

INSPECTION REPORT

POLESWORTH HIGH SCHOOL

Polesworth

LEA area: Warwickshire

Unique reference number: 125736

Headteacher: Mr Andy Clarke

Lead inspector: Mr Anthony Shield

Dates of inspection: 18th - 22nd October 2004

Inspection number: 268878

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive
School category: Community
Age range of pupils: 11-18
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 1,308

School address: Dordon Road
Tamworth
Staffordshire
Postcode: B78 1QT

Telephone number: (01827) 702 205
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Appropriate authority: The governing body
Name of chair of Mr D Butcher
governors:

Date of previous 8th March 1999
inspection:

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Polesworth High School is a mixed comprehensive school for students aged 11-18, situated in Polesworth in the north of Warwickshire. Students are drawn largely from the immediate residential area, and many come from socially and economically disadvantaged homes, although the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. There are 1,308 students on roll, with 213 in the sixth form. Attainment on entry is below average generally, although some years are closer to the average; the percentage of students with special educational needs is above average, with 229 students, including five in the sixth form, with identified special educational needs; this represents around 19 per cent of the school roll. Most of these have learning difficulties, although a small number have emotional and behavioural problems, or physical difficulties. Forty-three have a Statement of Special Educational Needs. The majority of students are of white UK heritage, with very small numbers of students from other ethnic minority backgrounds. There are no students with English as an additional language.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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30648	Brian Skelton	Team Inspector	English Drama
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16495	Howard Meredith	Team Inspector	Information and communication technology Business studies in the sixth form
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a **very good school, with some outstanding features**, and it provides very good value for money. Driven by the energetic and insightful leadership of the headteacher, the school is ambitious for further improvement. Standards are above average and improving. Students' achievements are very good as a result of very good and sometimes inspirational teaching.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The excellent leadership of the headteacher has created a very positive climate for learning and a strong sense of common purpose and direction.
- Thoughtful and hardworking staff are committed to providing high quality teaching and learning.
- Very good teaching and the confident and positive attitudes of students ensure that most achieve very well.
- Achievement is very good overall, except in French.
- Most students develop into mature and sensitive young people and they thrive in the very good opportunities for taking responsibility and caring for others.
- Self-evaluation and monitoring procedures are good but need further consistency at subject level to ensure that they are fully effective.
- Productive and effective links with partner schools and the wider community help to promote achievement.
- The quality of both personal and academic care and guidance is very effective.
- The impact of the school's international work is excellent, enhancing the quality of learning across all subjects and contributing much to the students' personal development and understanding of global issues.

Overall, the school has made very good improvements since the last inspection in 1999, maintaining the strengths identified and making confident and secure improvements elsewhere. Standards in Year 9 tests and in GCSE examinations have been improving more rapidly than the national trend. A-level performance has also been improving rapidly and results in 2004 were particularly impressive. Key issues at the time of the last inspection have been tackled effectively.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Achievement is very good overall, given the students' attainment on entry in Year 7. Standards in Years 9, 11 and in the sixth form are above average. This is the result of the school's sharp focus on providing effective teaching and learning at all levels and encouraging students to develop independent learning skills. Standards in English,

mathematics and science in Years 9 and 11 are above average, and students' achievements are very good in each subject. In other subjects in Year 9, students' achievements are very good in art and music and good in all other subjects except French, where they are unsatisfactory. In Year 11, students' achievements are very good in history, child development, art, music and religious education; good in design and technology, geography and physical education, and satisfactory in all other subjects except French.

Students' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are very good. Students are keen to learn and their positive attitudes make a strong contribution to their achievements. Behaviour is very good, and many students, as they move through the school, are considerate of others and behave with increasing maturity. Bullying is insignificant, and dealt with effectively, often by the students themselves through the *ban da bully* scheme. Attendance is above average.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The **quality of education** provided by the school is **very good. Teaching is very good.** Teachers are hardworking and reflective. They have high expectations and are confident in their subject knowledge. Many are using new technologies with increasing imagination and effectiveness. As a result, learning is very good in many lessons. The curriculum is good, preparing students successfully for their future, and the school's international links provide an imaginative and valuable dimension to the students' global awareness. An extensive range of out-of-school clubs and activities enriches the curriculum. The school's procedures for the care, guidance and support of students are very good. Relationships amongst the whole-school community are very good. Tutors know their students well and are committed to their personal and academic development. Extensive links with the community and partner schools make a very good contribution to students' learning.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership is very good. Outstanding leadership by the headteacher inspires others, and creates an ethos of professional rigour and trust. He is very well supported by his deputy and senior team. The work of the governors is very good, and they provide knowledgeable and committed oversight of the school's work. **Management is good.** The school is reflective, and management procedures for the monitoring and self-review of its work are in place, although these are not consistently well applied at subject level. Although the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship is not fully met, governors have done all they can and standards are not being adversely affected.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The school's partnership with its parents is very good. Parents are very supportive of the school and the school has their confidence. In particular, they are pleased that their children are expected to work hard and that they make good progress as a result of very good teaching. They also appreciate the good arrangements made to ensure their child settled in well on arrival in Year 7. Students also express considerable support for the school and they are fiercely loyal. They enjoy the challenge of the teaching and participate in all activities with enthusiasm. They feel trusted by their teachers. Students report that bullying is dealt with quickly and effectively.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Ensure a more consistent approach to self-evaluation and monitoring by heads of department.
- Improve the achievement of students in French;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- review the arrangements made for providing a daily act of collective worship.

THE SIXTH FORM AT POLESWORTH HIGH SCHOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

The sixth form centre is providing a **very good** education for its students, and has made very good improvements since the last inspection in 1999. Standards in 2003 were above average overall, and improved further in 2004. This improving picture is confirmed by inspectors' observations of work in the current Year 13. Given their prior attainment at GCSE, students' achievements are good as a result of very good teaching. The sixth form has made impressive improvements in both standards and recruitment in recent years. Leadership of the sixth form is very good; management is good. The sixth form is cost effective.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Overall results at A-level are above average in 2003, and students achieve well as a result of very good teaching.
- The accommodation for some subjects is too cramped to cope with the increasing numbers opting for sixth form courses.
- Students are overwhelmingly supportive and enjoy being part of the sixth form.
- Teachers are committed to providing opportunities for students to develop independent learning and research skills.

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	English - Very good. Standards are well above average and students' levels of achievement are very good because of the consistently very good teaching, their own positive attitudes to the subject and the outstanding way in which the department is led and managed.
Mathematics	Very good. Standards are improving, and are currently above average. Students achieve well because the teaching is very good and they have very

Science	good attitudes to their work. Leadership and management are very good, responsible for the very good improvement since the last inspection. Biology - Good. Although standards in recent A-level examinations were below average, standards are improving and are now about average. Achievement is good because of the good teaching.
Humanities	History - Good. Students of all abilities have very positive attitudes; they learn and achieve well from the generally very good teaching that they receive. Current standards are average. Geography - Good. As a result of consistently good teaching, students make very good progress and achieve very well. The subject is increasingly popular. Current standards are above average. Sociology - Good. Standards are average and students achieve well. Good teaching enables students to develop good independent learning skills and become active and reflective citizens. Government and politics - Very good. Standards are improving and are now above average as a result of very good teaching which enables students to take a lively interest and achieve very well. Psychology – Good. The teaching and learning are good and enable students to achieve well in this popular subject. Standards are around average.
Visual and performing arts and media	Art - Very good. Students achieve very well as a consequence of very good teaching. Standards are above average.
Business	Business studies - Good. Standards are average and improving. Good teaching inspires students to work with maturity and commitment, and achieve well.

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 quality of personal support and guidance that students receive is very good. Tutors know their students very well and are sensitive to their needs.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership of the sixth form is very good. Considerable attention has been given to raising standards and improving recruitment and the school has done well to improve the overall quality of provision. Management is well informed by comprehensive assessment systems, and is good overall. Governors are well informed.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students very much enjoy being part of the sixth form and almost all surveyed consider that the teaching is challenging. They particularly appreciate the helpfulness of the teachers and the encouragement to study independently. They consider that they are treated fairly and with respect, and their views are welcomed and often acted on.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Standards of work seen overall during the inspection are above average in Years 9, 11 and 13. Students' achievements are very good throughout Years 7 to 11 and good in the sixth form. Boys do particularly well at GCSE and their performance in recent years has been well above the national average for boys.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' achievements are very good throughout Years 7 -11.
- Students achieve particularly well in English, mathematics and science.
- Results at A-level improved significantly in 2004 and value-added measures indicate that students are now achieving well at this level.
- Standards in national tests in Year 9 and GCSE examinations have been rising faster than the improving national trend.
- Achievement in French is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

1. Given the students' below-average standards on entry in Year 7, as measured by their attainment in national tests taken at the end of their primary schools, most students' achievements are very good. There is some variation in attainment on entry in each year, and students in the current Years 8 and 9 were closer to the average on entry than students in other years, where attainment on entry was below average.

- In national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2003, the students' performance in English, mathematics and science was average. In comparison with 'similar schools' i.e. those with students who achieved similarly in Year 6 tests, performance in all three subjects was well above average. This very good progress made by students during Years 7 to 9 was confirmed by inspectors' observations. The overall trend in performance in Year 9 tests has been improving faster than the improving national trend, although the rate of improvement in English has been more varied. In 2004, results in mathematics continued to improve. Results in both English and science are subject to appeal.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	33.5 (37.5)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	36.0 (33.9)	35.4 (34.7)
science	33.9 (33.6)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 189 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

- Boys do particularly well in mathematics and science, where their performance often exceeds the girls. However, the overall difference between boys' and girls' results is not significant. Able students and those identified as gifted and talented achieve very well through Years 7 to 9. The achievements of students with special educational needs are also very good.
- At the end of Year 11, the proportion of students gaining five or more A*-C grades in 2003 was 60 per cent, above the national average and above the similar schools' average. The average total GCSE points score per student in 2003 was 45.9, above the national average and well above the average of schools which performed similarly in Year 9 tests in 2001. Although the percentage of students achieving five or more A*-C grades dipped slightly in 2004 (to 57 per cent), the percentage has been around this level for the last three years. The percentage of students achieving five or more A*-G passes (98 per cent) was well above the national average, while the percentage achieving one or more A*-G passes was very high and within the top five per cent of schools nationally. These measures indicate how well the school caters for average and below average attaining students.
- The average points score of students' best eight subjects in 2003 was well above average (39.4 compared to 35.6 nationally) and well above average compared to similar schools. Results overall since the last inspection have improved from 49 to 60 per cent of students achieving five or more A*-C grades, and the overall trend has been rising faster than the national trend. Value-added analysis indicates that students made well-above-average progress, representing very good achievement throughout Years 10 and 11.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	60 (60)	52 (50)

Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	98 (93)	91 (91)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	39.4 (37.1)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 203 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

6. In 2003, subjects which achieved results significantly better than the national average were art and design, science, drama, English and English literature, child development and music. Results in French and German were below average. In 2004, results in art and design, English literature, drama and music were particularly strong. And although both French and German improved, students in 2004 did less well in French.
7. Overall, students' achievement, that is, how high standards are in relation to their ability and prior attainment, are very good throughout Years 7 to 11. In work seen during the inspection in both Years 9 and 11, standards were above average.
8. The achievement of students with special educational needs is very good. This is due to well-focused support from the learning support department and well-planned support in lessons. Some students do particularly well in national tests in Year 9 and in GCSE examinations. Most students gain one or more passes at GCSE in Year 11, at C grade or above; all achieve up to G grades in others, some with six or more subjects.
9. The most significant factors in the improving standards are the strong attention which has been given to improving the quality of teaching and learning, and the very good attitudes of students to their learning, both of which help to promote very good progress.
10. In work seen in English during the inspection, standards are above average in both Years 9 and 11. Given their attainment on entry, students make very good progress and achieve very well through the school. Standards of literacy are above average throughout the school, and students make good progress because of their confidence in the use of language.
11. In work seen in mathematics, standards are also above average at the end of Years 9 and 11 and students' achievements are very good overall. Standards of numeracy are above average. Most students accurately use and apply numeracy skills in different contexts, and are reasonably confident at mental calculations.
12. Standards in science are above average in Years 9 and 11. Students' achievements are very good throughout. They have a good grasp of scientific principles, although some Year 11 students do not use scientific terminology confidently.
13. In other subjects in Years 7 to 9, students' achievements are very good in art and design, and music; and good in all other subjects except French where they are unsatisfactory. In Years 10 and 11, students' achievements are very good in history, art and design, music and religious education; good in design and technology, geography and physical education and satisfactory in all other subjects except French, where again they are unsatisfactory.

Sixth form

14. In 2003, students' results in A-level examinations were above average. The performance of boys in particular was very good, achieving an average points score well above the performance of boys nationally. Over recent years, standards in the sixth form have been improving strongly alongside increasing levels of recruitment from Year 11. In 2004, results improved further.

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	88.6 (91.5)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	23.0 (23.7)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per student	294.5 (277.8)	258.2 (263.3)

There were 66 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

15. Performance in subjects varies. In 2003, results were well above average in theatre studies and geography, and above average in information and communication technology, but below average in biology, English and history, and well below average in physics. However, results in 2004 improved in almost all subjects, and in general studies, theatre studies, mathematics, physics, music, art and design, business studies and home economics, students achieved better than their predictions based on their performance in GCSE. Value-added measures, however, indicate that some students underachieved in French, physical education, religious studies and biology. Because numbers taking some subjects have been relatively small, results have inevitably varied from year to year.
16. Results in vocational courses, including key skills and GNVQ courses, offered in conjunction with a local college are good. In 2003, there was a 100 per cent pass rate in health and social care, information and communication technology and business studies.
17. The impact of the work the school has done to improve both recruitment to the sixth form and the quality of teaching and learning has now begun to have a significant impact on results. The strong focus on what makes for effective teaching and learning at this level, in particular the encouragement of students' independent learning and research skills, has resulted in improved performance all round. Inspectors' observations confirm that there is an improving picture at sixth form level, and they judge standards overall to be above average and the achievements of most students in the current sixth form to be good. Retention rates through courses are reasonably good, with more and more students successfully completing the course.
18. The school prides itself on open access to the sixth form and has adopted an inclusive policy towards taking students onto courses, guiding students onto appropriate courses in relation to how well they achieved at GCSE. This has had the effect of improving performance at all levels, and improving retention rates. Students with special educational needs in Year 12 are on target to achieve well in subjects such as English, history and psychology at AS level. Overall, students with special educational needs achieve very well. Specialist support and teaching contribute strongly to their success.

