

INSPECTION REPORT

OUSEDALE SCHOOL

Newport Pagnell

LEA area: Milton Keynes

Unique reference number: 110487

Headteacher: Mr K M Leaver

Lead inspector: Mrs J Greenfield

Dates of inspection: 15th - 18th November 2004

Inspection number: 268872

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

© Crown copyright 2005

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	12 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1,743
School address:	The Grove Newport Pagnell Buckinghamshire
Postcode:	MK16 0BJ
Telephone number:	(01908) 210 203
Fax number:	(01908) 216 574
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr P Collins

Date of previous inspection: 18th January 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Ousedale School is a very large mixed comprehensive school for students aged 12 - 18. There are 1,743 students on roll, including 320 in the sixth form. Most students are from the local area, although many are transported by bus from surrounding areas. Attainment on entry is broadly average. Students come from a range of social and economic backgrounds, which is not particularly advantaged or disadvantaged overall. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. Nearly all students are from White, mainly British, backgrounds. About seven per cent of students are from minority ethnic heritages, mainly Black-Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Black-African and Chinese backgrounds. Two students are in the early stages of learning English and receive additional support. Four students are in public care. The proportion of students with special educational needs and with a statement is well below the national averages. The range of special needs includes specific and moderate learning difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties, visual impairment, hearing impairment and speech and communication difficulties. The school is a Beacon School and has Investor in People status. Last year, the proportion of students joining and leaving the school at times other than the normal transfer times was below average.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
7070	Mrs J Greenfield	Lead inspector	
15181	Mrs M Hackney	Lay inspector	
20709	Mr D MacIldowie	Team inspector	English
1033	Mr H Chester	Team inspector	Mathematics
30433	Dr C Corp	Team inspector	Science; biology
20420	Mr S Rawcliffe	Team inspector	Physics
20533	Mr D Rogers	Team inspector	Art and design
10894	Mr P Reynolds	Team inspector	Design and technology
20247	Mr R Parry	Team inspector	Geography
19032	Mrs I Randall	Team inspector	History
28106	Ms M Majid	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
12408	Mr A Frith	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
31660	Mrs M Young	Team inspector	Music; personal, social and health education
4647	Mrs J Evans	Team inspector	Physical education
4372	Mr R Fordham	Team inspector	Religious education; citizenship
7367	Mr I McPhail	Team inspector	Special educational needs; English as an additional language
32150	Mr K Redman	Team inspector	Economics
10759	Dr L Bappa	Team inspector	Sociology
12825	Dr N Carr	Team inspector	Psychology; business studies
24622	Dr D Davies	Team inspector	Drama; media studies

The inspection contractor was:

Tribal PPI
1 - 4 Portland Square
Bristol
BS2 8RR

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be made initially to the inspection contractor. The procedures are set out in the leaflet '*Complaining about Ofsted Inspections*', which is available from Ofsted Publications Centre (telephone 07002 637 833) or Ofsted's website (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	4 - 7
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS	8 - 13
Standards achieved in subjects and courses	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	13 - 21
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	21 - 24
OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES	24
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES	25
	- 59
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4	
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	60

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Ousedale School is a good and effective school that has many very good features. The quality of education it provides is very good. Standards are above average and the school's overall performance in national tests and public examinations has been well above average for the past few years. The very good leadership of the headteacher, together with the strong support of other senior staff, ensures an ethos in which students are valued and challenged to do their best. As a result, students respond very well to the school's high expectations. The school gives good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- the results in national tests and public examinations have been well above average for the past few years;
- the very good leadership of the headteacher and other senior staff sets a very clear direction and focus to the school's work;
- its distinctive and inclusive ethos promotes good learning, respect for others and a very strong sense of community;
- the very good range of extracurricular and enrichment opportunities extend and enhance students' learning and their personal development;
- its high expectations, combined with the setting of challenging targets and the careful monitoring of their progress, enable students to achieve well;
- the very positive attitudes and behaviour of the students enable them to get the most out of the opportunities the school provides for them;
- students receive high standards of care, advice and support and the school responds to their views very well; and
- the curriculum is mostly good, but provision for information and communication technology (ICT) in Year 8 and in art and design in Years 8 and 9, religious education in Years 10 and 11, personal, social and health education, and for a daily act of collective worship do not fully meet legal requirements.

The school has made good progress since its last inspection in 1999. Standards have risen and the quality of teaching and learning has improved. Tutors are systematically involved in monitoring the progress of their students; heads of department monitor the work of their departments more effectively; subjects make a greater contribution to the teaching of ICT, although this is hampered in some cases by insufficient resources. The school reviewed the length of the school day but found no compelling reason to change it at the time. It remains an issue for the school to re-examine in the light of current weaknesses in aspects of the curriculum. Some religious education is provided in Years 10 and 11, but it is insufficient to meet requirements, and there is no daily act of collective worship.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2001	2002	2003	2003
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	n/a	B	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.*

Students' achievement is good throughout the school. By Year 9, standards are above the expected level overall and are well above expectations in mathematics, science and geography. The test results have been well above the national averages since the last inspection and are above average when compared with the results in similar schools. By Year 11, standards overall are above the national expectation, and are well above average in mathematics, design and technology and geography. The GCSE examination results in 2003 and 2004 were well above average and well above average when compared with the results in similar schools. In the sixth form, standards are above average overall and are well above average in art and design, and history. The A-level results have been well above average for the past four years. All groups of students achieve equally well. **Students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are very good.** Their attitudes, behaviour and attendance are very good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. Teaching is good and is often very good, which ensures that students learn well. The assessment of students' work is very thorough and their progress and achievements are monitored carefully. The curriculum is mostly good, with strengths in the quality of the courses provided, the very good range of extracurricular and enrichment opportunities, and in the provision for students with special educational needs. There are weaknesses in the arrangements for ICT in Year 8, the use of ICT in art and design in Years 8 and 9, religious education in Years 10 and 11, and personal, social and health education. Not enough time is given to citizenship. Students receive very good care, advice and support from teachers and other staff. Students are fully involved in the school's work and development. Links with parents, other schools and the community are very strong.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership is very good and management is good. The headteacher provides very good leadership through his clear strategic vision for the school. The leadership provided by senior and middle managers is also very good as they share his philosophy and ensure that all staff contribute to providing the best possible education for students. Strategic planning is monitored carefully and the governing body supports and contributes effectively to the school's priorities. Governance is good overall, although governors have not ensured that all statutory requirements are fully met. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning have improved since the last inspection and performance data are used systematically in order to raise standards and achievement.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Most parents are very supportive of the school and are satisfied with the care their children receive and the education it provides. Students have great pride in the school and express very positive views about the support they receive and the way that they are able to contribute to and influence decisions about its development.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- strengthen the provision and give more time to personal, social and health education and citizenship;
- provide increased opportunities for students, especially in the sixth form, to contribute more effectively in lessons and to work independently;
- set sharper targets for students in the sixth form and ensure that all tutors give them frequent and consistent support;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- extend the provision for ICT in Year 8, and increase its use in art and design in Years 8 and 9;
- provide sufficient religious education for all students in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form;
- provide a daily act of collective worship for all students; and
- ensure that the content of the governors' annual report to parents contains all the required information.

THE SIXTH FORM

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is an effective sixth form that is cost effective and provides good value for money. Standards are above average overall and are well above average in art and design and history. Teaching is good and most students are achieving well.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- students attain high standards overall in their A-level and AVCE examinations;
- the school provides a good range of AS and A-level courses, although the range of vocational courses is rather narrow;
- students have very positive attitudes to their work and they respond very well to the school's high expectations;
- the good and often very good teaching enables students to achieve well, but teachers do not always give students sufficient opportunity to contribute to discussions and work independently;
- students have very good relationships with staff and with each other and they provide very positive role models for other students.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

Judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses inspected in the sixth form are shown below. They are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects in the sixth form were inspected.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Good in English literature . Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic. Students achieve well and enjoy their studies. Standards are above course expectations. Very good in French . Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching. Standards are above course expectations. The small amount of teaching seen in German and Spanish

	was very good.
Mathematics	Good in mathematics. Teachers are well qualified and have a good command of the subject. Students have positive attitudes to mathematics, and most achieve well. Standards are above course expectations.
Science	Satisfactory in biology. Standards are in line with course requirements. Achievement is mostly satisfactory, but a considerable number of students underachieve in Year 12. The teaching is satisfactory overall and is effective in Year 13 where teachers and students share good relationships. Satisfactory in physics. Standards are in line with course expectations and students' achievement is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are good. The small amount of teaching seen in chemistry was good.
Information and communication technology	The small amount of teaching seen in ICT was good.
Humanities	Good in geography. Standards are in line with course expectations. Teaching is good. Students' very keen attitudes and the teachers' high expectations promote good achievement. Very good in history. Standards are well above course expectations and students' achievement is very good. Teaching is good. Good in psychology. Standards of work are in line with course expectations. This represents good achievement and is a result of good teaching. Students' positive attitudes ensure that they learn well. Very good in sociology. Standards are above course expectations and all students achieve very well because of very good teaching and their own positive attitudes. The small amount of teaching seen in religious studies was good.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Good in design and technology. Teaching and learning are good. Students achieve very well and standards are in line with course expectations.
Visual and performing arts and media	Very good in art and design. Standards are well above course expectations. Students achieve very well as a result of the very good teaching. Good in media studies. Standards are above course expectations. Students achieve well as a result of teachers' strong subject knowledge and their own developing understanding of key media concepts. Teaching and learning are good. The small amount of teaching seen in theatre studies and music was good; in photography , it was very good.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Very good in physical education. Teaching and learning are very good. Students are highly motivated by the commitment and enthusiasm of the teachers and achieve very well. Standards are above course expectations. The small amount of teaching seen in leisure and recreation was good and sometimes very good.
Business	Good in economics. Standards are in line with course expectations. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching and learning. Students' attitudes are positive. The small amount of teaching seen in business was good.
General education	The small amount of teaching seen in personal, social and health education was good.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

The arrangements for ensuring the care, welfare, health and safety of students are very good. They receive good advice, guidance and support from their tutors, although the

frequency and regularity of the support provided by tutors is inconsistent. Induction arrangements into the sixth form are very effective and they receive very good guidance on further study and career opportunities. Their progress is carefully monitored but their targets are not always sharply focused or specific.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management of the sixth form are both good. The head of sixth form, who is a member of the senior leadership team, provides very good leadership and has a clear understanding of the priorities for developing its work. The vision, expectation and challenge promoted by the head of sixth form are supported by all tutors. There are effective procedures to alert tutors to any problems students may have, whether personal or academic. However, tutors are not as rigorous in evaluating data and examination performance as in the main school.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students enjoy being in the sixth form and express very positive views about the school. They feel they are supported well by staff, although some comment that the amount of time they have with their tutors to discuss their progress is variable. Students are able to make their opinions known very effectively through the school council and the sixth form forum.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Students' achievement is good throughout the school. Standards are above average by Year 9, Year 11 and Year 13 in most subjects and are well above average in a few. Students with special educational needs, the small number from a range of minority ethnic heritages and those who have been identified as gifted and talented achieve as well as other students in the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have achieved very well in national tests and public examinations for the past few years and standards overall have been well above the national averages.
- Standards are well above course expectations in mathematics, design and technology and geography.
- Students with special educational needs are making good progress and achieving well as a result of the support they receive.
- In science, although achievement is very good in Years 8 and 9, students in Years 10 - 13 do not achieve as well in this subject as in their other subjects.

Commentary

1. The results of the National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were well above average overall and remained at a similar level in 2004, although there are no national data available as yet against which they can be compared. These results represent very good achievement for the students from their average attainment on entry to the school, based on their performance in the national tests at the end of Year 6. The results have been consistently at this level for the last five years. The results in English and mathematics have almost always been well above average, but those in science have been slightly lower until this year when they, too, were well above average. Students' performance at the higher levels is also mostly well above the national figures. When compared with the results in schools whose pupils performed similarly at the end of Year 6, the school's results in 2003 were well above average overall and also in all three core subjects of English, mathematics and science. They remained at a similar level in 2004. There was very little difference between the performance of boys and girls. Since 1999, the school's results have improved at a faster rate than the national trend. The school met its targets in all three subjects in 2003, and in English and mathematics in 2004. The results in science were close to, but slightly below, the school's target in 2004.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	35.9 (37.5)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	38.0 (37.7)	35.4 (34.7)
science	35.7 (34.8)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 377 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

2. The GCSE examination results overall, and at five or more grades A*-C and five or more grades A*-G, have been well above the national averages for the past few years. In both 2003 and 2004, the school's performance for the 'capped' points score (based on the pupils' best eight subjects) was well above average and also when compared with the results of schools with a similar level of performance in the national tests at the end of Year 9. From their average attainment on entry to the school, students achieved very well in their GCSE examinations in both 2003 and 2004. The subjects that did best in 2003, with results that were significantly above the national averages, were English language and literature, mathematics, statistics, art and design, aspects of design and technology, especially food technology, geography, German, physical education, religious studies and child development. The results in a small number of subjects were not as good, and were below average in business studies and well below average in science and Spanish. However, the results in all three subjects improved in 2004, as did a number of other subjects that performed well or very well in 2003. As yet, there are no national data for all maintained schools to enable a more detailed comparison to be made of individual subject results with the national picture. The school was close to meeting its target for the average points score in 2003. It is not possible at this stage to judge the school's performance against its targets for 2004.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	64 (63)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	96 (96)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (98)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	39.3 (38.4)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 323 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. Current standards of work by Year 9 are above the level expected nationally overall and students' achievement is good. In the three core subjects, standards are above the national expectation in English and well above expectations in mathematics and science. Students' achievement is good in English and very good in mathematics and science. In the remaining subjects, standards are well above the national expectation in geography; above the level expected in art and design, history and physical education; and in line with expectations in citizenship, design and technology, ICT, modern foreign languages, music, religious education and drama. Students achieve very well in geography and physical education and well in the remaining subjects, as their starting points in some of these subjects are lower than expected when they enter the school. In citizenship, standards are in line with expectations and students' achievement is satisfactory.

4. Students continue to achieve well in Years 10 and 11 and overall standards are above national expectations by the end of Year 11. In English, standards are above those expected nationally and students achieve well. In mathematics, they are well above expectations and students achieve very well. In science, standards are in line with expectations. Although achievement is satisfactory, some lower attaining students are less enthusiastic about the subject and are underachieving, especially in their GCSE examinations. Standards are high in design and technology and geography, and students' achievement is very good in both subjects. In the remaining subjects, standards are above

the level expected nationally in art and design, history, ICT, music, physical education, religious education and drama, and are in line with expectations in citizenship, modern foreign languages and business studies. From their starting points at the beginning of Year 10, students achieve well in history, ICT, modern foreign languages, drama and business studies, and very well in art and design, design and technology, physical education and religious education.

5. There is little difference in the achievement of students across the year groups or any of significance in the performance of boys and girls. Students who are identified as gifted and talented are achieving well, as are the minority of students who are bilingual. The progress and achievement of the two students who are in the early stage of learning English is good in English and in their other subjects. Students with special educational needs make good progress in line with their peers in all subjects and achieve well.

6. Students' language and literacy skills are above average and enable them to contribute fully and confidently in class and group discussions in all subjects. They use their good mathematical skills to support their learning in other subjects, as well as in mathematics. Students have a good level of understanding of different applications and are able to apply their knowledge to good effect. Students' skills in ICT are satisfactory and, where opportunities are provided, they use them appropriately to support their learning in other subjects. Many subjects, however, do not have sufficient access to computers, which limits the opportunities available to students to enhance their ICT skills and their learning.

7. The above average standards overall and the high standards students attain in national tests and public examinations are the direct result of the good and often very good teaching they receive and because the curriculum is well planned to meet their needs. In addition, the very distinctive and inclusive ethos engendered throughout the school and the strong commitment to ensuring that all students are able to gain success mean that students develop very positive attitudes to learning and to work and, as a result, achieve well.

Sixth form

8. The school's overall A-level and AVCE examination results in 2003 were well above average. They improved in 2004 but there are no national data available against which they can be compared. Other than in general studies and AVCE business, all students gained at least a pass grade in every subject in 2003. The proportion of students gaining the highest grades of A or B was above the national averages in several subjects and well above average in a few. The most successful subjects in 2003, with results that were well above average, were design and technology, history, mathematics, physical education, physics, sociology and AVCE leisure and recreation. The weakest subjects, with results that were well below average, were theatre studies and English literature. The results were also below average in chemistry, psychology and media studies. In 2004, the results at grades A - E were broadly similar to those in 2003, but there was an improvement in the proportion of students gaining the highest grades of A or B in many subjects. There was a slight improvement in the results in theatre studies and a considerable improvement in those for English literature, media studies and chemistry, especially at the highest grades.

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	96.7 (93.1)	89.4 (92.6)

Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	33.7 (28.7)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per pupil	322.5 (303.8)	258.2 (263.3)

There were 118 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

9. Fourteen subjects in the sixth form were inspected in depth. Other subjects were sampled but there is insufficient evidence to make clear judgements about standards in these subjects. Standards of students' current work exceed course expectations overall. They are well above the level expected in art and design and history; above expectations in mathematics, French, physical education, sociology and media studies; and in line with expectations in English literature, biology, design and technology, geography, physics, psychology and economics. Achievement is very good in art and design, history, French, physical education and sociology, mainly because of the very good teaching and students' enthusiasm for the subject. Achievement is good in English literature, mathematics, design and technology, geography, psychology, economics and media studies, and satisfactory in biology and physics. In the small number of lessons sampled in other subjects, students are making good progress and generally achieving well. There are no significant differences in the achievement of male and female students, students with special educational needs or those identified as gifted and talented. All groups achieve well.

