standards represent **very good achievement**. Girls do better than boys. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress as they move through the school because of very good teaching and support. In 2003 standards were at the average of schools whose pupils reached a similar standard in national tests taken at the end of Year 6 but were well above in 2004. Standards are very high in comparison with schools with a similar proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals.

Pupils maintain very good progress in Years 10 and 11. **At the end of Year 11 standards are well above average and achievement is very good.** Pupils achieve **very well** in the core subjects of English and science and well in mathematics. Achievement in design and technology, science, art and design, physical education and citizenship is very good. It is not good enough in ICT. Standards in the sixth form were well above average in 2002 and 2003 and rose even further in 2004. Achievement in the sixth form is very good, particularly in English language and psychology (where it is very high), English literature, German, mathematics, geography, religious studies, design and technology, art and music.

Pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, develop very well in response to the school's provision. The rich programme of visits, links with

the local community and extra-curricular activities play a significant part in promoting moral, social and cultural development. The requirement for daily worship is not met. Attitudes and behaviour are generally very good. The school is largely free of tension, of racial or other harassment or bullying. Attendance is above average and pupils are punctual to lessons.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The overall quality of education provided by the school is very good. Teaching is very good throughout the school. The best teaching is in English, design and technology, art and design, physical education, and music. In no subject is teaching unsatisfactory. Pupils of all backgrounds and particular needs learn very well. The school offers a very good curriculum and a particularly broad and exciting range of other activities beyond the normal lessons. There are very good arrangements across subjects to provide for pupils with special educational needs and those of minority ethnic heritage, including pupils for whom English is an additional language, so that they learn and achieve well. There is excellent care and support for pupils and the school has excellent relationships with parents, other educational institutions and the community. All of these strengths play their part in establishing pupils' very good overall achievement.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership is excellent and management is very good. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding, combining high aspirations, vision and close attention to detail. The impact of management is very good. The governing body is excellent in most of its work of supporting the school and holding it to account. Financial management is very good.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents and pupils think very well of the school and of the provision it makes. The school is held in very high regard in its community. Pupils particularly appreciate the quality of teaching and support they receive.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Ensure that pupils in Years 10 and 11 have enough direct ICT teaching to meet their needs and entitlement.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Ensure that all pupils and students experience a daily act of worship.

THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form has 525 male and female students mostly studying a wide range of Advanced level (A level) GCE courses of whom a small number of students follow vocational courses. Almost nine out of ten students in Year 11 choose to stay on in education. Over half of the sixth form is made up of students from other schools. Nearly all students complete the course in Year 12 and almost all continue into Year 13.

OVERALL EVALUATION

Overall effectiveness is excellent as is value for money. Standards are well above average, and this represents very good achievement, given students' starting points at the beginning of their courses. Teaching and learning are very good. The leadership of the sixth form by the headteacher and senior staff is **excellent** and day-to-day management is also **excellent**.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Standards are well above average - achievement is very good mainly because of very good teaching.
- There is a broad range of academic courses and enrichment activities to meet students' needs and enhance their personal development.
- Students have very positive attitudes – they are enthusiastic and able to work independently.
- Support advice and guidance are excellent. There is very strong tutorial support, careers guidance and monitoring of progress.
- The leadership and management of headteacher and senior staff are a major strength. There is clear vision and very professional management.
- There are excellent links with the community
- There is particularly strong provision in psychology and English language.

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 | Excellent in English language. Teaching and learning are very good and achievement very high. Standards are well above average. English literature is very good. Standards are well above average. Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching. Very good in German. Teaching is excellent and students achieve well. Standards are well above average. |
| Mathematics | Very good in mathematics. Teaching is very good and students achieve very well. Standards are above average. |
| Science | Good in chemistry. Teaching and learning are good and students achieve well. Standards are above average. Good in physics. Standards are above average. Students achieve well because of good teaching. |
| Information and communication technology | Good in computing and information and communication technology. Teaching and learning are good and standards above average. |
| Humanities | Geography is very good. Standards are well above average. Students achieve very well. Teaching and learning are very good. History is satisfactory. Teaching and achievement are satisfactory and standards average. Psychology is excellent. Excellent teaching enables students to achieve extremely well. Standards are well above average. Religious studies is very good. Teaching and learning are very good and standards are well above average. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Engineering, technology and manufacturing | Very good in design and technology resistant materials product design. Achievement is very good and standards are well above average. Teaching and learning are very good. |
| Visual and performing arts and media | Art is very good. Standards are well above average and teaching, learning and achievement very good. Music is very good. Standards are well above average. Students achieve very well because teaching is very good. |
| Business | Business studies is good. Teaching and learning are good and students reach above average standards. They achieve well. |
| <i>The curriculum areas are broadly common across all post-16 education and training. They do not necessarily correspond with subjects and courses taught by the school. Inspectors make judgements in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. Excellent and very good are equivalent to the judgement 'outstanding' in further education and sixth form college reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to 'very weak'.</i> | |

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Support and guidance for sixth form students are **excellent**. Tutors know their students well and keep them informed about their progress. Excellent use is made of carefully analysed assessment data to inform the advice students are given about their progress. Subject teachers regularly review their work, offer advice and set targets. Students are highly appreciative of the support they receive. Careers advice, including information about higher education, is excellent.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management are excellent. The strong team of tutors is led with great purpose and attention to detail. There is a clear sense of direction and high expectations of what students might achieve. Students' progress and personal development are monitored excellently.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

All students, including those who joined the sixth form from other schools, are extremely positive about the sixth form and are pleased and proud to be part of it. Newcomers to the sixth form feel they have integrated quickly and well and all students say they were very well prepared for the sixth form. They appreciate the wide choice of courses and enrichment activities available and feel they have made the right choice of subjects. Students who are involved in other activities such as Young Enterprise or work with younger pupils are justifiably very proud of their achievements. Students taking the preparation for advanced level study feel that the course has given them confidence as well as access to further study. Students say that teaching is 'brilliant'. Their teachers are very knowledgeable in their field and relationships are generally informal and productive. They are treated with respect and as young adults. Teachers are always available if help with work is needed. Relationships amongst students are good and there is no conflict or tension. Students enjoy and make the most of their time in the sixth form.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Achievement in Years 7 to 11 is very good. The best achievement is in English, design and technology, science, art and design, physical education and citizenship, where it is very good. Girls do better than boys. Sixth form achievement is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average and pupils achieve very well throughout the school. This is mainly because of very good teaching, clear-minded management and pupils' very good attitudes.
- Boys and girls both do better than nationally and overall standards are well above average.
- Because of the high quality of support they receive, pupils with special educational needs and those of minority ethnic heritage achieve very well.
- Standards in ICT are not high enough because there is too little direct teaching of the subject in Years 10 and 11.
- Very strong provision results in very good standards and achievement in the sixth form.

Commentary

1. Standards as measured by national tests taken at the end of Year 9 were well above average in 2003 in all three core subjects. Results improved further in 2004. This represents very good achievement by pupils. Standards on entry to the school in Year 7 were above average for that year group. In the current Year 9 standards are well above average. Results in English in 2003 were above average in comparison with schools whose pupils were at a similar level in tests they took in Year 6; results in science were average and in mathematics were well below average. Results were very high in comparison with the average of schools with a similar proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. Since 1999 standards have risen faster than standards nationally. Standards of literacy and numeracy are well above average. Over the last three years boys' and girls' results have been well above boys and girls nationally. By the end of Year 9, achievement is very good in English, design and technology, science, art and design, physical education and citizenship, good in mathematics, modern languages, ICT, geography, music and religious education and satisfactory in history.

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

| Standards in: | School results | National results |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|
| English | 36.9 (33.7) | 33.4 (33.3) |
| mathematics | 38.3 (37.9) | 35.4 (34.7) |
| science | 37.6 (36.9) | 33.6 (33.3) |

There were 225 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. Pupils with special educational needs make progress at the same rate as other pupils. Their achievement is very good. In some subjects such as physical education, art and design in Years 10 and 11, design and technology and English, where work is expertly focused on their particular needs, they do very well indeed. Pupils at an early stage of English language acquisition, of whom there are few, make very good progress as a result of very strong and skilful teaching. Pupils of minority ethnic heritage make as good progress as others, though they are often at a lower level on entry to Year 7. In 2004, 60 per cent of these pupils achieved at least five GCSE passes at grades A* to C and 90 per cent went on to some form of further education.

3. GCSE results were well above average in 2003 and 2004. They were well above the average of schools with a similar proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals in 2003 and 2004 and in 2004 were well above the average of schools with similar test scores at the end of Year 9 two years earlier. Results over the last five years have improved at the same rate as those nationally. In 2004 the proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C was well above average at 72 per cent. The results of boys were well above average in both 2003 and 2004. This represents very good achievement, given attainment levels on entry to the school for this year group. Pupils with special educational needs and those of minority ethnic heritage make progress at a similar rate to other pupils. Achievement by the end of Year 11 is very good in English, science, design and technology, art and design, physical education, music and citizenship, good in mathematics, modern languages, and geography, satisfactory in history and religious education. Standards in ICT are not good enough because pupils have too little systematic teaching. Girls do better than boys though both boys and girls reach well-above-average standards. Standards by the end of Year 11 are well above average in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, art and design, music and physical education, above average in modern languages, geography and citizenship, average in history and the core religious education course and in GCSE religious education. They are below average in ICT. The school met its challenging targets for GCSE results in 2004.

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

| | School results | National results |
|---|----------------|------------------|
| Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades | 72 (69) | 53 (52) |
| Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades | 96 (94) | 86 (91) |
| Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades | 98 (98) | 97 (96) |
| Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects) | 42.4 (41.4) | 35.2 (34.7) |

There were 220 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

Sixth form

4. Students' A-level results in 2003 were well above average and they improved significantly in 2004. The proportion of students gaining the highest grades of A or B was also well above average. This represents very good achievement. Results have risen sharply in the last two years. There were 25 per cent more A and B grades in 2004 than in 2002. Standards are very high in English language, well above average in English literature, German, psychology, geography, music, religious studies, design and technology, and art, above average in mathematics, chemistry, physics, ICT, computing and business studies and average in history. Given standards on entry to the courses, this represents high achievement in English language and psychology, very good achievement in English literature, German, mathematics, geography, religious studies, design and technology, art and music, good achievement in, chemistry, physics, ICT, computing, and business studies and satisfactory achievement in history.

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 | 98.6 (98.9) | 89.4 (92.6) |
| Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades | 37.3 (43.1) | 32.6 (35.3) |
| Average point score per pupil | 304.6 (308.8) | 258.2 (263.3) |

There were 254 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Overall, provision is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attendance is better than average.
- Pupils are very positive in their attitude to school.
- The behaviour of most pupils is good
- Moral, social and cultural development, are very good. Pupils are clearly taught right from wrong, develop responsible and mature attitudes to themselves and others and are presented with a wide range of opportunities to broaden their cultural experience.
- There are not enough opportunities for pupils in the lower and middle school to participate in school life.
- Teachers are not always alert to evidence of bullying though known incidents are dealt with quickly and effectively.
- Opportunities to develop pupils' spiritual awareness are missed.
- Statutory requirements for collective worship are not met.

Commentary

5. The school works very hard to ensure good attendance. In this they are very well supported by parents. A very clear expression of partnership between parents and the school is set out in the home-school agreement. The practical consequences of this are clear; attendance of pupils aged eleven to sixteen is above the national average and the attendance of students in the sixth form is very good. The great majority of pupils are punctual in arriving at school and in attending lessons. These high levels of attendance and punctuality are a measure of the very positive attitude which the great majority of pupils have towards the school.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

| Authorised absence | | Unauthorised absence | |
|--------------------|-----|----------------------|-----|
| School data | 5.5 | 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.

6. The behaviour of pupils is good and that of sixth form students is excellent. In a very small number of lessons the behaviour of a minority was unsatisfactory where teachers did not manage pupils well. Clear guidance is given to pupils and staff about acceptable behaviour. The success of the school in maintaining a generally high standard is seen in the successful integration of pupils excluded from other schools and in the fact that there are no permanent exclusions and the temporary exclusion rate is low.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

| Categories used in the Annual School Census |
|---|
| White – British |
| Mixed – White and Black Caribbean |
| Mixed – any other mixed background |
| Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi |
| Black or Black British – Caribbean |
| Black or Black British – African |
| Black or Black British – any other Black background |
| No ethnic group recorded |

Exclusions in the last school year

| No of pupils on roll | Number of fixed period exclusions | Number of permanent exclusions |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1411 | 51 | 0 |
| 36 | 4 | 0 |
| 41 | 1 | 0 |
| 55 | 1 | 0 |
| 15 | 1 | 0 |
| 6 | 3 | 0 |
| 16 | 1 | 0 |
| 77 | 1 | 0 |

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

7. Pupils relate well with each other and relations between pupils of different ethnic heritage are very good. This is seen in many lessons where they collaborate on activities and in the social and corporate life of the school. The great majority are happy in school, feel it is a safe and secure place and that they have good relationships with their teachers to whom they can speak in confidence if they have problems. Incidents of bullying, when drawn to the attention of teachers, are dealt with quickly and effectively, though teachers may not always be alert to signs of bullying where a pupil does not speak about it.
8. The spiritual development of pupils is satisfactory. The school is successful in creating a positive ethos in which pupils can flourish. They are encouraged to strive for excellence in all they do and their achievements are recognised and celebrated. Links with local churches are good and events such as Remembrance Day and the annual carol service strengthen these. During Ramadan a room is set apart for prayer for Muslim pupils. A worker from Christian Youth Ministries runs a voluntary group for pupils. Current provision for collective worship does not meet statutory requirements. There is no policy for spiritual development. This means that, though there are some examples of good practice in music, religious education art and English, teachers generally are not alert to opportunities in their subject and are unsure how to develop them.
9. The moral development of pupils is very good. Pupils are taught to respect others and to consider the obligations they have to them as well as their own rights. They are very clearly taught the difference between right and wrong and to consider the principles which guide moral action. Religious education and the programme for personal and social education make distinctive contributions to this development. In modern languages, geography, history, ICT, and English good examples were also observed of teachers raising pupils' awareness of moral issues. The code of conduct and the assertive discipline programme reinforce the strong moral sense evident in the life of the school. Teachers are fair and consistent in their dealings with pupils and the great majority respond positively. In a small number of instances the behaviour of a minority showed that they had not fully understood the impact of their behaviour on other people. The school is very successful in stimulating in pupils concern for others. They are encouraged to express this in practical moral action. Pupils and staff give generous support to a wide range of local and national charities.
10. The social development of pupils is very good. It is evident that, as pupils move through the school, they are developing mature and responsible attitudes. This is seen in their behaviour in lessons, their respect for people and property and the responsible manner in which they conduct themselves off-campus, for example in the lunch club at the Baptist church. Many pupils are willing to take responsibility and to make a positive contribution to school life. Pupils in Year 11 work with pupils in Year 7 in the Friday Club. Sixth-form students act as 'buddies' to pupils in Year 8. Pupils are involved in the panel at staff selection interviews and act as guides and ambassadors for the school at open evenings. Field courses, residential visits and extra-curricular activities help to develop social skills. Mature attitudes and good social skills make a positive contribution to learning in many lessons and good examples were seen in music, art, geography, religious education, the Young Enterprise group, science, design technology, English and modern languages. Sixth-form students are able to play a very active part in the life of the school through the sixth-form council. Opportunities for pupils in the lower and middle school are not as plentiful and the school is not capitalising as well as it could do on the willingness of these pupils to be involved.
11. The cultural development of pupils is very good. A wide variety of opportunities for cultural enrichment is available in the extra-curricular programme. This is particularly strong in music, sport and performing and creative arts. Many subjects make distinctive contributions to the cultural development of pupils. The Comenius Project and foreign exchange visits in modern languages, battlefield visits in history, study of cultural diversity in geography, introduction to major world faiths in religious education, book events and drama club, and a wide range of visits to theatres, galleries and concerts broaden pupils' cultural horizons. Since the last inspection the school has taken steps to raise pupils' awareness of cultural diversity and has

hosted gospel singers, Bengali dancers and marked Black History Month with a variety of activities.

