

# **INSPECTION REPORT**

## **PRESDALES SCHOOL**

Ware

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117506

Headteacher: Mrs Janine Robinson

Lead inspector: Dr Pauline Buzzing OBE

Dates of inspection: November 22- 25 2004

Inspection number: 268879

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

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### ***Terms used in this report***

*Pupils in Years 7 to 9 are at **Key Stage 3**, having transferred in most cases from their primary schools at the end of **Key Stage 2** after Year 6. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are at **Key Stage 4** of their education. Those students who remain at school after the compulsory period of education are in the **sixth form**, in Years 12 and 13. Pupils in Years 7 to 11 follow courses and Programmes of Study set out in the National Curriculum. A course of religious education is a requirement for pupils and students of all ages at school.*

*At the end of Year 9, pupils aged 14 take national tests in the **core subjects** of English, mathematics and science. In all subjects of the National Curriculum, teachers also make their own assessments of what the pupils know, understand and can do at age 14. At the end of Year 11, pupils aged 16 may take examinations in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (**GCSE**). Others may follow courses leading to the award of the General National Vocational Qualification (**GNVQ**) or the National Vocational Qualification (**NVQ**). Sixth form students may take further courses leading to these awards, including the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (**AVCE**), or to those of the General Certificate of Education at Advanced level (**A-level**). Students may take examinations leading to the Advanced Subsidiary award (**AS**), equivalent to half the difficulty of the full A-level, which is gained by further study beyond AS standard. Some students may also take Advanced Extension Awards (**AEA**).*

*Inspectors judge the **standards** reached by pupils by comparing their attainments with national test and examination results, or by the levels of performance expected for pupils of the same age nationally. The pupils' **achievements** reflect whether they are doing well enough. These judgements take account of the educational **value added** over time. In this report, **similar schools** are defined as those having similar standards at the start of each stage of learning.*

## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Type of school: Comprehensive  
School category: Community  
Age range of pupils: 11-18  
Gender of pupils: Female  
Number on roll: 1046

School address: Hoe Lane  
Ware  
Hertfordshire  
Postcode: SG12 9NX

Telephone number: 01920 462210  
Fax number: 01920 461187

Appropriate authority: Governing Body  
Name of chair of Mr K Woollgar  
governors:

Date of previous 24-28 May 1999  
inspection:

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

Presdales School is an 11-18, community comprehensive school for girls. Its total roll of 1,046 pupils, broadly average in size, includes 209 in the sixth form. These figures represent slight increases over those at the time of the previous inspection. A few of the post-16 students are boys, who join the school for their sixth form studies. The school is situated in semi-rural surroundings on the southern outskirts of Ware, on a spacious campus shared by two special schools, one secondary and one primary, which are quite separate. It draws its pupils from a wide area, from about 50 primary schools. It is popular and over-subscribed.

The attainment of the pupils on entry is above average overall. Standards at entry are higher in English, mathematics and science than in most other subjects. The socio-economic circumstances of the pupils are above average. For example, the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals, at three per cent, is well below the national average of 11 per cent. There are no pupils from traveller or refugee backgrounds. The school population is predominantly white; there are very few pupils from ethnic minorities. The proportion of pupils with identified special educational needs, at 1.58 per cent, is well below the national average, as is the percentage of pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs. There are small numbers of pupils with some physical impairment, and

others with specific learning needs or behavioural difficulties.

There have been some difficulties in recent years in recruiting staff, but the school has retained a teaching force of well-qualified specialists. The school is a specialist language college and achieved a Schools' Achievement Award in 2003 and the Sportsmark award in 2004. The proportion of pupils joining or leaving the school, at three per cent, is low.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
15849	P Buzzing	Lead inspector	
11575	C Fish	Lay inspector	
3174	W J Powell	Team inspector	Business education 16-18
11508	C Griffin	Team inspector	English 11-18
27719	P Metcalf	Team inspector	Mathematics 11-18
22691	R Woodhouse	Team inspector	Science 11-16; physics 16 – 18
3555	C Emery	Team inspector	Design and technology 11-16
18638	C Shaw	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT) 11-18, citizenship 11-16
21975	A King	Team inspector	Modern languages 11-16; French 16-18
2740	B Barratt	Team inspector	History 11-16; special educational needs, psychology 16-18
32178	J Shears	Team inspector	Geography 11-18
10759	L Bappa	Team inspector	Religious education 11-16; sociology 16-18
10053	J Simms	Team inspector	Art and design 11-16, business education 11-16, English as an additional language
3163	J Gwyer-Roberts	Team inspector	Music 11-16
20395	C Rowe	Team inspector	Physical education 11-16

The inspection contractor was:

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**The overall effectiveness of the school is very good.** Standards in tests and examinations are well above average. Teaching and learning, and leadership and management, are very good. The school's commitment to inclusion and, in particular, its ethos is outstanding. Value for money is very good in the main school. Cost effectiveness in the sixth form is very good.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The ethos of the school promotes high academic standards and pupils achieve very well overall.
- The headteacher provides inspirational leadership. Leadership by other staff at all levels is very good, as is the governance of the school.
- The pupils are very well taught by enthusiastic subject specialists, so that they learn very well, and this encourages outstandingly good attitudes to school and excellent behaviour.
- The school's work as a specialist language college is a key strength.
- The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent.
- Relationships with parents, with other schools and with the wider community are very good.
- There are no major weaknesses in the school.