10. Students use their literacy and numeracy skills well in their chosen subjects. Their ICT skills are satisfactory but, as with the main school, they do not always have sufficient opportunities to use and apply them in lessons to support their learning. However, they have access to laptops in the sixth form centre to use during their study time and make good use of computers available to them at home.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good, as are relationships throughout the school. Attendance in Years 8 - 11 and in the sixth form is very good and students are punctual. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' very good attitudes and pride in the school make a strong contribution to their progress and achievements.
- Behaviour is very good and the school is a very orderly community.
- Attendance is very good and is rigorously monitored and promoted.
- Students have a strong voice in the management and organisation of the school.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is closely linked to the schools' very positive ethos.

Commentary

11. The majority of students have very good attitudes towards school and their work. Most are very keen to be involved in the extensive range of activities. Students generally concentrate well during lessons and want to succeed. In all year groups, students respond positively to the school's strong ethos of inclusion and high expectations of achievement and self-discipline. Most students listen well to their teachers, and they are responsive during discussions and keen to share their views. Relationships are constructive and are very good between students themselves and between students and staff. This helps

students to gain confidence and to develop self-esteem, which promotes their ability to work independently. Students are confident that there are adults they can trust to help them, and they know that the school is interested in their views and ideas.

12. Students' personal development is very good. Students grow in confidence and maturity as they move through the school and they respond well to the many opportunities provided for them. They are regularly involved in fundraising activities to support local and national charities, and they successfully undertake work in the area as part of community service. They enjoy taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and Young Enterprise, through which they develop a sense of responsibility and self-esteem.

13. The school is very aware of the importance of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its students and the impact it has on their progress, attitudes and achievement. The school's ethos, high expectations and wider enrichment through the extracurricular provision, as well as through the formal curriculum, develops these aspects very effectively. The religious education syllabus and its teaching provide very good opportunities for the students' spiritual development and opportunities exist in most other subjects to enhance this feature of their personal development. Students respect the beliefs of others and have a clear understanding of them. They reflect on issues of belief and form judgments that enable them to develop greater insights. Where opportunities are provided for reflection and discussion of spiritual matters, students clearly value the views of others and most are willing to share their thoughts and feelings.

14. Students' moral development is very good. They are well aware of right and wrong actions, have a clear knowledge of what is expected of them and respond very well. The school's insistence on high standards of behaviour contributes extremely well to these outcomes. By the time they reach the end of Year 11, they are confident and articulate young people who are able to express their views and concerns with confidence.

15. Provision for students' social development is very good and contributes very well to their achievement. The school provides significant opportunities for students to take responsibility and develop social understanding. The school forum provides good opportunities for students to develop their communication skills and make important contributions to the life of the school. Most subjects contribute effectively towards developing students' social awareness. For example, students work very well together and they are given many opportunities to express their views in pair work, group work and general discussion. Students are self-confident and are developing very well as responsible members of the community.

16. Students' cultural awareness is good. They are aware of their own cultural heritage and that of others. They demonstrate a clear knowledge of other cultures, but there are missed opportunities in some subjects to raise students' awareness of multicultural issues. Students are respectful and tolerant in their relationships.

17. Behaviour is very good and the school is a happy and well-ordered community in which to learn. The majority of students exercise a high degree of self-control and maturity. Behaviour is particularly good when students are walking along the very crowded narrow corridors and stairways, moving between buildings and when queuing in large numbers for lunch. During lessons, especially in those where teaching is good and engages students' interest well, behaviour is good and often very good. The behaviour and

attitudes to work of students with special educational needs are very good. In mainstream classes, it is hard to distinguish them from other students, as they are so well integrated. They participate in lessons in similar fashion to their peers, often with confidence and determination. The school has very good procedures, which include a well-organised rewards system, for managing behaviour, and staff apply them consistently. This has a very positive impact on the self-discipline that students demonstrate around the school. Students are confident that any issues of bullying or harassment that occasionally occur are dealt with promptly and effectively.

18. The number of fixed term exclusions is low when compared with schools of a similar size. The school works hard to provide a high level of support for students as part of its inclusion policy. Fixed term and permanent exclusions are used only in instances of the most serious behavioural problems.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1530	37	2
White – Irish	7	0	0
White – any other White background	32	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	11	2	0
Mixed – White and Black African	3	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	9	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	29	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	7	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	7	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	3	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	2	0	0
Black or Black British – African	9	0	0
Chinese	9	0	0
Any other ethnic group	2	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	32	0	0

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

19. Attendance is very good and is well above the national average. Unauthorised absence is low. There are very good procedures for the prompt follow-up of students who are absent. The attendance officer, matron and deputy headteacher work together closely to improve attendance and to counteract unauthorised absence and truancy. This has resulted in a steady improvement in attendance, although a number of students continue to take holidays during term time. Students are punctual in the morning and arrive at lessons on time.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	5.0	School data	0.1
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.

Sixth form

20. Students enjoy their life in the sixth form and find it challenging and rewarding. They have very positive attitudes towards their work and their behaviour is very good. Attendance is very good; students take responsibility for their own registration, which is monitored well by the school. Students respond very willingly to the many opportunities the school has to offer and they appreciate the strong support they receive to help them to succeed. In lessons, students take pride in their work and they work hard to achieve the best possible results. However, the skills of independent study of some students are not well developed and they tend to rely too heavily on their teachers to provide them with information. As in the main school, students' personal development is very good and is enhanced by their involvement in a wide range of extended school services and partnerships. Students value the very good relationships they have with staff and with each other. Older students, including the head girl and head boy, act as very good role models for younger students in raising their aspirations and career prospects.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. The breadth of the curriculum is good, but there are weaknesses in the provision for personal, social and health education, ICT in Year 8 and art and design in Years 8 and 9, and religious education in Years 10 - 13. The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship for its students. The school provides very good opportunities for students to enrich and enhance their experiences and to support learning. Teaching is good overall and enables students to learn and achieve well. The provision for students with special educational needs and in the early stages of learning English is very good. The school's care, welfare, health and safety of its students are very good, as is the way that it takes account of their views. Links with parents, the community and other schools and colleges are very good.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. There is very little difference in the teaching in Years 8 - 11 but there is a higher proportion of good and very good teaching in the sixth form than in the main school. The assessment of students' work is very good throughout the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to provide a range of well-planned activities to interest and motivate the students.

- The teaching in art and design, design and technology, history, physical education and religious education and sociology is very good overall.
- The very good relationships between students and staff ensure a very positive climate for learning in most lessons and students respond very well to the teachers' high expectations.
- Some subjects do not make enough use of ICT to support teaching and learning.
- Teachers mark and assess students' work and progress thoroughly and helpfully but there are some inconsistencies within some departments.

Commentary

21. The table below indicates the quality of teaching seen across the school. The teaching is good or better in nearly four out of five lessons in the main school and in almost nine out of ten lessons in the sixth form. Across the school as a whole, about two-fifths of the teaching is very good and occasionally excellent. In the sixth form, very good teaching occurs in just under a half of lessons. In no subject is the overall quality of teaching less than satisfactory and in all but science and personal, social and health education, the teaching is mostly good; in several subjects, including art and design, design and technology, history, physical education, religious education and sociology, the teaching is very good. There are examples of very good teaching in Years 8 – 11 in many other subjects as well, including mathematics, science, ICT, citizenship, drama, French, German, geography and music. On occasions, the teaching in English, design and technology, history and religious education is excellent.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 212 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
6 (3%)	80 (38%)	91 (43%)	33 (16%)	2 (1%)	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.

22. The quality of teaching has improved since the time of the last inspection, with an increase in the amount of good and very good teaching and a decrease in the extent of the unsatisfactory teaching. This is due to the support provided to new and newly qualified teachers in the school, the successful implementation of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy, and the school's systems for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of teaching in helping students to learn. Most teachers have successfully implemented the three-part structure to lessons.

23. There are a number of common strengths to the teaching, which help to make learning effective. Teachers have a very good command of their subject and of the examination criteria, which enables them to plan appropriate work to meet the needs of the students and help them prepare for external tests and public examinations. Lessons are planned well and provide students with a good range on interesting, varied and mostly challenging activities to enable them to learn effectively. These activities and tasks are often suitably matched to meet the needs of individual students, which enable them to gain success. Nearly all teachers identify clear learning intentions for the lesson and, in most cases, they review them effectively at the end of the lesson to check what has been learned. As a result, students develop their knowledge, skills and understanding systematically and successfully in most lessons, concentrate hard and apply themselves

well to their work. Occasionally, teachers run out of time and, in such instances, learning is not always consolidated sufficiently nor is the intended focus of the subsequent lesson shared with the class. Relationships between teachers and students are mostly very good. Teachers also have high expectations of students' behaviour and response, which means that learning is able to take place in a positive and calm working atmosphere. Students collaborate well with one another, listen carefully to each other's views and participate fully, as well as working on their own, as required.

24. Teachers encourage and engage students in their learning very well, giving clear explanations and often posing challenging questions to make them think and reflect. These questions are more often targeted at the boys rather than the girls and, consequently, girls make insufficient contributions to lessons. Teachers use a good range of teaching approaches in the main. However, there is a tendency in too many lessons for the teachers' exposition and explanations to dominate the teaching time available for too long and to use a narrow range of teaching styles in mathematics and science. Although students listen carefully and attentively, it means that they are passive rather than active learners, becoming too dependent on the teacher rather than being encouraged to develop a wider range of learning skills. A wide range of resources is used to good effect to support learning and there are some good examples of both teachers and students using interactive whiteboards successfully in lessons. Although very good use is made of ICT, including laptops, to support teaching and learning in geography, its use is not as strong in some other subjects, for example in modern foreign languages, mathematics and music, either because access to computers is difficult or because teachers do not include their use sufficiently in their planning.

25. The teaching of students with special educational needs is good. Teaching assistants provide very good support to students and to staff. They play a key role in modifying the curriculum for students and mediating in the lesson to make sure that students get the most out of it. The appointment of senior teaching assistants to work with English, mathematics and science further improves the range, depth and linkage to the main departmental schemes of work. They are also undertaking some very good work to enable higher attaining students with specific needs to remain in the higher teaching sets.

26. The teaching of students who are gifted and talented is good in most departments. Teachers provide relevant activities to stretch and enrich the learning experience of gifted and talented students in design and technology, physical education and modern foreign languages. A group of students identified as gifted and talented in Year 8 participated in a specific enrichment programme last year. These students speak highly of the experiences they encountered and the learning the programme engendered. The programme had a considerable impact on the students' skills for learning, team working, and their motivation and curiosity.

27. Where teaching is relatively less effective, yet satisfactory overall, there are some common features, although not all occur in every lesson. Planning does not set out clearly what students are expected to know, do and understand by the end of the lesson, teaching approaches are too narrow, work is not sufficiently challenging, the pace of the lesson is too slow, and the behaviour of some students is not managed well enough. Several of these features occurred in the two lessons where the teaching and learning were unsatisfactory.

28. The marking and assessment of students' work is very thorough. Marking is undertaken regularly and is detailed and constructive, helping students to know how well they have done and what they need to do to improve. Occasionally, as in geography and science, there are different approaches within departments, which produce inconsistencies of approach. Teachers assess students' progress, effort and attainment regularly and take account of the outcomes of assessment to plan future learning and set targets for students. Departments also make good use of data in the setting of targets. Students have a good understanding of their levels of performance and what they need to do to achieve a higher level or to reach their targets.

Sixth form

29. Teaching in the sixth form has a number of similar features to those in the main school. All the teaching is at least satisfactory and a high proportion is good. Almost a half of the teaching is very good. Students respond well to the good teaching and make good progress overall. The teaching in art and design, French, physical education and sociology is mostly very good. Some of the teaching in English, mathematics, physics, business studies, drama, design and technology, economics, geography, German, Spanish, history, leisure and recreation, law, media studies and psychology is also very good.

30. Teachers plan and structure lessons carefully. They use their very good subject knowledge to make the work accessible and understandable for the students and to give them clear guidance on the course and examination requirements of the subjects they are studying. Most students apply themselves conscientiously and productively to their work, and remain attentive throughout. Occasionally, teachers, in their enthusiasm for the subject and their determination to get through the work, talk for too long and do not involve students sufficiently through questioning them closely or in putting a greater onus on them to prepare presentations or lead discussions. Some classes spend too much time reading source material in lessons rather than undertaking the required reading in their study time or as homework. The effect of this is that students have too little knowledge to engage effectively in a discussion of the key issues, which would enhance and extend their understanding, and are not developing a wider range of learning and study skills as part of their preparation for the next stage of their education, which for most will be into higher education. In several subjects, not enough use is made of ICT to support teaching and learning.

31. Relationships between staff and students are very positive and purposeful, and students' contributions are valued and respected. Most students are keen to do well and they value the very good support and guidance they receive from their teachers to help them improve. They work well together on their own and with others, although opportunities for pair and small group work are not a very strong feature of some of the teaching.

32. Teachers mark students' work carefully, regularly and constructively. This gives students clear guidance on what they need to do to improve. Students appreciate this level of support and most have a clear understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to make progress. The targets they are set are not as sharply defined as they are for students in the main school.

The curriculum

THE SCHOOL PROVIDES AN INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM THAT IS BROAD AND BALANCED IN ALL YEARS. OVERALL, IT IS GOOD BUT IT HAS SOME WEAKNESSES. THE WIDE RANGE OF OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE IN YEARS 10 AND 11 PREPARES PUPILS WELL FOR FURTHER STUDY AND EMPLOYMENT. THE RANGE OF ENRICHMENT OPPORTUNITIES PROVIDED OUTSIDE LESSONS IS VERY GOOD. RESOURCES ARE MOSTLY GOOD OVERALL AND ACCOMMODATION IS SATISFACTORY.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school provides a good range of courses for students.
- Students are able to take part in a very extensive range of additional learning opportunities, and levels of participation in sport and in the arts are very good.
- Provision for students with special educational needs is very good.
- The match of support staff to the curriculum is excellent.
- Provision for religious education in Years 10 - 13 and students' personal, social and health education is unsatisfactory.
- Students do not participate in a daily act of collective worship.

Commentary

33. The curriculum meets the needs of the students well. Senior managers and governors keep the curriculum under regular review and they are developing new courses and flexible approaches to learning, often in co-operation with neighbouring colleges. The school has made good progress overall since the last inspection but the curriculum continues to have some weaknesses. There have been numerous positive changes to the curriculum, some of which have necessitated disapplication from the National Curriculum for some students. These include the successful introduction of an accredited course in ICT, a range of vocational courses through the college-linked NVQ course, and the applied GCSE courses in manufacturing and leisure and tourism. However, opportunities for vocational education experiences remain rather narrow. The school is planning to expand this range of courses in the near future to ensure that its curricular provision will meet the needs of all students more effectively. The school does not meet the legal requirement for a daily act of collective worship, a weakness identified at the time of the last inspection.

34. There are strengths in many departments, but also some weaknesses. Equality of access is very good in English, where the proportion of students who follow both language and literature courses exceeds the national figures. In mathematics, there is a good match of the curriculum to the full range of students' abilities. In modern foreign languages, the extracurricular provision includes Russian, leading to a GCSE qualification, as well as exchange visits to France, Germany and Spain. The involvement of students with special educational needs, as well as gifted and talented students, in drama is a strength. The introduction of three separate sciences for the higher attaining students, and for those who want to follow science in the sixth form, is a good innovation. Planning and assessment procedures in design and technology, and the breadth of media available in art and design for students in Years 10 and 11, are additional strengths. However, in history, the amount of time dedicated to the study of German history results in a relatively narrow curriculum for students. The time allocated to religious education in Years 10 and 11 is insufficient to meet the requirements of the local agreed syllabus, and around a half of students do not

receive their full entitlement. Although standards are broadly in line with national expectations, the arrangements for ICT in Year 8 do not allow coverage of the programme of study in enough depth and its use in art and design in Years 8 and 9 does not fully meet the requirements of the programme of study. The organisation of the programme for personal, social and health education, including citizenship, does not ensure that all the statutory elements are adequately covered. Whilst the school has successfully addressed most issues identified in the last report, the lower than recommended curriculum time was a key issue that the school deliberately chose not to change. The leadership team and governors reviewed the length of the school day and did not find sufficient justification to change the current arrangements. In view of the weaknesses identified above, inspectors consider that this decision should be revisited and changed.

35. Overall, the curriculum provision for students with special educational needs is very good. Individual statements are well written and provide good information on the learning needs of the students. The contribution of the head of department to the writing of these statements helps considerably, in terms of both relevance and detail. In Years 10 and 11, the introduction of a new ASDAN course has been particularly successful in creating opportunities for some students to learn. The special needs department supports the curriculum well with a spelling club, lunchtime club and revision programmes.

36. The curriculum for students who are identified as gifted and talented is satisfactory. Curricular provision for these students is mainly the responsibility of individual departments. Good developments are underway in several departments, which are enhancing their current resources for the more capable students. Although most departments have identified their gifted and talented students, many are still planning their response. The enrichment course provided last year for selected students in Year 8 was effective in helping them to develop a new range of skills.

37. No special arrangements are made in the curriculum for students learning English as an additional language. The current curriculum provides a good basis for the students' learning and integration into the mainstream culture.

38. Provision for personal, social and health education is unsatisfactory as insufficient time is allowed for all the statutory aspects to be covered adequately. Some elements of sex education are taught within the science curriculum. However, this does not fulfil the wider aspect of providing sex education in such a way as to have due regard to moral considerations and the value of family life or give parents the opportunity to withdraw their children from these aspects. There is also little time given for students to learn about the dangers of drugs, smoking and alcohol abuse. However, careers education receives ample time.