Sixth form

12. Sixth-form students have excellent attitudes to their work and are highly appreciative of the school's provision. Many play an active part in the life of the school and get involved in a range of activities beyond their lessons. Some of these activities, such as helping younger pupils in English or supporting pupils with special educational needs help them to develop stronger moral and social principles. They readily take responsibility for their own projects, such as running a coffee bar. A number of students organised their own visit to Germany to continue their friendships with German students they had earlier met through an exchange.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The overall quality of education provided by the school is very good. Pupils do very well because teaching is very good, the curriculum provides a rich variety of experiences, there are very good links with parents and the community and leadership by the headteacher is excellent. There are excellent standards of care for pupils.

Teaching and learning

Overall pupils learn and achieve very well because teaching is very good. Sixth-form teaching is also very good. The assessment of pupils' work and its use to promote their progress is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Learning is at least good in three-quarters of lessons, as a result of teaching which is good or better. There is almost no unsatisfactory teaching.
- Sixth-form teaching is very good. Teaching is very good or excellent in more than four out of ten of lessons and good or better in over eight out of ten. As a result, learning is very good.
- Teaching is very good or excellent at all stages in English, design and technology, art and design, physical education, and music.
- In a small proportion of Year 7 and 8 lessons some pupils are not managed well enough. As a result they do not learn enough and sometimes prevent others from learning.
- Teachers are very good at meeting the requirements of national tests and examinations.

Commentary

13. Teaching is very good at every level of the school. There is almost no unsatisfactory teaching and the general quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection. In particular, the proportion of very good and excellent teaching has risen sharply.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 214 lessons

| Excellent | Very good | Good | Satisfactory | Unsatisfactory | Poor | Very Poor |
|-----------|-----------|----------|--------------|----------------|--------|-----------|
| 12 (6%) | 75 (35%) | 72 (34%) | 46 (21%) | 9 (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.

14. Pupils' very good achievement and their very good learning in class are mainly due to the quality of teaching they receive. Teachers in all departments relate well to students. Although the school has a number of challenging pupils, in only a small number of lessons do pupils misbehave and hinder the progress of themselves and others. The overwhelming proportion of lessons is well planned to take into account pupils' needs and the demands of the curriculum. Most teachers are especially adept at helping pupils to meet the demands of the tests and examinations for which they are preparing.

15. In most lessons pupils with special educational needs learn very well. In the best lessons teachers adapt work carefully to pupils' needs. In English, for example, there is close personalised marking and targets are set. In design and technology and physical education pupils with special educational needs develop confidence and enthusiasm as result of very good support. In music, tasks are specifically designed to meet their needs, though this is not always the case in other subjects, as in history for example. There is good support in science where learning support assistants know in advance what is going to happen in the lesson. The teaching and learning of students withdrawn for additional support in the learning support base are very good. The small number of pupils for whom English is an additional language, learn very well. Their teaching, often individual, is skilful and focused closely on their needs.
16. English teaching is very good, and some is excellent. Teachers expect and get very good standards of work and behaviour. Pupils are presented with material designed to provide interest and intellectual challenge at all levels. Teaching methods are varied to create and sustain interest. Pupils respond very well to the very good relationships teachers are able to develop. As a result, they learn well and make very good progress
17. In science too, pupils learn very well because of very good teaching. Lesson planning is very good and teachers are very well organised. Many lessons are focused closely on the requirements of tests and examinations and this pays off in terms of pupils' results, though sometimes at the expense of liveliness and interest. Pupils' work is marked with great care.
18. Pupils learn well in mathematics because teaching is good. Teachers are themselves good mathematicians. Learning is helped by the good relationships evident in most mathematics classrooms. Lessons are brisk and purposeful. In some lessons, though, time is wasted and pace slackens. On a very few occasions in Years 7 and 8 teachers find it difficult to manage the behaviour of a small minority of pupils who disrupt the lesson.
19. The school has put a great deal of effort into incorporating the national Key Stage 3 strategy into lessons. Its impact is evident beyond the core subjects and better learning is resulting from the pace and variety of lessons.
20. Across the rest of the curriculum there is no subject or stage in which teaching is unsatisfactory. Most of the small amount of unsatisfactory learning seen by inspectors was as a result of teachers being unable to manage a small number of challenging pupils in Years 7 and 8 who could not sustain interest in the lesson and were disruptive. Overall teaching and learning are very good in design and technology, art and design, physical education, music and citizenship. They are good in modern languages, ICT, geography and religious education and satisfactory in history.
21. Teachers mark pupils' work carefully and make full use of homework to help pupils to become more independent learners. In many departments such as English, teachers make full use of the rich data and analysis of test and examination results to set targets for pupils and so help to boost their progress. This excellent practice is not yet embedded in the work of every department.

Sixth form

22. Sixth form teaching is very good. In German and psychology it is excellent. It is very good in English, mathematics, geography, design and technology, religious studies, art and design and music. In history it is satisfactory and in other subjects it is good. This impressive general teaching quality is the chief reason for students' considerable and improving achievement and for the deserved reputation the sixth form has locally for the high quality of its provision.

The curriculum

Curriculum provision is good; it is broad and balanced and meets the needs and aspirations of pupils well. Opportunities for enrichment are excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The range of and access to academic courses in the sixth form is excellent.
- Overall provision for pupils aged 14 to 19 is very good.
- The extent to which the curriculum is enriched by extra-curricular provision is outstanding.
- Accommodation, resources and staffing strongly support the delivery of the curriculum.
- The curricular provision for physical education is excellent. In English, art, modern languages and design and technology, it is very good.
- There is only one large indoor area so there is serious disruption to the normal timetable when the space is needed for external examinations.
- The range of vocational courses is limited.

Commentary

23. The curriculum in the main school is broad and balanced as it was at the time of the previous inspection. It is inclusive, ensuring equality of access and opportunity for all pupils. The school achieves 96% success in meeting the needs of pupils' option choices. The school's own surveys reveal a very high proportion of pupils and parents who consider the range of subjects on offer to be good or better. No pupils are disapplied from the National Curriculum and exclusion rates are low. The curriculum meets statutory requirements except in respect of the daily act of corporate worship. Tutor time at the start of the school day is not always used well.
24. Curricular links smooth the transition from primary school. In Years 7 to 9, pupils follow programmes of study which meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. ICT is taught in all three years but with limited time allocated for it. All pupils have drama lessons. Pupils study either French or German in Year 7, adding the second language from Year 8. Many subjects are taught through mixed-ability tutor groups but grouping by ability is introduced progressively. Pupils with learning difficulties are occasionally withdrawn from lessons for specific help but generally they are supported in mainstream classes and enabled to access the normal curriculum.
25. In Years 10 and 11, pupils normally take 10 GCSE courses together with physical education and the social education programme which includes religious education. Alongside the core subjects is a wide range of options including three modern foreign languages. Achievement in ICT is not good enough because pupils receive too little teaching focused on raising their levels of skill. Since September 2004, a small number of lower-attaining pupils have been able to replace one GCSE with a study skills course which leads to certification. The school plans to offer vocational GCSE's from next September. Currently, a small number of pupils replace one or more GCSE subjects with a vocational course at a further education college.
26. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good throughout the school. Most support is provided in mainstream classes by learning support assistants. Small numbers of pupils in Year 7 are withdrawn from normal lessons for additional support in literacy. They are returned to class as soon as they have the skills to manage the lessons. Some withdrawal continues into Years 8 and 9, usually for parts of lessons.
27. Work-related learning features in the content of the curriculum in many subjects and in the good provision for careers education especially from Year 9. All pupils in Year 10 have a fortnight of work experience. There is an active Young Enterprise programme. The range of projects in design and technology covers all media areas and makes use of new technologies.

The high level of access to courses and the effectiveness of links between GCSE and GCE courses ensure continuity and progression and contribute to the high quality of overall provision for pupils aged 14 to 19.

28. The extent to which the curriculum is enriched is excellent. A very wide range of extra-curricular activities flourishes during the lunch break and after school. Many, such as the homework club and subject revision clubs, directly support learning. Other activities enhance and extend the provision, building on the taught curriculum. There is fieldwork in geography and biology, language clubs, Maths Challenge, design and technology workshops. The science department runs a week of lunchtime activities for Years 7 and 8. Textiles can be accessed through evening clubs. There is an annual poetry day. There are annual exchanges to France and Germany and an extensive programme of visits by many departments – to art galleries, theatres and concerts. Numerous other activities involve pupils from all year groups and strongly boost their social development. ICT facilities and the library are available to pupils at lunchtime. Participation in arts activities including drama and music is very good. Participation in sport is outstanding.
29. The curriculum is very well resourced. Accommodation is very good. The three main blocks give each school an identity. Younger pupils, for example, only leave lower school for music, physical education and drama, which smoothes the transition for incoming Year 7 pupils. Against this, where subjects are timetabled at the same time on the timetable to allow grouping by ability, there are occasions when the number of groups far exceeds the specialist accommodation in that building. There is only one large space to serve as assembly hall, dining room, and as a venue for meetings and productions.
30. The library is well staffed and stocked. Resources used for the delivery of the curriculum are of a high standard. The capacity for data logging in science is hampered by a lack of lap-top computers. Teachers are well qualified and rarely required to teach outside their specialisms. The number of teachers matches the needs of the curriculum very well. There is a good mix of age and experience.

Sixth form

31. Curricular provision in the sixth form is very good. In terms of the provision for academic courses, it is excellent. The timetable is constructed in a way which allows students access to a very wide range of courses and opportunities. Two-year courses are offered in 31 academic subjects and two vocational areas. Additional AS level subjects are available in both Years 12 and 13. The range of courses is regularly reviewed and adapted and a number have been added since the previous inspection. The school plans to augment its vocational provision from next September. A one-year programme, the only one of its kind available locally, provides a complete GCSE programme, including general studies, for students who need a second chance. It also enables students to retake individual GCSE subjects if they need to. A one-year Sports Leader Award is also available. The curriculum is enriched by the same extensive programme of extra-curricular activities available to the main school, and the additional programme of visits and trips provided in the sixth form. AS-level general studies is taught to all students in Year 12 ensuring that the five AS courses they follow meet the intention of Curriculum 2000. Accommodation, staffing and resources are very good, except that some of the accommodation for computing and ICT is shabby and poorly laid out.

Care, guidance and support

The care, guidance and support of pupils and students are excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Tutors give excellent academic support based on careful analysis of the results of tests and examinations. This is particularly strong in the sixth form.

- The school is very good at seeking pupils' and students' views through the use of questionnaires, though some younger pupils want further involvement through the use of a school council.
- The quality of care for pupils by tutors, year and school heads is of high quality.
- There is high quality advice about careers or further educational opportunities.

Commentary

32. The school's architecture enables Years 7 and 8 and Years 9, 10, and 11 and the sixth form to be taught in their own buildings for almost all of their time. The school has capitalised on this by ensuring a strong team of tutors in each building, led and managed by year and school heads. This works extremely well. Pupils are known well by the teams of tutors. Year and school heads are able to establish a characteristic ethos across their areas of responsibility and monitor pupils and lessons in their building. So in the lower school, for instance, strong routines have been established, such as the use of two registration sessions each week for silent reading across the two year groups. Extra-curricular activities and assemblies are important in establishing the identities of the different buildings, giving pupils a sense of security which might otherwise be difficult in a large school.
33. Tutors and pupils get to know each other very well and tutors are centrally involved in giving academic and personal support. In this they are greatly helped by the school's very good analysis and general use of assessment data. Tutors also monitor pupils' planners well and maintain some contact with parents through the comments they read and write in them.
34. Behaviour is managed well. Pupils at risk of underachievement because of behaviour or concentration difficulties are monitored and counselled. Pupils experiencing difficulty are placed on report and year heads monitor their response. Systems of punishment and reward work well and seldom lead to exclusion.
35. There is excellent careers advice and support in making decisions about the next stage of education.
36. Care for students who are identified as having special educational needs is excellent. Caring relationships are established in the learning support base and learning support assistants work closely with pupils. There are very good arrangements to support these pupils as they move into the school in Year 7. The progress they make is carefully monitored and test results are used to chart their progress.
37. Pupils for whom English is an additional language also receive very good support. A bilingual support worker provides valuable liaison with the parents of some pupils and with the local Bengali support centre and a specialist learning support assistant works with pupils in lessons.

Sixth form

38. There is excellent tutorial support in the sixth form. Students and their parents greatly appreciate this and the willingness of teachers and tutors to give freely of their time. Students' progress is regularly reviewed and they are given good advice on how to improve their work. Assessment data are used to excellent effect in this process. Students know how well they are doing and have predicted grades for all their subjects. These are discussed with them and with their parents.
39. Advice about moving on to work or higher education is very good. There are very good links with a number of universities, very good advice on applications and parents are fully included

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Partnerships with parents are very good; there are excellent links with other schools and the community.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are very supportive of the school.
- Use of surveys to gather parents, pupils and staff views
- Strong links with other schools.
- Excellent community links, which enhance pupils' education.