19. Not all subjects were inspected in detail during the inspection. Of those which were, students' achievements, given their attainment at GCSE, are very good in English, geography, art and design, and government and politics; achievement is good for most students in mathematics, biology, history, business studies, sociology and psychology. Standards in all the subjects inspected in detail were above average for this stage in the course, apart from in English and art and design where they were well above average, and in history, business studies, sociology and psychology where they were judged to be average. In subjects sampled, some good work was seen in theatre studies, home economics, music and physical education.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attitudes and behaviour are very good in the main school and sixth form. Students blossom into mature, responsible young people and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. Attendance and punctuality are good in the main school and very good in the sixth form. The school has improved all aspects of students' personal development since the last inspection.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good attitudes and behaviour make a very good contribution to students' achievements.
- The school sets the highest expectations for conduct and has an excellent scheme to eliminate bullying.
- Personal development is very good because there are so many opportunities for students to take responsibility and also consider important issues.
- Very good relationships at all levels contribute to the very strong ethos.
- Attendance is good in the main school and very good in the sixth form because procedures to monitor and promote attendance are very well developed.

Commentary

20. Students are very proud of their school. They enjoy school life and show very high levels of interest in lessons and the range of activities provided. For instance, there was pin drop silence during a Year 10 assembly taken by the headteacher. All present were moved as the headteacher explained why he was wearing a scarf presented to him in front of 2000 villagers during a staff visit to Ghana. The interest of different groups of students is successfully maintained through various programmes that challenge and support them according to their individual needs.
21. Behaviour is very good at all times. Discussions with students of all ages indicate that bullying is not a significant problem. All students are aware of the *ban da bully* scheme. This includes much work in personal, social and health education lessons, excellent peer support and a 'drop in' facility providing confidential advice and a guaranteed staff response to any concerns. All students are aware of the school rules and there are particularly high expectations regarding conduct at all times. The house points system is especially effective. Students are very keen to gain credits in order to claim money vouchers, as well as certificates, small prizes and special treats for good behaviour, effort and achievement. The incidence of exclusion is low.

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

Categories used in the Annual School Census	Number of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White - British	902	37	1
White - any other White background	2	0	0
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	6	0	0
Mixed - White and Asian	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	7	0	0
Black or Black British - African	1	0	0
Chinese	4	0	0
Parent/pupil preferred not to say	327	1	0

22. The school promotes good relationships, including racial harmony, very well. The inspection team is impressed at how well students work together. For instance, in physical education, students frequently lead warm-up periods and help each other to develop their skills and techniques in sports such as badminton.
23. Spiritual development is very good because opportunities in assembly and in subjects such as religious education, science and geography allow students to marvel at the world around them and also to consider issues such as endeavour, hardship and catastrophe. For instance, during a Year 10 lesson about the causes and effects of flooding in Britain, students were shown a short video. Initially shocked and horrified, they showed great empathy for people whose lives were severely affected. Discussions with students confirm that their moral development is very good. They have a very clear sense of right and wrong. For instance, regarding human rights, Year 9 recently considered the rights to shelter and protection. They went on to contrast the state of such rights in Britain compared to Ghana. Students also consider topics such as crime, domestic violence, euthanasia and animal rights.
24. Students accept responsibility very well and feel that they have an important role to play in the community. Duty students in Year 8 perform their tasks especially well and are a credit to the school. Older students often help younger ones, for instance, by acting as prefects or bully mentors. The school council enables students from all year groups to develop their social skills. Students' cultural development is very good. There are many opportunities in the curriculum for students to learn about their own culture. School trips and many visitors to school make a very good contribution. The link with Ghana deserves special mention in that it has had a great impact on students' personal development and understanding of other cultures.
25. Good attendance rates from the great majority of students make a significant contribution to their achievements. Attendance was above average in the 2002/3 school year and unauthorised absence was low. Students' enthusiasm for school is

reflected in a significant rise in attendance for the most recent year. The school monitors and promotes attendance very effectively through first day of absence telephone calls and a system of rewards for good attendance.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	7.1	School data	0.3
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the last complete reporting year (2002-3).

Sixth form

26. Students have very good attitudes to life and studies in the sixth form and their behaviour is very good. Attendance in the last school year (2003/4) was very good, at 94.7 per cent. These factors make a significant contribution to students' achievements and personal development. Students respond very positively in lessons and to chances to take responsibility for their own learning. As in the main school, provision for cultivating and nurturing personal development is very effective. For instance, at the start of a new unit of work for Year 13, as part of their general studies course, students considered the contemporary world in relation to science and culture. They were very receptive to the teacher's obvious concern for the conflict between morality, medicine and religion. They thought very carefully about the dilemma in a situation where parents may not want to give consent for a blood transfusion because of their own religious beliefs. By the end of the lesson, students relished future work that will develop further their points of view and ability to argue about issues such as genetic engineering and cloning.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The overall quality of education provided by the school is very good. In particular, the very good quality of teaching, the effective use of assessment, the very good quality of advice and guidance given by tutors and pastoral staff and the highly effective links with partner schools and the community are ensuring that most students achieve very well.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are very good throughout the school. Assessment of students' work is good and is being used effectively to inform planning and the students themselves on how they might improve.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is characterised by high expectations and levels of challenge.
- The commitment of teachers is valued by the students.
- Relationships are very good and, as a result, students grow in confidence.
- The teaching of French is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

27. One hundred per cent of the students who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire consider that they are well taught, and almost all parents agreed that the teaching is good. Inspectors judge the quality of teaching overall, including in English, mathematics and science, to be very good.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 169 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
5 (2.9%)	68 (40.2%)	69 (40.8%)	25 (14.8%)	2 (1.2%)	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.

28. The school has had a strong focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning in recent years.
29. The curriculum committee of heads of department and subject leaders was re-named 'The Teaching and Learning Forum', and now meets to discuss and lead on developments in teaching. Issues such as emotional intelligence, assessment for learning, thinking skills and the development of independent learning skills through more effective use of the study centre have helped to promote a culture of development and self-review. This has been driven internally but is supported by external consultants, and has led to significant improvements in the quality of learning throughout the school. This focus on how best to ensure effective learning has had a major impact on the quality of teaching, and the proportion of excellent and very good teaching is higher than at the time of the last inspection.
30. Where teaching is most effective, it is led by the teachers with enthusiasm, commitment and confidence. In an excellent drama lesson in Year 9, the students were working on developing a scene based on a painting by Goya. The learning was characterised by a rapid pace and very effective use of prompts from the teacher to bring out detailed and focused responses from the students. As they evaluated each other's work, students effectively developed their skills of critical analysis and understanding of how to improve their own performance. As a result, students made outstanding gains in their learning.
31. Teachers are continually reviewing their practice and approach planning with a professional concern for what works best. The recent introduction of tablet computers and digital projectors has encouraged teachers to review their use of new technologies and develop imaginative and effective ways of using them to support learning. They have very good subject knowledge, which enables them to interest and engage the students in relevant and interesting activities, and to plan work which builds successfully on previous learning. Activities are designed to consolidate learning and deepen understanding when appropriate. Very good relationships between students and teachers enable a purposeful and productive climate for learning in classrooms. Many teachers are particularly good at offering encouragement and building confidence in the students' ability to learn independently of the teacher.
32. Above all, it is the high levels of challenge which ensure that good progress is made. In an excellent Year 11 mathematics lesson, students were problem solving in algebra. The students worked with high levels of interest and concentration, working effectively in pairs and discussing their ideas and work. The teacher ensured a very good pace of learning and was able to explain difficult concepts with clarity. Students were asked to explain their solutions, consolidating their progress.

33. Students reported how much they valued the commitment of teachers to their progress. They particularly valued the extra time teachers were happy to devote to supporting and helping them with difficulties. They remarked that teachers often answer their questions with another question, prompting the students to solve the problem themselves or to develop their understanding through the application of their knowledge in a different context. In a number of subjects, but especially so in music, physical education and drama, the commitment of teachers to provide additional and extra-curricular activities is very much valued by the students.
34. Where lessons are less effective, it is sometimes because work is not planned to meet the needs of all students in the class. This results in work which is too difficult for the lower attainers or insufficiently challenging for the most able. This was observed in a small number of lessons in modern foreign languages, design and technology and physical education. However, in most lessons, planning is thorough and detailed, and caters well for the full range of ability. Much work has gone into developing and adapting imaginative schemes of work which relate specifically to Polesworth students. The focus in all subjects, for example, on developing an international dimension specifically through the link with Ghana, has created learning tasks with relevance and coherence.
35. The use of assessment to monitor students' progress and to set targets for the next step in their learning is generally effective. Marking is particularly effective in English, where it is regular and supplemented with constructive comments about how the work might be improved. Students are very appreciative of the quality of marking and nine out of ten students responding to the questionnaire felt their work was marked helpfully. In some subjects, notably modern foreign languages, science and history, there are some inconsistencies in the quality of marking. The quality of oral feedback in lessons is high and, in the most effective lessons, teachers are continually looking for ways to move the learning forward by asking questions and suggesting the next step.
36. The quality of teaching observed for students with special educational needs is consistently very good. Planning is thorough and challenging and teachers know the students very well. Relationships are strong. Highly trained and skilled specialist teachers and teaching assistants support learning very well in class and in groups. They contribute strongly to students' success. Individual education plans have improved since the last inspection and are now appropriate and workable. They are used well in the majority of lessons across the curriculum. Very good teaching in English, dance, art and drama lessons, for example, led to very good learning outcomes for students with special educational needs.
37. The school has introduced the national Key Stage 3 Strategy well. Good use is made of the three-part lesson structure, ensuring that a lively introduction is followed by opportunities for active participation by all students and further opportunities to consolidate learning at the end through a well-managed summary. Activities are often well planned to interest and motivate students, particularly boys. In many lessons, active participation by the students ensures that learning is based on relevant experience. In a small number of lessons, the teacher over-directs the learning and fails to allow students to develop their own ideas.

38. The school has identified assessment for learning as a major focus of development throughout the school and senior management has a clear vision and mechanisms in place to achieve this. The assessment for learning group made up of staff from various departments is a positive step in the development of this programme. The school has effective systems in place to set targets based on an analysis of data available to the school. This information is shared with staff and forms the basis for target setting within each department. Teachers now have a common language through which they can discuss school and student targets effectively.
39. The use made by departments of this information is, however, more variable at different key stages. The strongest practice was seen in Years 10 and 11. Here targets are shared with students and good informative feedback through good marking was given regularly to students to enable them to improve their work and achieve higher grades in examinations. In Years 7 to 9, very good practice was seen in mathematics, and this was characterised by an innovative approach to marking that was both informative and helpful in enabling students to make progress. Good practice was also seen in English, design and technology, physical education and religious education. Here self and peer assessment is developing well and informative feedback is clear and helpful. In other subjects, satisfactory practice was identified, with a need for further development of self and peer assessment highlighted.

Sixth form

40. As in the main school, teaching in the sixth form is very good and, as a result, students make very good progress. Ninety-eight per cent of students feel that they are well taught and challenged to do their best. They particularly value the help and encouragement they are given to study independently and to research topics on their own. They also value the thorough and careful assessment of their work which enables them to see how they can improve. The very good relationships between teachers and students are the basis for the successful teaching at this level and of students' very good progress in their work. Of the subjects inspected in detail, teaching in English, mathematics, history, art and government and politics is very good, and in biology, geography, business studies, sociology and psychology, teaching is good.
41. The school's focus on improving teaching and learning has also impacted on the quality of teaching in the sixth form. In particular, teachers have considered carefully how best to encourage students to take more responsibility for organising their own learning and be more independent of the teachers in solving problems and in preparing their coursework assignments. This is now beginning to bear fruit, and the significant improvement in A-level performance in 2004 is indicative of how effective this has been. This focus on what makes for effective teaching and learning at this level is now making a real difference and ensuring much greater consistency in the quality of sixth form teaching.
42. Lessons are characterised by very good relationships between staff and students alongside an atmosphere of mutual respect. This encourages students to respond confidently and to be prepared to take risks in their answers and with their learning overall. Much teaching is imaginatively planned to excite and make the learning relevant. Typical of this approach was a Year 12 business studies lesson observed in

which real examples of business which have been created through partnerships were used to exemplify key points. The teacher managed the discussion skilfully and summarised the learning effectively at the end. High quality questioning of the students encouraged them to think more deeply and the teacher skilfully managed the thoughtful criticism by students of each other's contributions.

43. One of the great strengths of teaching in all subjects is the teachers' subject knowledge. This ensures that teachers have a confident approach and are able to ask questions which challenge the students' thinking and deepen their understanding.
44. Much of the most effective teaching is inspiring students to develop more independent and self-reliant approaches to their learning. This was especially the case in English, mathematics, government and politics and in art and design. In English and art and design in particular, students are encouraged to develop their reading and research skills by effective use of the library and the Internet. Over-directed learning by the teacher at times in geography and psychology leads to less successful learning. Lessons are often characterised by a good range of varied activities, collaborative working as well as high levels of debate, ensuring that students focus strongly on their learning. Although some students lack confidence in their learning, most adopt a positive and mature attitude to their studies. They are keen to do well and this has a very positive impact on the progress they make.
45. Students' learning skills are increasingly good. Most students take care with the presentation of their work, and files and notes are well organised and can be used effectively for revision. Key skills of communication are developed well in all lessons through written work, well-managed discussions and group work. Students are encouraged to complete research tasks and discuss their findings in most subjects. Numeracy and ICT are also used well.
46. Assessment practice in the sixth form is very effective, and students feel very confident about the support and guidance they receive. Students' performance is monitored regularly and teachers set realistic and challenging targets which are shared with the students. Students' work is assessed and marked very well. Marking of written work is often detailed, and contains much diagnostic comment. Examination criteria are used effectively to give students a clear idea of the standards required. Written comment is further supplemented by detailed oral feedback in one-to-one discussions. In questionnaires and interviews, students reported that their work is assessed helpfully.

The curriculum

47. Curriculum provision is good. All students have access to a broad and balanced education which in large measure caters for their interests, aptitudes and particular needs. It provides good, and sometimes very good, opportunities for enrichment through a wide range of sporting, cultural and other activities.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- All students have equal access to the curriculum and, therefore, there are no significant barriers to learning.