39. The school prepares students well for the later stages of education and employment. Provision is satisfactory in Years 8 and 9, where guidance on careers is included within the personal, social and health education programme. The provision for work-related learning, which is satisfactory, has been audited, and additional topics will be included from the spring term to meet requirements. Provision in Years 10 and 11 is very good. In Year 10, students undertake work experience for two weeks, which is very well organised. This is arranged through the local Education Business Partnership, which aims to give the majority of students their choice of placement. Some students arrange their own work placements through family contacts. Students now in Year 11 say that work experience is a very

important feature of their education. They list as its benefits: greater self-confidence when working with adults; extending their knowledge of careers and higher education routes; and re-charging their motivation for school studies. All students keep a diary, which is very well structured, to prepare them for employment and to record their experiences. Teachers and employers monitor students' progress. A number of subjects contribute to work experience, including vocational manufacturing, leisure and recreation, and the course leading to the ASDAN qualification.

40. The school provides a rich and varied programme of enrichment and extracurricular experiences for all students. There is an impressive variety of lunchtime and after-school clubs, in which high numbers of students participate. In physical education, there is a range of inter-school fixtures and the school is represented at regional and national levels. The school undertakes exchange visits with a school in India. There is a very popular drama club and students of media studies are involved in visits to the BBC to see how programmes are made. The science department runs an extracurricular science club, where, during the inspection week, all students were highly enthusiastic and fully involved in the activities. Students generally respond positively to all the extracurricular activities and are eager to be involved. To encourage participation, the school pays for transport each Wednesday to help pupils with the journey home. All pupils in Year 8 are involved in a residential experience. The school invites visitors with expertise to the school and follows up their contributions.

41. The range of expertise and experience of teaching staff is good, enabling subjects to be taught well. The match of support staff to the curriculum is excellent. The school has successfully introduced Workforce Reform arrangements, which has had a big impact on the school. Technical and administrative staff are seen as a vital part of the school staff as a whole. Clerical assistants provide very good support to departments. Technical support is very good and includes a dedicated classroom assistant for ICT. The special educational needs department has an adequate number of support assistants. This includes three senior teaching assistants who work in the three core subjects.

42. The accommodation is sufficient to support the curriculum. The accommodation is good in many areas, especially within the arts and physical education. Some teaching rooms are rather small, however, and are not suitable for the large groups in some subjects, such as history. Some corridors are narrow but the sensible approach of students ensures that movement around the school is uneventful.

43. The resources available to departments are good. All subjects have sufficient textbooks and equipment to support their subject. However, there is a lack of computers and ICT equipment in music, art and design, modern foreign languages and physical education. The resource centre provides a good resource for all subject areas, and students and classes use it well.

Sixth form

44. In the sixth form, a good curriculum of some 26 subjects is available at AS and A-level. However, as with students in Years 10 and 11, the range of vocational courses available is narrow. All students undertake general studies and follow a key skills programme, which is timetabled in Year 13 and taught through the tutorial programme.

The school does not fulfil statutory requirements to teach religious education to all students in the sixth form.

45. Students receive good quality guidance for their choices of courses and further education. Provision for careers education is satisfactory. Students receive substantial guidance on careers and university entrance, although no work experience is provided as a common element of the curriculum. A few courses extend students' knowledge and understanding of work. Students studying ICT for the GNVQ course include some work experience at a local primary school. Students studying for the Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education (AVCE) course in business participate in running their own company as part of the Young Enterprise scheme arranged in partnership with local employers. In the AVCE course in leisure and recreation, students investigate a number of organisations and visit them to gain evidence first-hand.

46. Students have very good opportunities to extend and enrich their learning through their involvement in extracurricular activities. Levels of participation in sports and arts activities are very good. There are numerous trips to other countries, to galleries and to the theatre. There are opportunities to join Young Enterprise or the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, or to produce and publish magazines. Students are involved in organising some of their own activities, both in the school and in the local community through the Millennium Volunteers group, which help to promote their independence and organisational skills.

47. The accommodation for the sixth form is variable and it is satisfactory overall. The purpose-built sixth form centre offers excellent facilities to support the academic and social aspects of the students' life at the school. The accommodation is good in geography, French and media studies. As in the main school, some rooms are rather small for the larger groups, for example in biology and psychology. The resources available to support sixth form teaching and learning are good. In media studies and physical education, they are very good.

Care, guidance and support

The school has very good procedures for ensuring the care, welfare and safety of students. Students receive very good support, advice and guidance. The arrangements for seeking, valuing and acting on students' views are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The system of form representatives and the school forum ensures that all students feel valued, leading to a greater sense of responsibility amongst students.
- The school has very good systems to track students' achievements and personal development.
- Very good procedures for health, safety and child protection ensure a safe environment.
- The support provided through the tutorial system in the sixth form is inconsistent.

Commentary

48. The school has very good procedures to ensure that students are well looked after and that they learn in a safe environment. Health and safety issues are monitored well through regular risk assessments, and matters of concern are recorded carefully and dealt with promptly. Procedures for child protection are very good. All staff have been given appropriate training and are aware of their

responsibilities. Students with special educational needs and those at risk of exclusion receive very good care and support. The very good relationships and the school's very positive ethos help to raise students' aspirations and self-esteem. These, together with well-established systems for managing behaviour, make a strong contribution to students' academic and personal achievements.

49. Students feel secure that the staff know them well and are confident that adults are there to help them. Many students benefit from the strong pastoral care and support provided by the 'drop in' facility with the school's matron. Students understand the good system of target setting for their academic and personal development, and they are involved well in setting targets and reviewing their own progress.

50. The school has very good systems for tracking students' progress and their achievements, together with a good system for evaluating and analysing students' grades for effort and achievement and communicating them to parents. Students understand the use of the tracking system. Students giving rise to concern are referred promptly to the Connexions adviser or to the student mental health adviser for appropriate advice and guidance. The Connexions adviser is present in the school each day and provides very good assistance, both to disaffected students who have been referred by heads of year and to other students who have taken advantage of the 'drop in' provision of advice available to all students. The student mental health adviser, who is a recent appointment made jointly with the Milton Keynes NHS Trust, provides a very useful source of support for students who have been referred by heads of year.

51. The school takes very effective action to seek, value and act on students' views. Students feel that they have a strong, beneficial and responsible effect on school life through the school forum. The system of form representatives linking to representatives on the school forum works well and enables every student to feel wanted, despite the very large size of the school. The school forum operates well and students on the forum can point to several developments that they have successfully initiated, for example, a cashless canteen, and swipe cards for using the library. The systems for seeking their views lead to the development of a strong sense of responsibility among students. Students feel that they can report misbehaviour without fear of adverse consequences to themselves. Very good leadership and management contribute to the effectiveness of procedures to care for, guide and protect students.

Sixth form

52. As with the main school, the arrangements for ensuring the care, welfare and health and safety of students are very good. The support, advice and guidance provided for sixth formers are good and students value the present system. Some students receive very good assistance from their tutors through the revised tutorial system but not all staff provide the same level of support. There is inconsistency in the amount of tutorial time available to sixth form students and students do not always receive the same amount of time with a tutor. The school has very effective induction arrangements for students both in the main school and in the sixth form. Sixth formers are able to make their opinions known very effectively through the school forum and the sixth form council.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has forged a very good partnership with parents, who are well satisfied with the school. The school's very good links with the community and its partnership with other schools are well established.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school works very hard to involve parents regularly through personal contact and frequent communication.

- The majority of parents have a positive view of the school and are very supportive of its work.
- The school provides parents with a very good amount of helpful information about the curriculum and students' progress.
- Parents of students with special educational needs are involved very well in assessments and reviews.
- The very good community links and partnerships with other schools enrich the curriculum.

Commentary

53. Since the last inspection, the school has maintained its very good partnership with parents. The school is committed to working with parents and contacts them promptly to discuss concerns and to celebrate students' success. Parents' views are sought through regular questionnaires and during consultation evenings, which are very well attended. The majority of parents are very positive about the work of the school and are satisfied with the care their children receive and the education it provides. Parents of students with special educational needs are involved well and the school positively encourages their help in supporting their child's progress. The Friends of Ousedale make a significant contribution to the life of the school through fundraising and organising events.

54. The school provides a very good and well-presented range of helpful information for parents. At the beginning of the year, parents receive an information booklet about the particular year group, which is focused on assisting them to help their children at home. The booklets contain a good amount of information about the curriculum, homework timetable, diary events, coursework deadlines and arrangements for work experience. Parents of students in the sixth form also receive an informative booklet about coursework deadlines, assessment and target grades. The parents of students in Year 11 receive an explanatory booklet describing the sixth form courses. This is followed by a consultation evening to assist them in helping students to make appropriate choices of subjects. Although a number of parents would like more regular information about progress, inspectors judge that the reports to parents are very good. Parents receive two progress reviews during the year, giving grades for achievement and effort, and they are encouraged to check for information about strengths and weaknesses contained in the students' planners. The annual reports are good and provide parents with a clear statement about progress and targets in all subjects.

55. Links with the parents of students with special educational needs are very good. Parents are kept well informed through formal meetings and other informal communication. The head of department has a long history of very good links with parents and a wide range of ways for communication ensures almost all parents are satisfied with the school's work. Currently, some significant departmental procedures are not written down, which would make it difficult for the school to ensure continuity of practice in the event of changes in staff.

56. Community links are very good, both in the main school and in the sixth form. Links with local businesses and local organisations are very good and well managed. As a result, students benefit from numerous projects to enrich the curriculum, which include visiting speakers, artists in residence and placements for work experience. An extensive programme of adult education classes and youth and community groups regularly makes

use of the school's facilities. Students following the community service course undertake work in local first, middle and combined schools, playgroups, residential homes and carry out jobs for elderly people in the neighbourhood. This makes a strong contribution to their personal and social development.

57. The school has very good links with other schools through its involvement with the Milton Keynes group of schools. Subject teachers meet regularly each term to share good practice and to establish curricular links. The well-established partnership with contributory primary schools provides very effective support for all students entering Year 8. Although there is no shared provision for sixth form courses, regular meetings take place between the heads of sixth forms in partner schools to discuss issues of common interest. The school has close links with Oxford Brookes and DeMontford Universities.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership of the headteacher and senior staff is very good. Management of the school is good. Governance of the school is generally good. However, the governing body does not meet all statutory requirements with regard to the provision of a daily act of collective worship, religious education in Years 10 to 13, ICT in Year 8 and in art and design in Years 8 and 9, sex and relationships education, and the content of the governors' annual report to parents.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher enables all members of the school community to make their own individual contributions to the success of the school.
- Teachers track students' progress consistently and comprehensively in Years 8 - 11, but the arrangements are less well developed in the sixth form.
- Middle managers have improved the quality of teaching by rigorous monitoring, but the monitoring and evaluation of whole-school cross-curricular aspects is a weakness.

Commentary

58. Over the past five years, the school has improved considerably. It has maintained its popularity in the local community and, as a result, continues to be over-subscribed. Standards in Years 7 - 9 have risen at a faster rate than nationally and the school's performance overall has been well above average in relation to the national figures. Relationships throughout the school are very good and the school makes a very good contribution to students' personal development. This means that the already good features noted at the time of the last inspection have been built upon successfully. There is a clear vision and strong sense of purpose to be found at all levels within the school.

59. The major reason for this improvement is the very good leadership of the headteacher. All staff, students, parents and governors are very clear that his role in moving the school forward has been crucial. Because of this, all members of the school community are pulling together to ensure that the momentum for improvement is maintained. There is now genuine pride in being part of a dynamic school. He is ensuring that the current consultation with the local education authority regarding the future direction

of the school does not have an adverse impact on the important issues of maintaining the highest possible quality of education for all students and the ethos of the school.

60. The headteacher receives very good support from his senior colleagues. Members of the senior leadership team are very good role models for colleagues and students, both in their commitment to provide a better education for all students and in the way they undertake their duties. Middle managers have clear, delegated responsibility for their own departments. The vast majority are very good leaders providing strong leadership and very good role models for other members of their departments. All staff support the expectations set by the headteacher in terms of raising standards and establishing the very good ethos found in the school. The main priority has been to improve the quality of students' learning through improved teaching and the school has been successful in achieving this aim. It has brought about related improvements, particularly in narrowing the difference between the achievement of boys and girls. Staff and governors have developed a coherent and forward-looking plan for improvement, which gives clear strategic direction for all that happens.

61. In line with its aims, the school attends well to the needs of all students. It monitors the progress of students well and ensures that it meets its strong commitment to equality of opportunity. The range of courses offered to students in Years 10 and 11 has been extended and the allocation of time given to different subjects has mostly been resolved, although some weaknesses remain. Curriculum leadership is good but there are weaknesses in the monitoring of cross-curricular issues, for example, students' learning and understanding of citizenship. Only in failing to ensure that the complete requirements for sex education are provided through the personal, social and health education programme, and failing to allocate enough time for religious education in Years 10 -13, has this leadership not been fully effective.

62. Leadership of the provision for students with special educational needs is good. Leadership comes from the senior management team and through the work of the special educational needs coordinator. The senior leadership team drives change and makes sure that the special educational needs provision remains in line with school strategic planning. A good example of this is the appointment of three senior teaching assistants to develop and coordinate work within the core subjects. These appointments are already having a good impact on improving the provision for students with special educational needs. The special educational needs coordinator provides good leadership to the department, giving direction to the team of learning support assistants, in particular, and maximising the impact of all staff on students with special educational needs.

63. The management of special educational needs is very good. The special education needs development plan is a good document, which translates strategy into practice. There is also a thorough policy document. However, this policy, although it conforms to the new Code of Practice, does not reflect current practice. Links between the document and the development plan are insufficiently developed. Students' records are thorough, detailed, up-to-date and well used. Information is communicated to staff efficiently. In particular, individual education plans, which give information to staff on how to modify their teaching, are familiar to staff. They act upon these plans well. Timely meetings ensure that students' progress is monitored effectively and the results, including any changes, are fed back to staff.

64. Leadership and management of the provision for students identified as gifted and talented are satisfactory. The programme for these students is under review. The strategy of devolving responsibility to departments is creating some good localised initiatives but overall, the drive to involve all staff across the school is not effective. Members of the senior leadership team are clear about the choices they have and the decisions they need to make. Following the pilot of the Year 8 programme, senior managers are currently considering the leadership of the whole initiative for the future. In departments where the initiative is moving on strongly, the provision is very good. However, many departments are looking for clearer direction. Some are trying out ideas, which are effective; others have made very little progress.

65. Leadership and management of the provision for students with English as an additional language are good. The school has committed additional resources to supporting what is a very small number of students. One teaching assistant has specialist training in the teaching of students learning English as an additional language. A new teacher has been appointed, who is also able to offer some support in this area. The school is well prepared to respond to any additional students and to continue with making the education of those at the school good.

66. A major factor in school improvement has been the implementation of a rigorous framework for self-evaluation, which covers all aspects of school life. Heads of subject are meticulous in their analysis of students' results and this helps them to identify and build on strengths, and to work on aspects of teachers' work requiring improvement. Senior managers give very good support to heads of subjects in relation to the curriculum and to tutors and heads of year regarding pastoral issues. This has been very valuable in helping new heads of subject to settle in quickly and to develop strategies for improving work in their areas of responsibility. Priority is being given to maintaining the quality of staff and developing strategies in order to recruit more teachers of high quality who will be needed when the school expands its student numbers.

67. Throughout the past five years, governors have been very actively involved in supporting and encouraging improvements. They have a very good understanding of the strengths of the school and are fully aware of the areas requiring further improvement. They play a full part in drawing up the school improvement plan. They also carefully monitor progress toward achieving the objectives of the plan. Governors have been careful in overseeing the many improvements that have taken place, providing appropriate challenge to the senior leadership team. They have not ensured that all students are able to take part in a daily act of collective worship or to receive their full entitlement of sex and relationships education. Currently, there are minor statutory omissions in their annual report to parents and they have not provided enough time for an adequate study of religious education by all pupils in Years 10 -13 and for ICT in Year 8 and in art and design in Years 8 and 9.

68. The school has a strong commitment to the professional development of all staff. The links between the school's priorities for improvement, individual staff needs as identified through performance management and the resources available are very good. Induction arrangements are good, enabling teachers new to the school or to the profession to settle quickly and to become effective members of the staff team. The school nurtures and develops the skills of student teachers effectively.

69. The management of the school's finances is good. Financial controls are secure. The headteacher maintains the overall strategic management role and is assisted by the finance manager, who ensures that the budget is administered correctly, keeps up-to-date records of income and expenditure and carefully monitors all accounts. The finance manager has procedures to ensure that the principles of best value are applied in fair competitive tendering and the securing of goods and services. She prepares budget reports for the governors' finance committee meetings, which she attends in order to give explanations and answer questions. Budget surpluses over recent years have created a significant balance in the school's finances. The school is awaiting clarification of a number of issues relating to its future before it commits itself to further expenditure on the present accommodation. Overall, based on the standards achieved, the quality of teaching and learning and education and its management, set against the average cost per student, the school gives good value for money.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	5,837,402	Balance from previous year	538,767
Total expenditure	5,762,419	Balance carried forward to the next	589,228
Expenditure per pupil	3,306		

Sixth form

70. Leadership and management of the sixth form are both good. Governance of the sixth form is good. The head of sixth form, who is a member of the senior leadership team, demonstrates very good leadership, combined with a clear understanding of her priorities for students in Years 12 and 13. She fosters and promotes an environment that is designed to give students the best possible conditions for studying. There are more students in the sixth form than at the time of the last inspection and it is much bigger than the average sixth form. For the past three years, examination results for students in Year 13 have been well above average when compared with the national figures. The vision, expectation and challenge for all students promoted by the head of sixth form are completely supported by all the sixth form tutors. They are united in their drive for students to fulfil their potential and have initiated procedures which alert teachers to any problems students may be experiencing with their work, or absences either from school or the monitored times for private study. This supports students very well. However the rigour in monitoring test and examination performance shown by those who teach students in Years 8 - 11 is not as well-developed by those who teach students in Years 12 and 13.