Commentary

40. Parents actively support the school and enjoy good relationships with staff of whom they speak positively. The school is popular with parents and is over-subscribed. Parents' and pupils' views are actively sought through surveys and individual contacts. Complaints are sympathetically and promptly dealt with. There is an active parent and teacher association. School newsletters keep parents informed. Pupils have homework planners that parents see and which provide a means of communication between them and school. Parents are happy with the frequency and content of pupil's reports, though they do not contain details of the National Curriculum levels at which pupils are working in Years 7 to 9. Sixth-form reports are excellent and provide detailed tracking of progress with targets for achievement. Parents' meetings and school events are well attended.
41. The school maintains very good contact with the parents of pupils with special educational needs. They are routinely involved in the drawing up of pupils' education plans and in supporting their children's progress through a reading programme. The special needs co-ordinator maintains excellent contact with parents as issues emerge. The home-school liaison officer works with parents of pupils of ethnic minority heritage to ensure mutual understanding and tackle any problems. Bengali parents say they think highly of the school because their voice is heard.
42. There is excellent liaison and co-operation with other schools. Contacts with primary schools are particularly good with sharing of expertise and facilities. Prospective pupils have a number of opportunities to sample aspects of life in the school before Year 7 and induction arrangements and documentation are excellent. There are strong links with other educational establishments and some pupils attend a further education college as part of their vocational studies.
43. The Leading Edge status of the school has enabled significant input to other schools and development of specialist skills and resources at Northgate in areas such as:
 - Training and continuous professional development of staff. (Plans are well advanced to offer, free of charge, an impressive programme of skills development to both Northgate and other schools in the area);
 - regional workshops for potential Oxbridge university candidates;
 - science teaching in primary schools and in secondary schools facing challenging circumstances;
 - assistance with management and development in other schools.
44. Links with the community are impressive and add significantly to pupils' opportunities, for example, shared (public and school) use of the superb on-site arts centre and sports facilities, local church coffee bar and numerous charitable events. The school plays a full and active part in a wide range of cultural and social activities locally, regionally and nationally, and is also

involved with other schools at an international level. Inspectors met many of the school's community partners; all were supportive of the school's contribution to local life.

Sixth form

45. There are very good levels of contact with and information for parents. There are meetings to discuss students' progress and very good briefings for parents to help them understand students' chances of success as well as very comprehensive written reports. Parents', and students' views are sought through exemplary use of questionnaires.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school is excellently led. The head teacher's excellent leadership, along with unusually well informed support from governors and key staff, has ensured the continued direction and growing influence of this very successful school. Management is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The head teacher's exceptional leadership and his shared vision for the school have been instrumental in its continued success.
- This success has led to the school's considerable popularity locally and its major influence in the region.
- Leadership is very effective in ensuring that all students are well integrated and fully included in school life, and that staff are nurtured in their professional development.
- Excellent forward planning, owned and shared by staff and governors, has underpinned the school's continued improvement.

Commentary

46. The head teacher provides excellent leadership. It is a measure of the quality of this leadership that the school, judged in the previous inspection to be very successful, has not only maintained its high standards but has moved forward in many respects. The rise in standards and students' achievement, especially in the sixth form, recognised by three consecutive School Achievement Awards; the enrichment of students' experience in many areas; the great improvement in the school's built environment – these are all products of the head teacher's ambition for the school and his energy in bringing it about. Other senior staff are extremely effective and work together very well.
47. As a result of this success the school has grown even more in influence. This has happened locally, where its high reputation continues to lead to over-subscription, and regionally through the award of Leading Edge School, Beacon School and Language College status. These are not only acknowledgements of the school's success, but lay on it the responsibility of reaching out to other institutions to give help, advice and support. An outstanding example of this is the work the school is doing with primary schools to ease the transition to the 'big school' and, through the Language College, to whet children's appetite for learning a foreign language.
48. The school has an excellent governing body. Governors play a key role in planning and monitoring the school's work. They share the ambitious vision of the head teacher and embody the pursuit of excellence which characterises the school's activities. They know the school very well through their work on appointments, reviewing standards and through the relationships they have established with individual departments. As yet, though, they have not found the means to ensure that the requirement for daily worship by all pupils and students is met.
49. These developments have not been bought at the expense of a calm, well-balanced community. A striking aspect of the school's leadership is that, in spite of the pressures to improve performance, changes are taking place in a spirit of good humour and mutual respect.

The ethos for learning is very strong. The school's efforts to ensure that all students are included and equally valued, whatever their aptitudes, disability or ethnic heritage, have been central in this process. As a result and despite the school's size, no student has been permanently excluded from it in several years. Students declare overwhelmingly that they enjoy being at school, and their parents feel the same.

50. Senior staff provide very good leadership and form a strong team with well-defined roles. Close links between senior staff and middle managers are well established and ensure frequent dialogue and subject leaders' continued accountability for the performance of their departments. Leadership at this level is strong. In English, design technology, physical education, geography and music, leadership is very good. The Language College has excellent leadership. In ICT, history and Spanish leadership is an area for improvement. Teaching and non-teaching staff are involved in a number of working groups looking at key aspects of the school's work such as equal opportunities and staff development. This work, done mostly in staff's own time, is developmental in its own right, but at the same time throws up some strong ideas for improvement.
51. One of the main engines of the school's consistent improvement has been excellent strategic planning. The school's improvement plan is a dynamic working document which has at its heart the further raising of standards through teaching and learning, and the improvement of the quality of students' school life. The process of arriving at its aims, involving staff and governors from the outset, brings the school together with a common goal and is a further example of the inclusive way in which the school does its business.
52. The day-to-day management of the school is very good. Likely problems are minimised through foresight and very good planning. Administrative systems are carefully thought through and implemented with skill. Financial management is very good and the school is careful to achieve best value in its purchase of goods and services.
53. Staff development is a strong area and is offered to other schools through Northgate's Leading Edge status. The induction programmes for new staff and newly qualified teachers are excellent. Results of tests and examinations are analysed very well to illuminate strengths and weaknesses, though in spite of the monitoring of lessons, a small measure of unsatisfactory or dull teaching remains. Provision for pupils with special educational needs and others of minority ethnic heritage is very well led and managed and results in the successful inclusion of these groups of pupils in the success of the school.

Sixth form

54. The very large sixth form is excellently led and managed. There is a very strong and effective focus on monitoring students' progress and supporting them in achieving as well as possible. Assessment data are thoroughly analysed and teachers and tutors use the results in exemplary fashion to identify any underachievement and to counsel students. There is clear-minded curriculum planning to meet students' academic and personal needs. There is acute awareness of students' needs and administrative systems are first class.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

| Income and expenditure (£) | | Balances (£) | |
|----------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------|---------|
| Total income | 6,118,654 | Balance from previous year | 288,916 |
| Total expenditure | 6,130,140 | Balance carried forward to the next | 277,430 |
| Expenditure per pupil | 3,645 | | |

WORK RELATED LEARNING

Provision in work related learning is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The well-structured specialist team has a very clear vision of what is achievable and what has yet to be achieved.
- Excellent schemes and the work experience programmes meet the statutory requirement in full.
- Students respond enthusiastically to the wide range of opportunities available to learn through work, about work and for work.
- Monitoring of work experience diaries is not sufficiently rigorous.

Commentary

55. Careers education and guidance are part of a combined course, which includes personal, social and health education, citizenship, religious education and ICT in Years 7 to 11. The careers education and guidance provision provides very good opportunities for pupils to learn about work and to make informed decisions about their future vocational intentions. The provision has an impressive range of talks, visits and workshops involving more than 20 organisations and places.
56. A Year 10 lesson was sampled during the inspection that was taught well. Pupils made very good contributions to a quiz about key issues relating to given jobs. A self-assessment activity about personal qualities was completed responsibly and with enthusiasm.
57. The two-week work experience placement is very skilfully co-ordinated and includes all pupils in Year 10. Risk assessments are thorough and ensure safe working practices. The work experience diary is comprehensive and is an excellent vehicle for recording objectives, personal feelings and expectations, and personal and employers' statements. Pupils make very good responses, which show that they gain much from the placement. However, not all diaries are complete and monitoring practices need further development to ensure transfer of data into pupils' personal progress files.
58. The established pre-16 programme of academic and vocational education (PAVE) and currently piloted award scheme development and accreditation network (ASDAN) programmes, are valued by pupils. These programmes provide a very well considered alternative to vocational GCSEs. PAVE pupils, especially, enjoy their two-day college placement for vocational studies. They would recommend it, without hesitation, to other pupils. They feel that the programme allows them to achieve more than if they had been following a non-vocational programme. There is excellent use of Learning Support Assistants to provide study support for the lessons missed through college attendance. Selection for the programme is rigorous.
59. The leadership and management of the elements of the careers education and guidance programmes are excellent. Links with Connexions staff are well established and effective. The team of staff manages provision that provides a model of outstanding practice. All staff know what they are working towards and are dedicated to ensuring the highest possible standards.

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

- Standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are well above the national average.
- The quality of teaching is very good. It stimulates and challenges, ensuring very good learning and achievement in lessons.
- A strong team of teachers with consistently high expectations and well-informed knowledge of individuals ensure pupils flourish in mixed ability classes.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent and the attitudes and behaviour displayed by pupils are very good.
- Exploration, understanding and enjoyment of literature lie at the heart of the department. GCSE English literature is offered to all pupils.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Marking is very good, but in Year 10 and 11 it is not always linked to GCSE grades.

Commentary

60. Standards on entry to Year 7 are above average. In 2003, at the end of Year 9, in National Curriculum tests, they were well above average. The percentage of pupils gaining the highest levels of 6 and above was almost double the national figure.
61. In the 2004 English and English literature GCSE examinations standards were well above average. In English literature more pupils achieved the highest grades of A* and A than in 2003, but the trend was reversed in English. The department is addressing this.
62. The standard of work reflects the National Curriculum and GCSE results. Pupils listen well. They can promote their point of view and the majority is articulate, fluent and confident. Pupils value literature. The lower attainers in Year 9 can identify themes and support their views by reference to text. By Year 11 the work of the highest attainers displays mature understanding of context, literary devices, attitudes and social implications. By the end of Year 9 the writing of the highest attainers is assured, lively and imaginative. By Year 11 it is mature and sophisticated. Pupils of all ages and abilities demonstrate the confidence to experiment with form and structure. The writing of a Year 7 pupil for whom English is an additional language was outstanding.
63. The quality of teaching is a great strength. Teachers have consistently high expectations. Pupils are challenged appropriately in a secure and supportive atmosphere. There is a good mix of individual, group and whole-class work and lessons are characterised by a variety of related activities. Relationships are excellent and pupils' attitudes very good. Pupils take obvious pride in their work. Teachers' enthusiasm for the subject is infectious. These factors promote the very good learning and achievement that is obvious in written work. The effective use of drafting, coupled with marking which at its best develops into a dialogue, plays a major part in the success story. Pupils of all abilities respond positively to encouraging and constructive comments. 'Red books' testify to the amount of preparation that has gone into assignments. There is evidence of tremendous effort by both teachers and pupils fuelled by the will to succeed and only accept the best. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress.

64. Leadership and management are very good. The major success is the formation of a first-class team and the ability to use its individual strengths to create a well motivated, imaginative, ambitious and self-supporting work force. Use of assessment data is good. To progress even further the faculty could examine the practice of two of its youngest members who make excellent use of the national Key Stage 3 strategy. The faculty has recognised the need to make even greater provision for its gifted and talented pupils.
65. Progress since the previous inspection has been very good. The main concern then was the provision for Years 7 - 9 where standards were average. Standards are now well above average. Other areas of concern, including the use and application of ICT, have been addressed.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

66. In a school where the vast majority of pupils demonstrate very good literacy skills a serious approach is taken to promoting and improving those skills. The newly appointed co-ordinator has made an audit that resulted in 100 percent return and a 'fantastic response'. The good practice revealed has been documented and disseminated across the school. Departments in general make use of the whole-school policy, but many areas have devised their own subject-specific policies (of particular note is religious education). Most rooms display and use key words. Where appropriate, subjects provide opportunities for speaking and listening, reading, writing and research. Numerous examples exist. These include geography where creative writing and research are built into schemes of work, and art where pupils in Years 7 to 9 are given spelling tests on subject specific words. In physical education speaking and listening opportunities abound. The library plays an important part in the life of a school that values and promotes reading for pleasure. Opportunities for shared enjoyment of books are offered during the lunch break where activities such as story reading attract large numbers.

Example of outstanding practice

In an excellent English lesson Year 8 pupils revised previous learning and applied it to story writing. They sat in rows in predetermined order. They were occasionally reminded to sit up straight, but there was nothing restrained about the pleasure and enthusiasm they shared in learning. For 75 minutes concentration and effort were intense. They started by unravelling acronyms and ended with 'interesting adjectives'. Along the way they encountered the 'word of the day', revised the use of apostrophes, considered genre, thought about how references to the senses bring stories and descriptions to life, used spider diagrams to build up a central character and started to plan a story. Effective use was made of individual whiteboards, specially designed work sheets, classical music and pictures. Pupils worked individually and in pairs. The lesson was carefully planned, timing was taut and one activity flowed seamlessly into the next. Relationships, attitudes and behaviour were excellent. The teacher had high expectations of all twenty-nine pupils in the mixed-ability class. They rose to her challenge. The needs of all had informed the planning and the learning-support assistant was employed appropriately. The pupils departed secure in the knowledge that they had done well and knowing exactly what was expected by way of homework. It was a delightful lesson!

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching, much of it very good, ensures that pupils learn well.
- Pupils achieve well and most have very positive attitudes to learning languages.
- Language College status has contributed greatly to pupils' linguistic and cultural development.
- Pupils do not achieve as well in Spanish as they do in French and German.
- Lower-attaining pupils would benefit from doing a different course in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils benefit from the department's very good use of its ICT resources and the very rich menu of extra-curricular activities on offer.

Commentary

67. In 2004 GCSE results in French and German at grades A* to C were above the national average. This represented good achievement, especially considering that nearly all pupils in the year were entered for a foreign language. Girls did especially well in French and more than a third of them gained an A* or A grade. Boys did better in German and their results were close to those of girls. In both languages results improved in 2004. For the small number who took Spanish in 2004 results were well below average, having been much higher in 2003.
68. In Year 9, standards in French and German are above average. Pupils are achieving well because they are with others of similar ability and move ahead at an appropriate pace. This applies equally to pupils with learning needs in small groups whose standards are well below average overall, but who achieve well in speaking and listening. Higher-attaining pupils speak with very good pronunciation and write with flair and precision using a variety of tenses. In German boys speak as well as girls, but not in French where girls find the accent easier to manage. In Spanish, which pupils started as a second language in Year 8, standards are below average and speaking is less well developed than in the other languages.
69. In Year 11, where nearly all pupils learn at least one foreign language, standards in French and German are above average and the large majority of pupils achieve well. Pupils in the higher sets, most of them girls, produce work of a very high standard and manipulate language with flair and agility. Pupils of minority ethnic heritage achieve just as well as their peers. Most pupils are hardworking, well behaved and have very positive attitudes to their work. A few pupils of lower attainment, mostly boys, hold back their own progress by reluctant behaviour. They would benefit from a language course better fitted to their needs. Standards in Spanish are broadly average. Pupils achieve satisfactorily in their listening and reading skills, but have too little opportunity to practise speaking.
70. Teaching varies considerably, but is good overall. Much of it is very good and pupils learn very swiftly because they are stimulated, challenged and given plenty of opportunity to speak and be active. Teachers have very good command of their languages and mostly use them well in lessons. Because of this pupils learn to listen carefully and make sense of what they hear. ICT is very well used to stimulate interest, improve presentation and facilitate research. Marking of pupils' work is thorough and helpful. A minority of teaching, some of it in Spanish, gives pupils too little chance to practise speaking and relies too heavily on the textbook. In these lessons pupils learn passively but are not active enough to improve orally. Teachers do not insist enough that pupils use the foreign language routinely to ask for things or apologise for being late.
71. The languages department is well led and efficiently managed. In this there is a great deal of help, support and funding from staff running the Language College who have been very successful in integrating with the department. Links with senior management are strong. Planning, too, is very well focused on raising achievement. The department reviews and evaluates its performance well. Through good new appointments there is now a strong team of committed specialists with a good balance of youth and experience. Pupils benefit greatly from very good modern accommodation, a broad range of up-to-date resources and the valuable work of foreign language assistants. Equally beneficial is the very rich menu of extra-curricular activities on offer to pupils, such as foreign exchanges, trips and language clubs, in which many of them enthusiastically participate.
72. Progress since the previous inspection has been satisfactory overall. Teaching and learning have improved and standards have remained strong. However, the department would benefit from some fresh thinking to find ways of reducing the small amount of under-achievement that remains in Spanish and among lower-attaining boys. In this it is well placed to improve further.