- International education and the cross curricular-projects resulting from the Ghana link permeate the curriculum and are a strength of the school.
- Students have access to a very good range of activities outside the school day and their participation in sport, music and drama is very good.
- Support for students with special educational needs is good.
- Cross-curricular provision for ICT has improved in Years 7 to 9, but shortcomings still remain in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

48. Overall, the curriculum is broad and balanced and provides equally for all students. The wide range of subjects has an appropriate amount of time and all statutory requirements are met, other than that for a daily act of collective worship. Every effort is made to ensure that all students have equal access to the curriculum, so that, for instance, almost all students learn a modern foreign language for five years. Although the range of subjects offered in Years 10 and 11 is wide, the school does not provide vocational courses at this level.
49. Within subjects, provision is very good in English and religious studies and good in all other subjects except design and technology, modern foreign languages and ICT, where it is satisfactory. Cross-curricular provision for ICT has improved in Years 7 to 9 but is still weak in Years 10 and 11, particularly in respect of data logging and control. It is not monitored adequately and there is no mechanism for teaching more advanced skills. However, the school has already acknowledged this and is currently working to put in place more rigorous monitoring procedures. Most subjects provide revision and support classes at lunchtime or after school and the curriculum is enriched by visits and by speakers from outside the school.
50. A strength of the school is the emphasis given to international education and in particular the very strong links with Pampawie in Ghana. Work related to the link is found in the schemes of work of all subjects so that Pampawie becomes very real to the students. The link and the activities associated with it make a considerable contribution not only to students' knowledge of life in a Third World country but also to their personal development. Other examples of the ways in which the school is constantly looking outward are the study visits and work experience in France and Germany, visits to the battlefields of the First World War by those studying the literature and history of the period, a geography field trip to Iceland, a study visit to Rome by students of religious studies and a study visit to Paris by students of history.
51. Provision for students with special educational needs is good. The school has a good screening process, good use is made of individual education plans, and learning support assistants provide effective in-class help. Learning support assistants willingly give up spare time to assist with programmes to promote learning; for example, in reading, spelling, writing and numeracy. Where support is absent for a lesson, such as French, design and technology or ICT, or when a student needs to catch up with class or homework, study groups are arranged to counteract the problem.
52. Students in Year 10 have a range of choices in work experience and link college courses offer a variety of interest for older students, including website design, media/performing arts, wood or brick trade, childcare, hair and beauty. Vocational

courses have proved very successful for students with special educational needs, who have a chance to achieve well.

53. The school deliberately does not formally identify the gifted and talented but expects that their needs will be catered for by the setting of more challenging tasks in individual subjects – an expectation that is usually but not always met in all classes.
54. The school has a comprehensive scheme for personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) which deals effectively with sex and relationships education and the problems of drugs and alcohol abuse. Citizenship has been imaginatively planned within the schemes of work for history, geography and religious education and within the tutorial programme. This works well, particularly in Years 7-9, although the programme for some students in Years 10 and 11 is not as comprehensive.
55. The opportunities provided by sport, music, drama and other activities are a strength of the school; they make an important contribution to students' wider education and moral, social and cultural development. The many music-making groups and the good provision for instrumental playing enhance students' aesthetic experience considerably. The range of sporting activities is considerable and rates of participation are high. The school enjoys considerable success in competitions, particularly in gymnastics. Other activities include the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme.
56. The match of teachers and support staff to the curriculum is very good. Staff are well qualified and the school does much to support unqualified staff on the graduate teaching programme. Teaching assistants are well deployed and effectively used in classrooms. The school provides part-time counsellor support to students. Technical support and the work of all other support staff ensure that the administration and management of the school are very effectively achieved.
57. Accommodation is satisfactory. The school has had some success in refurbishing and revising room allocation to better meet the needs of teaching and learning. The superb accommodation for drama and the refurbished art block are example of this success. Accommodation has not kept pace with the success and growth of the school over recent years and as a result, subjects such as humanities and modern foreign languages, although having an adequate core of rooms, need to use temporary accommodation. Other departments cope with similar pressures. The successful music department is struggling to function adequately in rooms which are too small for group work and practice rooms which are insufficient to meet the needs of the large numbers of students learning instruments. Similarly in English and mathematics, the creation of more teaching groups has exacerbated an already tight situation, resulting in groups being taught outside of the specialist rooms.
58. RESOURCES ARE GOOD IN MOST SUBJECTS; THERE IS, FOR EXAMPLE, MUCH BETTER PROVISION FOR ICT AND THE RECENT INTRODUCTION OF TABLET COMPUTERS IN MANY SUBJECTS IS ALREADY MAKING A STRONG IMPACT ON TEACHING AND LEARNING. THE SCHOOL'S LIBRARY/STUDY CENTRE IS AN ATTRACTIVE SPACE AND IS VERY WELL ORGANISED AND MANAGED BY THE LIBRARIAN. AS A MEMBER OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING FORUM, THE LIBRARIAN MAKES A STRONG CONTRIBUTION TO THE SCHOOL'S ENCOURAGEMENT OF STUDENTS TO DEVELOP RESEARCH AND INDEPENDENT LEARNING SKILLS. THE SERIOUSNESS WITH WHICH STUDENTS USE THE LIBRARY IS AN INDICATOR

OF THE IMPACT OF THE SCHOOL'S FOCUS ON DEVELOPING READING AND RESEARCH SKILLS.

Example of outstanding practice

The planning of the school's international work is an outstanding example of how to organise and plan the curriculum to embrace an international dimension.

The link with Pampawie (Ghana) was established in 1999. So far there have been eight study visits, involving 19 teachers, 12 from Polesworth and 7 from Pampawie. All the visits have been evaluated, disseminated and published in attractive brochures. The project has been fully evaluated by the co-ordinator. The link has had a profound effect on the individuals involved, the school ethos and departmental activity. It has broadened the outlook of the students. The Ghana project permeates all areas of the school. Each department has some curriculum activity planned in association with the project. As a result, all students come across Pampawie, and it acquires a reality which other case studies do not always have. Students develop an insight into the reality of everyday life in Ghana. The effect on students' personal growth is considerable. A garden on the school site designed to be a space for quiet reflection is a focal point for students. This year a mixed age group of students will be visiting the link school in Ghana.

Sixth form

59. The sixth form curriculum is good. The school offers a good range of AS and A-level subjects, a range further enhanced by the vocational courses offered in conjunction with a local college in subjects such as engineering, hairdressing, health and social care and leisure and recreation. All students also follow a personal, social and health education course, and A-level students also complete a general studies course. Students have access to a good range of extra-curricular activities.
60. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are satisfactorily accommodated in the main school, with the exception of sociology and psychology, where the accommodation is unsatisfactory. The rooms for these subjects are too small for the number of students, which has a negative impact on teaching and learning.

Care, guidance and support

Pastoral care is very strong. The provision of advice, support and guidance based on monitoring is very good. The school involves students in its work and development very well. Arrangements for students' care, welfare, health and safety are generally good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are very successful arrangements to settle new students into Year 7 and to prepare students for the demands of work at Year 10 and beyond.
- Students feel very confident and secure in their learning because they receive very good advice, support and guidance, underpinned by a very strong pastoral system and access to external support.
- They form very good, trusting relationships with adults because of the school's very strong family ethos.

- Students feel valued because their views are taken seriously and they are very well involved in whole-school matters.
- There are a few safety hazards and access to certain areas of the school is restricted for wheelchair users.

Commentary

61. Parents are rightly very pleased with the school's induction arrangements. The Anker Valley Partnership of schools is firmly established. Liaison and transfer arrangements are very good. Schools work together very successfully in organising Year 6 workshops in different subjects. This gives Year 6 students an early chance to mix with their prospective peers at Polesworth High School. The school provides prospective students with very good chances to experience the learning routines at induction days. Students in Year 9 are given very good guidance about their options and work demands in Year 10.
62. The school has made good improvements to the provision of advice, support and guidance since the last inspection. The pastoral support system is organised very well, with senior managers, heads of year, form tutors, support staff and external agencies making a very good contribution to achievement and personal development. The achievement of all students, including those with special educational needs, is monitored very effectively. Students are involved very well in setting future learning goals in all subjects through the target-setting fortnight. These targets are then reviewed periodically to ensure progress. Personal development is monitored very effectively through the support and advisory service. The group includes an assistant headteacher, school counsellor, careers advisers, youth service officers and school nurse. The assistant headteacher provides very strong leadership and management of this group.
63. Guidance on further study and careers is very good overall. Teachers work very effectively with colleges and universities regarding opportunities in further and higher education. All year groups receive careers education from tutors through courses in personal, social and health education. The Connexions agency provides very good support in lessons and also deals with staff, self and peer referrals.
64. Students confirm that the school has a very strong family ethos, underpinned by very good, trusting relationships between students and staff. These factors give students much confidence in raising any concerns or worries they may have.
65. The school council provides many chances for students to develop their confidence and speaking skills as they represent their peers and learn about democracy and decision-making. It is pleasing to see that the school has taken on board many of their views and ideas, for instance, regarding summer uniform, the provision of music in the toilets, and the development of a memorial garden in the school grounds. Members of the council are involved in interviewing new staff – an excellent example of the extent to which students' views are valued.
66. The school has maintained the quality of its provisions for health and safety since the last inspection. Arrangements for child protection and for those in public care are good. The designated officer for child protection is fully trained and teachers receive

good written guidance about their role and the school's procedures. General health and safety risk assessments are undertaken as required. Arrangements for first aid and fire procedures are good. Inspectors are concerned about ventilation and dust extraction inadequacies in design and technology classrooms. Also, there is no lift in one of the classroom blocks, presenting a problem for wheelchair users.

67. The school effectively provides for students with special educational needs. Close and valued support from the local education authority and outside agencies strengthens this. Contact with the speech and language therapist has been particularly beneficial. Staff training is ongoing and impressive. Individual students' progress is recorded daily and used to underpin future work. Frequent meetings between department and relevant mainstream staff ensure understanding and awareness of students' needs. Students are tested regularly, especially in reading and comprehension, to promote development in literacy. Students are aware of targets and respond to them positively.

Sixth form

68. Arrangements for the transfer and induction of students into the sixth form are very good. For instance, much very well-presented information is given at Year 11 and an open evening is available. An induction day encourages good study techniques and independent learning skills. Support and guidance are very good because of the very effective leadership and management of the sixth form by the director of studies. Sixth form tutors and subject staff work very well together to monitor their students' achievements. Any individual learning problems are quickly identified and additional support provided. These factors are effective in raising achievement. Information about higher education and careers advice in the sixth form is very good.
69. The sixth form student committee is very well involved in many aspects of the school and sixth form. It has a sizeable budget and has made very good improvements to the sixth form block by way of redecorating and refurbishment. The committee organised a very successful talent show recently for main school students and is currently liaising with sixth form tutors to introduce changes to the use of tutorial time.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has a very effective partnership with parents and the wider community, including other schools and colleges. The school has maintained its links with parents and made good improvements to links with the community and other schools since the last inspection.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents have a very high regard for the school because they are valued and consulted very well as partners in the education of their children.

- They make a very good contribution to the school and their children's learning because they receive very good information about the school and their children's progress.
- Very good links to the local and wider community help enrich the curriculum and support learning very well.
- Very good links with other schools, colleges and universities have a very positive effect on transfer arrangements into Year 7 and on learning in other year groups.

Commentary

70. The school is a very important focal point in the community. A questionnaire is sent to parents periodically and this is very well used to consult parents, enabling them to influence policies and identify issues. The school has four parents' associations based on the house system. Parental views and ideas are discussed frequently at the overarching liaison committee, chaired by an assistant headteacher, with parent representatives from each association.
71. Parents are very well informed about the school through the prospectus, handbook for parents, regular newsletters and issues of 'update'. There is also very good information through booklets and evenings covering induction, residential/field trips and study options at Year 10. Parents receive much individual information through their children's planners. Students' annual reports provide a helpful picture of how well they are doing in all subjects.
72. The parents' associations support the school very well by organizing many social and fundraising events. The groups regularly provide money for the school to spend on additional resources such as computer software, audio, visual and other equipment. Some parents help with various school events, for instance, they assist with musical productions and concerts. Students' planners show that most parents support their children's learning very well at home.
73. Polesworth High School and Pampawie Junior Secondary School in Ghana are recognised for their excellence in leading good practice for 'interaction, interdependence and identity' by the Department for Education and Skills. The inspection team found much evidence of the very positive effect of this link on achievement in almost all subjects. Teachers frequently take opportunities to enhance learning by reference to Ghana. The impact on personal development and students' understanding of the customs, values and beliefs of a contrasting culture is excellent. The school's leadership in developing the link in Ghana is outstanding.
74. Local businesses provide many donations to the school and one sponsors the students' planners. Many act as hosts for work-related experiences, undertake mock interviews to give students practice, or support the annual industry days. Members of the education business partnership conduct interviews for prefects and train them. Very good links with the sports centre enable students to make best use of its facilities during and after school. Many links support students' welfare. An excellent example is the successful partnership between the Youth Service, Connexions and staff in developing and implementing the *ban da bully* scheme. Visits and visitors enrich learning very well. For instance, school trips include art galleries, theatres, museums, environmental areas and science centres. The school puts much back into

the community. The school is very successful in fundraising for charities and good causes and also accommodates many local clubs and youth groups on its premises.

75. Extensive links with primary schools through the Anker Valley Partnership ensure a smooth transition into Year 7. There are also particularly effective links established through the special educational needs co-ordinator. Shared activities with a special school have led to greater understanding and improved opportunities. Three students from the special school, for example, take part in drama lessons with Year 10 each week. Their progress is impressive, and a good example of the school's commitment to inclusion.

Sixth form

76. Parental partnerships are also very good in the sixth form. The sixth form has a separate brochure and this provides very good information about what is on offer. There is much information about options and courses of study open to students. Information to parents about their children's progress and standards is good. Links with universities, colleges and the wider community are very strong. For instance, one university gives lectures in revision skills at school and others give students a very good insight into university life and how to best present their university application forms. There is a very good partnership with Tamworth College, enabling many students to complement their sixth form studies with vocational skills training. Visits and visitors support learning in the sixth form very well. Field trips include parts of France, Iceland and Rome. The police now lead a driver awareness course in school for Year 12. This includes citizenship elements and input from parents in the community who have suffered bereavement through the careless driving of others.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall, leadership and management are very good. Inspirational and clear-sighted leadership by the headteacher ensures that his vision for the school's development is shared by the whole community. He is very well supported by his deputy and senior team, who work very effectively alongside governors and managers at all levels. Management is good and increasingly effective. The work of governors is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The outstanding leadership of the headteacher inspires the confidence of the whole school.
- Monitoring and self-evaluation procedures need greater consistency at subject level to ensure they are fully effective.
- There is an impressive commitment to the inclusion of all students.