71. Governors have been involved in developing, and share, a clear vision for the sixth form. They have reviewed the range of courses available and there are plans to embrace new technology in order to increase and improve the already wide variety of subjects offered to students.

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

WORK-RELATED LEARNING

72. Provision for work-related learning (WRL) is satisfactory. A deputy headteacher has oversight of this aspect of the curriculum. A policy has been written and a working party has reviewed what is offered within the current curriculum. The coordinator of the

personal, social and health education programme has audited the provision for WRL, and she is in the process of adapting topics to meet the new requirements. In Year 10, the work experience programme contributes very well to developing students' understanding of employment. It benefits from the local Education Business Partnership in arranging placements for a large number of students. A small number of vocational courses include elements of WRL. Subjects have identified areas of their curriculum that contribute to WRL, and a few have started to work in partnership with local companies. For example, in design and technology in Year 10, students are designing a new logo and producing prototype sandwiches for a small catering company. This has involved visits to the premises and a visit by the managing director to the school. Provision in the sixth form is satisfactory. Vocational courses extend students' WRL through work experience and visits. However, this type of provision is limited to two courses. The AVCE course in business also gives students an opportunity to run their own company through the Young Enterprise scheme that also operates in Year 10.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in tests and examinations have improved, reflecting good achievement from Year 8 to Year 11.
- Very good leadership has created a strong team committed to further improvement.
- Planning and learning activities are very effective in most lessons.
- Good relationships and high expectations of learning and behaviour lead to good achievement.
- There are insufficient opportunities for extended writing in Years 8 and 9.

Commentary

73. In the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003, the results were well above the national average and the average for similar schools. Girls performed better than boys, although both were well above their national counterparts. The results were similar in 2004. Achievement has been very good during Years 8 and 9. Over time, there has been an improvement in the proportion of students gaining the highest levels. In the GCSE examinations in English and English literature, standards were above the national averages in 2003. Girls again attained higher grades than boys, particularly in English literature. In 2004, the results were well above average, showing an improvement overall and for boys in both subjects and for girls in English.

74. Standards by Year 9 are above national expectations, and students achieve well. Nearly all are articulate, with the most capable speaking in extended sentences. They listen well to the teacher and increasingly well to each other. Reading aloud is accurate but often lacks expression. Responses to books show above average grasp of plot, character and authors' intentions. Written work is above average in accuracy, with the language chosen appropriately to suit the purpose. Students produce little extended writing, however. By Year 11, work is above the standard expected nationally for both boys and girls, and good achievement is maintained. Students express their ideas clearly, responding well to teachers' questions and making good use of pair and group discussion. Formal oral work is at least as good as written work. They respond with interest to a range of literature and non-fiction. Most are able to make references to the text to support their views. The most capable students comment with perception on the effect of language. Writing for a variety of purposes is clear and well organised. Throughout Years 8 to 11, students make insufficient use of ICT to enhance their writing.

75. Students' attitudes and behaviour are good overall. They arrive promptly to lessons and settle quickly to work. Most maintain their concentration and interest throughout the lesson, although a minority were off task towards the end of some lessons. Presentation is

usually careful and homework completed on time. They respond well to being given responsibility in the classroom. Relationships are cordial and purposeful; teachers and students are on the same side.

76. Teaching and learning are good overall, with some very good or excellent practice. Teachers plan their lessons very well, providing a variety of activities that enable students to build on their skills and knowledge. Their enthusiasm is infectious, making students keen to do well. Intended learning is shared with them so they know why they are doing things and they are aware of their own progress. This is well maintained with regular setting and review of personal targets in partnership with their teachers. High expectations of behaviour and achievement lead to success for most students, including those with special needs. Teachers know these pupils well, and support staff are very well used when available. Calm and fair behaviour management leads to a good working atmosphere. Visual aids are used effectively to provide a focus to the lesson. In most lessons, teachers ensure that all students actively contribute; in a few, the boys receive more attention. In some lessons, students need more time for silent individual work to produce their own pieces. By encouraging students to consider social and moral issues such as justice and good and evil, English is making a valuable contribution to their development as young citizens.

77. The curriculum in Years 8 and 9 is structured well to provide a broad range of study that meets national requirements. All students are regarded as entrants for both English and English literature examinations; the department has a very inclusive approach. The well-qualified staff receive a very good level of administrative support.

78. The subject is led very well, and management is very good. The department shares a clear vision and strategies for further improvement in achievement. Candid self-evaluation has identified appropriate areas for development. Induction and support for new teachers are very good. Policies are clearly set out and reflected in classroom practice. Planning at every level is very thorough. Assessment data are used very effectively to track progress and inform planning. Regular monitoring is leading to the sharing of good practice and very effective professional support. The department uses display very well to stimulate and inspire. From a strong position in the last inspection, improvement has been good. Results in examinations and tests and the quality of teaching have risen, and monitoring is more rigorous and effective.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

79. The school has a clear policy for developing the skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing across the curriculum, and this is borne out by the good opportunities available in most subjects. In no subject was a lack of literacy skills identified as a barrier to learning and progress for the great majority of students, whose overall ability in this area is above average.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have improved recently and are broadly in line with the national expectation.
- The department is managed very well.
- Students benefit from a very good enrichment programme.
- Some students have too little opportunity to use ICT.
- Some teachers do not make sufficient use of the foreign language in the classroom and this has an adverse effect on pupils' confidence to use it themselves.

Commentary

80. All students, including those with special educational needs and students from minority ethnic heritages, achieve well during Years 8 and 9. Standards on entry to Year 8 are below average overall, but are in line with national expectations by the end of Year 9, reflecting the assessments undertaken by teachers in 2004. Boys do not reach the same standards as girls, but their achievement is just as good. The GCSE examination results in 2003 were above the national average in French, significantly above average in German and below average in Spanish. In French and Spanish, the performance of the girls was better than that of the boys in relation to their respective national figures, but in German, the boys' results were better. In 2004, the results were broadly similar to those in 2003 in French, were better in Spanish but were lower in German. Standards in all three languages by Year 11 are in line with national expectations overall. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good in all three languages and students' attitudes are positive.

81. Teaching and learning are good in all age groups in all three languages. Students work hard. All lessons are planned well and resources are of high quality, except for ICT, where a minority of students do not have enough access to computers. When they are available, teachers make very good use of the interactive whiteboards. Students write well because they develop good knowledge of grammar and skills in listening and reading are taught well. Speaking is good in most classes, but students' speaking skills are not consistently developed as well as the other skills. Assessment booklets, produced by the department, are very helpful to students. They contain regular tests, which fit well with the school's procedures, giving students a clear view of their progress and what they should do to improve. Most staff make considerable use of the foreign language in lessons, but there are some exceptions. Where teachers do not use the foreign language to communicate, students are less confident in using it themselves. Some teachers do not provide enough opportunities for students to use ICT to improve their language learning.

82. Leadership is good. Teachers and support staff work well as a team and the head of department provides a good role model by teaching successfully and promoting many worthwhile curriculum developments. The well-organised programme of enrichment activities, including exchange visits to France, Germany and Spain, makes a powerful impact on students' motivation. There is a vision for the development of languages in the school, but differences in the way it is interpreted by individual teachers lead to inconsistent practice, taking opportunities away from a minority of students. The department is managed very well, evaluating its provision conscientiously. By monitoring students' performance and teasing out weaknesses, teachers have been able to take timely and successful action to improve provision. The contribution of support staff, including the foreign language assistants, makes a very valuable impact on the quality of students' learning. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in the national tests and in GCSE examinations are well above national levels and those of similar schools.
- Students achieve very well because of the good teaching.
- Effective assessment and monitoring of students' attainment and progress result in high levels of achievement.
- Very good leadership sets a clear sense of purpose for students to achieve high standards.
- Students are often enthused by the teaching and so have positive attitudes to learning.
- Teaching is not monitored sufficiently well in order to promote a wider variety of teaching and learning styles.

Commentary

83. The results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2004 were well above the national average and well above schools with a similar level of attainment on entry. The results were similar in 2003, when boys' results were slightly higher than those of the girls. The test results have remained at this high level for the last three years, with an increasing proportion of students attaining the higher Level 6 and above. By the end of Year 9, students attain standards that are well above national expectations. All students develop further their number skills and begin to acquire skills in algebra. Skills and understanding in geometry and in handling data are developed well. All students make use of ICT in their learning.

84. In 2003, the GCSE examination results were well above the national average and well above those of similar schools. In 2004, the results were also well above the national average and were very high in comparison with the results for schools with similar levels of prior attainment. The results of boys and girls were very similar. The results have improved over the last three years, with a marked improvement in the boys' results between 2003 and 2004. Students entered for the GCSE examinations in statistics in Year 10 in 2003 and 2004 gained results that were well above the national averages. By the end of Year 11, standards are well above national expectations. Average and higher attaining students have a well-developed understanding of algebra. Higher attainers apply algebraic knowledge to trigonometry. Lower attaining students have limited numeracy but work well on basic concepts in number, shape and measures, probability and statistics. In Years 10 and 11, students of a wide range of attainment are able to work well independently.

85. In Years 8 - 11, students' achievement is very good. There are no significant differences in the achievement of different groups of students, including those from different ethnic heritages or boys and girls. Students with special educational needs make good progress, particularly with the help of learning support assistants.

86. The quality of teaching and learning is good at both key stages. Teachers have a good command of the topics taught. The planning in the schemes of work supports teachers in matching the work to the attainment of the students. However, individual lesson planning too often only refers to the content and not to the teaching methods to be used. This results in a rather narrow range of teaching and learning styles. Lessons are taught at a good pace, which maintains the level of students' interest and leads to good progress. Teachers give clear explanations and involve students in question and discussion. Questioning is at its best when the teachers insist that students explain their answers. Most lessons end with a summary, which helps to consolidate the learning. In some lessons, teachers motivate pupils by looking forward to what might come next. The good teaching and high expectations of work and behaviour result in the students enjoying

their lessons and having positive attitudes to learning. They listen and contribute well and often show enthusiasm for the subject. Most work is presented well in books, and coursework in Years 10 and 11 shows evidence of good independent study.

87. The high achievement of students is promoted by the good use of assessment. Students are tested and kept closely informed as to how well they are doing. Most marking of work gives helpful comments on how to improve. Targets for improvement are set regularly. The students' understanding of their own attainment is helped further by the use of a personal record, in which they can check off what they know and understand. The use of ICT to support learning is an increasing feature of the work, with teachers having easy access to a computer suite where students can work at individual computers.

88. Although the teaching is good, there are aspects that are insufficiently developed. For example, higher attaining students have insufficient opportunity to develop mathematical reasoning and an understanding of proof. The National Key Stage 3 Strategy has led to improvements in teaching, but teachers are not using the full range of resources available to build on the learning that students have established in Year 7. Teachers do not make sufficiently good use of the demonstration capabilities of the data projection available in the ICT suite and some other classrooms.

89. The leadership and efficient teamwork in the department are very good, demonstrating a clear sense of purpose to achieve high outcomes for all students. The head of department and other leaders provide good role models for less experienced teachers. The monitoring and evaluation of students' attainment and progress are very well established. However, the monitoring of the quality of teaching in order to promote a wider range of teaching styles is not sufficiently developed.

90. Curriculum opportunities are extended for higher attaining students in Year 10, through the additional provision of a GCSE course in statistics. Higher attainers in Year 8 have an accelerated programme that will enable many to enter for the GCSE examination in Year 10. Additional teaching in Year 9 to raise their attainment to the expected national standard supports lower attaining students. Progress since the last inspection has been good. The GCSE examination results have risen relative to national standards; better use is now made of the analysis of performance data to raise standards; and the provision of ICT equipment and software and its use in the teaching and learning of mathematics has improved.

Mathematics across the curriculum

91. The development of students' numeracy skills is being extended progressively across the school curriculum. The school has an effective policy for numeracy across the curriculum. Building on training undertaken with all teachers in the school, subject departments have reviewed the contribution they make to developing and applying numeracy and have revised policies in order to improve the impact of this aspect of learning. The geography department, for example, has written very useful guidance for teachers on *Maths Skills in Geography*. Students are required to apply their knowledge of measurement and to use formulae and carry out calculations in design and technology and science. In geography, they analyse statistics and calculate traffic flow rates. In religious education, students use graphs, charts and time-lines. In most of these applications, students have a good level of understanding and are able to apply their knowledge to good effect.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above national expectations by the end of Year 9 through good teaching and students' very good attitudes to learning.
- Higher attaining students achieve very well in GCSE examinations.
- A considerable number of lower attaining students in Year 11 do not gain their predicted GCSE grades.
- The leadership of the department is very good.
- Some teachers do not use a sufficiently wide range of teaching styles to engage some students fully.

Commentary

92. Students' attainment in the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2004 was well above the national average. In general, the trend has been upwards since the last inspection. The results were higher than those of students in similar schools, based on their earlier attainment. In the GCSE examinations in 2004, the proportion of students gaining grades A*-C was above the national average. This is an improvement over the results for the previous year, when standards were in line with the national average.

93. Students' work shows that standards are well above national expectations by Year 9 and are in line with national expectations by Year 11. Students' attainment when they enter the school is broadly average. Their achievement is very good in Years 8 and 9 as a result of good teaching and their very good attitudes. Students' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. Higher attaining students achieve well in the GCSE examinations and many students gain higher grades than predicted. Students with special educational needs are well supported by both teachers and teaching assistants and achieve well. A considerable number of lower attaining students do not achieve as well as other students in Years 10 and 11 and are not fully engaged in some lessons because they find the lessons of little interest. The department is aware of this and considering offering different courses next year.

94. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and are best in Years 8 and 9. The most successful lessons occur with higher attaining classes, where there are some examples of very good teaching. In these lessons, effective planning ensures that the pace is good, with students fully engaged and challenged through tackling a wide range of suitable activities. Many students have very good attitudes to science and show an enthusiasm for the subject. Relationships between teachers and students are good in these lessons, which lead to a pleasant cooperative atmosphere where students learn well. However, a considerable number of lower attaining students in Years 10 and 11 are less enthusiastic and this affects their learning. In these less successful lessons, the range of teaching styles is restricted and the pace is too slow. There are some very good examples in the marking of students' work that clearly indicates what they need to do to improve. However, not all teachers follow these procedures. Students receive very good guidance and support regarding their GCSE coursework.

95. Leadership of the department is very good. There is a clear understanding of the issues to be tackled to raise standards, especially in the GCSE examinations. The introduction of a revised course in Years 8 and 9, together with the opportunity for students to follow three separate sciences at GCSE, have contributed to the recent rise in standards. There is a large team of enthusiastic, well-qualified teachers, who receive good

support from an effective team of technicians, learning support assistants and other staff. The management of the department is good. The handbook and guidance to teachers are detailed and they give good support to all staff. The attainment of students is analysed in great detail and the findings are used effectively to produce the department development plan. The current detailed plan addresses all the major issues but not all staff implement the agreed procedures and strategies fully. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Standards are higher at the end of Year 9. The assessment procedures and evaluation have improved. However, standards in the GCSE examinations are slightly lower.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management of the department are good, and have some very good features.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and their planning is very effective, thus ensuring that students make good progress.
- Students in Year 8 have insufficient lesson time for ICT and the provision does not fulfil the requirements of the programme of study.
- Students have very good attitudes to the subject, especially the groups following the new GNVQ course.
- There is no opportunity for higher attaining students in Years 10 and 11 to take the full GCSE examination course.

Commentary

96. The assessment undertaken by teachers at the end of Year 9 in 2004 shows that students' attainment was in line with national expectations and improving. Students arrive in the school with varying levels of ability and experience and standards are generally below average. They make steady improvement in their ICT skills as they move through the school and standards by the end of Year 9 are in line with national expectations. Although curriculum time is limited in Year 8, the good teaching and very effective planning has resulted in students' achievement being good by the end of Year 9. Students are able to judge websites for reliability and accuracy, and produce spreadsheets using the appropriate formulae. They use assessment sheets effectively and add details of improvements they have made. In Years 10 and 11, both the GCSE short course and the GNVQ course are new. Scrutiny of work, observation of lessons and the assessments of progress show that students' attainment by Year 11 is above the standard expected nationally. Students are achieving well, including those with special educational needs.

97. Teaching and learning are good overall and there were no lessons in which they were unsatisfactory. This represents good improvement since the last inspection. In several lessons, teaching and learning were very good. Teachers' subject knowledge and planning are very good. Lessons move at a very good pace and their content is interesting and challenging. As a result, students are enthusiastic and eager to learn. Students in Year 10 following the GNVQ Intermediate course are producing portfolios of work of a high standard, which are carefully annotated by the students to show how they can achieve higher grades. In a very good lesson with higher attaining students in Year 11, learning was impressive as they were able to merge a solution from a spreadsheet into a database and create a new type of formula relating to the different software. Teachers use the starting activity very well to share objectives with the students; at the end of the lesson,

students are eager to display their work on the interactive whiteboard and discuss what they have learned. Where learning is only satisfactory, the inappropriate behaviour of a few students affects the achievement of the lesson's objectives.

98. Assessment is very good. The department ensures that all students are assessed with their National Curriculum levels from their first unit of work. Students know the level at which they are working and how to achieve their target level. Teachers make it clear to students studying for examinations what they need to do to achieve a higher level.

99. In response to the findings of the last inspection, there are now opportunities for accreditation in Years 10 and 11 and this shows good improvement. These courses, especially the GNVQ course, are planned and organised very well. However, at this time, there is no opportunity for students to take the full GCSE examination course and this particularly limits the progress of higher attaining students. The National Key Stage 3 Strategy has been very well adapted and extended for Years 8 and 9 to ensure that it fulfils curriculum requirements. However, students in Year 8 follow the course on a rotation basis with other aspects of the curriculum, which limits both the time when they are taught by skilled ICT teachers and the depth of learning in each unit. As a result, there is insufficient time to fulfil all the requirements of the programme of study in sufficient depth and breadth.