Since the previous inspection, the school's improvement has been very good. High standards have been maintained, teaching is better, and all aspects of the key issues have been resolved.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*Key: A\* – top 5%; A – well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E – well below average  
For Year 11, similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

**Achievement is very good overall.** Standards of work seen are well above average and achievement is very good in Years 7 to 11 as well as in the sixth form; history is a particular strength. In recent years, the school's test results at the end of Year 9 in English, mathematics and science have been well above average. At GCSE, overall results have also been well above average; though the results do fluctuate from year to year, they are consistently well above average.

**The pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are excellent overall.** Attitudes and behaviour are excellent, and the

sense of community in the school, as shown by the relationships of all groups within it, is excellent. Attendance is very good.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The overall quality of education provided by the school is very good. Teaching and learning are very good overall.** Teaching and learning are very good throughout the main school and in the sixth form. Teachers have high expectations of work and behaviour, and they offer excellent levels of challenge to the pupils and students; this results in a very good rate of learning. The breadth of curricular opportunities is very good; learning is matched well to needs and interests, and enrichment opportunities are excellent. The school shows very good care for its pupils and students; links with parents, with the wider community and with other schools and colleges are very good.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are very good overall.** The headteacher gives outstanding leadership, and her vision for the school is excellent. The leadership of others with responsibilities, the governance and the management of the school are all very good. However, the governing body does not meet, in full, the requirement for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils and students. The school is accurate in its self-evaluation: it knows its strengths and areas for development very well.

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

Pupils and parents are extremely pleased with and supportive of the school. Parents particularly like the fact that the school expects their daughters to work hard, and that the girls make good progress. Parents also think that the school is led and managed well. Inspectors agree. The parents are full of praise for the way the school helped the girls to settle in when they joined the school. A minority of parents are concerned that the school does not keep them fully informed about their daughters' progress, and they think that the school does not take parents' views into consideration as much as they would like. Pupils see the school's high expectations and good teaching as particular strengths, and value the community of which they are a part.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

There are no major issues that require attention.

However, in order to meet statutory requirements in full, the school should:

- ensure that all pupils and students take part in a daily act of collective worship.



## THE SIXTH FORM AT PRESDALES SCHOOL

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is very good.** The school admits some students from other schools, but most of those who join the sixth form in Year 12 have already been in Presdales for five years. Standards on entry to the sixth form are average overall, though they do vary from one year group to the next. However, the teaching they receive and the curriculum are both very good, and allow the students to achieve very well, given their starting points when they enter the sixth form. An excellent ethos benefits from very good leadership and management. The sixth form offers very good cost-effectiveness.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Results in the sixth form were above average in 2003, and were higher in 2004, as a result of the very good teaching the students receive.
- The sixth formers are very good role models for the rest of the school; they have very positive attitudes to education and demonstrate high levels of independence and maturity.
- The sixth form is very well led and curriculum leadership is very good.
- Assessment is used very well to respond to students' individual needs, and the tutorial system ensures that all students benefit from their time in the sixth form.
- Students experience a smooth transition into the sixth form, and very good academic and personal support as they enter and move through the sixth form.
- There are no major shortcomings in the sixth form.

### QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	<b>Very good</b> in <b>English literature</b> , with very good teaching that results in well above average standards overall. <b>Very good</b> in <b>French</b> , where teachers are competent linguists and conduct all lessons in French so that the students' use of the language is very good.
Mathematics	<b>Very good</b> in <b>mathematics</b> , where very good teaching enables students to achieve very well.
Science	<b>Good</b> in <b>physics</b> , where teachers have a very good command of the subject and use data well to monitor the students' performance.
Information and communication technology	<b>Very good</b> in <b>AVCE ICT</b> , where students benefit from a range of experienced teachers who bring considerable expertise to the subject.
Humanities	<b>Good</b> in <b>geography</b> , where good question and answer work develops thinking skills well. <b>Satisfactory</b> in <b>psychology</b> , where achievement is improving and teaching and learning are now good. <b>Very good</b> in <b>sociology</b> , where students have very positive attitudes

because teachers provide them with a relevant and challenging curriculum.

**Good** in **A-level business** and in **AVCE business**, where students show very good learning skills and positive attitudes to their work, and teachers have high expectations of what students should do.

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

## **ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

Very good advice, guidance and support are provided for students. The very good assessment and target setting procedures underpin the advice students are given. Students are well looked after from the moment they join the sixth form.

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

**The quality of sixth form leadership and management is very good.** Governors support the sixth form very well and support the increasing partnership with other providers. The management of the sixth form is very good: careful monitoring of the students' achievement is based on accurate data that are well used. Some teaching groups are very small, but these are balanced by others that are quite large, so that overall cost-effectiveness is very good.