Commentary

77. Leadership and management are very good. The school's ambition is marked by its improving standards of achievement and teaching since the last inspection, and its continuing drive for ever higher standards. Students thrive on the opportunities the school provides. The school has a number of awards for its work, including an

outstanding practice award from Investors in People, and most recently, the International School Award from the British Council.

78. The headteacher's appointment some eight years ago was transformational in moving the school forward. His excellent and inspirational leadership is the fulcrum for the school's determined drive for further improvement. He is clear about the direction of the school and his vision is widely shared. The school's values are well established, and his commitment to embracing new ideas and approaches has created a school culture of self-review and development.
79. Key to the success of the school has been the establishment of a climate of trust in which professional issues are discussed openly and supportively. This, alongside very good relationships at all levels and an insistence on taking ownership of and delegating responsibility for the implementation of initiatives, has led to a strongly professional management ethos.
80. The school is confident in its successes, but is never complacent. Governors and staff are continually seeking ways to secure further improvements. The headteacher's approach has successfully gained the full support and co-operation of the staff. He is well supported by his deputy, assistant headteachers and members of the leadership group, whose experience and expertise complement each other and provide the school with effective role models of good management. The leadership group is a strong focus for development in the school. Only recently re-structured, it has been instrumental in enabling the school to tackle issues more dynamically and with greater levels of consultation. Senior staff have a good understanding of standards through their monitoring of provision.
81. Management at other levels is also good and heads of department are providing effective leadership of their subjects, working hard to maintain high standards and secure improvements in teaching and learning, based on a careful evaluation of standards. Heads of year are also offering very good leadership of their teams. Line management meetings with senior staff are held regularly and are purposeful and useful opportunities to raise issues and review the work of their teams. Lines of communication are effective and staff feel that their ideas and views are valued. The re-designation of heads' of departments meetings as the Teaching and Learning Forum is symptomatic of the school's wish to place teaching and learning at the heart of its work.
82. The school has good procedures in place to monitor and review its provision. The annual school improvement plan grows organically from the regular cycle of monitoring, review and performance management, and all staff and governors are involved. Professional development is planned to integrate effectively with perceived school and departmental needs. Although the rigour and effectiveness with which heads of department are involved in monitoring the work of their teams are not consistently good, the school is moving effectively to becoming a fully self-evaluating institution. While the management of both English and mathematics is exemplary, not all other subjects monitor with the same degree of rigour and regularity.
83. The very good leadership and very effective management of the learning support department contribute strongly to its success. All members of the team work extremely hard and display considerable skill. Teamwork is evident. The special

educational needs co-ordinator has thorough knowledge of and experience in this area of education, showing an instinctive awareness of needs. Documentation is very thorough and up to date. Work is carefully monitored. The co-ordinator has motivated and organised the efficient support link with other schools and vocational studies. A recently-appointed assistant co-ordinator is bringing her own expertise to add strength to the department. The department has strong backing from across the school and the governing body.

84. Governors are committed and hard working. They bring a very good range of experience and professional expertise to the school's governance. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses through their detailed and comprehensive discussions of the school's work in committee and full governors' meetings. Governors are confident in their ability to question and challenge the headteacher and senior staff. Statutory requirements are met, except with regard to the provision of a daily act of collective worship. In relation to collective worship, governors have reviewed the situation carefully but have decided that they cannot fully meet requirements, given the school's accommodation and individual staff conscience. Regular assemblies of a good quality are held, and overall standards are not being affected by the governors' decision.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	4,179,297	Balance from previous year	85,850
Total expenditure	4,111,864	Balance carried forward to the next year	154,141
Expenditure per student	3,255		

85. The school's budget is very well managed, and the school provides very good value for money. Governors have a very good overview of the budget and are regularly updated with clear monitoring statements. The school applies best-value principles and is careful to explore the market and compare tenders. School maintenance, cleaning and catering are now all provided in-house, enabling better value for money, higher standards and a greater flexibility. Designated funds, including those for special educational needs and staff training, are used well. Measures to introduce workplace reform have been thoughtfully implemented.

Sixth form

86. Leadership of the sixth form by the director of studies is very good. Governors and senior staff share a clear vision for its development. Decisive and successful action has been taken to improve standards and recruitment. Management of the sixth form is good. Day-to-day management by the director of the sixth form is effective. It ensures that students' attendance is very good and contributes to their very positive attitudes. Induction of students to the sixth form is effectively managed. Students have confidence in the management and many more students now enter the sixth form than at the last inspection in 1999. Sixth form performance is evaluated well. The monitoring of teaching and standards of work is managed as a part of the systems operative across the whole school, and although arrangements are good, as in the main school, they are not consistent enough to ensure that best practice is fully shared. Courses are cost effective; best-value principles are well applied.

WORK-RELATED LEARNING

The school's provision for work-related learning (WRL) is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are guided to a good understanding of the workplace through comprehensive and growing opportunities to experience the world of work.
- The contribution of different subjects to the overall provision has not been audited.

Commentary

87. Students' achievements in activities related to the work place are good. They are learning some of the skills and attitudes which are necessary, and gaining a good understanding of "real world" situations through the well-planned programme. All the main aspects of the national framework for work-related learning are covered within the careers and education guidance programme taught to all students in Years 10 and 11. All students have two weeks work experience and the programme has been accredited by the local education partnership. Employers are involved and provide testimonials for all students. Year 10 students have a business enterprise day to work with business personnel. Year 10 students are involved in submitting application forms for the posts of prefect team leaders and prefects and are interviewed by local business personnel, followed by a one-day management training course off the school site. A number of students in Years 10 and 11 are offered one day per week vocational courses at a local college. This has proved an effective way of motivating and engaging some students with a relevant curriculum. There are very strong and well-established links with the Connexions service, who have an input into the personal, social and health education programme in Years 10 and 11.
88. Leadership and management of work-related opportunities are good. The co-ordinator is committed and hard working. The programme is well organised, although as yet, the contribution of subjects is variable, and no audit has been undertaken to establish the contribution each might make. The school is continually seeking ways to extend its provision, and an important priority for the school is ensuring the relevance of all courses in Years 10 and 11.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Consistently very good teaching in all years results in very good achievement by students of all abilities.
- Students make very good progress in relation to their prior attainment and standards at GCSE are well above average.

- Outstanding leadership of the subject has led to the production of excellent schemes of work and teaching resources by the department.
- Some students in Years 10 and 11 are not clear about the targets they should be aiming for at GCSE.

Commentary

89. In national tests at age 14, standards in English have generally been above the national average, although results in 2003 were average. Both boys and girls do well. Compared to their prior attainment, students achieve results which are well above average. Students' attainment in English is better than it is in mathematics and science.
90. Results in both English language and literature at GCSE in 2003 were well above average. Results rose again significantly in 2004. This is impressive because almost all students are entered for literature. Girls attain significantly better than boys in both subjects but boys attain very much better than do boys nationally.
91. In work seen during the inspection, standards are above average at the end of both Years 9 and 11. Attainment on entry is below average so students' achievement in Years 7 to 9 is very good in relation to their prior attainment. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is also very good in relation to their attainment at 14. Students achieve better on average in English than they do in other subjects. Those with special educational needs are well supported and achieve as well as other students. Speaking and listening skills are above average and develop very well. Teachers use questions very well and students are keen to answer. Many examples of good practice introducing key words were observed during the inspection. Reading skills are also above average and are strongly promoted through the emphasis in teaching on developing research skills. Writing skills are above average but are less strong than other aspects.
92. Teaching is very good overall. Consistently high standards of teaching are a strength of the department. Teachers have a very good command of the subject and a very good range of teaching skills. Lessons are well planned, brisk and challenging for students of all abilities. Much thought has gone into the development of teaching, using elements derived from the National Literacy Strategy and the National Strategy for English at Key Stage 3 (Years 7-9). These have been worked skilfully into very effective lesson plans and exceptionally good teaching materials developed by the department. Other skills like research, reading skills and ICT skills are very well taught by the department. Students enjoy their lessons. They respond positively to the very good teaching and no time is lost because of poor concentration or bad behaviour. The marking of students' work is generally very good and they receive helpful guidance on how to improve. The marking of students' work in Years 7 to 9 is very good, with excellent attention to spelling, punctuation and grammar. The scrutiny of GCSE assignments indicated that comments on the work of the highest-attaining students could have been more searching. Comments gave good guidance on what they should do to improve in the short term but some Year 11 students were not as clear as they should have been about their examination targets.

93. Leadership of the subject is excellent and is a major factor in the improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. There is a vision and a shared commitment to comprehensive education which is based on doing the best for all students and which is driving up standards. The quality of the leadership has resulted in exceptionally good collaboration in the department to produce very high quality teaching resources for all years. This supports teaching and curriculum development and extends students' learning beyond the classroom. Management of the subject is excellent. Teachers share high morale and high standards and are proud of what they help the students to achieve. There are very effective arrangements to monitor and share good practice within the department. There are very good links with partner schools, resulting in a very good curriculum for students joining the school.
94. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. The department has a very positive but professionally critical approach to self-evaluation, which promises well for sustained improvement in the future.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

95. Provision to raise the standards of students' reading and writing skills is very good and is central to their very good achievement in their lessons. Thoughtful surveys have identified the strengths and weaknesses of students, for example, the need for more personal writing in factual accounts. These have led to subject departments adapting their own literacy targets.
96. The level of vocabulary used in religious education lessons, for example, was very high in all years and resulted in a high level of discussion of ideas. In many subjects, students discuss ideas well in small groups and can report accurately on their findings. In design and technology lessons, students gave good oral presentations on their work in progress.
97. Reading skills develop very well. A Year 9 geography class enjoyed Bill Bryson's description of Blackpool and his comic style of "factual writing". A Year 9 English class working on a ghost story where the dead person sees the living as ghosts read the story with such intelligent attention to the clues and they guessed the end well before they should have done. The library is an excellent resource, with excellent support from the librarian, and is well used by all subjects. The English department organises courses in reading and research skills that have expanded to include use of ICT and the Internet. The impact of this work is evident in the confident way in which many students approach independent study.
98. Writing skills develop well but less so than the other skills. In science lessons, students who were good orally were not given sufficient opportunities for extended writing. In many subjects the quality of written work is reduced when spelling errors are not corrected. However, low-attaining students in English make very good progress because they are required to do a lot of extended personal writing. In history, students receive very well planned guidance in building up written answers from notes into essays.

Modern foreign languages

Provision in German is **satisfactory**; in French it is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Not enough attention is given to the development of communicative skills, particularly in French
- The teaching of French is unsatisfactory.
- All students learn a modern foreign language to age 16.
- Consistent use of the foreign language by teachers ensures that students achieve good standards in listening skills.

Commentary

99. Assessments at the end of Year 9 indicate that the proportion of students gaining the expected Level 5 is in line with the national average but that the proportion gaining the higher Level 6 is below average. In 2003, GCSE results were below average in both French and German, and in both languages, the proportion gaining A* or A was significantly below the national average. Girls performed better than boys. Results improved in 2004, and German standards were about average, but those in French remained below average.
100. Current standards in both Years 9 and 11 are average in German and below average in French, and reflect recent GCSE results. They are strongest in listening and reading, and weakest in speaking and writing. The quality of writing varies widely, particularly in Years 10 and 11, where the best work displays a good command of grammar and sound range of vocabulary. In Years 7 to 9, students do not have enough opportunities to write at length in order to develop their writing skills. The poor standards of lower-attaining students are linked to an acceptance of poor standards of presentation. Listening skills are well developed because all teachers use French or German for classroom communication. Even lower-attaining students are able to extract information from simple texts spoken at near-normal speed. Standards in speaking are below average in both languages throughout the school. Students do not have enough opportunities to develop confidence by communicating with each other in realistic situations. By Year 11, many are hesitant, have poor pronunciation and cannot sustain a conversation on a prepared topic.
101. Achievement at the end of both Year 9 and 11 is satisfactory in German and unsatisfactory in French. In German, higher-attaining students do not reach the standards of which they are capable. Students with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily.
102. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory in German but unsatisfactory in French. Although some good and very good teaching was seen, two lessons in French were unsatisfactory. The strengths of the teaching are: the consistent use of French or German by the teachers; well-organised lessons where the objectives are stated clearly and reviewed at the end of the lesson; and the very good relations that exist between the teachers and students. As a result, students are almost always attentive, concentrate well and do their best. Where lessons are less effective, there is too much emphasis on grammar at the expense of communication, and over-emphasis on translation and not enough pair work mean that most students do not become confident speakers. Teaching does not always take sufficient account of the range of abilities in the class, so that lower-attaining students are discouraged and higher-attaining students are not challenged. The quality of marking varies but the best is

thorough and analytical, indicating to students how they might improve their work. Regular assessments are carried out and related to National Curriculum criteria, but some of the assessments are not accurate and should be moderated.

103. The quality of leadership is good and management is satisfactory. The head of department leads by example; she has a clear vision for the future development of the subject and of current priorities but does not always receive sufficient support. The head of department does not have enough time and some tasks are not carried out as thoroughly as they might be; checking books and monitoring assessment, for example. Teaching is monitored regularly, but the effect on teaching quality has been patchy. The analysis of recent examination results has led to new strategies to improve the quality of speaking, which have had some effect in German, if not in French.
104. The curriculum is satisfactory and is enhanced by very successful visits abroad, including work experience. Resources are good, as is the main accommodation, but the location of two classrooms at the far end of the school is a distinct disadvantage in terms of maintaining communication and sharing resources. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

MATHEMATICS

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership is excellent, supported very well by an excellent team of teachers.
- Management is excellent; improvement since the last inspection is very good.
- Teaching and learning are very good, so the achievement of students is very good.
- Standards seen in the inspection are above average.