100. Leadership and management are good and have some very good features. The head of department is looking to obtain the highest possible standards and achievement in the subject. The department is well staffed, with very good support and technical staff. There has been a considerable amount of work done on improving the schemes of work and assessment is used effectively. The head of department's teaching is consistently very good and he is a very good role model for the other staff. He has a very clear vision for the future development of the subject.

101. The provision for ICT across the curriculum is satisfactory overall and is an improving area. It is being managed well and there is detailed mapping of where ICT is used in other subjects. However, with some subjects such as English and religious education, access to computers is difficult. Extending the use of ICT is identified as a priority in subject policies, but some subjects are under-resourced. To improve the use of ICT across the curriculum, the head of department has recently identified one person in each subject to be responsible for ICT and has led a number of training sessions on desktop publishing, use of the digital camera and interactive whiteboard, and effective use of the Internet.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

102. Students display sufficient skills to enable them to make satisfactory progress in most subjects. They find out information from a variety of sources by using the Internet. In English, students in Year 11 use word processing to edit, refine and enhance their work and achieve very high standards. Students in Year 9 use spreadsheets to solve equations in mathematics. In design and technology, they use computer-aided design (CAD) to produce samples of logos. Opportunities are missed in modern foreign languages to share information through an e-mail connection with another country and statutory requirements are not being fulfilled in art and design in Years 8 and 9. There is little evidence of pupils modifying and evaluating their work.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Lessons have a very clear structure that helps students to learn successfully.
- Students achieve less well in a small number of lessons because there is little planning to meet individual needs.
- Teachers' high expectations motivate students to attain very well.
- The leadership of the subject is motivating for teachers and students.

Commentary

103. Students start in Year 8 with broadly average subject knowledge and understanding. They achieve very well, and by the end of Year 9 in 2004, the assessments undertaken by teachers show that standards were well above expectations. Students' current work indicates that these standards are being maintained. Students understand how physical processes change the shape of the land: such as the way the sea erodes the coast. They use subject terms very confidently. In the GCSE examination in 2003, standards were significantly above the national average. Girls performed better than boys, but the gap is narrowing. The GCSE examination results in 2004 were similar to those in 2003 and they have risen since the last inspection. Standards are well above the level expected nationally and students in Years 10 and 11 achieve very well. Students know the reasons why physical phenomena, such as earthquakes, occur in certain parts of the world, and how they affect countries differently. Higher attaining students demonstrate their ability very well with independent coursework, collecting evidence and interpreting statistics, for example, in their work on the effects of tourism on Ely. Lower attaining students do not develop their explanations sufficiently. Students with special educational needs achieve very well in relation to their individual targets.

104. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. It is very good in Years 10 and 11, and good in Years 8 and 9. Teachers provide a very clear structure in planning their lessons. They assess learning from the previous lesson with quick-fire questions at the start, and other techniques that test knowledge and understanding. Students know at the beginning what they are expected to learn and teachers build on their existing learning. Teachers use this to develop skills, such as decision-making. For example, students in Year 9 learn to balance conflicting demands regarding issues of land-use and justify the decision they make. Very good use is made of ICT to support teaching and learning. Teachers use high-quality images so students quickly relate to issues, such as those of rapidly industrialised countries. Students use laptop computers skilfully to analyse statistics of gross national product. In a number of lessons, very good provision is made for all students. In a Year 11 lesson, students with a statement of special educational need used copies of a textbook article adapted by a support assistant so they progressed independently. In other lessons, extension work is given to high attaining students, and lower attaining students are provided with guidance on how to structure their writing. In some lessons in Years 8 and 9, where the quality of teaching is satisfactory, teachers pay insufficient attention to meeting the needs of all students and, as a result, a few students

become inattentive and do not achieve as well as they should. Marking provides most students with guidance on how to improve, but a number of schemes operate in Years 8 and 9 that produce inconsistencies. Teachers have very high expectations of students with average prior attainment, and these stimulate very good attitudes and achievement.

105. The head of geography has a very clear vision for sustaining very high standards and leads the department very well. She is leading the use of ICT for teaching and learning so students enjoy and understand geography better. The department works very well as a team, each member having a delegated responsibility for an area of work. Management is good. Assessment is used effectively to inform changes to the curriculum. Teaching is monitored informally; whilst there is much good and very good teaching, weaknesses are not addressed with sufficient rigour. Students who are identified as gifted and talented in the subject do not receive enough recognition or planned activities in lessons and homework. Standards have risen since the last inspection and improvement since that time has been good.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good and it results in very good achievement overall, especially in the GCSE course.
- Well-planned progression of understanding and skills through a range of activities meets the needs of all students, especially students with special educational needs.
- The lively and varied teaching style motivates students.
- The very good leadership is having a considerable impact on improving teaching, learning and students' achievement.
- The curriculum gives students a comparatively narrow experience of history.

Commentary

106. The assessments undertaken by teachers in Year 9 show that standards were above average in 2003, showing good improvement over students' attainment in history on entry to the school. The results in the GCSE examination in the same year were above average, although the proportion of students attaining the highest grades of A* and A was below average. The performance of girls was better than that of the boys. In 2004, the difference between the performance of boys and girls disappeared, and the overall results showed an improvement over those for 2003. The department met its target for the proportion of passes at grades A*-C.

107. Standards are above those expected by Year 9 and well above expectations by Year 11. Students in Year 9 evaluate sources systematically and use them well to draw conclusions, while the higher attainers draw valid conclusions about the relationship between sources and their context. Students have a good ability to draw conclusions and to explain them clearly. However, in some tasks, for example, when designing a historical game, students place higher value on the rules of the game than on their historical validity. Students in Year 11 express their ideas very well. They have good judgement about the examination and use of historical sources. Lower attaining students and students with

special educational needs select relevant facts to support their ideas. Higher attainers inform their judgements through their wide general knowledge. Students entering Year 8 perform as expected. Overall, therefore, students achieve very well, including those with special educational needs. Girls and boys achieve equally well.

108. The good teaching in Years 8 and 9 and the very good teaching in Years 10 and 11 is the cause of the good achievement. Closely structured guidance helps students to understand what is required, especially those with special educational needs, but the highest attainers do not show their maximum potential as they do not go beyond dependence on the structures they are given. The range and variety of stimulating activities maintain students' interest, whilst lesson planning builds over time on students' knowledge, skills and understanding so that they learn how to research, analyse and evaluate evidence, establish significance and express ideas very well. Literacy is developed well by this means. Teachers mark work well to establish the needs of individual students, while making clear to them how they can improve. In all classes, there is an atmosphere in which achievement is celebrated. Some teaching by non-specialists over-emphasises the expression of facts or style of expression rather than the historical ideas behind an activity.

109. The curriculum is designed very well to allow students to make progress in developing their skills and understanding, but its context is narrow. There is no study of a non-European culture from its own perspective, as the course on *Plains Indians* emphasises the experience of European settlers rather than native peoples. In every year, there is heavy emphasis on twentieth century Germany and its role in world wars at the expense of other aspects of British, European and world history. Thus, the subject has a very good impact on moral education, but its contribution to multicultural education is limited.

110. The very good teaching and high level of popularity of history are the result of very good departmental leadership in which there is strong belief in the value of the subject. The department is managed well, with good systems in place for spreading good practice. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in the GCSE examinations are well above average.
- The provision for the majority of students in Years 10 and 11 is insufficient to meet the requirements of the local agreed syllabus.
- The very good teaching, especially in Years 10 and 11, contributes very well to students' achievement.
- Very good leadership and management ensure that most students receive a full curriculum.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Assessment of students' work is very well established so students know what they need to do to improve.

Commentary

111. By Year 9, standards are in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus, which is an improvement since the last inspection. Given students' below average levels of subject knowledge on entry to the school, this represents good achievement. Students are able to link their knowledge of religion with their everyday experiences well. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are affected as the subject does not receive enough time in Year 10 to teach the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. Furthermore, only about half of the students in Year 11 study the subject. Students do not receive their full entitlement and so statutory requirements are not met. However, provision for those students who do receive their full entitlement is very good. They achieve very well.

112. The GCSE examination results for students taking the full course in 2003 were significantly above the national average. In 2004, the results were close to the national average. Whilst the results were lower than in the previous year, they were above the school's expectations. By Year 11, standards are above average in the GCSE full course. Students extend their knowledge and understanding of how they can learn from religion and apply it in their lives. They make very good gains in their knowledge and understanding of religious concepts. They are achieving very well. In the short course, standards are in line with national expectations. Because of the lack of time, students do not always question and explore their own attitudes in sufficient depth.

113. Teaching is very good and it has improved since the last inspection. Teachers make very good use of discussion and questioning, which enables students to express their opinions and form clear judgements about religious and moral issues. Students' spiritual and moral awareness is very good. They demonstrate a profound respect for the views, faiths and traditions of each other. The achievement of students with special educational needs is good, because they are provided with good support and work that matches their needs. The use of key words and subject-specific language enable students to improve their speaking and listening skills well. Students make good progress as a result of the teachers' very good knowledge of the subject and an awareness of the needs of individual students. Effective teaching methods, coupled with high expectations and challenge, enables all students to make very good gains in their knowledge and understanding of religious and moral issues. Homework is used well to allow opportunities for individual research and to extend students' understanding. The assessment procedures provide a very good basis for assessing what students know and understand. Teachers make detailed comments on students' work to enable them to know what they need to do to improve.

114. Curriculum leadership is very good and has a clear purpose and direction. The head of department has a clear view of the needs of the subject. The subject is managed very well, with very good planning and effective monitoring of teachers' and students' work. This represents a considerable improvement since the last inspection. In spite of these improvements, there are weaknesses in the school's arrangements for the subject in Years 10 and 11 and progress in addressing the key issue in the last inspection report has been unsatisfactory.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very effective and promote very good achievement in GCSE examinations.
- Assessment is used very well to monitor students' progress and to raise standards.
- The range of courses offered meets the needs of students of all capabilities well.
- The very good links with local businesses are promoting achievement.
- Their lack of drawing skills is a barrier to reaching higher standards for students following the GCSE course in resistant materials.

Commentary

115. Students enter the school with a limited experience of design and technology. Throughout Years 8 and 9, achievement is good and by the end of Year 9, standards are in line with expectations. The course gives students good opportunities to experience the different areas of design and technology. They learn to plan and record their work in detailed design folders and develop the practical skills needed to work with a range of materials. Students' drawing skills are not sufficiently developed to allow them to plan in detail how their products will be constructed.

116. In the GCSE examinations in 2003, the results were well above the national average overall, although there was some variation in the results in the different courses. In contrast to the very high standards in food technology, graphics and textiles, standards in resistant materials were below average. A significantly higher proportion of girls than boys gained grades A*-C. In the 2004 GCSE examinations, standards were well above the national average. They showed a small rise overall and a significant improvement in resistant materials where standards were above average. The gap between the performance of girls and boys remained but narrowed, as the proportion of boys gaining grades A*-C rose significantly. Standards overall are well above the level expected nationally. However, the low quality of drawings prevents some students from reaching the very high standards needed to gain the highest grades in resistant materials. Students' achievement is very good because, in addition to students' willingness to work hard, their teachers have high expectations, monitor progress carefully and frequently, and provide very specific feedback on ways to improve. The dual award GCSE examination in manufacturing is currently in its second year. No students have completed the course but lower attaining students are reaching average standards and achieving very well because the course is well structured and the opportunities to work with local businesses are highly motivating. Students with special educational needs receive appropriate care and support and achieve well.

117. The quality of teaching and learning is very good in both key stages. Teachers have very high expectations and their very secure subject knowledge and general teaching skills are applied well to ensure that students meet them. They prepare lessons well and provide very competent demonstrations and explanations of new skills and techniques. They manage students very well, and create a calm and purposeful working atmosphere. Students respond well, with very good behaviour, high levels of co-operation and willingness to work hard, both during lessons and when completing homework. Teachers assess work and monitor progress very well. They give students very specific guidance on how to

improve their grades and set challenging targets. The quality of teachers' assessment is a key factor in the successful results in the GCSE examinations.

118. Leadership and management of the department are very good. The head of department has a clear vision for the development of the subject and has developed a conscientious team that is committed to raising standards and achievement. Teachers receive good support from technicians, who relate very positively to the students. Teachers' work is monitored by observation of their teaching, the monitoring and moderation of their assessment of students' work, and through discussion with the head of department. In this way, standards in graphics and resistant materials have risen, are now above the level expected nationally and are closing the gap with those in food technology and textiles. Resources and accommodation are satisfactory and staff use them carefully. In some lessons, the rooms are just large enough for the size of the groups but learning remains successful because of the teachers' very good planning and control, and the students' very good behaviour and positive attitudes. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards are higher and the variation in standards across the different courses and between boys and girls has narrowed considerably. A vocational GCSE course has been introduced and the quality of teaching is better.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- By Year 9, standards are above average because of good planning and teaching.
- Students achieve very well as the result of very good teaching, and attain well above average standards by Year 11.
- Students' attitudes are very positive and enthusiastic.
- The requirements for teaching ICT are not met in Years 8 and 9.

Commentary

119. In 2003, the GCSE examination results were well above the national average. The department recovered well from a very unusual drop in standards in 2002, the effect of significant staffing changes. This situation has clearly stabilised, and results in the GCSE examination in 2004 continued the upward trend.

120. By the end of Year 9, standards are above the national expectation, and are better than the teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2004 would indicate. From the outset, teachers place a strong emphasis on the development of drawing skills and the use of colour. Students plan their work well and interpret their ideas in a wide range of two- and three-dimensional materials. Homework, linked to class work, is set and marked regularly. The use of ICT to support teaching and learning does not meet statutory requirements in Years 8 and 9. Achievement in Years 8 and 9 is good.

121. By the end of Year 11, standards are well above the national expectation. Students understand the importance of research and experimentation in achieving their final pieces.

They know about a wide variety of famous artists and the traditions of other cultures, and this is reflected in their work. They work effectively on their own, and use and mix a very wide range of two- and three-dimensional materials with confidence and success. The department is very aware of the progress that individual students need to make and is very successful in preparing them thoroughly for examination success. Attitudes to work are very positive and enthusiastic; this contributes to their achievement, which is very good.

122. Students with special educational needs, and those who are identified as gifted and talented, also make good progress as the result of careful departmental planning and support. Teaching and learning are good in all years and often very good. The more effective lessons have very good pace, learning is strongly reinforced by questioning and there are very high expectations of students' active involvement. In a small proportion of satisfactory teaching, insufficient pace and challenge only results in satisfactory learning. In these lessons, the outcomes are not reviewed with sufficient rigour to identify underachievement. Aspects of literacy are developed well in art, but opportunities to develop students' spiritual awareness are often missed. Assessment procedures, which have been revised and improved in all years, are very thorough, informative and helpful. The individual tutorials in Years 10 and 11 are a particular strength.

123. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. There is a growing programme of liaison with middle schools. A highly experienced and dedicated teacher leads the department very effectively. There is a strong team spirit emerging amongst a relatively new group of specialists with diverse but complementary skills. For management to be equally successful, the most important improvement needs to be the use of ICT in Years 8 and 9 in order to meet statutory requirements.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well because of carefully planned and energetic teaching which meets the needs of everyone.
- Leadership of the subject is characterised by clear vision and high aspirations.
- There are not enough computers in the department.
- The current method of assessing students' work in Years 8 and 9 does not give a clear picture of their strengths and weaknesses.
- Students value and enjoy all the activities that the department offers, which make a significant contribution to their personal development.

Commentary

124. Standards are in line with national expectations by the end of Year 9. This reflects the assessments undertaken by teachers at the end of Year 9 in 2004. Students' musical ability is below average on entry to the school, so their achievement during Years 8 and 9 is good. This is so for all groups of students including those who have special educational needs. The proportion of students attaining grades A*-C in the GCSE examination in 2004 was above the national average and maintained a three-year rising trend in the proportion of students attaining these grades. Boys and girls attained similar results; however, a

smaller proportion than average attained the highest grades of A* and A. The standard of work of current students in Year 11 is above that expected nationally, and their achievement is good. This maintains the above average standards in Years 10 and 11 noted in the last inspection. Students are competent performers and many of their compositions show a mature understanding of different musical styles. Students explore complex rhythms and harmonies, which add interest and variety to their compositions.

125. The quality of teaching and learning is good for all students. They achieve well because of consistently good and challenging teaching. This is characterised by teachers' comprehensive musical knowledge and high expectations. They are very competent musicians who are able to demonstrate tasks clearly. Content is relevant to students' interests and this means that students work hard during lessons and give of their best. All students enjoy their lessons. Working relationships are strong. Students are all involved and work hard to support each other through pair and group work. Lesson planning is good so that musical skills develop systematically. Students learn from each other because of regular performances and evaluations, which increases their understanding of how to improve their own work. Occasionally, teachers do not use time productively to ensure that, at the end of lessons, students reflect upon and review the progress they have made. There are insufficient computers for students to use; this means that they do not learn different ways to compose, save and refine their work.

126. Leadership of the subject is good. The joint heads of department have established a clear sense of direction, consistency of approach and strong teamwork in the department. All teachers, including visiting instrumental staff, contribute to the good musical environment that students enjoy. Students take part enthusiastically in a range of ensembles and this social interaction contributes to their personal development. The progress made by students in Years 10 and 11 is regularly monitored and evaluated. This system is not as clearly established with students in Years 8 and 9. Assessment is involving students in setting themselves targets but does not build a clear picture of their individual strengths and weaknesses. As a result, management is satisfactory. However improvement since the last inspection has been good because standards, the quality of teaching and the achievement of students in Years 8 and 9 have improved. Apart from insufficient computers, there are now more resources for students to use.