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

Students expressed great satisfaction with the range of courses available, the way they are taught and supported by their teachers, and the way they are encouraged to become independent learners. They are very pleased with the range of enrichment activities available to them, and with the way students' views are taken into account. Inspectors agree with these strengths.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

*In the main school and in the sixth form, standards are well above average and achievement is very good.*

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement overall is very good: pupils gain better results than would be expected from their standards at entry to the school.
- Pupils with special educational needs, those who are gifted and talented, and those from all ethnic groups achieve very well.
- Standards are well above average in most subjects, and in history, they are very high.

#### Commentary

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	37.3 (39.8)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	39.9 (38.7)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	38.3 (37.3)	33.6 (33.3)

*There were 166 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	74 (90)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	98 (99)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (99)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	38.3 (37.3)	34.7 (34.7)

*There were 162 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

##### ***Standards in GCE A/AS level and VCE examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2002***

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	97.2 (98.7)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	41.5(50.4)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per pupil	255.6 (262.1)	253.1 (254.5)

*There were 102 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*

#### ***Main school***

1. Standards at entry to Year 7 in the main school are above average overall; standards in English, mathematics and science tend to be higher than in most other subjects. Some 50 primary schools send pupils to the school, and there is a wide range of prior attainment in some subjects.
2. In the national tests taken at the end of Year 9, results since 1998 have been well above average and rising at a similar rate to the national trend. When individual pupils' overall test results are analysed, pupils did much better at the school than would have been expected from their standards at entry, representing very good achievement between Years 7 and 9. There are no significant patterns of results by ethnicity of the pupils.
3. The school's GCSE results since 1999 have been well above average, though marked by wide swings in some years. In 1999 and 2002 the percentage of pupils achieving A\* to C grades reached 90 per cent. Results fell in 2003, but the DfES's index of value added for this particular group of pupils shows that they performed well above the levels they were expected to reach when they entered the school. Results were above average in physical education and well above average in all other subjects but history, where results were very high. There were no examination results in ICT.
4. In work seen during the inspection, standards in Year 9 are well above average overall. They are above average overall in modern foreign languages, ICT, physical education and in citizenship. In all other subjects, they are well above average. Overall, these standards represent very good achievement. Though their standards on entry to the school in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are already above average, there is very good achievement in English and science and good achievement in mathematics, from teaching that is consistently good, and often very good, which has deepened and widened the pupils' knowledge and understanding. Not only do they improve the level at which they work, but they also develop learning skills of a very high order, and a degree of independence in their learning that is unusual for their age. In some other subjects, standards on entry to the school are average, and pupils show very good achievement by Year 9 to reach standards that are well above average. This is evident in geography, history, and religious education. In other subjects, achievement is good.
5. Standards of work seen are well above average in most subjects and overall in Year 11. They are above average in science, ICT, physical education and in the business and communication course, and well above average in all other subjects, with the exception of history, where standards are very high. The pupils' own excellent attitudes to their work contribute to these high standards. They often initiate debate and discussion and the very good teaching they receive creates a climate for learning in which they thrive.
6. In Years 10 and 11, achievement is good in science, ICT, art, physical education and business education, and very good in all other subjects. This represents very good achievement overall for the pupils concerned, based on their prior attainments at entry and at the end of Year 9. Yet again, pupils who start Year 10 with above or well above average standards are extended and broadened to enable them to acquire the higher order skills that are needed to gain the well above average grades, across a wide range of subjects, at GCSE.

7. The leadership of the school ensures that the pupils' achievements are at the heart of its work, and smooth management allows the maximum amount of time to be spent on teaching in a calm atmosphere which creates an excellent ethos in which to learn and to progress. Parents are very pleased with the way their daughters are achieving, and the pupils agree that they are encouraged to work hard and make progress.
8. Pupils with special educational needs of all kinds make very good progress in reaching their individual targets. Their progress is carefully monitored and they achieve as well as other pupils in all subjects, with particularly good achievement in English, science, geography and history. They achieve results at GCSE and other external examinations that are much better than expected, given their prior attainment. The highest attaining pupils in the school, those who are gifted and talented, show very good achievement at all levels: they are well challenged by their teachers.
9. Standards of literacy are well above average. Overall, literacy is very well developed by subjects through schemes of work, and teachers build well on this area of strength and provide good role models in their own very good use of language. Standards of numeracy are above average, but, although provision to promote numeracy across the curriculum is good overall, it is not as well developed as the provision for literacy. Standards of ICT use are also above average; most subjects now use ICT well in their own work, and the Internet is used well for research. However, some subjects, such as art, music and science, are not yet fully exploiting what is possible.