Commentary

105. In 2003, standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 were average, and well above the average of similar schools. Standards are improving in line with national trends, and performance improved slightly in 2004. In 2003, GCSE standards were average for the number of students with grades A* - C, and above average for the number of students earning a grade. Boys and girls performed equally well. Performance was similar in 2004, except that girls' performance exceeded that of the boys. Performance in mathematics was not as good as other subjects in 2003.
106. Standards seen in the inspection are above average in Year 9. Innovation in the curriculum and the new teaching arrangements in Years 8 and 9 are raising standards at all levels. More students are at the level expected for their age as well as at the higher levels. Achievement is very good compared to the below-average attainment levels of students on entry to the school. Standards seen in the inspection are above average in Year 11. Students are now better prepared for their coursework examination than has been the case before. Students are confident in their ability to manipulate algebraic expressions, to recognise and describe patterns, and talk about the methods they have used to do calculations. There is also an increased focus on the attainment of those students close to the GCSE grade C boundary. Achievement is very good. Standards of literacy are average, although low-attaining students have difficulty with the comprehension of mathematical problems set. Standards in ICT are average. There is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls, students with

special needs, gifted and talented students and those from different ethnic backgrounds. Standards have improved since the last inspection.

107. Teaching is very good overall, which is why students learn very well. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. The groupings of students for teaching purposes in Year 7 make it difficult for the less experienced teachers to ensure that the needs of all the students in the class are met. The needs of students in other years are met. The support for students with special needs is very good in lessons as teachers work very well with support staff. The strength of the teaching lies in the very good subject expertise of the teachers, the expectation and challenge to students in their work and the encouragement and engagement of students in their learning. The students behave very well and have very good attitudes to their work, which helps in their learning. In the excellent teaching seen, students are asked to explain their solutions to problems. This is excellent practice as the process consolidates their learning, in the solution of algebraic problems, for example.
108. Leadership by the key members of staff is excellent, providing an innovative approach to the presentation of the curriculum, an inspiration for the department and a leading example in the classroom. The use of in-service training has been very effective in maintaining the very good levels of teaching reported at the last inspection. The problem-solving exercises in Year 8 are a particularly interesting feature of the department's work, helping to raise the profile of the subject within the school. Management is also excellent, having established very good staffing levels and appropriate teaching arrangements, with good support for the teaching staff. The reduction in class size has placed a strain on the accommodation, resulting in some teachers using a large variety of different classrooms, so limiting their use of the department's good resources. Improvement since the last inspection is very good.

Mathematics across the curriculum

109. Standards are above average in mathematics across the curriculum. In science, students interpret graphs well. Data handling and basic number handling are good. Mathematics makes a good contribution in art through print making in particular, as the ability to cut a stencil demands a high level of abstract visualisation. Standards are also above average in ICT. In geography, mathematics is used well; data analysis is good, with examples of calculations of correlation coefficient in coursework, for example. Appropriate references to mathematics are included in the very good scheme of work. Standards are average in design and technology. Computer-aided design is a good aspect of the teaching, developing spatial awareness well. Number work is above average overall.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' very good subject knowledge ensures thoroughly planned and well-focused lessons.
- A good range of teaching styles and activities helps students concentrate and use time effectively.
- Very good relationships enhance learning by creating a positive climate for learning.
- Where ICT is used, it supports learning well, but opportunities are too limited.
- Skills for independent learning are not fully developed.
- Assessment and target setting needs to focus teachers and students more clearly on progress made and next steps in learning.

Commentary

110. The achievements of students by the end of Year 9 are very good and build well on the standards on entry, which are below average. This very good achievement is reflected in the end-of-Year 9 tests, where results in 2003 were above average. Achievements of students by the end of Year 11 are very good and are reflected in above-average standards in GCSE examinations. Standards of work seen were above average at the end of Year 9 and 11 and reflect the targets set. These targets, however, need to include a greater degree of challenge to raise standards further. The very good quality of teaching and range of learning activities are contributing to raising standards.
111. Many students start Year 7 with a sound knowledge base and a range of investigative skills upon which they are able to build. They are keen to learn and when well taught, rise to the challenge and make good progress. In Year 9, students are confident with science ideas, apparatus and data but are not so confident in the use of scientific terminology. This means that they do not communicate their findings well in their written work. In Year 11, students achieve very well, with all students achieving a pass grade and nearly two-thirds at the higher grades. They are able to apply their learning to a range of contexts. For example, in a very good lesson on production of ammonia, they were able to understand the process and its application in an industrial context.
112. Teaching and learning throughout the school are very good and characterised by fast pace, a good variety of activities and enthusiasm and hard work of students. In the less effective teaching, activities are mundane and lack real challenge and the students are over-directed by the teacher. As a result, students do not take enough responsibility for planning and organising their own learning. Marking is sound although sometimes the teachers comments are not sufficiently clear about what needs improving. Teaching in Years 10 and 11 engages students well and often contains good, challenging activities. A very good year 11 lesson on rates of reaction, for example, involved students using their prior knowledge to make predictions about rates of reaction at different temperatures. They are able to make sketch graphs to illustrate this and can explain these with confidence. Teachers use new technologies including effectively presenting ideas and stimulating teaching. Effective questioning skills encourage students to discuss their ideas confidently. Relationships are very good throughout, creating a positive learning ethos within lessons.
113. Leadership is good. The new head of department has a clear vision for the department, is clear about the developments that need to take place and has made a good start. For example, revision of schemes of work has begun and staff have been identified to take the lead. Relationships are good and others with responsibilities are clear about what they are. Management is satisfactory. There is a lack of rigorous and systematic monitoring of teaching and learning to ensure that the very good practice seen in many lessons becomes the norm. Identified opportunities for ICT to be used within lessons by students to enhance their learning are too few and need developing. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- ICT is taught well through most subjects of the curriculum. As a result, students become confident and skilled users of ICT as a tool for learning and research.
- There are good network facilities, which are well and equitably used by the subject departments.
- The quality of technical support for the large range of equipment and software is very good.
- There are too few opportunities for students to develop their skills and understanding of computer sensing and control, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- Overall, this is a well-led cross-curricular subject, but there is insufficient time to manage all aspects well. As a result, there is a lack of consistency in the assessment of students' ICT progress in the various subjects.

Commentary

114. In Year 9, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected Level 5 in teacher assessments in the last three years has been above the national average, although the proportion gaining higher levels has varied. Girls did better than boys in each of these years.
115. The standards of work seen in Years 7 to 9 are above average, and students' achievements are good. All groups achieve well, because the teaching which is done entirely through other subjects concentrates on developing students' skills, knowledge and understanding, including their ability to evaluate why their decisions are good ones. As a consequence, students take trouble over getting good information, making judgements about which software to use, about how to present numeric data and about the use of colour, graphics and layout, and so they become quite adept even in Year 7. There is a lack of consistency in teaching sensing and control, which is limiting the students' potential for achieving the highest levels.
116. In Years 10 and 11 the standards seen overall are average and pupils' achievement overall is satisfactory. Over half the boys and girls demonstrate very good levels of skill with word-processing, desktop publishing, spreadsheets, drawing and graphics, multimedia presentation, and use of the Internet as a research resource. Some lower-attaining students and students with special educational needs have developed their skills and speed above expectations because the teaching is stimulating. The power to think about issues in ICT is well developed by all the higher-attaining students and about half of the middle range of students in Year 11, to the extent that they can hold a mature debate about the impact of ICT on society, about the breakneck speed of technology change, about its impact on employment patterns and about the social dangers linked to Internet misuse. There is no opportunity to gain a specialist qualification at GCSE level.
117. The quality of teaching and learning is good; much is very good. A major strength of the teaching is the care and skill which is taken, in the lesson planning stage, to present ICT as a natural aspect of the subject's way of working. Therefore a new skill in, say, desktop publishing, is only taught in history because it is needed to produce a high quality document which will effectively communicate images and feelings about

life in Caesar's Rome to its audience. But teachers then develop students' thinking skills: "Why does that page layout communicate so well?" "Why have you used a pie chart rather than a bar chart to present these statistics about the poor in Rome?" "What other software could have done the job even better?" Students are very much at home with this approach and they appreciate the enrichment which ICT has brought. They feel good about being so productive and about achieving such quality in what they do. In consequence the pace of lessons is often brisk, the subject is enlivened and there is enjoyment and enthusiasm to be witnessed across the board from Year 7 to Year 11. Behaviour in such a fertile learning environment is very good.

118. Overall the subject is well led. The learning area manager is very clear about the direction in which the department is moving and how to reach targets quickly and efficiently. He successfully leads a large team and liaises well with other subject leaders and with the county support services for ICT. Management is satisfactory. The management of resources and the priorities for technical support are well thought out and the delivery of them is very good. However, there is insufficient monitoring of the quality of teaching and there is a lack of consistency in the assessment of students' progress. This is because there is insufficient time for the manager to lead in all aspects of the job thoroughly. With the exception of computer sensing and control in Years 10 and 11, there has been good improvement in ICT since the last inspection.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

119. The school teaches ICT skills and understanding through a cross-curricular approach, and all subjects make a carefully planned contribution. Increasing resources are enabling teachers to develop increasingly sophisticated approaches to learning through ICT and developing students' knowledge through real-life applications. The use of ICT across the curriculum is good.

HUMANITIES

History, geography and religious education were inspected in detail. Sociology was sampled.

120. An excellent Year 11 sociology lesson was observed. A group of students with a very broad range of prior attainment were supported very well in preparing for their coursework assignment. They built on their existing knowledge about primary and secondary research experience and by the end of the lesson all were confidently able to evaluate the individual statistical data they hope to use in comparison with their primary research topics on education and family life. Students used ICT well to support their research in a variety of ways, including constructing graphs from their own questionnaires. Very good rapport between the students and teacher allowed issues of covert observation and hidden assumptions to be aired, defusing potential stereotyping by humour and contributing very well to an understanding of citizenship.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students display very good attitudes to learning.
- There are very good opportunities for fieldwork throughout the school.
- Student use of ICT is good.

Commentary

121. Students enter the school with levels of attainment that are below average, although some students have better-than-average skills in geography. Teachers' assessments for 2003 showed that the percentage attaining national expectations were above average. GCSE results were broadly in line with national averages in 2003. Results in 2004 were very similar to those in 2003. In work seen, students are attaining above-average standards at the end of both Year 9 and Year 11. Achievement is good throughout the school. The gains in learning that have been made in the early years in the school are consolidated through Years 10 and 11. Students have a good geographical knowledge and understanding and display very good skills of data collection, display and analysis.
122. Teaching and learning are good in all years. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen during the inspection and several good and very good lessons were seen. The most successful lessons were those in which students' attention was quickly engaged, expectations were high and in which learning activities were varied, matched to students' learning needs and offered opportunities for independent learning. Students developed their skills in literacy through good speaking and listening activities, and their writing skills were helped by the provision of effective writing frames. Good teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants enabled students with special needs to make good progress through adapted tasks and careful monitoring of learning. Opportunities for independent learning were good in some lessons, allowing gifted and talented students to explore ideas in greater detail, but were weak in a minority of lessons. Some very good teacher use of ICT was observed and many students use ICT very effectively in producing homework and coursework assignments. Student attitudes to learning were very good or excellent in all lessons and the working atmosphere in classrooms was harmonious and purposeful, allowing students to make very good progress.
123. Leadership and management of the department are good. The acting head of department is leading the department with energy and commitment and consolidating the developments set in train by her predecessor. Schemes of work and the departmental handbook are detailed, assessment for learning is being implemented and teachers provide constructive comments in the marking of students' work as part of the whole-school policy. Although some of the students are aware of the level at which they are working, attainment data is not shared sufficiently with students. Fieldwork is included in the programmes of study throughout the school, including opportunities to visit Iceland and the Grand Canyon, enabling students to gain understanding at first hand.
124. Three of the geography rooms are spacious and well equipped with up-to-date ICT equipment, but one unsatisfactory room is some distance from the rest of the department and this restricts the use of ICT in teaching. The department resources

are satisfactory overall and the interactive tablet computers that are a recent addition to three of the classrooms allow some teachers to use ICT in lessons, enhancing the quality of teaching and learning.

125. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Attainment in all years has improved, the use of ICT in teaching and learning is now good and the popularity of the subject as a GCSE course has increased.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students attain many A* grades in GCSE examinations.
- Boys' results in GCSE examinations compare well with those that they gain in their other subjects, but girls do much better and greatly exceed the standards reached by all girls nationally.
- The teaching and learning are very good and students have very positive attitudes to the subject.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning is insufficient to ensure that the best practice is fully shared.

Commentary

126. When students enter the school in Year 7, their standards are a little below those expected nationally. By the end of Year 9, girls and boys from all social and ethnic backgrounds reach average standards. Students of all levels of competence, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in Years 7 to 9 and achieve well. They gain knowledge and understanding of many historical topics. For example, Year 7 students successfully relate their experience of doing Roman military drill and tactics when they write on this topic. Students analyse evidence increasingly well and use ICT effectively by Year 9.
127. By the end of Year 11, students' standards are above average. GCSE examination results are consistently above average and many students, especially girls, attain the highest grade. Girls and boys from all backgrounds achieve well overall. Girls' GCSE examination results are well above the standards attained by all girls nationally, and they perform better in this subject than they do in most of their other examination subjects. Boys do better in this subject than in most of the others that they take and reach standards in line with those of boys nationally. In Years 10 and 11, students' writing becomes increasingly well organised. Their presentation of work is usually very good, but often marred by errors of spelling. Coursework for the GCSE examination reveals much skill and competence in interpreting and evaluating evidence.
128. Teaching and learning are very good in all years. Teachers have a very good command of the subject and its examination requirements and enable students to learn very well. Teachers enliven the subject with imaginative methods and create, for example, a vivid sense of the uncertainty of life for young children working in the unhealthy and hazardous conditions of 19th century mines and factories. Teachers adapt work well for the needs of pupils, use a good range of methods and employ ICT

competently. They manage students very well through the very good relationships that they have with their classes. Objectives are not always made clear enough to students at the start of lessons. Although most lessons run at a brisk pace, students are sometimes given too long to complete an activity and the pace of learning slows too much. Work is marked and assessed well in Years 10 and 11, but in Years 7 to 9, in some cases, students are not given enough advice on how to improve and errors of spelling are not corrected consistently. Students enjoy the subject and respond very well to the teaching; large numbers choose to study it in Years 10 and 11.

129. The leadership of the subject is very good and has ensured good improvement since the last inspection. Leadership generates much sharing of imaginative and innovative ideas to make the subject a rewarding learning experience for students. There is very good teamwork among the very enthusiastic, hard-working team of teachers. Management is good, but monitoring of teaching is not extensive enough to ensure that the best practice is fully shared. There is, as yet, no rigorous approach to raising boys' attainment in GCSE examinations. Subject rooms are not all grouped together, and this is unhelpful to department co-ordination and access to resources.