Language College

73. Through dynamic leadership and innovative planning the Language College has brought significant benefits in a number of respects:

- for the school it is helping to raise achievement and interest in languages by allowing it to appoint good staff and to buy the latest in language teaching resources;
- for the local community it is providing excellent outreach to primary schools by introducing foreign languages to over 200 children;
- for the region, as the only language college in Suffolk, it is providing some pioneering opportunities, such as the county-wide programme for the ablest linguists, for pupils to develop their languages in fresh contexts.

MATHEMATICS

Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils of all ages achieve well due to good teaching.
- The leadership and management of the department are good.
- Pupils' attitudes to the subject are strong.
- Where immature behaviour is not challenged effectively learning becomes unsatisfactory.

Commentary

74. In 2003 the results of national tests taken at the end of Year 9 were well above average with boys reaching a higher standard than girls. The 2004 GCSE examination results taken at the end of Year 11 were also well above average. There was no difference between the standards of boys and girls.
75. The achievement of pupils throughout the school is good, with little difference between boys and girls. Pupils, especially high attainers, are stimulated by extra curricular activities, such as 'master classes'. Also, many pupils enter the UK Maths Challenge and are very successful. However, despite these provisions, there were too few A* grades at GCSE in both 2003 and 2004. All pupils have access to homework clubs after the end of the school day. This enables pupils to reinforce their learning and helps towards success in national examinations. Pupils with special educational needs, are helped by the effective setting arrangements and the good provision of in-class support. Support staff in lessons are generally specialist mathematics teachers. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as other pupils.
76. Teaching is good with some significant strengths. There is high challenge to pupils in lessons, especially in Year 11. Teachers have strong knowledge of the subject, lessons are well planned and most are delivered at a brisk pace. Very good relationships develop between teachers and pupils and this encourages positive attitudes towards learning. In the best lessons very effective teaching engages pupils for the whole lesson and learning is very good. Interactive whiteboards are installed in a few classrooms and they are very effective in illustrating and illuminating the subject. Some lessons (noticeably in Years 7 and 8) do not make full use of the 75-minute periods. Here, the pace drops and some pupils find it difficult to concentrate for the whole lesson. The behaviour of a small minority of pupils (noticeably in Years 8 and 9) is immature. Where such behaviour is not challenged effectively both teaching and learning are unsatisfactory.
77. The mathematics department is a strong, cohesive team, effectively led and managed. There is effective self-evaluation of the department, which shows clear vision and accurately identifies areas for improvement. There is also very good planning, with appropriate strategies

for improvement in place. There are strong links with local primary schools. The assessment of pupils is reasonably effective but lacks clarity. There is a need to develop a more accurate assessment system that will set appropriate targets for pupils and help pupils know how they are progressing. Procedures to check on the quality of teaching are not yet fully formalised. There is a need to spread best practice more effectively amongst the mathematics staff. The department has yet to equip all classrooms with interactive whiteboards. Key words of the subject are rarely displayed on classroom walls and there needs to be more emphasis on them in lessons.

78. Since the last inspection there has been improvement in pupils' numerical skills, especially in Years 7 to 9. Pupils' results in national examinations have continued to rise. Overall this represents good improvement.

Mathematics across the curriculum

79. The previous report noted that the school had yet to develop a whole-school numeracy policy. Since then an impressive document has been developed even though the impact in other areas of the school has been inconsistent. In science there is much good practice with pupils confidently able to draw appropriate graphs and make distance-speed-time calculations. In design and technology pupils measure and mark out accurately. In art pupils can understand proportion in the context of perspective drawing. In geography there is some good practice although the topic of numeracy does not appear in departmental documentation or in lesson plans. Pupils understand co-ordinates and measures of longitude and latitude as well as constructing graphs from geographical data. In ICT there is also little departmental documentation to acknowledge the school's numeracy policy, and there are few opportunities for numerical reinforcement.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Management and teaching are very good so pupils achieve very well.
- The use of ICT to enhance learning is unsatisfactory.
- There is excellent marking and target-setting.
- There are very good laboratory resources and accommodation.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to learning.

Commentary

80. Pupils enter the school at above-average standards in science. The results of the 2003 Year 9 tests were well above the national average and average when compared to similar schools. There was a dip in the 2004 results both at Level 5 and Level 6 but they remained well above the national average. Results in the 2003 GCSE examinations were well above average. Results in science in 2004 were very similar to the previous year.
81. Pupils achieve very well throughout Years 7 to 11. The progress that is made through Years 7 to 9 is maintained through to Year 11. Pupils' very good literacy skills and attitudes greatly assist their achievements in science. Behaviour is very good though lower-attaining older pupils lose focus where teaching lacks pace.
82. Teaching is very good. Lessons are very well planned and greatly supported by extensive use of good worksheets. Practical work is carefully managed and competently completed. Investigative and enquiry activities were very well prepared and made particularly interesting in Year 7. Few examples were seen of lessons that were stimulating, innovative or creative. In Years 9 and 11 there was a considerable focus on the preparation for the tests and GCSE

examinations and teachers directed the pupils extremely well on how to answer questions and how to maximise their marks. A particular strength of the teaching is the excellent marking of pupils work, mainly in the form of clear, formative comments and carefully produced targets. This is clearly evidenced on the Key Stage 4 coursework where pupils are carefully guided in both their research, how to interpret results, and to present their findings. The national Key Stage 3 strategy has been very effectively incorporated into teaching and learning.

83. Learning is also very good. Even when teaching is not very stimulating pupils readily stay on task and complete their work. They learn to extract information from work sheets which are of good quality though not usually designed to meet the needs of pupils working at different levels, which limits the learning of pupils of high and lower attainment. There are books for homework and others are available in the laboratories, together with calculators and dictionaries. There are workshops at lunchtimes and after school for pupils who are not making enough progress.
84. The faculty is well led by the head of science and is supported well by other staff who have particular responsibilities for subjects and stages. The head of lower school science has responsibility for the BAYS scheme of awards, which have proved so successful that the teacher has been demonstrating this approach in schools in Slovenia and Germany. The faculty is very well organised with clear policies and a very good handbook. Teaching is monitored through regular lesson observations. Learning support assistants are well managed; they are deployed mainly in the lower school to help the pupils with special needs, who receive good support. There is active and effective liaison with primary schools.
85. Progress from the last inspection has been good. Standards and achievement have both improved to make the science faculty one of the most successful in the school. However, ICT is still not used to best advantage. The faculty has a considerable amount of subject-specific software accessible from each laboratory but with only one fixed and one portable projector available this expensive and very effective software remains largely unused. Its effective use would stimulate learning and turn good lessons into very good or excellent ones. No pupils were observed using ICT for research, data logging or the production of work.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Management of the subject is unsatisfactory because pupils in Years 10 and 11 do not receive their National Curriculum entitlement.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which benefits pupils during their first three years in the school.
- Standards are above average by the end of Year 9 and achievement is good.
- Curriculum arrangements hinder the progress made by more able pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9.

Commentary

86. Standards of attainment on entry to Year 7 are average. During the first three years pupils develop their knowledge and skills and reach above average levels by the end of Year 9. Despite the limited amount of time allocated to discrete lessons pupil achievement is good. However, time constraints reduce how well the higher-attaining pupils progress. No pupils reached National Curriculum level 7 in 2004. The standard of work seen during the inspection was above average.
87. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are below the expected level for the age group. Teachers' assessments show that there is little improvement in attainment between the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11 because there is too little systematic teaching of ICT skills. There is

little difference at the end of Year 11 between the level reached by boys and that reached by girls. There is no variation in the capability of pupils who come from different cultural backgrounds.

88. GCSE (short course) results in 2003 were broadly average but in 2004 were below average with the number of higher grades awarded being 10 per cent below national figures.
89. Quality of teaching is good. The majority of lessons observed were at least satisfactory. In the better lessons effective management of pupils ensures that introductions are crisp, pupils know what to do and why. Expectations are made clear and pupils are given clear deadlines to meet. When they move off task this is quickly identified and dealt with. Teachers provide a good level of oral assessment so that pupils know how to improve their work. In weaker lessons objectives are unclear and pupils are not sufficiently involved. Then teachers have to interrupt the lesson in order to regain pupils' attention. Where the work is of an individual nature pupils are allowed to dictate the pace of the lesson. Often insufficient time is given to reviewing learning.
90. The day-to-day work of the department is effective and leadership of the discrete subject is satisfactory. A small supportive team are committed to developing their own skills and those of all pupils. Assessment systems are in place for Years 7 to 9 and the data held is analysed effectively by the individual teachers. Management of the subject in Key Stage 4 is unsatisfactory. There is no comprehensive overview of the quality or quantity of work produced in Years 10 and 11 across the curriculum. The contributions of other subjects to pupils learning in ICT is not planned well enough to guarantee that they develop the necessary range of skills. What pupils know and can do is not monitored satisfactorily.
91. Since the previous inspection standards and assessment have improved in Years 7, 8 and 9. Teaching is good overall. However the problems created by the curriculum arrangements in Years 10 and 11 remain and this affects the achievement of the more able pupils. The Key Issue from the previous report remains. The improvement in the quality of provision since the previous inspection has been unsatisfactory.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

92. Across the curriculum the quality of provision is very varied. In science there is little evidence of ICT use. Discussions with pupils confirmed that activities involving the use of computers were infrequent. Use of ICT in history is also unsatisfactory. There are areas where use is very good, including physical education, learning support and modern foreign languages. Provision in design and technology is good despite the limited equipment available for realising the good computer-aided design work. Use is adequate in mathematics, geography and music. However the unco-ordinated approach and lack of effective monitoring hinders overall achievement resulting in unsatisfactory progress throughout Years 10 and 11. Pupils make few advances in the skills, knowledge and understanding gained during Years 7, 8 and 9.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- By the end of Year 11, standards are above average and pupils achieve well.
- Lessons are well planned so that pupils are engaged for the full 75 minutes.
- Pupils with learning difficulties are supported well.
- The department boosts literacy, numeracy and citizenship though its contribution is not well monitored.

- The most able pupils in mixed ability classes are not always sufficiently challenged.
- Not all pupils are confident about how well they are doing, how well they should be doing and how to improve.

Commentary

93. There are curricular links with the main partner primary schools and a common humanities transfer task but many students arrive with poor geographical knowledge. Few know enough about where places are. They make good progress though, and by the end of Year 9, attainment is above average, as at the time of the previous inspection. Pupils are beginning to use geographical terms when they answer questions. Many still have a poor knowledge of where places are.
94. Geography is a popular GCSE option and standards are above average. Results have continued to improve. In 2004, three quarters gained at least grade C. Girls outperformed boys by a larger margin than in the national picture. This had not previously been the case and boys in the current Year 11 achieve at an appropriate level. The use of grouping by ability in GCSE classes enables teachers to challenge the most able. Effective strategies are in place to meet the needs of all pupils with learning difficulties. Support staff serve them well.
95. Pupils enjoy geography. Relationships in classrooms are relaxed and positive. Pupils are well behaved and contribute willingly. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Lessons are well planned with a mix of activities which helps younger pupils to remain on task during what are lengthy periods. Question-and-answer sessions are interspersed with individual and group activities. Pupils learn very well where the tasks are well matched to their competence especially where versions of worksheets adapted for different levels of ability are used. More could be done to accelerate the learning of the most able pupils in mixed ability classes in Years 7 to 9.
96. The head of department has the necessary vision to drive up standards. She is a good leader of a team of teachers which shares a commitment to raising standards. Her first improvement plan rightly concentrates on the revision of schemes of work but this will need to be followed by updating the departmental handbook. Much data is gathered on pupil progress but this needs to be tied more closely to National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades. Pupils' progress and the standards they reach are not effectively moderated across different teaching groups, so test scores are not firmly rooted in evidence. The department is very well resourced but finding space for older pupils to access computers is a problem. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.

History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management have not been sufficiently effective in addressing the issues raised in the previous inspection.
- Teachers do not always use materials or plan tasks that meet the needs of all pupils.
- Teachers' historical knowledge is good.
- A valuable programme of visits enhances pupils' learning.
- Pupils, especially in Years 7 to 9, are not given opportunities to measure their own progress or set appropriate targets for improvement.
- Introductions and lesson endings are not always well used to review and re-enforce learning.
- Pupils have positive attitudes towards history.

Commentary

97. Standards of attainment by the end of Year 9 are average and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Standards of attainment by the end of Year 11 are average and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. In Years 10 and 11 pupils have covered the examination syllabus content thoroughly and their knowledge and understanding are usually secure. Pupils use historical sources effectively to extract and use information and their ability to evaluate is developing. GCSE results in 2004 were average but slightly lower than in 2003. Taken as a whole, these results represent satisfactory achievement. Learning support assistants enable pupils with special educational needs to achieve appropriately.
98. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers have good subject knowledge. They teach historical key words systematically and cover examination requirements. The good lessons observed were characterised by careful planning, with clear explanations of key words. Good pace was maintained with appropriate questioning to support all pupils. Pupils were given opportunities to discuss issues in small groups. A range of tasks helps pupils' literacy skills. However, in most lessons observed, work was not planned to take into account the varying needs of pupils. Teachers over-direct tasks so opportunities for pupils to develop thinking skills are limited. Teachers often talk for too long. This lack of pace allows pupils to sit passively or to become distracted. In discussion, pupils indicated that they preferred lessons where they were more actively involved. Rushed lesson endings, often with pupils writing down homework tasks, mean that the re-enforcement of learning is less effective than it might be. Examples of pupils' work examined during the inspection showed very limited use of focused tasks or support materials to meet the needs of all pupils. In Years 10 and 11, teachers' good subject knowledge and pupils' own motivation encourage them to work hard and to remain interested. The local history topic coursework in Year 11 gives pupils good opportunities to identify with past events.
99. Assessment is unsatisfactory. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly but assessment in Years 7 to 9 is not sufficiently rigorous and does not use National Curriculum criteria. Pupils do not appear to be aware of their own progress or academic targets. Though there is liaison with primary schools the transfer project is not used to help teachers gauge pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills when they enter the school in Year 7. As a result, there is no benchmark by which to measure progress. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are given more indication of their progress towards projected grades in the GCSE examinations. However there is no formalised system to help them improve their performance.
100. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory and too little improvement has been made since the previous inspection. Since the last inspection, there has been little progress in implementing the use of computers to enhance teaching and learning. The curriculum is clearly outlined and supported by a range of outside visits, but the schemes of work are insufficiently detailed to support teachers' planning. For example, there is a lack of skills-progression as well as insufficient guidance about suitable resources to meet the needs of all pupils. The system for monitoring pupils' performance and progress is inadequate. A departmental mark scheme has been introduced but the weaknesses in teaching and assessment from the previous inspection have not been effectively addressed.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at GCSE are not high enough.
- Assessment in Years 7 to 9 does not give pupils sufficiently clear targets for improvement.
- Good teaching in many lessons engages and challenges pupils.