Drama

Provision in drama is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' good subject knowledge enables students to make good progress.
- The wide range of teaching styles ensures that students use appropriate dramatic techniques in their performances.
- Students are committed to their work and their attitudes and behaviour are good, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- The assessment of students' work is not always focused sufficiently on improving its quality.
- The pace and level of demand in lessons are sometimes insufficiently challenging in Years 8 and 9.

Commentary

127. Standards by Year 9 are in line with national expectations and students' achievement is good. Students in Year 8 are able to create effective examples of physical theatre and use dramatic terminology appropriately when evaluating each other's performances. The GCSE examination results in 2003 were above the national average and remained at broadly a similar level in 2004. Standards are above national expectations by Year 11 and students achieve well. They use dramatic techniques such as 'freeze framing' and 'cross cutting', as, for example, in a lesson based on characters in *Dan Nolan-Missing*. Standards are rising because teachers help students to show their potential in the subject. Students make good progress in all years. This includes students with special educational needs, who receive additional assistance to enable them to take a full part in lessons, and students identified as gifted and talented, whose work is highlighted and rewarded where appropriate. There are no differences in standards between boys and girls by Year 9, but girls achieve better results than boys by Year 11.

128. Teaching and learning are good in Years 8 and 9 because teachers use a wide range of teaching strategies to enable students to demonstrate a range of dramatic techniques in their performances. A lesson on physical theatre enabled students in Year 8 to show their ability to take on the role of objects, for example, a 'human hoover', whilst other students in the same year were able to use expressions to create effective tableaux based on fairy stories. All teaching in Years 10 and 11 is at least good; some of it is very good. Teaching and learning are successful because careful coaching enables students to produce work of a high standard in incremental stages. In a Year 10 lesson, for example, a simple starter activity devising a sound piece based on the sounds and patterns of rain built into demanding group work on the creation of sound collages to evoke sensations on the battlefield. Students are shown how to pay close attention to concepts of space and audience, such as in a Year 11 presentation on 'Keeping it Safe', aimed at Year 8 students. In less successful lessons in Years 8 and 9, the pace was slow and pupils were not challenged sufficiently to produce sustained work. Attitudes and behaviour are generally good in Years 8 and 9 but some students are slow to settle; attitudes and behaviour in Years 10 and 11 are usually good.

129. Literacy is promoted strongly in the department, with examples of dramatic language on walls and a focus on the use of dramatic terminology by teachers in lessons. Students in all years use dramatic terms appropriately. Students in Years 10 and 11 produce word-processed coursework and there are appropriate opportunities to use sound and lighting equipment.

130. Leadership is good and has a positive effect on standards. Management is effective, with detailed schemes of work for all students and regular monitoring of staff. Data are used well to monitor the effectiveness of teaching. The use of assessment in the department is generally good but sometimes gives students insufficient guidance on how to improve. Extracurricular provision is very good, with a very well attended weekly drama club, visits to the theatre by students and visits to the school from theatre groups. The quality and standards of both provision and practice have improved and progress since the last inspection has been good.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The head of department provides strong leadership.
- Teaching is very good and, as a result, students are highly motivated and make very good progress.
- Students' attitudes to learning are very good and they respond well to the high expectations demanded of them.

- Physical education makes a significant contribution to students' social and moral development.
- Extracurricular provision is of a high quality and participation levels are high.
- ICT is not used effectively enough to enhance teaching and learning.

Commentary

131. Standards by the end of Year 9 are above national expectations, and a number of students are attaining well above this level. These standards do not match the assessments undertaken by teachers at the end of Year 9 in 2003 and 2004, which indicated that standards were well above average. From the evidence available, these assessments were too generous. With the development of assessment on entry in Year 8 and sharper assessment systems, staff will be better able to moderate and assess students' attainment and their achievements more accurately. By the end of Year 11, standards in the core programme are above those found nationally, and a number of students are attaining well above average standards. The GCSE examination results in 2003 were significantly above average; however, the results in 2004 were lower, although above average, as the girls did not attain as well as the boys.

132. Students' make very good progress as they move through the school and their achievement by Year 9 is very good. Students with special educational needs are fully included in the physical education programme and achieve well. By the end of Year 9, students perform a range of games skills with increasing control and accuracy, and apply them into competitive play appropriately. They demonstrate a good understanding of games play and recognise the importance of rules in individual, pair, group and team activities. Achievement in gymnastics is very good. Students create and perform complex sequences with a partner with increasing control and fluency, including variations of levels and direction. A number of higher attainers respond to the challenges and take risks in performing balances with a partner with increased confidence, clarity of body shape and body tension. In dance, movements lack quality and expression, and students' knowledge and understanding of dance styles are limited.

133. By the end of Year 11 in the core programme, students perform a range of skills with increased consistency, control and accuracy in competitive games using more advanced skills, tactics and strategies. Students in the GCSE examination groups make very good progress in planning, performing and evaluating games play and make very good progress. For example, in a Year 10 hockey lesson, students performed a range of games skills with precision, accuracy and control and were able to apply short corners effectively into the game. They analyse and comment on their play and understand how skills and tactics relate to the quality of performance.

134. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall. Teachers are knowledgeable specialists, confident in teaching a range of activities. Teachers are enthusiastic, very good role models and establish very good relationships with the students. As a result, students' attitudes to learning are very good; they respond well to the high expectations demanded of them, participation is high and behaviour is very good. Physical education makes a significant contribution to the social and moral development of all students, increasing their confidence and self-esteem to perform well. In competitive team play, students develop very good social skills and demonstrate fair play and very good sporting behaviour. Lesson planning is very good, thorough and well researched;

students are well managed and organised, and teachers are implementing the National Key Stage 3 Strategy effectively.

135. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department is innovative, has established a shared vision with colleagues, and provides strong leadership. Staff work well together as a team and give generously of their time, especially to extracurricular sport and enrichment activities. Development planning is very effective, brought about by thorough systems of self-review and the monitoring and evaluation of provision.

136. The curriculum in Years 8 and 9 meets statutory requirements. Students benefit from a range of activities. Health-related exercise enriches the curriculum, but games activities dominate the curriculum in Years 10 - 11. The Junior Sports Leader Award has been introduced successfully in Years 10 and 11 and students in Year 11 now benefit from two lessons of physical education a week. However, there are difficulties when two different year groups are timetabled to be in the department at any one time. Extracurricular provision is very good, with high levels of participation and excellent team results. Students are highly successful in competitive sport and many individual students play at regional and national levels. The development of health-related exercise is limited because of the lack of specialist facilities and the condition of the all-weather pitch limits opportunities to play hockey on a full size pitch. Resources are very good, but the use of ICT to observe, analyse and evaluate movement is not used effectively enough.

137. Physical education has seen significant improvements since the last inspection. A commitment to raising standards, introducing assessment for learning in Years 8 and 9, the development of the sports leader awards and performance management are all contributory factors to an improving department. The department now benefits from a physical education technician and, as a result, wall displays are excellent.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business studies

138. The work in business studies was sampled in Years 10 and 11 and it is not possible to make an overall judgement about provision. Standards are in line with national expectations. This represents good achievement and is a result of good teaching. Students in Years 10 and 11 exceed expectations when account is taken of their earlier attainment. Students' positive approach also results in good learning. Students make good progress as they move from Year 10 to Year 11 and they achieve well in both year groups. The GCSE examination results in 2003 were below average at grades A*-C. The results in 2004 were higher than in 2003 and closer to the average. The girls' results were better than those of the boys. Leadership and management are good. Many aspects of provision have improved over time. The Young Enterprise Scheme in Years 10 and 11 is good. The high number of Level 2 Enterprise Certificates for Year 10 is outstanding.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students follow a well-planned course in citizenship but the time allocated to it is insufficient to develop it fully.
- Teaching is good and makes a clear contribution to students' achievement and conceptual development.
- The work of tutors and subjects is not monitored sufficiently well to ensure consistency in the teaching of the subject and in the experiences that students receive.
- Students do not have enough opportunities to participate in school and community-based activities.

Commentary

139. By Year 9, standards are broadly similar to those expected nationally. This represents satisfactory achievement. Students are developing their knowledge and understanding of responsible citizenship well. By Year 11, standards are in line with expectations. Students have a sound understanding of concepts such as rights and responsibilities and relate these to their own and others' experiences. Their achievement is satisfactory because they apply their learning to new situations.

140. The school is committed to the provision of citizenship and sees it as integral to students' personal development. The programme has been developed well and significant steps have already been taken to plan this aspect of the curriculum. Citizenship is taught within tutor time alongside the programmes for personal, social and health education and careers. It is partly supported by related themes and topics covered in other subjects, especially in the humanities subjects, which make a significant contribution. However, there is insufficient time provided to ensure that citizenship is fully developed. Citizenship is not always explicitly identified and some students are unclear whether or not they are studying the subject. Students have additional opportunities to develop an understanding of responsible citizenship and the democratic process through activities such as the school forum. However, they do not have enough opportunities to participate fully in active citizenship within the wider community.

141. The teaching is good and challenges students to develop their own attitudes towards citizenship well. In lessons, the teachers' good knowledge and confidence enable students to develop important skills of interpretation and application. The good use of questions and range of teaching approaches allow students to think about their own responses to issues, enabling them to develop skills, attitudes, values and independence of thought, feelings and actions. Students with particular needs make good progress because they are given work that matches their needs.

142. The curriculum coordinator has a clear vision for the subject, and has been successful in providing lesson plans and resources for all tutors. The teaching of citizenship is supported well by a comprehensive scheme of work and clear assessment procedures that enable the coverage of topics to be recorded. Monitoring of the work of the subject is not sufficiently developed to ensure consistency in the teaching of the

subject and in the experiences that students receive. Progress in developing citizenship is satisfactory and there is a firm base for further improvement.

Personal, social and health education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Not all students have the same opportunities to experience a comprehensive programme of personal, social and health education.
- The organisation of the programme does not give students sufficient time to develop the skills of making informed choices and decisions about their lives.

Commentary

143. There is insufficient time allowed for all the statutory aspects of the subject to be covered. The programme is taught partly through the tutorial session, which shares its time with an assembly, and partly through subjects, including English, science, religious education, physical education, child development and the life skills programme in Year 8. There is a clear framework outlining what should be taught, but the way it is done and thus the experiences received by students can vary, depending on the decisions of individual teachers. This means that the provision is uneven. Some elements of sex education are appropriately taught within the science curriculum. However, this does not fulfil the wider aspect of providing sex education in such a way as to have due regard to moral considerations and the value of family life or give parents the opportunity to withdraw their children from these aspects. In addition, little time is given for students to learn about the dangers of drugs, smoking and alcohol abuse. However, ample time is given to careers education.

144. The teaching of personal, social and health education in the small amount of tutorial time ranges from unsatisfactory to good and overall it is satisfactory. In Year 9, students review their progress and are introduced to the challenge of setting sharp and specific targets for improvement. Teachers help students to develop their targets but the time is too short for work to be undertaken in any depth or for students to gain any real sense of achievement. Work in Year 11 follows on from, and builds on, the theme of revising for examinations, which was introduced to the year group in assembly. In the two lessons seen, the students' response was variable. In one, students completed the task of identifying their preferred learning styles with interest and concentration, receiving good advice and support from their form teacher and gaining a clear understanding of independent study. In the other, the students lacked application as the presentation of the task and the subsequent discussion did not engage or challenge them sufficiently.

145. Leadership from the subject co-ordinator is satisfactory. There is a clear understanding of the subject and teachers are provided with a clear framework for lessons and suitable resources. However, management is unsatisfactory. The curriculum arrangements mean that monitoring the consistency of teaching is not possible to ensure that all students receive similar opportunities. Since the last inspection, the school has continued the arrangement of teaching the subject as part of other activities. As a result,

improvement since that time has been unsatisfactory as the provision for students is uneven in all year groups.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 14 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

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

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	30	100.0	80.1	23.3	23.7	36.0	29.9
Biology	18	61.1	65.2	0.0	11.1	17.2	20.6
Chemistry	11	63.6	72.7	0.0	13.9	19.1	24.1
Communication studies	9	77.8	86.4	22.2	23.8	33.3	32.0
Drama	12	75.0	86.5	0.0	19.6	18.3	30.6
Economics	15	86.7	73.6	13.3	20.1	24.7	26.4
English/English language	13	84.6	82.9	15.4	17.5	27.7	28.7
English literature	12	83.3	85.9	0.0	19.1	23.3	30.2
French	3	33.3	78.2	0.0	18.9	6.7	27.6
Design and technology	15	93.3	74.9	13.3	15.1	29.3	25.3
General studies	79	53.2	73.9	0.0	17.8	12.7	25.7
Geography	31	67.7	74.3	12.9	19.8	20.6	26.5
German	4	75.0	81.5	0.0	19.3	15.0	28.9
History	9	55.6	80.7	11.1	19.5	20.0	28.6
Mathematics	9	77.8	61.9	22.2	17.1	33.3	22.1
Music	3	100.0	86.5	0.0	21.4	30.0	30.7
Other social studies	30	36.7	69.7	3.3	16.7	12.0	24.1
Physics	13	53.8	68.6	23.1	14.4	20.0	22.7
Religious studies	5	60.0	80.2	20.0	22.6	22.0	29.8
Sociology	20	80.0	71.8	25.0	18.4	30.0	25.4
Spanish	2	100.0	78.5	100.0	17.7	50.0	27.3
Sports/PE studies	6	66.7	73.2	0.0	11.4	16.7	23.1

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	20	100.0	98.6	30.0	50.2	82.0	87.5
Biology	19	100.0	96.4	26.3	39.2	74.7	78.6
Chemistry	7	100.0	97.6	28.6	49.0	71.4	84.9
Communication studies	24	100.0	99.4	12.5	37.8	75.8	82.1

Drama	15	100.0	99.5	13.3	40.1	72.0	83.6
Economics	28	100.0	98.9	53.6	52.0	92.9	88.3
English/English language	19	100.0	99.4	47.4	36.3	87.4	80.9
English literature	16	100.0	99.5	12.5	46.5	67.5	86.5
French	4	100.0	98.8	50.0	51.5	90.0	87.6
Design and technology	13	100.0	97.8	38.5	35.0	87.7	77.9
General studies	73	100.0	94.7	16.4	31.0	66.8	73.1
Geography	27	100.0	98.7	44.4	44.5	82.2	84.0
German	2	100.0	98.4	50.0	47.9	90.0	84.8
History	22	100.0	99.0	54.5	44.6	95.5	84.6
Mathematics	22	100.0	96.7	63.6	55.6	99.1	88.8
Music	2	100.0	98.8	0.0	38.9	60.0	81.1
Other social studies	37	100.0	97.4	24.3	42.7	77.3	81.8
Physics	10	100.0	96.7	50.0	44.6	92.0	81.7
Religious studies	5	100.0	98.8	60.0	46.7	92.0	85.6
Sociology	18	100.0	98.2	83.3	44.3	101.1	83.6
Spanish	1	100.0	98.3	0.0	50.2	60.0	86.9
Sports/PE studies	9	100.0	98.0	44.4	30.9	84.4	75.2
Business (AVCE)	22	88.4	65.0	37.2	14.6	71.2	60.1
Leisure and recreation (AVCE)	5	100.0	62.9	40.0	10.2	88.0	57.9
Travel and tourism (AVCE)	2	100.0	71.8	0.0	14.5	60.0	62.2

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was on A-level English literature and French. Work in English language, German and Spanish was sampled. The teaching of English language is very effective, enabling students to make very good progress in their understanding of children's early speech. Standards in recent A-level examinations in language have been above average and are improving. The A-level examination course in German is taught very well and standards are above average. The teaching of A-level Spanish is very good and standards are above average.

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most lessons are characterised by a shared love of literature.
- There is a good partnership between teachers and students, which gives lessons a sense of purpose and enjoyment.
- Teachers' very good subject knowledge gives students confidence in them.
- In some lessons, students are given too little scope to explore texts for themselves and clarify their ideas through group discussion and presentations.

Commentary

146. In 2003, the A-level examination results were well below average, and were below average at AS level. In 2004, the A-level results improved to the level attained in 2002, when they were in line with the national average. At AS level in 2004, they were much higher than in previous years. English literature is a popular choice, particularly for female students, and the retention rate into Year 13 is good.

147. Standards are in line with course expectations by Year 13, indicating good achievement because students' prior attainment at GCSE was below the usual level for the course. Students make good use of apt quotations and references to support their arguments, showing detailed knowledge of the set texts. They share their responses to literature in a clear and open way, and make good progress in structuring their written work. The most capable students write perceptive analyses of the impact of language and imagery, but the majority are more confident in explaining content, themes and characterisation. Although they have a sound mastery of critical vocabulary, many students find it difficult to explain the effect created by devices such as *alliteration* and *assonance*. They are responsive to teachers' questions in most classes, although a minority in Year 12 are reluctant to contribute. Students listen to each other's ideas with respect and, when given the opportunity, they make good use of pair and group discussion. The outcomes of these discussions could be enhanced if they were required to present their findings more formally. Students' attitudes are good overall, and there is a good sense of partnership with their teachers. They value English literature for its interest, enjoyment and the likelihood of success.

148. The overall quality of teaching is good, and ranges from satisfactory to very good. In the best lessons, students are challenged to explore the text and think for themselves. Objectives are shared and reviewed so that students can measure their progress. Teachers' obvious enthusiasm for literature is shared with the students, who are keen to do well. Very good use is made of group discussion and research to help them develop their own viewpoints. In all lessons, the teachers' very good subject knowledge gives students confidence in them and enables them to draw attention to other parts of the text. In some lessons, students are insufficiently challenged when the teacher does most of the thinking and speaking. Students are encouraged to read more widely and to use the Internet to research background and criticism, which enhances their appreciation and understanding of set books. Marking is detailed and encouraging, giving clear advice on how to improve.