Religious education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in teaching and learning are good in Years 7-9 and very good in Years 10 and 11.
- Teachers adopt lively and imaginative teaching styles that hold the student's interest.
- The students are interested in and enthusiastic about their work.
- More regular assessment of how students are progressing would help them understand how to improve.

Commentary

130. All students in Years 10 and 11 follow a short course GCSE. Results in 2003 were about average but declined in 2004. The department believes that this was due to the introduction of a coursework module and has this year re-designed the teaching of this aspect to allow more time.
131. Attainment at the end of Year 9 is above average and students' achievements are good. In Years 10 and 11, students' attainment is well above average and their achievements are very good. Year 7 students write imaginatively in their own words about some of the events and incidents surrounding the life and times of Jesus. They accurately distinguish between traditions and legends and have well-developed reference and research skills as they look at biblical evidence, in order to separate fact from fiction. Year 8 students know the meaning of the five Pillars of the Islamic faith and write sensitively about the significance of prayer to followers of Islam. In Year 9, students can successfully identify and define accurately the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path of Buddhism. Students make very good use of ICT and produce their own PowerPoint presentations on Buddhist philosophy, using Word Art competently.

They tackle the topic of suffering in some depth in whole-class, group and paired discussion, and their thinking skills are very well developed.

132. GCSE students engage in high quality discussions, using good quality resources to establish their knowledge and understanding of difficult religious, humanistic and atheistic concepts. Class and group discussions on the concept of evil and suffering are of a very high order. Discussions are open, frank and honest. The level of participation by students with special educational needs is particularly engaging as well as insightful. Students in responding to skilfully considered questions, become confident to reason, analyse and to question the meaning of statements associated with religious beliefs.
133. The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 7-9 and very good in Years 10 and 11, and is based on meticulous lesson planning and clearly identified objectives. Resources, including ICT resources and worksheets, prepared by the teachers are of very good quality and significantly help all students to achieve very good standards in their written work. The use of open-ended questioning techniques enables students to think for themselves and to offer sustained and articulate responses. Students concentrate well and are developing their thinking and research skills in positive ways. Teachers use good models of speech and the emphases throughout are on developing, in significant ways, students' literacy skills. Occasionally in Years 7-9, in a minority of lessons, teacher introductions are too long, with the students insufficiently actively engaged. Assessments are undertaken on the completion of units of work. More regular assessments at intervals, to identify the students' strengths and weaknesses as an ongoing process, could provide specific working targets for improvement.
134. The head of the religious education department displays very good leadership and managerial skills. All teachers are subject to regular monitoring, and professional development is at the heart of the department's work. Issues raised during the last inspection have been fully addressed, and overall improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is good, with much that is very good.
- Well-above-average examination performance in food technology and child development.
- Good relationships contribute to a positive student response to the subject.
- There is a collective vision for the teaching of design and technology across the department.
- Teaching is not monitored with sufficient rigour to ensure good practice is shared more widely.
- Standards in graphics in Years 10 and 11 are not high enough.

Commentary

135. In 2003 the GCSE results were average overall. Girls' results were above average for A grades, with boys and girls above average for B grades. In 2004, GCSE results in food technology were above average, textiles and resistant materials below average and graphics well below average. Recent examination performance has been broadly average. Child development results have been well above average over the last three years. Achievement in this subject is excellent.
136. Current standards in Year 9 are average. Attainment on entry is below average in terms of design and technology experience, and students' achievements are good throughout all years. A good range of ideas was seen in the Year 9 clock project, good use of ICT in research and presentation in a textiles project also in Year 9, and very neat work in a Year 8 exercise looking at batch production methods in food technology. Weaker work is mainly due to poorer presentational skills, drawings in pen and not pencil, no annotation, spelling errors and incomplete work. Current standards in Year 11 are average overall across the department. In food technology and child development, standards are well above average. Work in textiles and resistant materials shows average standards, and graphics below average. Very good work was seen in the healthy eating project in food technology, good work in the textiles exercise looking at beachwear accessories and a good appreciation of aesthetics and function in the jewellery project in resistant materials. These projects used ICT, colour, annotated drawings and good evaluations in the work. Weaker work has poorer presentational skills, design ideas not developed in detail, evaluations not linked to original specification or work incomplete. There are spelling errors in work across the department. Achievement is good overall and very good in food technology and child development. Practical work is of a good standard. In textiles, students were investigating African Art with a particular emphasis on Ghanaian art and 'Kente' fabric design, and students in food technology have planned a menu for a local restaurant. This exercise increased students' learning about the workplace and developed good social skills in Year 10.
137. The quality of teaching and learning is good, with some very good teaching seen. Good subject expertise, engagement of students in their learning, good use of time and resources and high expectations are some features of the most effective lessons. A Year 7 lesson increased students' awareness of African culture when designing and making a machine embroidery sample; a Year 9 lesson increased students' design thinking skills in research methodology and a Year 11 lesson enabled students to make considerable gains in learning about environmental factors in child development. Where lessons are not as good, there is a lack of challenge, insufficient planning for different ability levels in the class and students are off-task. In most lessons teachers use good questioning skills and good plenary sessions to reinforce learning. Literacy support is good, and technical language is used well. Students have good numeracy skills and ICT is used appropriately.
138. Leadership and management are good. A recently appointed head of department for the resistant materials area is working very closely with the head of food technology in promoting a cohesive team approach to developing a design and technology philosophy. Most issues from the last inspection have been addressed, but procedures to share best practice are not yet fully in place. The development plan is good with

appropriate priorities identified, and the assessment booklet used in Years 7 to 9 is a good support to students. Well-devised strategies are in place to improve standards in resistant materials and particularly in graphics. However, monitoring of teaching and learning is not sufficiently rigorous. Accommodation is satisfactory, but dust extraction is barely adequate at present.

139. Improvement since the last inspection is good. There has been an improving trend in examination performance and students achieve very well in some areas of the department. The use of data is now used to set appropriate targets and the coursework assessment sheets in Years 7 to 9 are a good support to learning. Industrial links have been established with a restaurant chain locally.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

140. Music, art and design were inspected in detail; drama was sampled. The quality of drama teaching is consistently very good. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are above average and achievement is very good. Attainment at GCSE is very high and students consistently attain standards well above the national levels for their age. In lessons they demonstrate a high level of drama skills and a mature ability to work with together in a range of challenging activities. Drama makes a very valuable contribution to the personal development of students and there is a very good range of extra-curricular opportunities, including theatre visits, actors visiting the school and an annual production involving more than eighty students in close collaboration with the music department. In addition to Drama Club, there is a Technicians' Club where students can learn lighting and sound skills.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are well above the national average for both girls and boys with the gap between them being less than that seen nationally.
- Teaching is very good and results in very good achievement.
- The very good leadership of the head of department enthuses students and teachers and promotes high standards.
- The assessment of Year 9 students' work needs to be more effectively moderated.
- Teaching is not monitored regularly enough to ensure strengths in the teaching are shared.

Commentary

141. 2003 GCSE results were well above average. Girls did better than boys but the gap between them is not as wide as that seen nationally. Students of all abilities achieve very well and over the past four years, high standards have been maintained.

142. Entering the school with widely differing experiences in art, all students make very good progress in Years 7 - 9, achieve very well and by the end of Year 9, standards are above average. In lessons and in the work of students in Year 9, standards seen were above average. Developing very good visual language skills, students respond to the world about them, exploiting the potential of such things as mark-making and

colour to produce well-considered compositions. Confidence in the use of different media is evident in their work, and strongly so when they exploit interesting media combinations.

143. In Years 10 and 11, the same high and well-above average standards seen in the GCSE results are evident and achievement is very good. Responding directly to the visual world, students use drawings well to identify strong compositional elements in, for example, landscape. Experimenting with colour and media, they refine their ideas and final pieces show how well they can use their own visual language in exciting combinations of colour, shape and texture. Work in textiles is equally interesting, exploiting the richness of fabrics and threads by weaving, appliquéing and by combining different materials in interesting ways. Design work in this course is less successful because it relies too heavily on secondary sources.
144. Teaching and learning are very good. The best teaching is rooted in the personal enthusiasm of the teacher, whose own interest in the visual world and the possibilities offered by different media are very well used to inspire and enthuse students. The calm, hard-working environment, which is a feature of most lessons, is a reflection of these enthusiasms and results in high standards and very good achievement. Relationships are very good and are built on mutual respect, which contributes significantly to all students being fully included and involved. This is particularly evident when students talk about their work in class, which they do with refreshing openness. Where learning is less successful, teachers control the outcome too tightly and give too little opportunity for students to use their own imagination. Students feel well informed about how well they are doing because of the good quality verbal feedback they receive. End of lesson discussions are not always well used to focus students' minds on what has been learned and how future work might develop. Assessing students at the end of Year 9 is less good because moderation is not well used; the result is that assessment levels for these students are too high.
145. The head of department is a very good role model and provides very good leadership. This is based on personal example and commitment to the subject. The art rooms reflect high standards of organisation and are interesting and well-ordered places in which to work. The broader management of the department is good but could be improved by more formal monitoring of teaching and learning, and by a more rigorous use of assessment data to help with more focused evaluation and review.
146. Very good improvements have been made since the last inspection. GCSE results have improved significantly and ICT, which was then non-existent, is now being well integrated into the work of all students. Students now have more opportunities to work in three dimensions, supported by the recent appointment of a sculptor.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching leads to very good achievement in all years.
- Good leadership and management.

- The very strong extra and extended curricular activities available.
- The opportunities on offer and take-up of instrumental and vocal tuition are very good.
- The lack of computers limits pupils' range of experiences in music.

Commentary

147. Standards in the GCSE examination have been well above average for the past few years and these high standards were maintained in 2004, with a good proportion of students achieving the highest grades. Teacher assessments for 2003 at the end of Year 9 indicate that standards were above average. In 2004 there was a slight dip in results. Standards seen during the inspection suggest that they are at least above average at the end of Year 9. This represents very good achievement from a broadly below-average intake in Year 7. In Year 9, students are confident performers, can echo blues phrases as a starter activity and perform their own raps. They can discuss their compositions and performances well, and suggest improvements as part of their assessment of their own and others' work in the class. Standards seen at the end of Year 11 are well above average and their achievement is very good. In Year 11, students can discuss different types of scales confidently and are able to perform to a very good standard. Compositions are well crafted, showing good technical knowledge of instruments and musical structures. Boys achieve as well as girls and students with special educational needs achieve well. The school's very strong instrumental provision has a very good effect on maintaining and enhancing the standards of work in music throughout the school.
148. Overall, teaching and learning are good in all years because teachers know their subject very well and have high expectations of students in terms of work and behaviour. In the best lessons, effective use is made of starter activities and the interactive whiteboard. Students show very good attitudes in music. They are well motivated and work well together in groups and as individuals. Although students have the opportunity to assess their own and others' work in class, students are not sufficiently clear about the assessment criteria to be used. Target setting is in its infancy and work needs to be carefully adapted to meet the needs of all students within the class. In Years 7 to 9, assessment criteria are not linked closely enough to National Curriculum programmes of study. There are insufficient computers in the department and this inhibits students' range of experiences in composing and performing activities.
149. Leadership and management are good. However, schemes of work are not detailed enough to identify assessment opportunities and the match of work to students of different abilities, particularly so in Years 7 to 9. Monitoring systems are not yet fully operational for both staff and students. A strength of the department is its extra and extended curricular activities, which are very good. Nearly a third of students have instrumental or vocal tuition on a range of different instruments ranging from orchestral to drum kit, keyboard, piano, voice and steel pans. The department is well supported by a team of ten experienced and dedicated peripatetic staff. Many students are learning several instruments and are working or have achieved the highest grades in external instrumental examinations. There are numerous concerts and performing opportunities for students, including Christmas and a Leavers' Concert and annual musical productions. These are supplemented by recital evenings and

lunchtime concerts and many students are heavily involved in the many instrumental groups run by the local education authority. The department makes a very important contribution to the cultural and social life of the school.

150. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The number of instrumentalists and singers having tuition has nearly doubled, GCSE and A-level courses are flourishing, standards have risen and effective links with primary schools have been developed. Resources have improved, other than computers. Accommodation remains inadequate, with only two teaching rooms and two practice rooms for a busy and growing department.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have positive attitudes to learning and their behaviour is very good.
- The quality of teaching is good, sometimes very good.
- Extra-curricular activities are a strength of the school.
- All staff have high expectations of dress, conduct and behaviour.
- Strategies to extend the more able in lessons need developing.
- The health-related fitness component in all lessons needs strengthening.

Commentary

151. Standards are above average. Boys and girls both attain higher-than-average standards. There are very high standards in girls' dance. Year 7 students at this early stage of the school year are showing developing higher standards, as seen in boys' gymnastics and girls' dance.
152. In 2003, teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were above the national average. All students follow the short course GCSE programme but standards are well below the national average. Work seen during the inspection, in Year 11 dance and Year 10 personal improvement plans, was around average and indicates improving standards. A sharper focus on the theoretical aspects of the course through the introduction, last September, of a student booklet could help to raise standards.
153. Standards seen during the inspection were above average at the end of Year 9. In dance, girls show clarity of movement, awareness of choreographic principles and how to achieve variety, developing expression and elevation. In Year 11, girls show fluency and expression. Year 8 boys in badminton show good understanding of the rules of the game, whilst boys in a Year 9 rugby lesson demonstrate good understanding of health and safety in the ruck. All

students in Years 7 -9 are developing awareness of the effects of exercise on the body, of the need to warm-up and how to warm-up effectively. They demonstrate good collaborative skills during student-led warm-ups.