- The great majority of pupils are very positive and enjoy the subject.

Commentary

101. Standards at the GCSE examination in 2004 were below average at grades A*-C. Though girls did better than boys the achievement of both boys and girls was unsatisfactory overall. The head of department has been in protracted correspondence with the examination board. Resulting from this, new procedures for revision and essay writing have been implemented.
102. All pupils in Years 10 and 11 follow a course in religious education in the core provision. There is also a GCSE course which some of these pupils take. Standards in the GCSE course are average and achievement is satisfactory. Pupils have a sound knowledge of religious belief and practice and can describe important features of the religion studied. The standards of higher-attaining pupils are above average. They write clearly and with evident understanding of the topic they study. Girls generally attain a higher standard than boys because boys' written work is often too brief and their answers superficial. Among higher-attaining pupils there is no significant difference between the standards reached by boys and girls. One lesson was given over to careers. In the lesson observed standards matched the expectations of the agreed syllabus and achievement was satisfactory.
103. Most pupils in Year 9 reach the standard generally expected of their age group. Though they are weak at recalling previous learning about religious traditions, most can make links between belief and behaviour in the topics they study. Achievement is satisfactory. Revised schemes of work in Years 7 and 8 are helping to raise both standards and achievements of pupils, but these are still to have impact on Year 9.
104. Teaching overall is good and on occasion very good. Some teaching, mainly in Year 11, is satisfactory. There was one unsatisfactory lesson. Teachers have good subject knowledge and most lessons are planned well. Pupils are positive about the subject, and enter enthusiastically into lessons. Very good teaching in Year 7 helped pupils understand the importance of Jesus to Christians. Many of these pupils spoke with evident pleasure and pride about their work. Where teaching is only satisfactory, teachers provide too much input and do not plan effectively for variety of activity or for more open class discussion. Lessons became slow in pace and dominated by questions and answers, either orally or in writing.
105. A wide range of good in-house resources supports learning. These are particularly helpful to pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language, enabling them to play a full part in lessons and to experience success. Their achievement matches that of their peers. Teachers go to great lengths to ensure that lessons are accessible to pupils of all backgrounds. They are successful in creating an atmosphere of acceptance of diversity and a willingness to learn from others. Assessment of pupils' work is less well developed and though supportive and encouraging does not give sufficient guidance on how to improve. Statutory requirements for religious education are met.
106. Leadership and management are good. The head of department provides good leadership to his colleagues. The department is well managed. Teaching is monitored and clear targets for improvement agreed. There has been good improvement since the last inspection in the specialist expertise of the staff, monitoring of teaching and in curriculum planning for Years 7 to 9. These improvements have not yet fully impacted on standards at GCSE. The subject is making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the personal and intellectual development of pupils and the ethos of the school.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and Technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The heads of department have built a very effective team of staff with excellent subject knowledge.
- There is consistently very good teaching with very clear expectations of pupils.
- The very good use of ICT resources can be developed further through 3D CAD/CAM prototyping.
- The excellent support by technicians requires enhancement in food and textiles.
- Pupils in Years 7 to 9 do not receive sufficient guidance on how to evaluate their design ideas.
- Pupils at GCSE, especially those of average attainment and below, have not sufficiently developed their independent learning skills to organise work effectively.

Commentary

107. Standards and achievement are well above average overall. GCSE examination results, A* to C grades and A* to G grades, are well above national figures in all of the courses taught. Overall percentages of A* to C grades have improved. In food technology girls achieve significantly better than boys at GCSE. In other areas there is no gender difference in achievement.
108. Project booklets are effective in providing activities for projects in Years 7 to 9 and guidance on developing GCSE project work. However, pupils at all levels in Years 7 to 9 need further guidance on how to evaluate their design work as it develops. Pupils have a clear understanding, through good target setting, of what they must achieve to improve their work. In Years 7 to 9 this guidance does not explicitly relate to National Curriculum attainment levels. At GCSE, targets link very closely to examination objectives, but pupils of average ability and below would benefit from additional guidance to develop independent learning skills.
109. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Teaching is always at least good and some is excellent. Lessons start with precise learning objectives that allow pupils of all abilities to make good progress. Work in lessons is demanding and pupils know what to expect. There is consistent use of assertive discipline strategies to promote positive behaviour. Lesson time is used effectively, through varied activities, with a brisk pace quickly established and maintained. Pupils listen carefully, concentrate on their work, help each other and work safely. Excellent monitoring of progress focuses on producing high quality outcomes. Support from Learning Support Assistants is excellent with effective use made of pupils' individual education plans.
110. The excellent support by technicians requires enhancing by additional time in food and textiles. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge, which includes technologies associated with modern and smart materials. There is very good use of ICT resources, for example laptops and data-projectors. Use of computer-assisted design resources is effective with appropriate output to cutters and embroidery machines. However, this needs to include output to three-dimensional computer-assisted manufacture hardware.
111. Leadership and management are very good. The heads of department provide excellent role models by providing a clear vision of what needs doing and how to achieve it. The clearly written policies are followed consistently, for example applying the national Key Stage 3 strategy beyond Years 7 to 9. Staff are encouraged to develop their own styles and to share good practice. Evaluation is open and accurate. Procedures are not bureaucratic and are adapted to the changing nature of design and technology. The outstanding commitment by staff and pupils has resulted in first prizes in the Ransomes Award for resistant materials and the Suffolk Show for food technology.
112. Improvement has been good since the last inspection. Teaching of resistant materials in Years 7 to 9 is good. Good practice is shared. Resource booklets to support projects have been developed.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average at the end of Year 11.
- Teaching and learning are very good in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils have very good attitudes.
- The department is very well led and managed.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning lacks sufficient rigour to ensure consistency of teaching, learning and challenge across the department.
- The management of some behaviour is not firm enough to ensure all pupils have an equal opportunity to learn.

Commentary

113. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 were very high. The 2004 GCSE results were well above average and the boys' results were very high indeed. These results were similar to those in 2003 and an improvement on those at the last inspection. Pupils' work by the end of Year 9 is above average and improving. Pupils enter school with below average knowledge and skills but their achievement by the end of Year 9 is very good. The work at the end of Year 9 is above average. Pupils produce compositions in painting and drawing, textiles, print, clay and plaster and on computers. Drawing is central to pupils' work but occasionally drawing skills are weak. Sketchbooks are used well. The art of the Italian renaissance, the Aborigines and Georgia O'Keefe provide pupils with wide-ranging examples of different genres and sources of inspiration. Finished work has a very high profile in the department and there is little evidence of development work on display.
114. Work at the end of Year 11 is well above average and pupils' achievements are very good. Sketchbooks are increasingly personal and investigative and full of visual material and comment. Pupils experiment with drawing in a range of media and papers. Pupils use photography to explore buildings, objects, and atmosphere while life drawing adds breadth to pupils' work. There is excellent use of the pinhole camera and computers to generate original imagery. The least able pupils make very good progress because teachers know their pupils well and ensure that the work challenges all of them. The most able pupils make excellent progress and almost a third of the pupils gained the A* and A grades in the 2004 GCSE examination.
115. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and relate well to their pupils, generating co-operation and very good attitudes. Teachers' planning is very good. Lessons build on previous learning with clear introductions and well-delivered demonstrations. Opportunities for pupils to reflect on their progress at the ends of lessons are sometimes missed. Pupils accept increasing responsibility for their own learning as they move through the school. Teachers in Years 7 to 9 develop pupils' literacy skills by defining new words as they occur and setting occasional spelling tests. Challenge is central to the best lessons. Year 8 pupils made rapid progress when using mixed media and experimental printmaking to produce a collage influenced by music, sport, and motorcars or to comment on the contrast between war and peace. Learning was unsatisfactory in a Year 7 lesson when the teacher failed to manage the noise of a minority of pupils who interfered with others' learning, while the unsatisfactory behaviour of a minority of boys spoiled a Year 8 lesson..
116. The high standards make it clear that the department is very well led and managed. The head of department has ambition for his pupils, his staff and his subject. Planning aims to raise

standards yet higher. There is strong teamwork. The monitoring of teaching and learning is not sufficiently regular to ensure consistent learning throughout the department. The curriculum and resources for learning are good and allow pupils to use traditional processes and computers. The assessment of pupils' work sets targets for improvement but teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 are too generous. The department has made very good progress since the last inspection. Pupils now achieve very well and teaching and learning have improved to very good. Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 is now above average. The use of computers has improved. Schemes of work now build progressively on pupils' learning. Sketchbooks are central to pupils' working and their literacy skills have improved. The accommodation has improved but storage space remains problematic.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards improve through the school and achievement is very good overall.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- Pupils enjoy music in class, in instrumental lessons and in fine extra curricular work.
- There are too few computers for the large number of pupils studying the subject.
- Good progress has been made since the previous inspection.

Commentary

117. Standards at the end of Year 9 are above average. Pupils play *Stand By Me* well. They recognise which instrument is missing from an instrumental texture when listening. They use their good knowledge of music to appraise performances. Very good remedial strategies to improve pupils' listening are having a beneficial effect with the result that pupils are achieving well. It is a pity that progress cannot be sustained through Year 9 because of the rotation of music with other subjects.
118. Standards in performance and composition in Year 11 are well above average. Pupils achieve very well. They have good background knowledge of music but some struggle to relate this to their listening. This is identified by the department as a weakness and, as with Year 9, good remedial action is being taken. When compared to national averages, GCSE results were above average in 2004. Girls did slightly better than boys. Music is a popular subject and well above-average numbers of pupils across the ability range now take the examination.
119. This popularity is evident in all the work of the department. Instrumental lessons are of very good quality and pupils work hard in these and in the wide range of extra-curricular activities. The work in the classroom is interesting and engaging because the teaching and learning are very good overall. In Years 7 to 9 it is all good, and has very good and excellent features. Pupils develop very good knowledge and skills because the teachers are experts in their subjects, plan very well, and use a wide variety of ways of learning. They are mindful of pupils' individual abilities and prepare appropriate music for them to play. Face-to-face advice is strong and the new assessment procedure, discussed in the classroom at all stages, helps pupils to improve their work. Further to this, pupils are encouraged to engage their thinking skills in predicting the outcome of a certain course of action, so making reflection easier on completion. Pupils at all stages in the school use ICT for composition work. The very good numbers studying the subject mean that great demands are placed on the departments' computers so more are needed.
120. The leadership of the department is very good and brings vigour and a sense of purpose to the department. Teachers make a very strong team. The department is well managed. It examines its own successes and weaknesses, setting out a plan for improvement which is realistic but achievable. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils reach very good standards and achieve very well, particularly in games.
- Excellent leadership and management have brought about significant improvements since the last inspection.
- The pupils are helped very successfully to take responsibility for their own learning through excellent curricular opportunities.
- Almost all teaching is very good, with some that is excellent.
- Students with particular talents are challenged to the full extent of their competence.
- Pupils with physical disabilities get excellent support in achieving to the best of their capabilities.
- There are a few occasions when feedback to students is too general to be helpful.

Commentary

121. Standards in the current Years 9 and 11 are well above average, representing very good achievement in relation to the attainment pupils bring to the school. Pupils reached consistently well above average standards in the GCSE examinations over the last four years. Pupils enter Year 7 with a sound grounding in ball handling and in the creation of sequences in dance and gymnastics. Through the skill of teachers in providing progressively demanding activities, pupils make very good and sometimes excellent progress. In Year 9 pupils have already advanced to well above average standards in almost all activities. Pupils' learning is supported by an excellent range of extra-curricular activities.
122. Standards of work of Year 11 pupils taking the GCSE examination are consistent with the standards reached in the most recent examinations. Pupils have a very good knowledge of the theoretical elements of the course. The higher-attaining pupils are particularly good at evaluating performance and in identifying key skills for further practice. As a result of excellent support, pupils with physical disabilities make very good progress in activities adapted to their needs.
123. The quality of teaching is very good, with some that is excellent. A strong feature of the most effective teaching is the imaginative way that pupils are involved in coaching one another when practising skills. Lessons move at a very good pace. A further key strength is the use of the end of the lesson to look at what pupils learned and to set targets for the next lesson. In many lessons, this work is enhanced by the very good use of digital photography to help pupils identify how well they are performing and how they might improve. Very occasionally, feedback is not clear enough to help pupils improve. Pupils are very good learners, responding with real commitment to their work. They are eager to refine and improve their performances to the point of perfection.
124. Excellent leadership and management lie at the heart of the department's success, going from strength to strength since the last inspection. This shows itself in the much-improved quality of teaching and in the very good achievement of all pupils. Assessment is used very well to help pupils maintain very good standards in their work.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in discrete lessons are above average.
- Pupils achieve very well through the school because of very good teaching and learning.
- The co-ordination of the department needs strengthening.
- The teaching of citizenship through other subjects needs to be made explicit.
- More opportunities need to be found for pupils to participate in citizenship activities.

Commentary

125. Because of the timetable arrangements for citizenship and PSHE, it was possible to see discrete citizenship lessons only in Years 8 and 10. Standards overall are above average. Pupils in Year 8 show their understanding of friendship and the resolution of conflict through their thoughts and ideas. They are developing a good understanding for this area and have a good feel for citizenship. In Year 10, in their first lessons in this series of citizenship lessons they showed great interest in the topic of personal debt even though their prior knowledge was limited. Very good learning during the lesson enabled pupils to clarify many issues to be developed during the course. Pupils make very good progress in citizenship achieving very well through the school.

126. In the discrete citizenship lessons observed the teaching and learning were very good. Citizenship is clearly acknowledged and discussed in the lessons. Teachers are very well prepared and organised, lead very good discussions in which pupils participate very well, and make pupils think through the use of challenging questions. Teachers manage pupils very well, enjoying good relationships and expecting and getting high standards of behaviour. All pupils are made to feel valued. Teachers are aware of pupils' needs through appropriately designed work and give them many opportunities to develop their literacy skills through speaking, reading and writing. Pupils learn through a good variety of tasks. Teachers are very good at using pupils' thoughts and observations, weaving their answers into an overall picture with considerable skill and clarifying misconceptions. A common thread through all lessons is that of personal responsibility. It is emphasised and brought home to pupils, making this subject a very good vehicle for their personal development. Pupils are assessed satisfactorily and are involved in the process though they do not always know how to improve their work further.