### ***Sixth form***

10. Students enter the sixth form with GCSE profiles that are typical of sixth formers nationally, both overall and from subject to subject. The overall results vary somewhat from year to year, reflecting the different character of each intake. In the 2003 examinations, the most recent for which verified national data are available, the overall results in Year 13 were above average, as they were in the two previous years. In 2004, however, results increased sharply. The relatively small number of male students who joined the sixth form at the start of Year 12 performed better than did their female counterparts.
11. In the 2003 A-level examinations, results were particularly high, in the top five per cent nationally, in physics, and well above average in art and design, biology, history, sociology and physical education. In the AS examinations, results were well above average in biology, German and psychology, as well as in the AVCE awards in business and ICT. Analyses of the individual students' performances in 2004 show that lower attainers do particularly well in relation to their GCSE profiles. They also demonstrate that the small number of pupils from minority ethnic groups do as well as their colleagues.
12. In work seen during the inspection, standards are well above average overall. In relation to the standards at entry of these particular students, this represents very good achievement, and is the result of very good teaching. Further, it comes from the very good learning skills that the students have; the excellent ethos of the school produces strong attitudes towards studying. In the nine subjects that were fully inspected, standards in work seen are average, and achievement is satisfactory in

psychology; they are above average, with good achievement in business education, geography, and with very good achievement in ICT; and they are well above average, with very good achievement, in English, French, mathematics and sociology, and with good achievement in physics.

13. Sixth form students have above average competence in ICT to support their studies across the curriculum. Many students turn automatically to the computer to write essays, conduct research or make presentations. Geography or business education students, for example, can easily incorporate graphical information, statistics and pictures into word-processed documents. Students use spreadsheets to perform calculations or computer aided design when designing furniture. The school runs a non-examination course in ICT to help students consolidate or extend their skills. The teaching draws problems from different subject areas to make them more relevant, so that students find the course very useful. As at the time of the previous inspection, students achieve well.
14. Standards of communication skills are well above average. They are particularly strong in English literature and in geography. The standard of students' application of number is above average, but varies in different subjects, from very good in science to average in business studies and in geography.

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

*The pupils and students have outstanding attitudes to school. Their behaviour is excellent. Personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is exceptional. Attendance and punctuality are both very good.*

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Outstanding relationships underpin the excellent ethos of the school.
- The pupils' and students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent.
- The pupils and students show great enthusiasm for everything that goes on in school.
- Very good levels of attendance reflect the pupils' and students' desire to learn and do well.
- Very high levels of maturity ensure that behaviour is excellent.

### **Commentary**

#### ***Main school***

15. This is a very pleasant school to be in. The atmosphere is highly supportive and there is an excellent work ethos. The relationships, mutual respect and trust that develop between adults and the pupils are strengths of the school and underpin the purposeful and productive environment that allows them to learn successfully. The pupils are courteous, friendly and considerate to visitors. They go out of their way to help each other, willingly take on responsibilities and tasks and use their initiative very well to ensure that things run smoothly. They are refreshingly independent both in their learning and in the way they organise their lives.

16. The pupils say this is a good school to attend and that they are taught well, expected to work hard and helped to do their best. They are very enthusiastic about everything offered to them and enjoy what they do. The teachers provide them with interesting things to do in lessons and thus they develop a desire to learn. The excellent provision for extra-curricular and other opportunities for enrichment is taken up by the pupils with great eagerness. They become involved, not just in work, but also in developing other interests and experiencing new things, and thus reinforce the sense of purposeful busyness in school.
17. Because motivation and enthusiasm are so high, attendance levels are very good. The school engenders a love of learning in the pupils so that they want to get on. Very occasionally the school encounters a problem with an individual pupil's attendance and this is then looked at carefully with valued support from the educational welfare officer.
18. Bullying is not seen as a problem by either parents or pupils. They are confident that it is handled very well if it occurs and speak very highly of the support received from 'Big Sisters' from the sixth form. The pupils from different communities get on very well together. Behaviour throughout the school is excellent. Pupils know exactly what is required of them and strive to meet the expectations set. Very occasionally behaviour and attitudes drop in a lesson and pupils may be talkative and lack focus; this is sometimes towards the end of a double lesson. The outstanding, usually unsupervised, behaviour around school shows very good self-control and maturity. The high level of trust placed in pupils is not abused and thus they are excluded from some areas of the school only on safety grounds. Exclusions are very rare. Unusually, there were three fixed term exclusions and one permanent exclusion last year. These were made very reluctantly in the best interest of all parties and only after rigorous attempts had been made to keep the pupils in school. More appropriate arrangements have been made to educate these pupils.

***Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%) 2003/2004***

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	4.4	School data	0.0
National data	N/A	National data	N/A

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

19. The school's aims and excellent ethos are very effectively underpinned by the prominence given to developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils' spiritual development is excellent, and they are given time for reflection at the start of each day. The religious education department's considerable contribution also enhances this provision very effectively through numerous visits to places of worship of different faiths, and talks to the pupils by different faith leaders. The provision for moral development is excellent through well-run assemblies, a very strong pastoral system and a clear code of conduct. Pupils have a very good sense of what is right and wrong which is reflected in their excellent attitudes and behaviour in and around the school. Pupils' social development is excellent, fostered through team building days in Year 7 and a leadership day in Year 9 and well-run school and year councils.