154. Achievement is good in all years. Year 7 students in particular make rapid progress. Boys and girls both achieve well. Special needs students are well integrated and supported. As a result they make equally good progress. Higher attainers are not always challenged through extension tasks.
155. Teaching and learning are good, sometimes very good, especially in dance. Well-qualified, experienced teachers with a range of skills and competencies teach a wide-ranging curriculum. The organisation of lessons and the management of students are very good. Teachers have high expectations of dress, conduct and behaviour. There is an atmosphere of mutual respect in all lessons. Students have a very positive attitude to learning and respond very well to set tasks. They lead warm-ups, devise practices and take on leadership roles to develop independence. They work well together in collaborative activities, sharing ideas, and organise themselves and their equipment quickly. Lessons have good pace and keep students engaged, working productively with a high degree of activity, keeping the heart rate high. They develop confidence and their self-esteem is raised through their success and achievement, becoming more skilful. Currently there is too much whole-group teaching using the same tasks for all. The use of different tasks to challenge the more able could ensure that they fully achieve their potential. Lessons cover all four strands of the National Curriculum, but the health-related fitness strand is not consolidated enough within each lesson. When evaluating the performance of others, students are not always clear of the criteria for what makes performance good.
156. Leadership of the department is very good. It is both reflective and innovative. There is a clear vision for the future. There are clearly identified areas for development. Management of the department is good, with a strong focus on improvement. Monitoring of students' achievement is well established and assessment processes are effective. The quality of the extra-curricular activities is very high, enriched by support outside the department. Staff give willingly of their time to give students the opportunity to engage in a range of activities. The work of the Kangaroos Club – in trampolining and gymnastics – is inspirational and a strength of the school. School teams are very successful in local competitions and the school's good links to local clubs steer the more able and motivated students to wider opportunities. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Personal, social, health education is taught as part of the fortnightly tutorial programme. No teaching was observed. The programme is well planned and includes sex and relationships education, drug education and careers education and guidance in all year groups.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum has been imaginatively planned to integrate with humanities subjects.
- The school provides very good opportunities for students to take responsibility, and to make their voice heard through the school council, thereby experiencing citizenship in action.
- Monitoring is not systematic enough to ensure consistency for all students.

Commentary

157. Citizenship has been introduced into the school curriculum through the tutorial programme and across history, geography and religious education, which have been given additional time and staffing.
158. Standards of work seen during the inspection were average. Written work from the tutorial lessons demonstrates that a range of topics is covered to increase knowledge and understanding, with a good variety of opportunity for students to reflect on issues and to present their views by way of debate, poems and posters. Effective use of the learning resource centre helps to develop skills of enquiry in Years 7 to 9. Activities relating to human rights issues encourage students to develop skills of participation and responsible action.
159. The achievement of students is good. They democratically elect members of the school council, who report directly to governors and have responsibility for a £1,000 budget. The council has been involved directly in decisions which are important to students, and an optional summer uniform was introduced as a result of its lobbying. The Year 10 peer-mentoring programme supports personal development and encourages responsibility for other students as members of the school community and in making the school environment a safer, healthy place. Enrichment activities include Crime Awareness days with Year 9 and the school's strong links with Ghana, which broaden the horizons of students and make an impressive contribution to their global awareness.
160. No judgement can be made on teaching and learning as no citizenship teaching was observed during the inspection. However, schemes of work are carefully planned to include all aspects of the citizenship curriculum. Coverage is more comprehensive during Years 7-9 than during Years 10 and 11, but evidence from the scrutiny of students' work indicates that the arrangements in all years meet statutory requirements.
161. Leadership and management are good. There is a clearly articulated view about the role of citizenship in the school and a realistic plan for implementation. An audit of provision across the four subjects has been undertaken and is to be extended to include all subjects. Students benefit from a range of outside providers such as the Youth Service, Connexions and Amnesty International, who enrich the learning in the tutorial programme and special off-timetable days. Management structures are in place, and both heads of year and form tutors are involved in reviewing the coverage in tutorial time. However, monitoring of the programme across other subjects needs more careful co-ordination to ensure consistency, progression and coherence for all students.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, nine 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	1	100.0	80.1	100.0	23.7	60.0	29.9
Biology	7	42.9	65.2	0.0	11.1	8.6	20.6
Business studies	4	50.0	76.4	0.0	16.3	12.5	26.2
Chemistry	2	0.0	72.7	0.0	13.9	0.0	24.1
Drama	4	100.0	86.5	25.0	19.6	35.0	30.6
English literature	9	100.0	85.9	22.2	19.1	30.0	30.2
French	4	50.0	78.2	0.0	18.9	10.0	27.6
Design and technology	1	100.0	74.9	0.0	15.1	40.0	25.3
General studies	16	62.5	73.9	6.3	17.8	19.4	25.7
Geography	5	80.0	74.3	0.0	19.8	18.0	26.5
History	14	71.4	80.7	21.4	19.5	24.3	28.6
Home economics	1	100.0	78.4	0.0	17.6	20.0	27.0
Information and communication technology	2	50.0	67.0	0.0	10.9	10.0	21.4
Mathematics	12	66.7	61.9	8.3	17.1	18.3	22.1
Music	3	100.0	86.5	66.7	21.4	43.3	30.7
Other social studies	13	46.2	69.7	15.4	16.7	16.9	24.1
Physics	5	80.0	68.6	0.0	14.4	18.0	22.7
Religious studies	5	100.0	80.2	0.0	22.3	26.0	29.8
Sports/PE studies	2	50.0	73.2	0.0	11.4	10.0	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	8	100.0	98.6	50.0	50.2	87.5	87.5

Biology	6	66.7	96.4	50.0	39.2	60.0	78.6
Business studies	8	100.0	98.7	25.0	36.8	75.0	80.1
Chemistry	2	100.0	97.6	50.0	49.0	80.0	84.9
Drama	9	100.0	99.5	66.7	40.1	93.3	83.6
English literature	29	96.6	99.5	34.5	46.5	77.9	86.5
French	3	100.0	98.8	33.3	51.5	66.7	87.6
General studies	59	100.0	94.7	23.7	31.0	75.9	73.1
Geography	12	100.0	98.7	50.0	44.5	95.0	84.0
History	31	96.8	99.0	19.4	44.6	72.9	84.6
Home economics	4	100.0	98.1	0.0	34.6	70.0	76.6
Information and communication technology	10	100.0	95.6	20.0	24.6	72.0	69.5
Mathematics	6	100.0	96.7	33.3	55.6	80.0	88.8
Music	2	100.0	98.8	50.0	38.9	80.0	81.1
Other social studies	28	100.0	97.4	21.4	42.7	75.0	81.8
Physics	8	100.0	96.7	12.5	44.6	60.0	81.7
Religious studies	4	100.0	98.8	0.0	46.7	55.0	85.6
Sports/PE studies	4	100.0	98.0	25.0	30.9	70.0	75.2

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at A-level are improving rapidly.
- Consistently very high standards of teaching help students with a wide range of prior attainment to achieve very well.
- The curriculum is very well planned and is very well supported by excellent teaching resources made by the department.
- Students' individual needs are well known and they receive very good personal guidance.
- Extra-curricular provision is very good in the sixth form.

Commentary

162. Standards in work seen are well above average and students' achievements are very good. Standards at A-level were below average in 2003 but are improving rapidly. The percentage of students gaining grades A or B doubled from 2002 to 2003 and increased again in 2004, with all students passing and more than half of the 42 entered gaining grades A or B. Given the wide range of attainment with which

students enter the sixth form, this represents very good achievement brought about by very good teaching. Boys achieve better than girls in the sixth form.

163. Standards of literacy are high in the sixth form and are part of the good progress made by students with a wide range of prior attainment. Oral skills develop very well. Very effective teaching encourages students to use technical vocabulary with accuracy and confidence. Teachers make very good use of open-ended questions to encourage investigative thinking. Students work well in pairs and small groups, testing ideas and explaining their findings well. Reading skills develop very well in the sixth form. Excellent reading resource materials extend background knowledge, offer an introduction to wider critical reading and provide students with guided opportunities to reinforce and extend what had been covered in lessons. Writing skills are well developed and critical writing is well informed and succinct.
164. The quality of teaching is consistently very good. Teachers have an excellent command of the subject, which is enhanced by very thorough preparation. Teaching resources developed by the department are excellent and are very well used to extend the learning begun in the lessons. Teachers know their students very well and ensure that they are all challenged and supported appropriately in lessons. Students speak very positively about their relationship with teachers and the quality of the teaching that they receive. Assignments are very well planned and prepared, with close attention to assessment objectives and the skills that students need to succeed. The high quality of written assignments seen in a scrutiny of students' work was strong evidence of very good teaching.
165. Both leadership and management are outstanding. The curriculum has been very well planned. The department has produced excellent schemes of work and teaching materials which support lessons and extend the learning beyond the school day. Extra-curricular opportunities are very good. For example, in a Year 13 class studying the First World War novel "Birdsong", all 11 students had visited the places described. Enthusiasm and vision are motivating teachers and driving up standards. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. The subject is very popular and standards have improved because the curriculum has improved and the quality of the teaching has improved.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

166. Provision for the development of key skills in language and literacy across the curriculum is good. Standards of literacy are high. Good practice was seen in many subjects. History has made very successful efforts to improve students' writing skills by teaching them how to structure their essays and examination answers. Theatre studies students write very well on a range of topics, from the technicalities of sound and lighting techniques to criticism of performances seen. However, writing tasks for sixth form students in science were directed by teachers and were not sufficiently challenging. Students of politics receive very good guidance in planning and developing their written work. While standards are high and helping students to achieve well, there is still a need for the best practice, particularly with regard to writing, to be more widely shared.

MATHEMATICS

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good, occasionally excellent, leading to improving standards that are now above average.
- Students have very good attitudes and achieve well.
- Leadership and management are very good, responsible for the very good improvement since the last inspection.

Commentary

167. In 2003 the number of students completing their A-level course was too small for national comparison. The majority of students earned a grade, half with higher grades. Standards improved in 2004 as all students earned a grade, the majority with higher grades. Results in AS level examinations in 2004 for the thirteen students currently in Year 13 followed a similar pattern. Students complete modules in pure mathematics and the first modules in statistics and mechanics by the end of their course. There are now twenty students in Year 12.
168. Standards seen in the inspection in Year 13 are above average. This represents good achievement, given students' average level of attainment at the start of the course. Students apply their ideas well in the development of strategies to learn new algebraic techniques. They solve complicated problems in calculus accurately. The principles of calculus are well understood, but there is a lack of fluency in some basic operations. Year 12 students have begun their course well, knowing and using basic formulae accurately in both statistics and pure mathematics.
169. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teaching is always good or better, occasionally excellent. The strengths of the teaching are the very good subject expertise of the teachers, the very good planning of lessons and the level of challenge that students experience in lessons. The excellent teaching is characterised by significant oral contributions from students that clarifies their learning. These responses come from the excellent use of questions in line with the very good introduction to new work. Students have good skills of independent study, fostered by the teachers who all offer extra support for students' learning. The attitudes of students to their work are very good.
170. The quality of leadership and management is very good. The school has adapted very well to the new courses and is using them very well in relation to students' needs. The quality of the team of teachers in the sixth form is excellent. Improvement since the last inspection is very good as standards have improved and the number of students has improved significantly.

Mathematics across the curriculum

171. Opportunities for students to develop competence in mathematics are available in a variety of subjects and this is helping to support and access learning across the curriculum. Generally students demonstrate above-average levels of competence in mathematics, and are able to apply and use their skills in a range of different contexts, although in psychology some students are less confident in the use of statistics.

SCIENCE

Biology

Provision in biology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good relationships have a positive impact and students confidently ask and answer questions.
- Very good subject knowledge of teachers encourages students to work hard and achieve well.
- Target setting and support are effective but do not always focus on next steps in learning sufficiently clearly.
- Teachers make very good use of ICT but students do not use it often enough during lessons.

Commentary

172. Standards of work seen in the current Years 12 and 13 are about average, higher than results in the most recent A and AS level examinations, which were below average. In 2004, although results improved, value-added measures indicate that some students still underachieved. However, standards are improving as a result of more effective and challenging teaching. Achievement of students in lessons is good. In one Year 13 lesson students demonstrated good investigation skills and the ability to self-direct and co-operate with each other in groups. They were able to use a range of equipment with confidence and accuracy and explain their findings when questioned. Most students can interpret information in a variety of formats, formulate clear explanations and use appropriate terminology. Very positive relationships and good motivation create an ethos of learning. Homework is used to enhance and consolidate learning.
173. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers are well qualified and enthusiastic about their subject. Challenging use of questions encourages students to use extended questioning during their investigation work; as a result they are able to consolidate learning. This results in good progress in understanding scientific concepts being made. The setting of challenging homework and marking that focuses on improvement also impact positively on learning. A wider range of teaching styles should be developed to ensure that the wide ability range is more fully supported and encouraged to develop their scientific understanding beyond the syllabus requirements. The use of ICT by students requires further development in lessons.
174. Leadership and management are satisfactory. This role is under-developed, focusing mainly on administrative functions such as ensuring coursework is completed and syllabi are covered. Monitoring and evaluation procedures are less well developed.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

175. ICT was sampled, and one Year 13 lesson was observed. Results in A-level examinations were above average in 2003 and have been improving. Teaching in the lesson observed was good. Students have a very mature approach to their studies and thrive in the learning climate which is provided. They have high expectations of themselves and are prepared to put in a significant effort to make sure they do well. An important characteristic, which contributes strongly to students' progress, is the mature tutorial style, which combines personalised learning with a strong level of challenge and intellectual demand. This is supported with good written feedback on assessed work, which clearly points out the standard which is being achieved and how it can be further raised.

HUMANITIES

176. Geography, history, sociology, psychology and government and politics were inspected in detail. Religious studies (philosophy and ethics) was sampled. Religious studies is taught at A-level where students follow the Religious studies, Philosophy and Ethics course. Religious Studies is also taught as part of the general studies programme. The first A-level group of students was introduced in 2003, with a 100 per cent pass rate. Students are confidently studying a range of philosophies

including Utilitarianism, Kant's concepts relating to morality and religion and Hume's criticism of the theological argument for God's existence along with Swinburn's counter-criticism of Hume. The teaching is significantly geared to encouraging the students to postulate their own critical ideas that challenge such philosophical theories. Students demonstrate a high level of achievement and possess very good understanding and appreciation of fairly complex philosophical concepts. The high quality work of the students both in their written compositions and in their oral competency means that their achievement levels are high and the progress they make is very good.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is very good.
- Student attitudes to learning are very good.
- Skills in independent learning are weak in a minority of students.
- Fieldwork opportunities are very good.