127. The leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. The school has made a strong and enthusiastic commitment to the subject. However, the co-ordination of the subject is loosely shared and roles and responsibilities are not clear. The full course covers all the requirements of the National Curriculum for citizenship, although opportunities for pupils to participate are limited. There are however many opportunities to participate in activities beyond the curriculum. There has been a very thorough audit of all subjects to ascertain what they can contribute to citizenship though their responsibilities lack clarity and teachers are unaware in many cases of the role their subject is playing. Citizenship was not acknowledged in other lessons observed during the inspection. This has particular implications for Year 9 whose standards in citizenship are reported and yet the subject is taught without acknowledgement through history and geography.

Personal, social and health education

Provision in personal, social and health education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The programme is comprehensive and planned well.
- The programme is very crowded, particularly after Year 8, so some topics receive too little time.
- Teaching and learning are good.

Commentary

128. Personal, social and health education is taught in Years 7 by form tutors and in Year 8 by specialist staff. From Year 9 to 11 this is replaced by a core programme which includes the religious education and ICT together with personal and social education, economic awareness, citizenship and health and sex education.
129. The programme is planned carefully to meet pupils' requirements and needs. Health education topics include diet and exercise and there is further work on alcohol, tobacco and drugs abuse. Pupils' personal and social concerns also receive attention with work on bullying, abuse and harassment. Basic safety issues are also covered through topics about simple electrical wiring, road safety and safety in the home and at school. These topics are supported by good materials.
130. In Years 9, 10 and 11 the core programme is dominated by religious education and careers guidance. Careers provision is excellent. Religious education is taught well and supports pupils' spiritual moral development.
131. The programme includes a small number of ICT lessons though, these fall short, of guaranteeing pupils' entitlement. Citizenship lessons are clearly identified and are very well planned.
132. Teaching and learning in the lessons observed was very good. In a well-taught lesson about crime and punishment, for example, pupils achieved very well because the teacher successfully encouraged them to consider issues of personal responsibility. As a result they focused on the material well, learnt new ideas and developed their understanding of the responsibilities of the citizen.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, fifteen 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 |
| English language | 3 | 100.00 | 82.9 | 33.3 | 17.5 | 43.3 | 28.7 |
| English literature | 8 | 100.00 | 85.9 | 37.5 | 19.1 | 41.3 | 30.2 |
| Communication Studies | 7 | 100.00 | 86.4 | 85.7 | 23.8 | 54.3 | 32.0 |
| French | 12 | 83.3 | 78.2 | 8.3 | 18.9 | 27.5 | 27.6 |
| German | 6 | 100.0 | 81.5 | 50.0 | 19.3 | 41.7 | 28.9 |
| Spanish | 6 | 83.3 | 78.5 | 16.7 | 17.7 | 25.0 | 27.3 |
| Mathematics | 35 | 91.4 | 61.9 | 22.9 | 17.1 | 32.0 | 22.1 |
| Biology | 16 | 87.5 | 65.2 | 0.0 | 11.1 | 20.6 | 20.6 |
| Chemistry | 14 | 92.9 | 72.7 | 7.1 | 13.9 | 31.4 | 24.1 |
| Physics | 7 | 100.0 | 68.6 | 28.6 | 14.4 | 35.7 | 22.7 |
| Other sciences | 12 | 100.0 | 71.4 | 33.3 | 15.8 | 38.3 | 24.3 |
| Information Technology | 21 | 95.2 | 67.0 | 19.0 | 10.9 | 33.3 | 21.4 |
| Classical studies | 6 | 100.0 | 87.4 | 16.7 | 34.3 | 40.0 | 35.2 |
| Geography | 8 | 100.0 | 74.3 | 50.0 | 19.8 | 45.0 | 26.5 |
| History | 8 | 100.0 | 80.7 | 62.5 | 19.5 | 43.8 | 28.6 |
| Religious Studies | 4 | 100.0 | 80.2 | 0.0 | 22.6 | 32.5 | 29.8 |
| Sociology | 7 | 100.0 | 71.8 | 42.9 | 18.4 | 40.0 | 25.4 |
| Other social studies | 9 | 88.9 | 69.7 | 22.2 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 24.1 |
| Design and Technology | 18 | 94.4 | 74.9 | 44.4 | 15.1 | 39.4 | 25.3 |
| Home economics | 6 | 83.3 | 78.4 | 16.7 | 17.6 | 31.7 | 27.0 |
| Art | 22 | 100.0 | 80.1 | 36.4 | 23.7 | 41.4 | 29.9 |
| Business Studies | 7 | 100.0 | 76.4 | 42.9 | 16.3 | 35.7 | 26.2 |
| Economics | 3 | 100.0 | 73.6 | 0.0 | 20.1 | 30.0 | 26.4 |
| General studies | 229 | 99.6 | 73.9 | 21.4 | 17.8 | 35.8 | 25.7 |

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

| Subject | Number entered | % gaining grades A-E | | % gaining grades A-B | | Average point score | |
|------------------------|----------------|----------------------|---------|----------------------|---------|---------------------|---------|
| | | School | England | School | England | School | England |
| English language | 22 | 100.0 | 99.4 | 63.6 | 36.3 | 101.8 | 80.9 |
| English literature | 68 | 100.0 | 99.5 | 57.4 | 46.5 | 94.7 | 86.5 |
| Other languages | 1 | 100.0 | 96.9 | 0.0 | 64.5 | 80.0 | 93.8 |
| Communication Studies | 66 | 100.0 | 99.4 | 50.0 | 37.8 | 89.1 | 82.1 |
| French | 9 | 100.0 | 98.8 | 33.3 | 51.5 | 80.0 | 87.6 |
| German | 5 | 100.0 | 98.4 | 20.0 | 47.9 | 60.0 | 84.8 |
| Spanish | 1 | 100.0 | 98.3 | 0.0 | 50.2 | 60.0 | 86.9 |
| Mathematics | 59 | 100.0 | 96.7 | 44.1 | 55.6 | 84.1 | 88.8 |
| Biology | 55 | 100.0 | 96.4 | 34.5 | 39.2 | 78.9 | 78.6 |
| Chemistry | 40 | 100.0 | 97.6 | 42.5 | 49.0 | 79.5 | 84.9 |
| Physics | 32 | 100.0 | 96.7 | 37.5 | 44.6 | 79.4 | 81.7 |
| Information Technology | 42 | 100.0 | 95.6 | 33.3 | 24.6 | 77.6 | 69.5 |
| Geography | 33 | 100.0 | 98.7 | 51.5 | 44.5 | 87.9 | 84.0 |
| History | 20 | 100.0 | 99.0 | 25.0 | 44.6 | 81.0 | 84.6 |
| Religious Studies | 3 | 100.0 | 98.8 | 66.7 | 46.7 | 100.0 | 85.6 |
| Sociology | 21 | 100.0 | 98.2 | 52.4 | 44.3 | 90.5 | 83.6 |
| Other social studies | 73 | 100.0 | 97.4 | 63.0 | 42.7 | 93.7 | 81.8 |
| Design and Technology | 9 | 100.0 | 97.8 | 22.2 | 35.0 | 73.3 | 77.9 |
| Art | 50 | 100.0 | 98.6 | 44.0 | 50.2 | 90.0 | 87.5 |
| Music | 5 | 100.0 | 98.8 | 40.0 | 38.9 | 84.0 | 81.1 |
| Business Studies | 28 | 100.0 | 98.7 | 46.4 | 36.8 | 85.7 | 80.1 |
| Economics | 8 | 100.0 | 98.9 | 37.5 | 52.0 | 82.5 | 88.3 |
| Sports studies | 20 | 100.0 | 98.0 | 55.0 | 30.9 | 88.0 | 75.2 |
| General studies | 23 | 100.0 | 94.7 | 56.5 | 31.0 | 89.6 | 73.1 |

Level 3 vocational qualifications

| Qualification | No in final year | % gaining qualification | | % gaining merit | | % gaining distinction | |
|---------------|------------------|-------------------------|---------|-----------------|---------|-----------------------|---------|
| | | School | England | School | England | School | England |
| Business | 16 | 100.0 | 88.6 | 12.5 | 20.6 | 60.0 | 60.1 |
| Science | 8 | 75.0 | 88.3 | 0.0 | 9.6 | 42.5 | 58.5 |

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was on English language, English literature and German. A lesson each of French and Spanish were observed. Students are achieving well in both languages in response to good teaching. They are mature, independent learners.

English language

Provision for English language is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards rose dramatically from 2002 to 2003.
- The quality of teaching and learning is consistently very good.
- Leadership and management are excellent.
- The course is popular and its reputation attracts students from beyond the school.
- Students enjoy the challenge of the subject and achievement is very high.

Commentary

133. In recent years standards at A-level have risen dramatically. In 2002 they were below the national average. In 2003 they were very high when compared to national figures and the pass rate was 100 percent. Half the students attained grade A. The percentage of both males and females, represented in almost equal numbers, who gained this grade was very high when compared with national performance. Provisional results for 2004 indicate A and B grades at a similar level, but a smaller proportion with grade A.
134. A minimum grade of B at GCSE is the usual entry requirement to the course. Standards of work seen were well above average. Students handle complex concepts with great confidence. They demonstrate secure knowledge and understanding. They are assured and confident in discussion. They have the ability and maturity to tease out ideas and so open up their learning experience. Year 12 students have completed a substantial amount of work at a level which is well above average in a relatively short time. Given the initial complexity of the course this represents excellent achievement. In lessons they were able to explain why model answers had gained full marks and use appropriate terminology, for example 'lexical repetition', with confidence. Year 13 students demonstrate confident use of ICT. They are able to incorporate the lessons they have learnt about language into their own writing, such as using the conventions of transcription. There is evidence of students working beyond their remit for sheer enjoyment.
135. In discussion students were enthusiastic about their experience and expressed appreciation of the quality of teaching. Students new to the school say they fit in well. Teaching and learning are very good. Relationships are mature and mutually respectful. Teachers demonstrate excellent command of the subject and levels of expectation and challenge are extremely high. Tasks are imaginative and varied and delivery stimulating and assured. Students are made to think for themselves and so grow as independent learners. Marking, assessment and use of performance indicators are very good. Students are enabled to evaluate their own work, gauge progress and understand how to improve.
136. Leadership and management of the course are excellent. The administration, vision, and drive stem from the teacher in charge of the course and who initially set it up. A strong team of three teachers works closely together. They are enthusiastic, dedicated, and highly effective. Planning is excellent and ensures full coverage of the examination syllabus. Very good resources and guides to units have been devised to support learning and raise achievement. The strength and organisation behind the course are such that when cover staff are needed they fit in seamlessly. Standards of attainment are much higher than at the time of the previous inspection.

English literature

Provision for English literature is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well because of high expectations and very good teaching.
- Results at A level have been consistently above or well above average.
- Students enjoy the subject and are very enthusiastic about the course.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- The subject is very popular.

Commentary

137. In the last three years students have gained A-level results which are above or well above average. In 2003 attainment in the A-level examination was well above average; nearly 60 per cent of students gained A or B grades. In the following year results were not quite as strong and the proportion of higher grades fell back to 40 per cent. In most years all students are graded. Performance at AS is similar to the A-level picture. Many more female students take the subject than males although males do very well.
138. Standards at present in both Years 12 and 13 are well above average. Students' knowledge develops well and they learn to support their ideas by reference to text. They draw on their personal experience as well as text to comment on character and theme. Understanding is sensitive and perceptive and students' interpretation of text is often lively. Writing is fluent and clear, and some students have a very mature style. They acquire a good grasp of technical terms and make thorough and detailed notes. Many students are articulate, confident speakers. They enjoy exchanging ideas in discussion and take part in an enthusiastic and thoughtful way. They work very well both independently and co-operatively. Over the course students develop higher-order skills such as understanding structure, language, and style in poetry and prose.
139. Overall the quality of teaching and learning is very good although it is not uniformly so. Students achieve very well because teaching is very strong. They recognise and appreciate the quality of teaching in the subject. They say the real enthusiasm of teachers in lessons imparts itself to them. This was especially evident in an excellent lesson on *The Merchant of Venice*. In this very rigorously paced lesson the teacher posed challenging questions so that students had to think very hard about the character of Shylock as tragic victim. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject, expectations are high and lessons are carefully structured and planned to include a range of different learning strategies. Relationships are very positive. Activities sustain interest well, and are designed to ensure that everyone participates. There are many opportunities for discussion and for independent learning. Teachers have good knowledge of students as individuals. Work is accurately assessed; students know their benchmark grade and have a good idea of the level at which they are working. Marking is very good. Students appreciate discussing their work with their teacher. An appropriate emphasis is given to examination techniques. In order to bring all teaching up to the standard of the best, the department should consider adapting some elements of the national Key Stage 3 strategy for sixth form work.
140. Leadership and management of the course are very good. Thought is given to the composition of teaching teams in order to balance students' experience as well as providing support for less experienced colleagues. Teams of teachers are very well led. There is a very good grasp of issues in the teaching and assessment of the course.
141. The subject is a very popular choice for students a number of whom go on to read English at university. The department organises some theatre trips and together with the history

department recently visited the First World War battlefields. A weekly lunchtime discussion group has been set up to widen students' experience of literature. During the inspection this group discussed the work and influence of the black American poet and writer Maya Angelou.

142. The high standards reported at the last inspection have been maintained. Opportunities for students to engage in discussion are now very much improved.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

143. The very good practice in promoting literacy skills across the school is replicated in the sixth form. Students have well-developed literacy skills. Most write clearly and accurately. They listen carefully and are confident and articulate speakers. There are opportunities on many courses for students to exchange ideas and discuss issues. In psychology and in English, for example, students are encouraged to develop study skills and the confidence to work independently but the value of these opportunities is missed in some subjects. Too little time is given to the development of speaking skills in history.

German

Provision in German is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students learn very well because teaching is highly proficient and intellectually demanding.
- Students contribute significantly to their achievement by their very mature commitment to their work.
- The modern foreign languages department offers much to students beyond the curriculum to enrich their experience and broaden their horizons.
- Students in Year 12 need more practice in forming fuller and more idiomatic sentences.

Commentary

144. German A Level results in 2003 were well below average but were not typical of students' performance over the past three years. Taken together, these have been similar to the national average. Unconfirmed results for 2004 suggest a significant improvement over 2003. AS Level results of students currently in Year 13 were above average.

145. In Year 13 standards are well above average and all five students are achieving very well. The most gifted linguists among them have reached a very high standard. They have unusually good comprehension of native speakers, reflecting the excellent quality and uncompromising use of German by their teachers. They also speak with confident fluency, using correct German grammar and idiomatic language. Their writing, too, has a strong feel for the rhythms of German and they manipulate complex grammar adeptly, rarely making serious errors. Other students are not quite as fluent or accurate in their spoken and written German, but their work is still above average.