20. The impact of language college status has developed pupils' cultural awareness enormously. The school's provision is excellent as pupils' cultural knowledge and understanding are enhanced not only through numerous European visits but also by awareness of the wider world through exchanges with a Japanese school and World Challenge Expeditions, this year to Peru. Their cultural development is promoted very effectively through the very wide range of languages on offer, and the fact that all pupils study more than one foreign language throughout their time in the main school. This very rich language provision, together with the involvement of all other subjects in cross-curricular work on the international dimension, particularly during the school's European Week of Languages, help to ensure that pupils are introduced to cultures different from their own, and to some of the different attitudes, beliefs and heritages involved.
21. In addition to regular, well-planned study visits and exchanges in France, Germany, Italy, Russia and Spain to support work in modern foreign languages, many other departments also organise foreign trips, such as the Year 9 visit to Belgian battlefields and a visit to Berlin for GCSE history groups; a study visit to Iceland in geography; to the United States and to Disneyland, Paris in business studies; to Italy to explore philosophy and ethics in religious studies, to support work in art and design in Years 7 to 9, and to experience skiing as an additional physical activity. There is also a home stay visit to Japan that is open to all pupils and students – not just to those who are studying Japanese; Team Challenge expeditions to Peru, Poland, Romania and Canada; and Year 10 pupils work with pupils in a German school on an Achievers International project which encourages international citizenship and enterprise.

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

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	943	3	1
White – Irish	1	0	0
White – any other White background	11	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	5	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	11	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	6	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	12	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	0	0
Black or Black British – African	1	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1	0	0
Chinese	6	0	0
Any other ethnic group	4	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	43	0	0

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

***Sixth form***

22. The excellent standards and provision in the main school continue in the sixth form. The students want to come to school because they have high aspirations, want to do well and know the importance of being in school and attending lessons. Their attitudes are impeccable throughout and they do whatever they can to help staff and the rest of the school, even if very occasionally they feel their efforts are not recognised. They eagerly take on responsibilities such as being senior students, head or deputy head girl or being part of the 'Big Sister' scheme that supports younger pupils. They take a major part in the organisation and running of events and activities in school and want to do as much for themselves as they can. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is, again, excellent, and particularly strong features are the twice yearly religious education conferences organised for the sixth form, one of which took place during the week of the inspection, and was judged to be outstanding. Sixth form students also benefit from the activities promoted through the school's work as a language college, and there are very good opportunities for them to undertake work experience in France, Germany, Italy or Spain. The students' independence in all they do is thoroughly commendable and is a valuable lifelong skill.

**QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**

*The overall quality of education is very good. Teaching, learning and the school's curriculum are very good, as are its links with parents, the wider community and other schools and colleges.*

### **Teaching and learning**

*Teaching, learning and assessment are all very good at all levels of the school.*

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very high expectations teachers have of all their pupils and students and the excellent level of challenge in many lessons lead to outstanding levels of engagement and involvement by learners.
- The school is successful in ensuring that most teaching is done by subject specialists; their subject knowledge is very good.
- Teaching has improved significantly since the previous inspection.
- No unsatisfactory teaching was observed during the inspection, and even where there are mild shortcomings, pupils tend to work well.
- The use of data to set targets and drive up standards through target setting is impressive, although pupils could sometimes be clearer about what they must do to improve, especially in Years 7 to 9.

## Commentary

### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 159 lessons*

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
6 (3.8%)	58 (36.5%)	73 (45.9%)	22 (13.8%)	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.*

### **Whole school**

23. The school has maintained the very good standards of teaching and learning observed in the previous inspection, and the proportion of teaching that is good, very good or excellent has increased even further. A high percentage of parents who returned the questionnaire agree that the teaching is a strength of the school. The very best teaching and learning are to be found in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, where nine out of every ten lessons are at least good. Examples of very good or excellent teaching were seen in every subject and in each year group throughout the school.
24. No aspect of the teaching is less than very good, but there are some outstanding features: teachers have very high expectations and offer excellent challenges to all pupils. As a result, the pupils apply themselves diligently and with enthusiasm, so that their learning is highly productive, and they have very positive views of the lessons they are involved in. Teachers encourage the pupils very well and all pupils are engrossed in their work and make much better progress than might be expected, not only in terms of the levels at which they are working, but also in the way they use very sophisticated study skills.
25. There are excellent relationships in the classroom and, in a high percentage of lessons, pupils challenge their teachers, initiate discussion and follow through ideas of their own in a very mature way. They relish the challenge they are offered. The majority of lessons are very clearly focused, brisk, purposeful and well planned to sustain very good pace and challenge. In history, where the teaching is excellent overall, highly interactive approaches feature skilled questioning, so that the pupils' knowledge and understanding are tested.

26. Pupils with special educational needs of all kinds are taught very well. Individual learning needs are well known, approaches are strongly inclusive and teachers use a range of effective strategies to meet learning requirements. The teaching of these pupils is particularly good in English, science, geography and history. Pupils' progress is closely monitored through the regular review of their progress in consultation with subject teachers, and of the achievement of their targets on individual education plans. In a minority of cases, procedures for testing pupils' progress, especially in the improvement of literacy skills, are not sufficiently systematic. The objectives set in Statements of Special Educational Needs are fulfilled well and annual reviews are carried out effectively.
27. Pupils who are gifted and talented are taught very well. Individual learning needs are well known and teachers use a range of methods to match work to their needs and to ensure that challenge is at the right level. As a result, the pupils know where they stand, and achieve accordingly.