149. The teaching of literature is well led and managed. Planning is closely monitored and relates well to the examination requirements. Nevertheless, the department recognises the need for more joint planning. Target setting is not as fully established in the sixth form as it is in Years 8 to 11 as a means of achieving higher standards. Similarly, there is less close evaluation of teaching strategies and their impact. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

150. In all subjects in the sixth form, students have more than adequate communication skills to cope well with their courses of study.

French

Provision in French is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average.
- Students' achieve very well as a result of the very good teaching.
- Very good enrichment activities inspire enthusiasm for the course.
- Students use the Internet to acquire relevant knowledge of French-speaking countries, but rarely use ICT to produce their own work.

Commentary

151. The A-level examination results in French were above the national averages in 2003 and 2004, although the small numbers following the course make comparisons with the national figures difficult. Current standards are also above national averages in all skill areas. The numbers taking French in Year 12 have risen recently and, in the last two years, a high proportion of these students have continued with the subject in Year 13, reflecting the enthusiasm for the language engendered by the department. Students achieve very well because they enjoy the course, and make rapid progress in response to the systematic approach and high level of challenge provided by their teachers. Fewer male students than female students have chosen the course in recent years, but they achieve just as well.

152. Teaching and learning are very good. All teachers communicate exclusively in French, using a variety of up-to-date resources, many of which are derived from the Internet. Topics chosen are relevant to the lives of young people, emphasising their role and responsibilities as European citizens. The course is very well planned and students organise their work carefully, developing very good study and literacy skills. Students appreciate the effective way in which teachers develop their grammatical knowledge and supply them with useful information sheets. They manipulate a lot of statistical data in French, developing skills in numeracy, but do not use ICT to produce and present their work as much as they could, overlooking the benefits of using on-line dictionaries and grammar checks. Students receive regular reviews of their progress, which make clear how they can improve. They benefit from contacts organised by the school with people in countries where French is spoken, including exchange visits. Teachers sometimes miss opportunities for devolving responsibility to students for making presentations and enabling them to communicate with each other in French during lessons.

153. The course is well led. There is a clear sense of direction and enthusiasm on the part of the department, which conveys itself to the students. The work of the different teachers is very well co-ordinated and the department has very good systems for evaluating its own performance, including detailed analysis of examination results and action taken to remedy any weaknesses. Teachers manage the recruitment of students very successfully, taking care to ensure that students follow a course that meets their needs. The department's systems fit well with those of the school and ensure they can monitor students' progress, set challenging targets and provide guidance and additional support when necessary. Management of the course is very good. Standards have risen and improvement since the last inspection has been good.

MATHEMATICS

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

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well in A-level examinations because of good quality teaching.
- Teachers are well qualified and have a good command of the subject.
- Students have positive attitudes.
- A significant proportion of students failed to gain a grade in the AS examinations in 2004.

Commentary

154. The results in the A-level examinations in 2003 and 2004 were well above the national averages. All students gained grades A - E and the proportion of the highest grades of A and B was above average. In 2003, the results in the AS level examinations were much higher than the national average. In 2004, although the proportion of grades A and B in the AS examinations was high, a significant proportion of students failed to gain a grade.

155. Standards by Year 13 are above course expectations. Most students achieve well in the AS course and those that go on to complete the A-level course achieve very well. The majority of those who failed to gain an AS level grade in 2004, had studied the subject from a lower baseline of attainment in their GCSE examinations. There are no significant differences in achievement between boys and girls. Students have a very positive attitude to mathematics. They apply themselves well in lessons, concentrate and make well thought out contributions. They work well on their own and with others when given the opportunity.

156. These positive attitudes to learning are a result of good quality teaching. Teachers have good subject knowledge that is effective in establishing understanding in more complex topics. They match the level of study well to the students' level of understanding, by relating the work to what they already know and understand. As a result, students are able to build on a good foundation of understanding in algebra and to apply this to the greater demands of A-level topics. Students in Year 13 are able to transfer learning from pure mathematics to other areas within statistics and mechanics. Where teachers encourage students to discuss questions and look for strategies together, this is very effective in involving the less confident members of the group. Homework that reviews previous topics helps students to consolidate their learning. Students receive good feedback on their work in lessons and some of the work in folders includes constructive written comment.

157. The breadth of the curriculum at AS and A-level is good, enabling students to benefit from courses in pure mathematics, mechanics, statistics and decision mathematics. This enables most students to match their study to their learning needs. Those wishing to make mathematics as the major part of their sixth form study are able to follow the A-level course in further mathematics. There are, however, a number of students who have enjoyed mathematics in Years 10 and 11 and wish to continue, but who are starting from an average level of attainment in their GCSE examinations. These students find the AS courses demanding and some are not achieving success in the present arrangements. Teachers are aware of this and plan to offer a more appropriate course for these students. The textbooks available to students are of good quality. The accommodation for teaching is satisfactory, although some space is restricted for larger groups.

158. Leadership and management are good, with responsibilities delegated to a senior member of the department. There is an outline scheme of work that supports teachers in structuring their

planning. Assessment is used well to allocate students to groups and courses. Because of the regular assessment, teachers know how well students are doing throughout the course and action is taken to support students where needed. Students receive advice and support both within and beyond the lessons that helps in overcoming problems. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory. The A-level examination results have remained high. The introduction of AS has been successful for higher attaining students, but less so for others. The school continues to offer students a breadth of curriculum opportunities in mathematics.

Mathematics across the curriculum

159. In the sixth form, there are extensive opportunities for students to apply their knowledge of mathematics. In physics, students' arithmetical, algebraic and graphical understanding is used and applied extensively, although some students struggle with aspects of mathematics. In psychology, students use both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to analyse and understand information. They show a good ability to select appropriate methods to interpret and analyse data. Students studying modern foreign languages also make good use of their ability to manipulate data. In physical education, students analyse performance skills data using statistical methods. Their mathematical understanding also finds application in the science component of the subject. In all these subjects, students demonstrate a good level of mathematical understanding appropriate to the needs of the subjects they study.

SCIENCE

The focus of the inspection was AS and A-level biology and physics. Work in A-level chemistry was sampled. In the chemistry lesson seen, students in Year 13 shared good relationships with their teacher and worked together well. The very experienced teacher used an effective method of organising the students' discussion to ensure their understanding. Standards are wide ranging but students are reaching their predicted grades and their achievement is satisfactory.

Biology

Provision in biology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at A-level are in line with course expectations.
- Teaching and learning are good in Year 13, leading to good achievement at A-level.
- Teachers and students share good relationships and work well together.
- The monitoring of progress in the large teaching groups in Year 12 is ineffective.
- Teachers are well qualified, are subject specialists and show an enthusiasm for the subject.

Commentary

160. At the end of Year 13 in 2003, the A-level results were at the national average. They were slightly lower than this in 2004. The AS level results in 2003 were below the national average and remained below in 2004. The achievement of many Year 12 students at AS level in 2003 and 2004 was unsatisfactory, with many students not progressing on to Year 13.

161. Current standards are in line with course expectations by Year 13 but are below the level expected in Year 12. The extensive school data indicate that students taking biology have relatively low GCSE grades and they enter the sixth form below the level normally found. Their achievement in Year 12 is satisfactory. Students are able to identify the major components of cells but unable to describe some of their functions in detail. Students achieve well in Year 13. They are able to discuss the processes in photosynthesis in detail and the cellular components involved but some students are unable to explain the role of nitrogen in protein synthesis.

162. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in Year 12 and good in Year 13. The new team of teachers is enthusiastic and they have good subject knowledge. Lessons are well planned and give students many opportunities to perform practical activities. Teachers and students share good relationships and work in a constructive and cooperative atmosphere. Students' attitudes are good, especially in the smaller groups in Year 13. The large groups in Year 12 of up to 26 students, with a wide range of prior attainment, make it difficult for teachers to monitor progress and students' understanding as effectively as they would wish. Students appreciate the teachers' efforts and the range of teaching and learning styles teachers use. They are aware of their attainment and progress through the regular progress reviews and the teachers' detailed marking.

163. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There is a shared desire in the new team of teachers to raise standards and achievement. Teachers are aware of the issues they need to address, such as identifying students who start to underachieve earlier. There are many examples of good practice but they are not yet clearly identified and shared amongst the teaching team. The less experienced teachers are supported well and meet on a regular basis with the head of department to review the effectiveness of their teaching.

164. There was little detail given in the last inspection report regarding many aspects of biology. The number of students has increased and there is greater use of ICT in lessons. Standards at A-level have been maintained at the national average. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

Physics

Provision in physics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' very good subject knowledge and experience enable them to present the course content clearly.
- Students' good attitudes to work, to each other and to their teachers enhance their learning.
- Teaching does not ensure that the planned work fully meets the needs of all students.
- Students do not receive enough specific guidance on how to improve their work.

- There is insufficient up-to-date apparatus and ICT equipment to support teaching.

Commentary

165. The A-level examination results were well above the national average in 2003. Students achieved very well when account is taken of their attainment on entry to the sixth form. In 2004, the results were not as high and were closer to the national average. In the AS examinations in Year 12, the results in 2003 were in line with the national average. They declined considerably in 2004, as many students underachieved and did not attain their expected grades. Only a small number of female students study physics and their attainment is generally lower than that of male students. This year, very few students have continued with physics in Year 13. Current standards are in line with course expectations and students' achievement is satisfactory. Students in Year 13 understand simple harmonic motion, electrical circuitry and the use of formulae; they show research skills in astrophysics; and their coursework is of a high standard. Higher attaining students in Year 12 apply equations of motion, use data effectively to solve unknowns and to construct graphs, although those with less mathematical background find this work demanding. Folders show appropriate advanced level work, but some lack organisation and notes are not well made. Others show good organisation and supplement this with additional notes.

166. Teaching is good overall and on occasions, it is very good. Learning is good. Where teaching is strong, good use is made of starter activities, followed by logically sequenced ideas. Teachers provide a range of challenging activities and consolidate learning with a review of findings at the end of the lesson. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, an awareness of pace and of health and safety matters. Occasionally, there is a need for a faster pace to lessons to allow time for evaluation and review, which is an area of weakness identified in students' coursework. Students are not encouraged to take enough responsibility for their own learning and teachers make insufficient use of their contributions in lessons. At times, work becomes very academic and numerical, which some students find difficult to understand. Teachers use a limited range of teaching and learning approaches, which do not do enough to bring greater relevance to the work or to help students who do not find the subject easy.

167. Students have very good attitudes and apply themselves well. They show interest and ask questions, demonstrating understanding and the wish to learn. Some find difficulty in meeting deadlines for homework, which means that work is incomplete. This has a negative impact on the achievement of these students. Students are helped to learn independently as they are provided with relevant textbooks and course booklets. Half-termly projects and individual coursework further develop their skills of working independently.

168. Assessment is satisfactory and data are used appropriately to set target grades. Students' progress is logged and underachievement identified. Much work is marked by a tick and work is graded, but feedback on how to improve is limited. Coursework is thoroughly marked using examination criteria. There are insufficient comments on record sheets to help students know what they must do to improve. Drop in 'clinics' during lunchtimes help pupils who are experiencing problems.

169. Leadership is good. Standards have improved since the last inspection and the number of students in Year 12 has risen this year. The subject leader has participated in a 'Physics on Stage' convention and he encourages students to join in competitions. An astrophysics project is undertaken each year. Management is satisfactory. There is an awareness of students' achievement but teaching does not fully address the needs of all students. There is insufficient up-to-date equipment and ICT provision is unsatisfactory. Display material is insufficiently stimulating. Since the last Inspection, progress has been satisfactory. Standards have improved, and the number of students has increased.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Work in the GNVQ course in ICT in Year 12 was sampled and one lesson was seen. In this lesson, students achieved very well and were very enthusiastic about the course. The teaching and learning in this lesson were good.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

170. Students use their ICT skills well to support their learning in a number of subjects when they are provided with opportunities. However, not all subjects use ICT sufficiently in lessons, including, for example, psychology and physical education. In French, students do not use ICT sufficiently in the presentation of their work. Students have access to laptops in the sixth form centre during their study time and there is considerable demand from students to use them.

HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was on A-level geography, history, sociology and psychology. A small number of lessons in religious studies, government and politics, and law were sampled. In religious studies, one lesson in Year 12 was seen. Teaching and learning were good and students achieved well. In the two lessons seen in government and politics, the teaching was good and students achieved well. In the two lessons seen in law, teaching and learning were very good and students' achievement was satisfactory.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' very keen attitudes, and the teachers' high expectations, promote good achievement.
- Teachers' guidance and support motivate students to focus sharply on ways to improve.
- Opportunities for students to use their skills for learning independently and collaboratively do not feature sufficiently in all lessons.
- The department gives students considerable support with resources and organisation.

Commentary

171. Many students enter Year 12 with levels of attainment that are below average for A-level courses. At the end of Year 12 in 2003, students' performance in the AS level

examination was broadly similar to the average, and this shows good achievement. A high proportion of students continue their studies in Year 13 and almost all complete the A-level course. In the A-level examination in 2003, standards were broadly in line with the national average, and the 2004 results show some improvement, particularly in the proportion attaining the highest grades of A and B. Standards over time have risen. The performance of male and female students fluctuates, but female students have attained better results than male students have in two years out of three. The school's analysis of students' performance shows that they achieve well. Standards of students' current work are in line with course expectations by the end of Year 13. Students acquire good research skills; they read rapidly, highlighting key points, and they make effective use of ICT to explore web sites for evidence for their assignments. They summarise their findings succinctly, making good use of diagrams, graphs and statistics. They work well on individual and small group tasks, but they are less confident in giving oral answers and developing them. Students with special educational needs achieve well.

172. The quality of teaching and learning is good, and there are examples of very good teaching. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which they communicate well, so students acquire knowledge, understanding and skills that are appropriate for this level and relate closely to the requirements of the examination syllabuses. Students collaborate well in researching for evidence. In a Year 13 lesson on the El Niño effect and its link with climate change, they quickly organised their research within small groups, using resources provided by the teacher. These included laptop computers, textbooks and a newspaper article. The teacher asked probing questions to assess their understanding, and a student made use of diagrams to explain clearly to the class her understanding of the topic. However, in lessons where the teacher leads the lesson for too long, time for participation by students is limited. Their understanding of issues and topics is underdeveloped when they are not encouraged to extend their oral answers fully and debate areas of uncertainty. In lessons where students with a specific learning difficulty are present, the teacher provides very good support that assists their good progress. Students know their target grades and receive guidance on how to improve their answers. Teachers support learning further with course guides that they have written and booklets of past papers they have arranged under syllabus topics.

173. The head of department gives a very good lead to sixth form geography. She provides a very clear vision for improving standards and achievement. She divides the teaching amongst five teachers who share their ideas very well and contribute to organising fieldwork. There is very good management of the courses. Assessment is regular, and used to evaluate the effectiveness of schemes of work. The performance of students is monitored effectively so that their achievement is maximised. At the time of the last inspection, examination results were above average, but since then a wider ability range of students undertake the courses, and more students take geography. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' good performance is helped greatly by the very good teaching of study skills and literacy.
- Lively and imaginative teaching maintains students' interest very well.
- Most teachers have high expectations of students' depth of thinking and work rate.
- Some students' poor subject knowledge is lowering attainment in one aspect of the AS course.

Commentary

174. The A-level results were well above average in 2003, with the performance of male students better than that of female students. The proportion of students attaining the highest grades of A and B fell slightly in 2004, but students' achievement was high, as their prior attainment at that time was lower than previously. The AS results were below average in 2003 but were close to the average in 2004. Standards in Year 12 and Year 13 are higher than expected when account is taken of students' GCSE results and are well above course expectations. Their achievement is very good. As a result of the well-planned development of their study and literacy skills, they write fluently, expressing and supporting their views well. Their understanding of cause and effect is good. Higher attaining students have a very good overview of the periods they study. Students have good knowledge and understanding of German history because of thorough coverage of the subject in previous years. Students' very good achievement in Year 13 is the result of very hard work, as their limited earlier experience of British history has a negative impact on their historical knowledge and understanding on entry to the course in Year 12. Although, in the past, the results have shown male students to attain better results than female students, this is less striking in the present Year 13, where the highest attainers are girls.

175. The quality of teaching is generally good, with some very good teaching by almost all staff. There is a very good atmosphere that celebrates learning. Teachers use lively methods to motivate students, whilst giving very good attention to the development of good habits for study and expression of ideas. Their thorough marking helps them to establish and act on students' strengths and weaknesses. They make ambitious demands on their students, who know what is expected of them. Teachers give them confidence that they can succeed. When teaching is less strong, the depth of knowledge and deduction expected is weak, while students have too little background knowledge to prepare them for decision-making.

176. The strengths of the sixth form course stem from the very good leadership of the department that provides a positive role model for staff. The department is managed effectively. Resources are plentiful, up-to-date and meet the needs of the students well. There is good use of data to establish the direction of planning for individuals and groups. However, there is not enough collaboration over the introduction to British history in Year 12 to make sure that all students are fully prepared for the requirements of the course. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The department has taken steps to improve the standard of writing, and the accommodation is now satisfactory.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' lesson planning is good and the range and quality of tasks promote effective learning.
- Teachers have a good awareness of modern psychology and research methods.
- Management and leadership are undertaken conscientiously and well.
- There is limited accommodation to improve independent learning.
- A limited range of ICT resources is in use in the classroom.

Commentary

177. The A-level examination results in 2003 were below average overall and a lower proportion than average gained the highest grades of A and B. Female students have gained greater examination success than male students. Examination performance has been variable in recent years. Although still below average, the A-level results in 2004 were better than those in 2003, with a higher proportion attaining the highest grades of A and B, and reflected the predicted grades for this cohort of students. A higher proportion gained grades A and B in 2004. Students achieved well in both Year 12 and 13 in relation to their standards on entry.