146. In Year 12 standards are above average and all students are achieving well. They listen well and understand much of their teachers' fluent German. Most students, those of higher attainment, have fully left behind them the simple descriptive utterances of GCSE and are now adapting language successfully to form complex structures in speech and writing. A few students are less natural linguists and they struggle to form full spontaneous sentences. These students in particular would benefit from more systematic practice in sentence building.

147. Teaching at both stages is of a very high quality: thorough, demanding, very well organised and conducted almost exclusively in German. Students therefore have no option but to listen carefully and sharpen their skills in the process. As a result they speak with very good German pronunciation. This is further enhanced by students' weekly contact with the German

assistant. Teachers' questioning is skilfully probing, ensuring that students stretch themselves and deepen their understanding. A pleasant working rapport exists between students and their teachers. This further contributes to good learning, as do students' mature, industrious attitudes and their strong capacity to work independently. Assessment of students' work is very thorough and helpful. Students themselves warmly appreciate the quality of teaching and the support and guidance they receive. A small amount of less experienced teaching is not rigorous enough in insisting that students answer questions in full.

148. German in the sixth form is well led and managed. Good communications between staff ensure that students make the most of being taught by more than one teacher. Students have open access to the department's resources, including the languages ICT room and satellite television. A very good planned reading scheme in Year 12 ensures that students look beyond the AS Level course for their German reading matter. Most students take advantage of the well-established German exchange and gain in confidence as a result. The current Year 13 students arranged a trip to visit their German exchange friends entirely independently of the school. Since the previous inspection the department has made good progress in the quality of teaching and the breadth of experience it offers to sixth form linguists.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching enables students to achieve very well.
- Very strong relationships between teachers and students create a strong learning ethos.
- Students' attitudes to A-level mathematics are very positive.
- Female students are under-represented in the subject.

Commentary

149. Sixth-form students have the opportunity to study A-level mathematics, A-level further mathematics, or to resit GCSE mathematics. These courses are popular although historically males consistently outnumber females on the A level course, usually by a factor of three to one.
150. In 2003 A-level results were average. Male students did slightly better than females in 2003, reversing the position of the previous year where females outperformed males. The 2004 A-level results were significantly better than the 2003 results. There was no significant difference between the attainments of male and female students. Further mathematics results were very impressive. In the group of 12 that took the examination only one student was female.
151. Standards are above average and the rising trend in examination results shows this to be an improving department. Students' achievement in A-level is very good. They make very good gains in learning as a result of strong algebraic skills. This is aided by effective bridging lessons that take place between GCSE examinations in Year 11 and the start of the A-level course. There is little difference in achievement between males and females. Those students who study further mathematics also achieve very well.
152. Teaching of A level mathematics and further mathematics is very strong. Teachers know the subject very well and deliver well-paced and very well planned lessons, with a strong emphasis on algebra. This allows students to learn very well, both within lessons and over the long term. Teachers develop excellent relationships with students which generate very strong positive attitudes. Very few students leave the school without completing the course. Students enjoy mathematics and very much appreciate the fact that teachers are approachable and can be consulted away from the classroom. The provision of frequent workshops in the subject after

the school day allows students to seek effective help in their work. Good teaching in GCSE resit classes allows students to improve on their GCSE grades.

153. Sixth-form courses are very effectively managed. The teachers who teach A-level mathematics and further mathematics are well qualified and form a very strong team. There is clear and very effective planning and organisation. Assessment data are analysed very well and used effectively to inform students about their progress. Some teaching is impressively innovative, for example when teachers have the opportunity to use interactive whiteboards.
154. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. Standards at A level have risen, students' algebraic skills have improved and excellent relationships between teachers and students have helped students develop very positive attitudes to the subject.

Mathematics across the curriculum

155. There is much good practice in mathematics in other subjects. Most students taking A-level physics and chemistry also take mathematics, which enables them to cope with the demands of the courses. Support by the respective departments for the few students who do not study mathematics is effective. In product design students have a good understanding of relevant mathematics, and are, for example, able to make confident calculations of force and stress in resistant materials. In geography students are required to analyse data in many forms. The department ensures that students are taught the necessary statistical techniques. There is also good practice in ICT in programming and spreadsheet calculations.

SCIENCE

The focus of the inspection was on chemistry and physics. Biology, human biology and science AVCE were sampled. Biology is a successful A-level subject. In 2003 standards were above the national average. They rose further in 2004 as the percentage of A and B grades increased. Learning was excellent in the Year 12 lesson seen due to very enthusiastic and stimulating teaching. Challenging teaching, getting students to think for themselves and share ideas resulted in excellent achievement. Results in human biology in 2003 were below the national average but improved significantly in 2004. A third of the 20 students entered gained grades A and B but 2 failed to attain a pass grade. Teaching in the lessons seen was good. Students' response is lively and interested and they are achieving well. Small numbers of students take science AVCE. In 2003 standards were below the national average. In 2004 results improved and all students were successful. Teaching in the lesson seen was good and as a result students achieved well. Students enjoy the course seeing science at work in the real world.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and learning enable students to achieve well.
- Students' positive attitudes to work are in response to supportive teacher-student relationships.
- Good practical skills are developed in a structured way.
- There are not enough opportunities for students to use computers to help their learning.

Commentary

156. In 2003 the pass rate at A-level was 100 per cent and the average point score was in line with the national average. Some students underachieved as their results were lower than those expected from their GCSE performance. In 2004 the pass rate was again 100 per cent and there was a significant improvement in the percentage of the higher A and B grades. Students

achieved well, particularly male students, who out-performed the females, against the national trend.

157. Standards of work seen during the inspection were above average and students' achievement is good because of good teaching and their good attitudes. In Year 13, students understand standard enthalpy changes and can use Hess's Law to calculate a reaction enthalpy. Higher-attaining students can confidently apply Le Chatelier's Principle to study reaction rates of equilibrium reactions. Year 12 students can explain trends of reactivity in groups of the periodic table and relate these to oxidation numbers. They have a good understanding of atomic structure and chemical bonding.
158. Teachers' very good command of the subject allows them to explain new topics clearly to develop students' understanding. All lessons are carefully planned and structured. In the more effective lessons, teachers focus students' learning on the lesson objectives and how they fit in with previous and future work. The teaching provided good challenge yet built on students' prior knowledge in small, structured steps enabling all students to make good progress.
159. Teaching is enthusiastic. Teachers present information in a lively, energetic way motivating students to work hard. Homework is used well to reinforce learning. Students speak very highly of their teachers and of the extra help they receive. Teachers' encouraging and supportive attitudes boost students' confidence, enabling them to persevere when they meet difficulties. The integration of practical work with theory aids understanding.
160. There is a wide span of prior attainment in Year 12 and teachers do not always provide a sufficient variety of activities to meet individual learning needs. This results in higher-attaining students making insufficient progress. Sometimes teachers do not involve students enough during the lessons; they provide them with the required knowledge and skills but their questioning does not allow students to contribute to the development of their thinking. Not enough opportunities are provided for students actively to discuss and debate topics to increase their scientific curiosity and improve their learning. The use of ICT to enhance learning is underdeveloped.
161. The subject is well led and managed. The head of department has introduced strategies to raise standards. Student performance is analysed carefully and good use is made of assessment data. Written course materials are of a high quality and marking is diagnostic and helpful to students. They know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further. Extra-curricular activities such as a visit to Essex University and participation in a national chemical analysis competition enrich students' experience in chemistry. There is some inconsistency in the quality of teaching. More systematic monitoring of teaching and learning would enable best practice to be shared across the department.

Physics

Provision in physics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well because of the good teaching they receive.
- Very good attitudes and relationships with teachers promote learning.
- Teachers use their specialist knowledge to prepare students well for examinations.
- Teaching methods sometimes do not adequately meet the learning needs of all students.

Commentary

162. A-level results in 2003 were in line with the national average and all students entered gained a pass grade. In 2004 the percentage of the higher grades A and B rose but one student failed.

Standards of work seen during the inspection were above average and good teaching and learning result in good student achievement.

163. A key strength of teaching is teachers' very good specialist expertise, which enables them to focus their teaching carefully so that students are well prepared for examinations. Very good relationships between teachers and students engender a positive attitude and interest in physics. This enhances their learning. Lessons are well planned and structured.
164. Year 12 students have a good understanding of Young's Modulus, forces and motion. Higher attainers can relate qualitatively the type of tyre tread and road conditions to braking distances. Year 13 students can describe the photoelectric effect and higher-attaining students can discuss the fact that it provides evidence for a particulate nature of electromagnetic radiation, while phenomena such as interference and diffraction provide evidence for a wave nature. Lower-attaining students are not very responsive in class and this has a negative effect on their learning.
165. Students' experimental skills are developed in a structured way and by Year 13 they are good. They can plan an experiment in detail, have good manipulative skills and can take accurate measurements. Lower-attaining students find the analysis of experimental evidence and the evaluation of their procedures difficult in spite of good teaching on error treatment.
166. Lively delivery communicating teachers' enthusiasm for the subject engages students' interest. In a lesson on gravitation the teacher's historical overview of the state of knowledge at the time of Kepler and Newton stimulated students' response leading to good participation in the lesson, and as a result, very good learning. Students appreciate the willingness of teachers to give them extra help outside lessons. Students' written work is well presented and organised. Marking is detailed and students are shown how they can improve their work. ICT is used well to support learning.
167. The teaching methods seen during the inspection sometimes involved whole-class teaching with insufficient opportunities for students to progress at different rates according to their learning needs. Where tasks are the same for students of all attainment levels, higher-attaining students are not sufficiently challenged and, in consequence, make too little progress. In some lessons learning objectives are not made clear and are not reviewed at the end of the lesson so that both teacher and students can assess what has been learnt. There are not enough opportunities for the development of independent learning skills and some students are too reliant on their teachers.
168. The physics department is well led and run and the performance of students carefully monitored. There is a need, however, to identify specific strategies for further development in order to raise standards and to encourage more female students to study physics.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main Strengths and Weaknesses

- There have been above-average pass rates over time in the two subjects at both AS and A levels.
- Teaching and learning are consistently good.
- Students attain a relatively low proportion of A and B grades in comparison to the grade profile of the school as a whole.

Commentary

169. Courses are offered at AS and A level in both ICT and computing. Standards are above average at AS Level, well above average at A-Level and overall are above average. Pass rates in both ICT and Computing at AS and A2 level compare favourably with national averages. A-level ICT and AS computing gained 100 per cent passes in each of the last two years. The proportion of grades A and B is lower than for other subjects in the school but still above national averages. GCSE information technology is taken by a small number of students: the pass rate is low.
170. Since many students take ICT as a fourth subject, and their points score when they begin the course is lower than for most other subjects in sixth form, these A and AS-level results represent good achievement. The quality of work seen shows that this standard is being maintained. Very small numbers continue the subject from AS to A-level in Year 13. The proportion of female students taking ICT and computing courses is small.
171. The teaching of ICT and computing is consistently good or better, from teachers who are particularly attuned to work at this level, matching sound preparation with high-level expertise. Several members of the team have industrial or commercial experience, while an additional strength lies in experience as examiners so contributing to the security of assessment. Input by a very skilled learning support assistant who is an ICT specialist enhances the help for individuals. Students bring very good attitudes and skills, and respond well both in commitment to their own work and in whole-class and discussion activities.
172. The leadership and management of ICT are satisfactory. There is sound tracking and recording of data; management of examination board demands in respect of deadlines and attainment criteria; strong planning and support for colleagues where classes are shared. The management of the department has supported newer colleagues in their development from graduate trainees or newly qualified teachers to strong professional competence. Examination boards comment favourably on the quality of assessment.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

173. The use of ICT to support work across the curriculum has improved since the last inspection. There is now extensive use of ICT in most sixth-form courses, and students bring high skill levels, which they use extensively in both independent learning and in research. There are not enough opportunities for students to use ICT effectively in chemistry. The sixth form is very well equipped with computers which are in constant use. Students make good use of the Internet and CD-ROM resources in the production of coursework and presentations. They incorporate quantitative analysis and images into text and presentation files, and use ICT as a natural extension of their work particularly in music, geography, English and physical education.

HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was on geography, history, psychology, and religious studies. One lesson of government and politics was sampled in which teaching and learning were good.

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average. Students achieve very well.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good. There is a strong fieldwork element.

- Management of the curriculum is excellent.
- Geography is a popular subject which students enjoy.
- The capacity of students to benefit from independent learning.

Commentary

174. Geography is a popular sixth-form subject. Compared to their level of prior attainment, students make very good progress, as they did at the time of the previous inspection. Few students fail to complete the course and two thirds typically continue the subject to A-level.
175. In 2003 A-level results were above average. In the previous year they were well above. Results in 2004 were excellent; the proportion of students attaining A and B grades was 87 per cent. There is no significant difference between the performance of male and female students as was previously the case. No student has failed to achieve at least grade E in recent years.
176. The key to this very good level of achievement lies in the way the subject is managed. Early exposure to fieldwork challenges students and requires them to think and to analyse information. It rapidly fosters effective student/teacher relationships and builds bonds between students. It develops independent learning so that students rapidly make the transition from GCSE to sixth-form work and are well equipped with the skills that will facilitate learning.
177. Teaching and learning are very good. Following early fieldwork, the teaching of skills, knowledge and understanding are emphasised further and that the pace of learning is rapid. Students are challenged and rise to teachers' high expectations of them. They willingly accept responsibility for learning because teachers make clear what they need to do. Such independent learning stretches their knowledge and understanding. By Year 13, they are able to make connections, analyse complex information and draw various strands from different aspects of the work together. They use terminology confidently. Regular assessments and a modular approach keep students and teachers well informed of progress.
178. Students enjoy geography, especially human geography lessons, appreciating the often innovative teaching styles employed. The department is well resourced. Leadership is very good. There is a shared commitment to raising standards still further. The department has maintained standards since the last inspection.

History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' speaking skills are not as well developed as they could be.
- There are not enough opportunities for active participation by students in lessons.
- Targets for improvement are not clear enough.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and are able to explain complex events clearly to students.
- Most students have a positive attitude and work hard.

Commentary

179. Standards in the 2003 A-level examination were average. Female students' results were better than males' at the higher grades but did not match the above-average results of the previous year. Achievement was unsatisfactory. Staff have discussed these results and put procedures in place to raise attainment. In the most recent examination, results improved and the performance of females matched the above-average results of earlier years. Male results at the higher grades were better than in 2003.