### ***Main school***

28. The overall quality of teaching in the main school is very good, and leads to very good learning. There is slightly more teaching that is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11. In the satisfactory lessons, teachers sometimes explain to pupils what they will be doing in the lesson, but do not always express this in the form of an objective for the lesson. In a small minority of lessons, teachers talk rather a lot, and do not make the very most of the pupils' good independent learning skills. In contrast, the very good and excellent lessons capitalize on the pupils' highly developed learning skills. The school has placed considerable emphasis on learning as its central activity, and this is resulting in a high percentage of very good lessons.
29. Teaching and learning are good overall in science, ICT, art, physical education, design and technology, business studies; and in Years 7 to 9 in music and in mathematics. They are very good overall in English, modern foreign languages, history, geography, and religious education; and in Years 10 and 11 in mathematics and music. No judgement could be made on the teaching of citizenship because no lessons were observed.
30. Most lessons are very well planned, usually with three parts to them: an introduction and setting of the scene, a varied range of activities with well-chosen methods that promote learning of very good quality, and a drawing together of what has been learned. As a result, pupils remain interested and keen to do more. In Years 10 and 11, teachers make effective reference to examination board mark schemes, and pupils adopt an analytical approach to what they say and what they write, so that answers are well focused and relevant.
31. The thoroughness and constructiveness of assessment at whole school level is very good. Very clear procedures underpin the school's robust practices. Rigorous analyses of data and value added factors enable the school to track pupils' progress in great detail, and thus set challenging targets for improvement. These measures contribute significantly to standards achieved in national tests and GCSE examinations. Constant review and evaluation indicates commitment to monitoring at senior management level. Ongoing assessment is very good in Years 10 and 11 and good in Years 7 to 9, where the school is in the process of fine-tuning developments.

32. The use of assessment to respond to individual need is very good. Careful monitoring by senior and middle managers leads to prompt identification of underachievement. Subsequently, pastoral teams and subject teachers provide very good support for pupils across the ability range. Teachers draw on the wealth of data available very effectively, to identify whether individuals are performing in line with, above or below expectation. The provision of profiling days, homework clubs and subject revision sessions, together with mentoring in Year 11, all contribute to the school's use of assessment as pupils move up the school. Additionally, parents receive regular reports on their daughter's progress and whether it is good enough.
33. Pupils' understanding of how they can improve is good in Years 7 to 9. The school's relatively recent use of subdivisions of National Curriculum levels enhances the pupils' knowledge of how their work compares to national benchmarks. Where assessment is very good - for example, in English, modern foreign languages, science and geography - they also understand, in subject specific terms, what they need to do to improve. Pupils' understanding is very good in Years 10 and 11. They receive individual target grades in each examination subject, and information on whether their current performance matches their potential. Teachers' marking and feedback usually provide clear links to national criteria and GCSE grades.

### ***Sixth form***

34. Teaching in the sixth form is very good overall, and this is the main reason why the students achieve so very well. Over half the lessons observed were very good or excellent and, from standards on entry that are broadly average for sixth forms, the students achieve results that are better than might be expected, and this is why current standards are well above average. Teaching is good in psychology, geography and business studies, and very good in English literature, mathematics, physics, ICT, French and sociology.
35. In most lessons, the very good teaching stems from enthusiastic subject specialists who plan and structure their lessons very well, so that not a moment is wasted. Teachers have very good knowledge of examination requirements, they urge students to think for themselves, and question and answer are used very well. As a result, fully engaged students want to do well, are intellectually curious and respond with energy to their tasks, playing a full part in lessons. In some subjects, where the teaching is good, rather than very good, sometimes there is a need for questioning to be more probing and for teachers to help lower attainers more specifically with their written work. In business studies, shortcomings of the accommodation limit the scope of teaching and learning.
36. The thoroughness and constructiveness of assessment continue seamlessly into the sixth form. Meticulous data analyses and value added procedures ensure that transition from the main school, and from other schools, is very smooth. Systems to track both male and female students' academic progress and personal achievements are very comprehensive. Close monitoring by the headteacher and senior management team, head of sixth form and her deputy, tutors and most subject teachers helps the students to keep abreast of their academic or vocational targets.

37. The use of assessment to respond to students' individual needs is very good. From the headteacher down, staff know the students very well and whether their sixth form work is good enough in relation to their prior attainments. The well-established system of individual tutorials also reflects the school's concern that students across the ability range should benefit equally. Thus, effective individual support exists for underachievers, middle attainers and Oxbridge candidates.
38. In most of the subjects that were inspected in depth, students' understanding of how they can improve is very good. For example, in business education, they receive unambiguous information from their teachers about how to achieve the next grade. In English and geography, teachers' marking provides explicit links to AS or A-level examination criteria. Students know their subject targets, and this information acts as a spur to further developments in their learning.