178. Standards by Year 13 are in line with course expectations, reflecting students' mixed GCSE results on entry to Year 12. Their achievement is good. Most students have at least satisfactory numeracy and literacy skills. The overall level of computing skill is good. Higher attaining students often do better than expected for their age. Students in Year 12 demonstrate good understanding of experimental psychology and use scientific terms accurately when describing research outcomes. Lower attaining students, however, often struggle to express their thoughts clearly in spoken and written English. Students' skills in investigation work generally match their levels of attainment. Teachers work hard and effectively to ensure these students are well supported. Students enter Year 12 never having studied psychology and their previous attainment is average. Early in Year 12, they produce some work that has risen, overall, to above average standards. The small number of students who have a specific learning need make good progress. The higher attaining students make good progress and produce exemplary work and on time. These students are able to make the full connection between the anatomy of the brain and behaviour.

179. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers of psychology show an appropriate interest in the areas of cognitive and social development, individual differences and psycho-dynamic approaches. Teachers help students to research; for example, in two Year 12 lessons, they aided students to design an experiment investigating psychology and behaviour. The strength of the teaching is the informed commentary and the clear analysis of relevant psychological studies. Students seek to collect objective and verifiable facts about human behaviour in order to construct empirically based theories but make insufficient use of computers in their research. There are different activities to cover all levels of ability and key skills are highlighted.

180. Leadership and management are good. The support provided to students by teachers is very good. Students feel confident, valued and well placed to make the most of their opportunities in the sixth form. Improvement to the subject has taken place over time and progress since the last inspection has been good. Changes have been made each year to improve aspects of teaching, learning and assessment.

Sociology

Provision in sociology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good; as a result, students achieve very well and standards are above average.
- Students have very positive attitudes because teachers provide them with a relevant and challenging curriculum.
- Leadership and management are very good and there is a clear commitment to high standards, improvement and inclusion.
- Occasionally, teachers do not draw together students' ideas to reinforce and extend learning.

Commentary

181. The A-level examination results were well above average in 2003 and a very high proportion of students gained the highest grades of A and B. Although male students did not gain such a high proportion of the highest grades as female students, the number of male students opting for sociology was too small to make meaningful statistical comparisons. The results in 2004 were not as high as in 2003 in terms of grades A and B, although the numbers opting for the subject increased significantly and reflected a wider ability range. The AS results in 2003 were above average, as they were in 2002; those for 2004 exceed this level of performance. Current standards are above average by Year 13. Students in Year 13 build very well on what they learned in Year 12 and are beginning to develop a very good understanding of sociological theory, and can apply it to unfamiliar situations. Students in Year 12 have made a very good start to the course. They have not previously studied this subject and have already made very clear gains in their knowledge of topics such as the family and in their understanding of sociological concepts such as functionalism. Achievement in both years is very good. More male students are beginning to opt for the subject and there are no significant differences in the current achievement of male and female students.

182. Sociology is an increasingly popular option for both male and female students and it recruits a wide range of ability in line with its inclusive ethos. This happens because of very good and enthusiastic teaching and because students want to do well and are prepared to work hard. Lessons are challenging and lively, and teachers work hard to ensure that content reflects current issues and concerns. During the inspection, for example, students looked at foxhunting and at government proposals to ban smoking in public places. Teachers are particularly good at providing students with the right degree of support so that they develop independence within a secure environment. As a result, students clearly enjoy their lessons and work very hard. Written comments on students' work are very effective in showing them what they have done well and what they need to do in order to improve. On most occasions, teachers make very good use of discussions to take students' learning forward and to help them clarify and extend their arguments. Occasionally, teachers do not effectively pull together students' discussions so that ideas are shared and reinforced.

183. Leadership and management are both very good. Teachers work very well together, sharing good practice as well as concerns. The head of department has a very clear vision of how to improve the department and has a very good understanding of how to achieve this. Departmental procedures are supportive and effective. Sociology makes a very good contribution towards students' personal development, particularly in the area of developing their understanding of what it means to live in today's society. Monitoring and evaluation procedures are very effective. All teachers, for example, observe each other regularly and mark the work of each other's students. The head of department makes very good use of data to show whether students are achieving as well as they should. Sociology was not a sixth form subject at the time of the last inspection and it is not possible to make a clear judgement about improvement since that time.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

The focus of the inspection was on AS and A-level design and technology and food technology.

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have good subject expertise.
- The team approach to teaching is well co-ordinated.
- Students have very good attitudes to their work.
- Students' drawing skills and a lack of experience using computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture (CAD/CAM) limit their ability to design more ambitious and innovative products.

Commentary

184. In 2003, the A-level examination results were well above the national average. All students gained a pass grade and the proportion of students gaining the higher grades of A and B was above the national average. In 2004, the results were not quite as good, although all students gained a pass grade, and were closer to the average. When they begin the course, the attainment of most students is a little below average. Analysis of the results of individual students shows that their achievement is good. The AS results in 2003 and 2004 were above average. Standards of work of students on the current AS and A-level courses are in line with course expectations.

185. Students' attitudes to their work are very good. They are willing to work hard to meet the targets they are set by their teachers. Many of the products they design rely on traditional construction techniques. For many students, their drawing skills are not good enough to enable them to show sufficient detail in their design proposals. There is insufficient use of CAD/CAM resources to produce innovative and original designs. Students on the AS course are working closely with local companies to develop prototype food products suitable for batch production or to improve menus in local restaurants. The quality of the products is very good and the motivation of the students is raising their achievement.

186. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers work well as a team to ensure that they provide a programme that covers the examination syllabus; everyone is able to concentrate on their own particular area of expertise. They encourage students to learn through a combination of directly taught topics and, more frequently, individual design assignments. Relationships with students are very good. Teachers know each student's interests, strengths and weaknesses very well, and offer support and challenge to help them reach the necessary standards in all aspects of their work. They take care to ensure that information is up-to-date and relevant for the students. In a debate about the significance of renewable energy resources, articles from current newspapers and journals prompted the students to challenge their thinking on the issues raised. Teachers assess work accurately and give students a clear picture of how their work compares to A-level standards. If they choose, students can submit work early for an interim assessment and use this opportunity to revise their assignments.

187. The quality of leadership and management is good. Teachers are committed to raising standards and share aspirations to continue to expand and develop the opportunities for studying design and technology in the sixth form. The team is effectively co-ordinated and work is planned well. Teachers meet regularly to review students' progress and to agree a consistent approach to help students thought to be working below their full potential. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The number of students taking design and technology has increased and the range of options available for students has increased to include food technology.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus of the inspection was on AS and A-level art and media studies. Work was sampled in theatre studies, photography and music. In theatre studies, one Year 12 and one Year 13 lesson were seen. The teaching ranged from good to very good. Students' achievement was good and standards were above course expectations in both lessons. One lesson was sampled in AS photography, which is an extremely popular and heavily oversubscribed course. Teaching and learning were very good and students achieved very well. Two lessons were sampled in music in Year 12 and Year 13. Standards were above average and teaching was good. Students have very positive attitudes to their studies and are closely involved in the various music ensembles run by the department.

Art

Provision in art is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teaching is very good.
- Standards overall are well above expectations for the course.
- Students have very positive and enthusiastic attitudes.
- Levels of expectation are not always sufficiently challenging.

Commentary

188. The A-level examination results in 2003 were in line with the national average. The proportion of students achieving the highest grades of A and B fell well below the national average because of significant staffing changes, which have now stabilised. Prior to this, the results have consistently been above or well above national expectations. The results in the 2003 AS examination were above the national average overall. All students gained a pass grade in both AS and A-level examinations in 2004 and there was an increase in the proportion of students gaining the highest grades of A and B. Current standards are well above course expectations and students achieve very well. Students explore and select visual information in relation to their own ideas. They manipulate a very wide variety of fine art and three-dimensional materials and processes to communicate their own ideas, skilfully and successfully. The content of the course is extremely varied and interesting. Much of the work demonstrates very good standards of imagination, inventiveness and confidence, and the rigorous use of colour and form. Research and experimentation are extensive, sometimes prolific. The influence of both traditional and contemporary artists is very evident through the development of work. Strong personal styles emerge in many cases.

189. The teaching is very good and generally makes very high demands of students. Learning is very well organised and managed through the scheme of work, although lesson time is not always used consistently well to maintain progress. The four specialist teachers, who each contribute to the course, are very enthusiastic and have very good subject knowledge. Very thorough assessment procedures, frequent individual tutorials and regular target setting mean that students are very well informed of their progress and areas for improvement. Students' knowledge, understanding and levels of appreciation are extended by visits to galleries and the extensive written work they undertake in compiling their personal studies. Relationships and attitudes are very good and contribute to productivity and progress. Whilst no dedicated accommodation is available, there is always space within the suite of rooms for students to continue their work out of lessons. This is often inspirational for other year groups using the department.

190. Leadership and management are very good. The monitoring system, used and shared by all teachers, provides a very full record of the progress of individual students. The highly experienced head of department provides a very clear vision and direction for the subject. Organisation, planning and record keeping are very thorough. A stimulating and very well resourced environment, linked to very challenging learning opportunities, fully engages the students. Progress since the last inspection has been good.

Media studies

Provision in media studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good explanation of key media concepts by teachers enables students to make good progress.
- Extensive use is made of ICT in the department.
- The assessment of students' work is closely targeted to provide them with individual assistance.
- Insufficient use is made of media terminology in some lessons.
- The pace of some lessons is relatively slow and undemanding.

Commentary

191. The A-level and AS examination results in 2003 were below the national averages but showed an improvement in 2004, with a higher proportion of students gaining the highest grades of A and B. Standards by Year 13 are above course expectations and students are achieving well. Standards are rising because of the good teaching. Students are becoming more familiar with key media concepts and they are using their understanding to create media products such as magazine covers and DVDs. Students in Year 13 are able to discuss the relative merits of new media technology in comparing news websites with traditional sources of news media. Higher attaining students in Year 12 are able to discuss key media concepts such as 'audience', 'representation' and 'institutions', for example in a study of film trailers. However, lower attaining students in Year 12 use descriptive rather than analytical terminology, as in a Year 12 lesson looking at reasons why members of the public make complaints to the Advertising Standards Authority. In addition, the teacher does not make enough use of media terminology to assist students. The majority of students make good progress overall in their understanding of the media.

192. The quality of teaching and learning is good in both Year 12 and Year 13. In the most effective lessons, students broaden their understanding of media concepts well. For example, in a Year 13 lesson on subjectivity in the media, the teacher's effective use of the different ways in which a media text can be interpreted led naturally into a perceptive discussion on the cropping of images in situations of conflict for political gain. In a less effective lesson, too much time was spent on reading aloud from a text about advertising standards at the expense of practical textual analysis, and the pace was relatively slow and undemanding. Students' coursework is assessed closely against the A-level criteria and teachers set individual targets for students. The best coursework is of very good quality, including, for example, the front cover of 'Sultry', a magazine aimed at teenagers, a DVD on snowboarding and a media collage entitled 'Eye See You'. Students evaluate their own work effectively in accompanying 'media logs' and commentaries. Media technology is used extensively in lessons and good use is made of numeracy in the analysis of data from websites.

193. A wide range of curricular and extracurricular opportunities is available and students have had opportunities to study the making of programmes at the BBC and to use this knowledge in making their own media products. Teachers in the department are not media specialists but all have a good understanding of key media concepts. There is very good use of ICT in the department, with a good supply of computers and other resources, including a video editing suite.

194. Leadership is good and has a positive effect on standards. Regular departmental meetings are held and the work of individual teachers in the department is monitored on a regular basis. All members of the department take part in cross-marking exercises, using the standardised criteria in the A-level course specification. Management is effective and all teachers are enthusiastic. Data are closely analysed by the head of department to ensure that appropriate targets are set for students. Progress since the last inspection has been good. Quality and standards of both provision and practice have improved.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus of the inspection was AS and A-level physical education. Work in leisure and recreation was sampled and two lessons in Year 12 were seen. The teaching ranged from good to very good and students' achieved well in one lesson and very well in the other.

Physical education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teaching is very good; as a result, students are highly motivated and make very good progress.
- Leadership and management are very good; courses are well planned and assessment is used effectively to respond to individual needs.
- Very good resources support learning, independent study and research, although ICT is not used effectively enough.
- Extracurricular provision in sport is of a high quality.

Commentary

195. The A-level examination results in 2003 were well above the national average and the proportion of students gaining the highest grades of A or B was also above average. In 2004, all students gained a pass grade, as in the previous two years, but a smaller proportion gained the higher grades of A and B. The AS level examination results in 2003 were below the national average and no student gained grades A or B. In 2004, the numbers taking the examination improved considerably and the results at grades A-E and at the highest grades of A and B were much higher than in the previous year.

196. The majority of students by Year 13 are producing work that is above course expectations. Within a wide ability range, most students are achieving very well and are able to apply a range of theoretical principles to comparative studies and to the characteristics of sport. They demonstrate a very good command of technical language, although the scientific element in both courses challenges many students. The Community Sports Leaders Award (CSLA) continues to be a highly successful course, developing management, communication and leadership skills. In a Year 12 lesson, students showed a very good understanding of the principles of safety in sport, especially in the ability to carry out a risk assessments.

197. The teaching is very good. Teachers establish positive relationships with students, valuing and respecting their contributions to lessons. Very good planning, command of the subject and a range of teaching methods motivate students and maintain high levels of interest. As a result, students are enthusiastic and respond well to the high expectations demanded of them. The use of challenging questioning and extended discussion improves students' knowledge and understanding. For example, in a Year 12 lesson on the respiratory system, students made effective use of more advanced technical language and were beginning to develop their analytical and evaluation skills, making links between physiology and physical activity. The resources available for each module are used very well but teachers do not use ICT effectively.

198. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department has a clear vision, is innovative and has a commitment to improving standards. Staff are rigorous in monitoring and evaluating data and assessment information through regular progress reports; target setting is used effectively, responding to individual needs. As a result, students' progress and achievement are very good. In Year 12 and Year 13, students participate in a programme of physical recreation in curriculum time and the very good extracurricular opportunities provide well for those students who wish to lead an active healthy lifestyle and play competitive sport. Progress since the last inspection has been very good, with improvements made to the curriculum, in the use of performance data and in the processes of self-evaluation and review.

BUSINESS

The focus of the inspection was on A-level economics. Work in business was sampled. The AS and AVCE results in Years 12 and 13 were above average in 2003, although based on small numbers, and were broadly similar in 2004. Four lessons were observed. Teaching and learning ranged from good to very good and students are achieving well.

Economics

Provision in economics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Target setting and the development of good examination skills help students to achieve well.
- Good teaching and good working relationships make positive contributions to learning.
- A range of extracurricular activities enriches students' experience.
- Teaching methods and students' learning are constrained by the lack of any ICT facility in the economics classroom.
- In Year 12, insufficient opportunities for presentation, pair and group work limits the development of students' skills of working independently.

Commentary

199. In 2003, the A-level results were above the national average and showed an improvement on 2002, when they were average. In the last three years, all students gained a pass grade but a higher proportion gained the highest grades of A and B in 2003 than in 2002 and 2004. There was little difference in the results of male and female students. In the AS examinations, the results were at the national average in 2003 and are likely to be above average in 2004. Female students gained a higher proportion of grades A and B than male students. The 2003 results represent good achievement at AS and A-level.

200. Standards are currently in line with course expectations by Year 13 and achievement is good. In a Year 12 lesson, students showed good understanding of the concepts of opportunity cost, elasticity of demand and producer and consumer surplus. They demonstrated good analytical skills and competently used graphs to illustrate written answers. In a Year 13 lesson, students understood fully the concept of oligopoly and the characteristics of demand facing firms in this market position. Again, they were able to represent this graphically.

201. The good achievement is clearly linked to good teaching and learning and the productive relationships that exist between students and their teacher. Lessons are well planned and taught at a good pace. Consequently, students remain on task and show commitment and enthusiasm for their work. The teacher's exposition is brisk and clear and delivered with sufficient challenge to ensure that the needs of all students are met. The regular use of praise and humour encourages the students, who readily enter into discussion and thus develop their oral skills. There is an appropriate emphasis on examination techniques to help students improve their performance. The teacher's wide

experience and good subject knowledge gives students confidence. The use of up-to-date information on such topics as house and oil prices, and the use of newspapers make the subject more relevant for them. Homework, to extend students' understanding and examination skills, is regularly set and marked. It often requires them to use the Internet, so extending their computer skills. Students find the work interesting, challenging and very relevant to real life. However, there is insufficient presentation, pair and group work in Year 12 to allow students to contribute more to lessons and, consequently, to their learning.

202. Leadership and management are good. The head of department has a clear vision. He is an experienced teacher and examiner who is well organised and focused on raising standards. He shows a sound understanding of the current position in the department and an awareness of its strengths and weaknesses. A basic improvement plan has been written but this could be developed further. Assessment procedures, target setting and the monitoring of students' progress are well established and they contribute significantly to the students' good achievement. Students are provided with a range of extracurricular opportunities that enrich their experience and develop their leadership, group working, presentation and ICT skills. Activities include Young Enterprise, the Cranfield University Arts Business Challenge and the Bank of England Target 2.0. Although the subject is adequately resourced with textbooks and video materials, the lack of any ICT facility in the economics room constrains the range of teaching approaches and thus the learning opportunities for students. The environment is insufficiently enhanced by the use of imaginative and illustrative display material. The many strengths detailed in the last report are still apparent and good improvement has been made in the few areas of weakness noted.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The school does not provide courses in this curriculum area.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

Only one lesson was seen in personal, social and health education. In this lesson, the quality of teaching and learning was good.

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

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