Commentary

177. A-level results in 2003 were above the national average. Most notably, two students were awarded prizes by the examination board for the best performances nationally in A-level geography. High standards were maintained in the 2004 examinations.
178. In work seen, standards are above average and achievement is very good, given the standards of entry to the sixth form. Students make very good progress through the sixth form to the extent that 50 per cent of A-level candidates achieve grades A or B. Differences between the performances of boys and girls are in line with national differences. Year 13 students show a very good grasp of geographical principles and their writing is detailed and fluent. They have well-developed skills of data gathering, processing and analysis.
179. Teaching and learning are good overall, with some very good lessons being observed during the inspection. Teachers have very good relationships with their students, who contribute readily to discussions and so further their own understanding. Teachers ensure that the students' learning is put into a context that they can understand, which is particularly helpful for lower-attaining students. Very good learning was seen when students were provided with opportunities to learn independently and learning was less secure when teaching was too directive. Group discussions were most effective in challenging more able students and supporting those of lower ability. Students have a clear understanding of how well they are doing and what steps they need to take to improve further. Although no student use of ICT was seen during the inspection, very good examples were seen in students' work, and some teachers use ICT as an aid to teaching with very good results.

180. Leadership and management of the department are good. The acting head of department is ensuring that the high standards established by the previous incumbent are being maintained. Schemes of work are detailed, priorities for development are clearly set out and examination results are carefully analysed and action taken in response. A newly-formed team is sharing the A-level teaching with enthusiasm. Residential fieldwork activities are well established and more adventurous opportunities are offered in Iceland and the Grand Canyon. The department is adequately resourced, although the large increase in numbers of students studying geography in Year 12 has placed resources and accommodation under strain. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The numbers studying geography in the sixth form have increased markedly; examination results have improved, especially for the most able, and the range of learning opportunities has increased.

Government and politics

Provision in government and politics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is an improving trend in examination success at A-level.
- Students are developing political awareness as well as analytical skills.
- The subject is very well led.
- Assessment is satisfactory and is improving as statistical data is used to plan individual targets for the range of skills needed.

Commentary

181. Results during the first two years of A-level have been line with national averages, and 2004 shows an improving trend and larger numbers taking the examination. Standards seen are above average. Year 12 are quickly adapting to the demands of the course and are able to handle technical terms well. Year 13 gain in confidence and the ability to respond to complex questions. They show an enthusiastic interest in their study and a commitment to continuing with the subject.

182. Achievement is very good. All students maintain good notebooks with an emphasis on interactive marking. Literacy is developed by the imaginative use of writing frames, and by preparing students for debate and discussion of their ideas. An emphasis on revision is a key factor in confidence building for public examinations. Many students challenge ideas in discussion and put forward original ideas. Year 13 students show a good appreciation of the complexity and variety of political opinion.

183. Teaching and learning are very good. Strengths include the teachers' expertise and enthusiasm, and a focus on preparing students for examinations. Marking is thorough and is both supportive and challenging. Students are encouraged to be active and aware citizens by getting involved, and by the ready access to newspapers and periodicals. Lively debate is characteristic of the teaching. Teachers maintain a very good pace of learning in lessons, enabling students to develop their ideas fully. They are encouraged to define and distinguish between ideologies, for example, classical

and modern liberal ideas. As a result, most students become independent learners and confident in their approach to the subject.

184. The leadership of the subject is very good and management is good. Only recently introduced, the subject has developed rapidly. Assessment processes are firmly linked to examination requirements.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well, overall, but few top grades were gained in A-level examinations in 2003 and 2004.
- Most teaching and learning are very good.
- Students have very positive attitudes to the subject and many choose to study it.

Commentary

185. When students begin the Year 12 AS-level course, their standards are those typically expected from previous GCSE examination work. They achieve well overall to attain a good base of subject knowledge, understanding and skills by the end of Year 12 and are able to continue to A-level with confidence. In 2003, Year 13 A-level results were below average, when one in five candidates gained grades A or B. In 2004, double this number gained the A or B grades. In both years, almost all students passed the examination.
186. During the inspection, students' standards seen were average. Girls and boys from all social and ethnic backgrounds achieve well. Students gain knowledge and understanding of all topics and often analyse, interpret and synthesise evidence well. However, not all apply these skills well enough to reach higher standards. Students' written work is usually competent, thorough and generally very well presented, but it often contains spelling errors. Both girls and boys are confident and competent in discussion in response to teachers' questions, or when they are working in small groups.
187. Teaching and learning are very good. Students' very good response to the teaching contributes considerably to their successful learning and good achievement. They are very interested, enjoy the subject and their attitudes are very mature. Teachers' subject knowledge is extensive. They take great care to teach students the techniques to meet examination requirements. They are very enthusiastic and committed to the subject. Occasionally, the knowledge and skills that students are to gain from lessons are not communicated clearly enough to them at the beginning, nor summarised sufficiently at the end.
188. Leadership and management are good and have ensured good improvement since the last inspection. The department is a very good team that inspires many students to study the subject. However, the monitoring of teaching is not yet extensive enough to ensure consistency and the full sharing of best practice. Some classrooms are too cramped and restrict learning. Teachers cannot reach students to give personal advice

and support during individual work or when students are working in small groups in these rooms.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The courses are very well organised and work is effectively structured.
- The teaching and learning are good; there is warm rapport among teachers and students, but lessons are sometimes too closely directed.
- Students' attitudes are mature and very positive.
- Many students take the subject, but classrooms are too small for the size of some groups.

Commentary

189. Students have no previous experience of the subject when they enter Year 12, but their attainment in GCSE examinations, overall, is average. They usually attain well enough in Year 12 AS-level examinations to continue to A-level successfully. In 2003, A-level results were at the national average, and the 2004, as yet unvalidated, results were of a similar standard.
190. Students' work seen during the inspection was average. Students make good progress from Year 12 with this new subject and achieve well. They produce a very good volume of work on all the topics that they study. By Year 13, they apply their understanding well of psychological theories. For example, they use their knowledge of the work of Freud, Lorenz and Bandura effectively when discussing the gender differences that influence and determine behaviour. Students' written work is competent and usually very well presented. Not all students are confident enough with the statistical work that they are expected to do in some lessons.
191. The teaching and learning are good. Teachers organise and structure the course very well and make clear to students what is to be learned. They manage large classes very well, and relationships with students are warm and very positive. Explanations are clear. The assessment and marking of work are outstanding and give very clear guidance to students on what standards they have reached and how to improve their written work. The very structured approach is very well resourced and provides a useful reference for revision. However, insufficient opportunities for students to use initiative and to work more independently were seen during the inspection. All lessons seen were closely directed by the teachers.
192. Leadership and management are good. The department's enthusiasm is infectious and the many students who choose the subject enjoy it. The size of some classrooms is too cramped for the numbers of students in Year 12 classes, and restricts teachers' opportunity to support individual students in lessons. The absence of ICT in some classrooms to assist teachers' presentations is also unhelpful to learning.

Sociology

Provision in sociology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good leadership, management, expertise and enthusiasm are building up this new subject.
- Each student is well supported to learn the essential ideas and develop research skills.
- Poor accommodation is hampering the use of ICT.

Commentary

193. Standards of work seen are average. Students are well prepared for developing their own research and comparing this to existing evidence. They write concisely and define technical terms well. Students' achievement is good. Well-prepared booklets ensure that all students can relate confidently to theories and methods. Girls predominate in groups currently and achieve better than boys overall.
194. Teaching and learning are good. All students maintain files, which include booklets, their own notes and work marked thoroughly to examination standards. They respond well to questioning, and have learned the necessary theories, using them to examine the family, education, religion, crime and deviance, and politics confidently. There is a strong emphasis on preparing all students for external examination. The coursework component is an excellent way to ensure that all are equipped for independent study. All students gain in confidence by the support and guidance they receive. Some students intend to follow courses in this subject at university, or to take up employment, which builds on the knowledge and understanding of society they have absorbed. The subject makes a good contribution to citizenship education through challenging prejudice and stereotyping.
195. Good leadership and management characterised by enthusiasm and expertise are somewhat hampered by poor accommodation and consequent lack of access to up-to-date technology. The popularity of the subject is growing and more boys are studying in Year 12. The subject contributes well to the development of young people as active and reflective citizens.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

196. **Home economics** was sampled. Numbers taking A-level were too small to make valid statistical comparisons but numbers and retention rates are improving. Current standards are above average. Achievement is at least good and very good for some students taking this course. Teaching and learning were very good in the lesson seen. High expectations and clear lesson objectives contribute to the very good learning achieved by students when working on individual case studies as part of their coursework.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

197. Art and design was inspected in detail. **Theatre studies** was sampled. Leadership of this subject is outstanding and the schemes of work are excellent, combining a high

level of performance skills and a deep understanding of drama theory. Another strength of the curriculum is the possibility for students to study technical elements of sound and lighting. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities. The quality of teaching in the two lessons observed was very good or excellent and this leads to a very high level of attainment. Standards achieved by students are well above national standards. At A-level in 2003 all fourteen candidates passed and three quarters of them obtained the highest grades A or B. A scrutiny of students' written work and the quality of their work observed in lessons confirms these high standards of achievement.

198. **Music** was also sampled in the sixth form. One Year 13 lesson was observed, where good teaching contributed to the good standards achieved.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- All students achieve very well and results at A-level show significant added value.
- The clarity of vision provided by the head of department - rooted in his practice as an artist - is a significant factor in promoting high standards.
- The very best practice seen in relation to how students' ideas are researched and developed is not yet fully present in the work of all teachers.

Commentary

199. A-level results in 2003 were average. In 2004 three students took the examination, gaining two A grades and one B grade. Five students completed the AS course in 2003, all gaining A or B grades. In 2004 the eight entrants gained one grade A, one B, five Cs and one D. The numbers gaining higher grades fluctuates from year to year, but in relation to capability all students achieve very well. Over time there is no significant difference between the attainment of male and female students.

200. Year 12 students have adjusted well to the demands of the AS course, showing good levels of interest and motivation. These students are currently relying too much on secondary sources for ideas, and as a result, final responses tend to be a repeat of found images. Standards seen in Year 13 are above average, indicating very good achievement in relation to capability. Skills of research are well developed with students confidently drawing on a wide range of source material from direct observation, visits to galleries, library resource and digital information. Students talk with enthusiasm about their work and show developing skills of critical analysis. The encouragement given students by teachers to experiment and exploit the potential of different media has a positive impact on standards and students are increasingly confident in selecting media to match the work they are doing.

201. Teaching and learning are very good. Lessons and projects are well planned and the methodology evident is well matched to the requirements of the A-level examinations. The strong emphasis on visual research and the encouragement given to exploit its potential using different media are strong features of the best teaching. Teaching and learning are less

successful when this emphasis is less strong. Teachers' analysis of the ongoing work of students is very good, and results in lessons which provide a very good balance between taught sessions, and the freedom given to students to develop individual responses. The way teachers' own work is often used as a point of reference galvanises the thinking of students and promotes very good learning.

202. Leadership and management are very good. The clarity of vision provided by the head of department, rooted in his own practice as an artist, is a significant factor in promoting high standards. Since the last inspection, high standards have been maintained. Students following the advanced courses are provided with a rich experience, which fosters enthusiasm and interest in art.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

203. One Year 12 lesson in physical education was sampled during the inspection in which achievement was good. Students were attentive and focused. They benefited from the teacher's very good subject knowledge and the good use of question-and-answer to check and consolidate learning. The use of a CD-Rom together with textbooks allowed students to gather and process information to be further developed through the challenge of wider research via websites as homework. Standards are average for this time in the school year and the new course and should rise by the end of the year.
204. Written assignments, from previous students, are well presented, word-processed with computer-generated graphs, tables and diagrams to illustrate data and information.

BUSINESS

Business studies

The foci of the inspection were the A-level in business studies and the vocational courses which are in a consortium with Tamworth College. In the latter, the school teaches the key skills and provides additional support for the College's GNVQ ICT and business courses.

Provision in business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good and the standard of care and support for students is very good.
- The attitudes of most students to the subject are good.
- The department is well led and there is a strong, cohesive team.
- Students do not make sufficient or rigorous use of the subject language. This limits their achievement.
- ICT is not used widely enough to support learning.

Commentary

205. Attainment has improved since the last inspection. Results in 2003 were average and all students passed. In work seen, standards are average and students' achievements are good. Higher-attaining students can quickly analyse the risk factors in alternative business decisions, calculate the expected value that could result and produce well-structured arguments to support their case. When they analyse the efficiency of different production models, they can also see the human side and discuss issues of quality in a mature way. Lower-attaining students respond more superficially, failing to apply their knowledge or to analyse thoroughly. Numeric skills are of a satisfactory standard in Year 12, but in Year 13 there is too much reliance on calculators where mental arithmetic would be expected. Standards in ICT are below average in both cases because there is insufficient opportunity to develop higher-order skills.
206. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and students are very well managed and supported. Some of the teaching seen in the inspection was very good. For example, a lesson on manufacturing production in the car industry was very well researched, fast moving and infused with high quality questions, which forced students to think hard and apply their knowledge. Another lesson on partnerships required students to develop strong negotiating skills to produce a deed of partnership. Such teaching is very well planned and is supported by good quality learning materials, which are often enriched by reference to modern business examples. Involvement with local firms adds further value and touches on wider issues. In the most memorable case, a lesson on business efficiency ended with a moving ironic poem that set the human issues in their proper perspective from an employee point of view. Such teaching has an impact on students. The marking of both classwork and homework is thorough and is supported with perceptive written comments that point students to higher standards. The quality of teaching could be even higher if the ICT and business language issues were addressed, but the absence of any ICT equipment in the business rooms is hampering progress on the first issue.
207. It is the good teaching that inspires students. They appreciate that they are being taught well and that the support is very good, so they respond by making a good intellectual effort, even undertaking wider research on their own initiative. There is a small minority of boys in Year 13 who limit their own progress by the rather casual approach that they sometimes take.
208. The main strengths of this well-led department are its very good relationships and its commitment to professional development through shared responsibility. It makes an honest assessment of its strengths and weaknesses and sets priorities to address them. There is periodic monitoring of the quality of teaching and frequent monitoring of student progress using a range of assessments. However, there should be more use of background data to judge the potential of each student, and so set consistently high expectations.

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	2	2
How inclusive the school is		2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	2	2
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	2	2
Overall standards achieved		3
Students' achievement	3	2
Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		2
Attendance	2	3
Attitudes	2	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2	2
Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		2
The quality of education provided by the school		2
The quality of teaching	2	2
How well students learn	2	2

The quality of assessment	3	3
How well the curriculum meets students' needs	3	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		2
Accommodation and resources	4	4
Students' care, welfare, health and safety		3
Support, advice and guidance for students	2	2
How well the school seeks and acts on students' 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	2	2
The leadership of the headteacher		1
The leadership of other key staff	2	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).