## **The curriculum**

*The breadth of curricular opportunities is very good: opportunities for enrichment are excellent. Accommodation and resources are good overall.*

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The enrichment of the curriculum is an outstanding feature of the school.
- The specialist language college status permeates the whole curriculum very well.
- The curriculum for pupils aged 14 to 19 is very good, and offers a wide range of learning styles.
- The good accommodation and resources contribute effectively to the pupils' and students' learning, though some spaces for the sixth form are rather cramped.
- Arrangements for delivering design and technology, and ICT, in Years 7 to 9 could be better.

## **Commentary**

39. Since the previous inspection in 1999, most of the criticisms in the report have been resolved, and the great range and take-up of enrichment activities have been retained. The school has made significant improvements to its programmes for personal development, and arrangements now meet statutory requirements at all levels, apart from the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship, due to the lack of a sufficient number of large spaces to accommodate all the pupils. However, the school makes very good arrangements to compensate for this. In curricular terms, the pupils with special educational needs are better provided for now than in 1999. The working week is longer than in most schools, and is organised around 35 weekly periods of 40 or 45 minutes in length. Many lessons are taught as double periods. Whilst this offers good opportunities in many subjects, it is sometimes too long for others, such as mathematics. On balance, however, strengths outweigh the weaknesses.

## **Main school**

40. The school's curriculum meets the statutory requirements for the National Curriculum and religious education in Years 7 to 11. When pupils arrive at the school, they are

placed in one of three bands based on information from their primary schools, including their Year 6 national test results. After one term, mathematics reorganises pupils into sets, but other subjects retain the banding structure. This has no noticeable effect on the very good achievement that pupils show in their first year. Pupils in Year 7 experience the language college dimension from the start; their ICT lessons are taught using French.

41. As a specialist language college, the school places great emphasis on learning languages. In Year 8, all pupils follow a second modern language, and in Year 9, a third is added, chosen from Italian, Spanish or Russian. The time needed to allow this extension of language work does not have an adverse effect on other subjects, except for design and technology, where inadequate time is available to provide sufficient depth of coverage in some aspects of the work. By Year 9, pupils are grouped by prior attainment in English, mathematics, science, French and German. Year 9 also sees the start of a two-year course for all pupils leading to a GCSE in religious education by the end of Year 10. The school challenges its best linguists in Year 9 by expecting the ablest pupils in French to gain an AS level in the subject by the end of Year 11. This approach may be used by other subjects in the future to ensure that higher attainers progress at an appropriate rate. Overall, the school provides very well for its gifted and talented pupils at all levels.
42. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is based on a core of English, mathematics and science, plus physical education and, in Year 10, religious education, with all pupils following at least two modern languages; Japanese is added to the list of those available. Higher attaining pupils - about one-third of the total - follow courses in the three separate sciences; the rest take combined science. Although the 'three-science' pupils lose some time from English and mathematics, this is judged not to affect their achievement. Pupils select additional courses from a suitable range of options, including a leisure and tourism vocational course.
43. Since the previous inspection, the school has made considerable improvements to its provision for personal development, which now includes work-related learning and citizenship. Provision for personal, social and health education is very good. Pupils experience a regular and effectively planned programme of study, activities, visits and lectures, as well as many opportunities to initiate and participate in events, both in and out of the school. Healthy eating and lifestyle, the dangers of drug and medicine abuse, sex education, and relationships, are explored through research, role-play, discussion and work in groups. The many visits and expeditions on offer also give pupils opportunities to socialise and take responsibility.
44. Pupils are fully involved in the year councils and school council, which regularly canvas pupils' views. The school council has a budget and this enables pupils to make real decisions, some of which involve improving the working environment, while others involve raising money for charity.
45. The personal and social development programme is delivered in discrete regular sessions by well-trained staff. In addition, many lessons in other subjects incorporate aspects of the programme as a natural part of the school's caring ethos. The citizenship programme also overlaps, as does ICT, for example when pupils learn how to use the Internet safely. Policies are regularly revised by a very effective leader, supported by governors and parents.