180. Standards at AS in 2003 were well above average for both males and females and achievement was good. In the most recent examination females' results matched those of 2003 but males' results were lower.
181. Standards attained by most students in Year 13 are average and those of higher-attaining students above average. Most students have good subject knowledge and use this to describe key developments in the period studied in ways which show that their understanding is sound. The written work of some students does not yet have the critical and analytical quality required at this level. Higher-attaining students write with confidence and present cogent arguments in answer to questions. Achievement is satisfactory. Progress is being made in acquiring subject knowledge and the study skills necessary to handle material from a variety of sources. Students are learning to think historically and to make informed judgements about key historical events.
182. Standards attained by most students in Year 12 are average. They have sufficient subject knowledge to analyse sources in an appropriate way. The written work of most is of a higher standard than their responses in class where they lack confidence in expressing and defending an opinion. The standard reached by females is generally higher than that of males. This is because their written work is more thoughtful and more persuasively argued. Higher attaining students reach above average standards. They write well and handle complex material with confidence. Achievement is satisfactory. Progress is being made in developing study skills and the ability to analyse source material.
183. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and on occasion good. Teachers have good subject knowledge which enables them to help students understand complex events. This sometimes means, however, that they provide too much information; not enough attention is paid to planning for the active participation of students and the pace of the lessons is slow. Opportunities for group discussion are not always taken and students are more often required to provide factual answers to questions rather than to pose and defend an opinion. Insufficient attention is paid to the development of speaking skills.
184. Assessment of written work is thorough and levels clearly indicated. Targets for improvement tend to be implicit and are not sufficiently clearly indicated. Most students have a positive attitude, are diligent and work hard in lessons.
185. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The curriculum choices widen students' historical knowledge and understanding. Teaching is monitored but developments are not sufficiently focused on improving teaching quality. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. More reliable data on the prior attainment of students is now available than at the time of the previous inspection.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent teaching enables students to achieve extremely well: by Year 13, their attainment is well above average.
- Practical work and high quality questioning are used effectively so that students understand complex psychological theory.
- Marking, target setting and assessment procedures are used exceptionally well to help students understand the standard of their work and how it could be improved.
- Leadership and management of psychology are excellent.
- Personal development is promoted very well and, as a result, relationships are excellent.

Commentary

186. Given students' prior attainment at GCSE, achievement is excellent. In 2004, all students achieved at least their benchmark grade at AS-level and many exceeded this. Students perform highly in psychology compared with their results in other subjects, and the progress that students make at A-level places the school as the highest performing school for the subject in the county. The number of students continuing from AS to A-level is very high. In 2003 the proportion of students attaining A and B grades at A-level was 64 per cent. All students passed. Results in 2004 were similar. Standards are rising, with more students opting to take psychology year on year. Standards of work seen during the inspection were well above average at AS and A-level, including the level of understanding revealed by students in discussions. Students' achievements are excellent, because the quality of teaching and learning is excellent.
187. Teachers have very good knowledge in all areas of psychology, and relate activities very effectively to everyday life situations. Very high quality questioning and the focus on practical tasks involving experimental and investigative approaches makes students think hard and enhances their understanding extremely effectively. Teachers are also particularly effective in developing students' critical thinking and have produced excellent course work guides. Students are told what standard of work is expected at AS and A-level. Students' understanding is supported by excellent use of teacher-made resources and close adherence to the requirements of the syllabus and coursework. Teachers provide time for students to reflect and recognise their mistakes whilst also providing them with strategies for improvement. Excellent promotion of literacy enables students to extend their writing and rapidly develop a thorough grasp of technical vocabulary. Very good quality marking further develops literacy skills.
188. Assessment procedures and their use are excellent. Teachers track students' progress effectively to identify their learning needs and set targets for students' performance at AS and A-level. Clear targets are discussed and monitored regularly so that students know what they must do to achieve the results. Students' work is marked regularly and teachers use assessment information to inform students of what they need to do need to improve.
189. Leadership and management are excellent. The head of department provides a model of best practice for developing the curriculum and ensuring the highest quality of teaching and learning. Teaching and students' work are monitored regularly so that the head of department has a thorough knowledge of strengths and weaknesses in the department.
190. Personal development is promoted very effectively through excellent opportunities for paired work and small group work, which in turn promotes sharing of ideas and the development of a mature outlook on important psychological issues. As a result, relationships are excellent. The curriculum is very good and the department is rightly proud of students' achievements. Psychology is a particular strength of the school.

Religious studies

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well; examination results in recent years have been well above national averages.
- Students enjoy the course and value the extent to which they develop refined analytical skills.
- Lessons are challenging and rooted in the teacher's excellent knowledge of the subject.
- There are occasional missed opportunities for students to engage in independent and collaborative work.

- The subject is very well led and managed through clear vision and direction.

Commentary

191. Overall standards have been well above average over recent years, as has been the proportion of students achieving the higher grades A and B. These results represent very good achievement in relation to the students' overall results at GCSE. Work seen during the inspection and the observation of lessons reflects these very good standards and confirms that students achieve very well. Students at all levels of earlier attainment make rapid advances in learning. Male and female students reach comparable standards as do students from minority ethnic backgrounds. Higher-attaining students show considerable refinement and depth of understanding in the interpretation of challenging theological positions. All students are at ease with their work in philosophy and handle most abstract ideas well. Almost all students persevere to the end of their course, with a significant proportion intending to pursue their studies further.
192. Teaching and learning are very good, with some excellent features. The teacher's comprehensive knowledge of the subject and the skill with which he explains even the most demanding ideas lies at the heart of the students' rapid gains in knowledge. Lessons are challenging and imaginative, including all the students to the full extent of their capabilities. The students, in turn, work with commitment and dedication. A particular strength is the imaginative range of resources and materials prepared for the students, who are very well prepared for examinations. There are occasional missed opportunities to develop more self-reliance in learning; students' own ideas are not always used to best effect.
193. The subject is well led and managed. The subject leader has a clear vision for the development of religious studies. Religious studies make a good contribution to students' moral development. The many opportunities to explore the ethical foundations of human behaviour are used well. The students use the resources available to them well, including the Internet and email. The department has improved significantly since the last inspection, particularly in the quality of teaching and in the standards attained.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

The inspection focus was on AS and A level design and technology resistant materials product design. Other courses sampled were AS level textiles technology product design and AS and A-level home economics. Good teaching was observed in a Year 12 food lesson where the teacher led discussion about lipids in relation to healthy living and diet and in a Year 13 lesson analysing food packaging. Students respond to questions accurately and offer well-considered views. In Year 12 textiles teaching is very good because of the monitoring and guidance offered to students in developing their fashion designs. Portfolio presentation is excellent and the garments are of exceptionally high quality. Students use a wide range of techniques in their making.

Design and technology resistant materials product design

Provision in design and technology resistant materials product design is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- An excellent team approach meets the examination specification's detailed subject knowledge requirements.
- There is very good monitoring of progress and target setting.
- The technician support is excellent.
- There are insufficient ICT resources for 3D computer-assisted design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) prototyping.
- Students, especially those of average ability and below, have insufficiently developed independent learning skills to structure and organise their time effectively.

Commentary

194. Standards and achievement are very good overall. Standards are well above national averages for AS and A-level. However, with increased numbers of male students, a larger proportion of students achieve grades D and E, especially at A-level. As a consequence there is a downward trend in achievement at the higher grades since 2002. In-house course booklets provide very good guidance on what students must do to achieve their target grades and this is complemented very effectively through on-going monitoring and accurate target setting. These would benefit from the inclusion of guidance on independent learning skills especially to help average and below average students manage time-planning more effectively.
195. Current standards of work show very good development of design portfolios leading to detailed proposals for high quality made outcomes. Projects show good imagination and thorough research into the areas being developed. Making skills draw on a very wide range of tools materials and processes including the use of computer-assisted design modelling. Opportunities for CAD/CAM links are more limited because of the lack of 3D prototyping facilities.
196. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers provide very good tutorial support to set targets and to assist students with resolving difficult stages, for example with the evaluative skills needed for good design. Students have a very good understanding of the physical properties and working characteristics of materials. They enjoy their work and many are considering entry into design or engineering professions.
197. Leadership and management of the product design course are very good. The team of staff work effectively together to share their excellent subject knowledge. Technician support is exemplary because it is reactive to students' needs, demonstrating advanced making skills and in preparation of materials for their projects.
198. Improvement has been very good since the last inspection. The enthusiasm of staff has led to an increase in the number of students opting for product design courses.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus of the inspection was on art and music. Film studies, media studies and performance studies were sampled. Year 12 students make good progress in film studies. Teaching in the lesson sampled was based on very good subject knowledge and enthusiastic explanation about the impact of music and style of acting in the spaghetti western. Students in Year 13 say they are enjoying the media studies course very much. Standards were above average in the lesson observed. Students made good progress as a result of careful use of selected film clips and very focused and challenging questions. One lesson of performance studies was sampled. Students worked very hard and maturely. Standards are well above average and achievement is very good as a result of very good teaching and learning. Students' attitudes are excellent.

Art

Provision in art is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Students have very good attitudes.
- The department is very well led and managed.
- A minority of students do not read or research enough to develop independent learning skills.

Commentary

199. The AS examination results in 2003 were well above average. The A-level results in 2003 were broadly average although below-average numbers gained the highest grades. Results in 2004 were not as strong as in 2003 or at the time of the last inspection. Work in school now is well above average and improving. Students' achievement is very good, often excellent. The breadth of research in sketchbooks reflects their commitment to investigation and discovery. They draw for presentational purposes, to investigate space, form, colour and light, and to plan abstract or figurative compositions in two and three-dimensions ranging from A4 size to greater than life size. The use of conventional and digital photography to comment on every-day life, record events in journalistic style or to portray conflict and emotion, is also well above average. Students pursue their interests in dancing, fashion, music and architecture and are clearly influenced by artists, designers, musicians, and photographers. A small number of students are not sufficiently well motivated to read and research in enough depth to develop a personal view of art or photography; they rely more than is usual on their teachers for direction.
200. Teaching and learning are very good and often excellent. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and bring a wide range of interest and experience to lessons. They relate well to their students, generating very good attitudes. Students are challenged to take responsibility for their own learning and by the time they take the final examinations their work is truly personal.
201. Some well above-average results and very good achievement point up a department which is very well led and managed. The head of department has ambition and vision for yet higher standards. Teamwork is strong. There are very good opportunities for students to work with two and three-dimensional processes including ICT. The mix of experiences and interests in the department is reflected in the breadth of students' work. Accommodation is very good and has improved for photography, but there is a shortage of storage space for students' larger compositions. The department has made very good progress since the last inspection. Students now achieve very well and teaching and learning and the use of ICT have improved.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average in both years.
- Achievement is very good overall.
- Extra-curricular work enhances learning and achievement.
- Students' attitudes are excellent.

Commentary

202. The AS and A-level music course attracts students from a wide area because of a justly deserved high reputation. In Years 12 and 13 standards are well above average. Students in Year 12 have a very good grasp of harmony, writing with a good chorale style. They can apply this knowledge to other situations and demonstrate a real understanding of the relationship between different components of the course. In Year 13 they know and can use a wide range of musical language. They write well, analytically exploring topics such as the Rise of Jazz. Listening skills are quite strong although in common with the rest of the school some students find difficulty in applying their extensive knowledge to the music they analyse whilst listening. Students play instruments to a high standard and apply their skills and understanding to different situations within the course. They achieve very well. Examination results in 2003 were above average. All five students passed and three achieved grade C or higher. Results in 2004 were better than this. Results have remained high over several years.

203. Students' attitudes to their work are excellent. They speak highly of the course and of what the department offers. Many take part in concerts and performances taking their interest and expertise beyond the school to local and county level. Teaching is very good and students speak very highly of it. Discussions in lessons are extensive, detailed and well led by teachers. Students take a full and lively part in these opportunities drawing on knowledge of playing their own instruments and their experience of performance. Some teaching is very traditional when students receive instruction from the teacher, but its impact on learning is very good and results in considerable improvement in skills. They receive good written and verbal feedback from teachers about their work, though occasionally students are not sufficiently encouraged to be as reflective about their learning as they might be and the teachers' marking sometimes lacks advice on how to improve.
204. The department is very well led and well managed. The head of department leads a good team with a shared vision for students' success. Planning for further progress and the maintenance of the high standards already achieved is based on a thorough evaluation of strengths and weaknesses. Students' standards and progress are checked closely. The standard reached by extra-curricular groups is very high: the string ensemble and quartet, made up of many sixth formers, play to a very high standard. Workshop opportunities to extend learning by contact with professionals are very good.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

205. Physical education was sampled. Students reach well-above-average standards. As a result of very good teaching, they achieve very well. The work of the department is supported by excellent leadership and management.

BUSINESS

206. The focus of the inspection was on A-level business studies. Economics A level, business advanced certificate of vocational education (AVCE), and GCSE business studies were all sampled. In these courses teaching was equally effective. Standards of work seen in the AVCE course and in economics were above average, with students achieving well. Standards on the GCSE course are average.

Business Studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good attitudes of students lead to good levels of application and productivity.
- Teachers have a very good command of their subject, engaging and encouraging students effectively.
- Very good assessment supports good learning and ensures that students understand how to improve.
- The subject benefits from good leadership and is very well managed.
- Accommodation and resources are adequate for the curriculum offered.

Commentary

207. Attainment on entry to courses is average. Few students coming onto the AS and A-level courses have more than the minimum entry requirements. About one third of those taking the A-level course have studied the subject at GCSE. Results in 2003 were above the national average and students gained above average A and B grades. Unvalidated results for 2004 are similar. There is little difference in standards between male and female students although the

numbers of female students taking the subject are low. Students' work seen during the inspection confirms the above-average standard.

208. Throughout both Years 12 and 13 the level of achievement is good. All students are able to respond to questioning by drawing on and applying the knowledge gained through the course. They show confidence in accurately using a broad range of business terminology. The majority have a clear understanding of business concepts and are able to relate their learning to real business situations. Most are able to analyse given information recognising that different sources may be biased.
209. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have a very good command of their subject. They make good use of current issues to illustrate theory. Case studies are relevant and accessible to all groups. Teachers know their students well. Good and very good lessons hold students' interest effectively, securing very mature responses. Teachers use questioning to develop students' capacity to think through problems and apply their knowledge. On occasions, teachers provide too much information allowing students to become passive receivers. In some lessons lengthy written answers completed in the lesson do not make effective use of teachers' expertise. Work is assessed frequently providing students with very good guidance on how to improve. Students appreciate the support and guidance they receive from teachers.
210. The department is very well managed by a good leader who has developed an effective team. There is a well established, comprehensive and accessible system for tracking and checking on students' progress. Good use is made of the school intranet to support students' learning and the very good curriculum is enhanced by involvement in the Young Enterprise Scheme. There are adequate resources and accommodation.
211. Since the previous inspection leadership and management of the subject have improved and the quality of teaching and standards has been maintained. Improvement has been good.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

General studies and key skills were sampled. All students in Year 12 take general studies to AS examination level. Standards in 2003 were well above the national average. In 2004 students did even better, 41 per cent gaining A and B grades. In the two lessons sampled students were considering the political systems and parties in this country. Teaching and learning were good in both lessons although students' levels of knowledge varied considerably. In key skills, one lesson of the one-year preparation for advanced level study course was sampled. The course provides students with careers guidance alongside the opportunity to achieve five GCSE subjects including English and mathematics as well as the key skills qualification in communication, application of number and information technology. Teaching and learning in the sampled lesson were very good. The course is very well designed to meet the needs of individual students. Relationships are excellent.

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

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