46. The school provides effective and timely guidance on further study and career opportunities for all pupils and sixth form students. Parents are also fully involved as pupils move from stage to stage. Pupils say they have good advice on choosing subjects for GCSE or the sixth form and students receive good support for university or college applications. All pupils and students are included and the school's very broad curriculum means that choices can be imaginative as well as realistic. Pupils are able to make use of the services of appropriate external bodies. They can request interviews with the careers service, for example.
47. The curriculum provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Provision is very well planned to meet pupils' specific learning requirements and is strongly inclusive. All pupils have full access to the whole curriculum and this is enhanced by teachers being well informed of the support needed to help them to achieve well. In addition, a range of activities and strategies is provided to enable them to learn effectively across the curriculum. These focus strongly on improving literacy skills, and in Years 10 and 11, on helping pupils to improve organisational and study skills in preparation for GCSE. The range of activities and support is restricted by the lack of a specialist teaching area for this work.
48. The school's enrichment programme was judged to be outstanding at the previous inspection; this excellence has been maintained. The range of activities available to pupils each week is a remarkable one, and provides opportunities for specific year groups to take part in activities. These range from an impressive range of sporting and musical options to academic, economic, and interest activities, as well as daily language clubs. In the wider life of the school, the language college element is once again clearly evident. For example, there is an intensive French day in Year 7 and an intensive language oral day in Year 11, whilst a wide range of exchanges is offered in Years 9 and 10, including to Russia. Pupils are also able to undertake home stay visits and intensive weekend work to support Japanese. Work relating to other countries and cultures is a feature of the whole curriculum; for example, planning trips to France in mathematics, or the use of e-mail to communicate with other countries.
49. The match of well-qualified teachers to the taught curriculum is very good. The school recruits and retains high quality applicants at all levels of teaching responsibility. This process is underpinned by very good appointment procedures. For example, the teaching of all candidates is observed. The match of support staff to the needs of the school is good. It is particularly strong in modern foreign languages and in the quality of support for pupils with special educational needs. Technicians in the science department are well qualified. However, there are not enough hours allocated to technician support in design and technology. The school has taken advantage of recent initiatives in workload reform. For example, where possible, it has transferred departmental administrative tasks to support staff.
50. Overall, the accommodation is good. The facilities for learning in modern foreign languages are very good while music suffers from a shortage of space and standards and achievement in physical education are constrained by the lack of facilities. Other accommodation is at least satisfactory. Corridor and classroom displays create a stimulating learning environment. Disabled access to the site is difficult. There are

plans to start work on improving music and physical education facilities as well as providing better disabled access to the school.

51. Resources are good and support the delivery of the curriculum well with a good range of materials used effectively to support teaching and learning. However, limited access to ICT restricts use within subject areas. The library is well resourced and provision promotes reading effectively through initiatives within subjects and reading initiatives such as the Avid Reader Scheme.

### ***Sixth form***

52. The sixth form curriculum is very good, offering a wide range of AS and A-level options including critical thinking skills. Different learning styles are also catered for by three and six-unit AVCE courses in business, travel and tourism, and in ICT. Business is also available as a 12-unit option. Although there is no programme of key skills teaching leading to certification, the school provides all students with courses in ICT and presentation skills. At present there is only limited joint provision of courses, but the head of sixth form has been involved in working with other schools to increase the range of choices with a common option block.
53. Sixth formers follow a physical education course. They also take part in two religious education days each year; these are of very good quality.

### **Example of outstanding practice**

**In a sixth form religious education conference day, excellent visiting speakers and a series of exciting tasks provided rigour and challenge, and very effectively demonstrated that students can be totally engaged by the subject.**

The day centred on the theme of expressing religion. All sixth form students attend two such conference days each year. The earlier day focused on issues of war and peace. Expressing religion consisted of a series of workshops, attended by each tutor group in turn, where students could listen, participate and challenge their teachers, the visitors and each other. A visiting Hindu priest proved to be the most popular visitor. He was lively, energetic and had a very good sense of humour. As well as talking to students about his religious convictions, he brought along an enormous range of resources, including both religious artefacts and material objects, such as a basket of saris for the girls to try on. Another very popular session taught the students a classical Hindu dance. Everyone, including the very small number of boys in the school, joined in with enthusiasm. Other workshops, all of which were engaging and effective, focused on Buddhism and art, Christian story telling, the use of film in religion and a meditation activity called the Labyrinth. A more traditionally run session looked at the significance of bread and wine in Christian Holy Communion. Students were still talking very enthusiastically about the conference the next day.

54. In the sixth form there is very good provision for students to continue to study languages at AS and A level. As would be expected, the range of language work is a wide one, with courses in French, German, Italian, Japanese, Russian and Spanish. In addition, students may follow NVQ Level 2 language units in French, or gain a GCSE in Latin. All sixth formers must follow a course in a language that is new to them in Year 12. Sixth form students on the AVCE Business Studies course have the option of studying the additional NVQ Level 2 language units in French.
55. As in the main school, the range of enrichment for sixth formers is excellent. In addition to a very wide range of extra-curricular activities throughout the week, all students may go on exchange visits, and those following courses in French, German and Italian may undertake work experience overseas. There is a good variety of European projects involving Year 12 students, for example focusing on technological

or ecological topics, and involving working in other countries, as well as hosting projects based at a local university.

56. The match of well-qualified teachers to the taught curriculum is very good. This enables the school to offer a very good range of subjects in the sixth form that are taught by teachers with very good subject expertise. The match of support staff to the needs of the school is good. It is particularly strong in modern foreign languages.
57. Sixth form accommodation and resources are good overall. The main block is self-contained and provides good facilities for social and learning opportunities including a sixth form common room and a reading room for quiet study. Some rooms are too small for the classes timetabled in them so that in some English lessons, for example, opportunities for group work are restricted. Disabled access to sixth form classes is difficult.
58. There is a good range of resources within subjects to support and develop learning in the sixth form. The reading room and the designated ICT room are well-used resources providing students with good access to a quiet study area and materials for independent learning.

### **Care, guidance and support**

*The procedures and policies to ensure the pupils' and students' health, safety and welfare are very good. They are provided with very high quality support, advice and guidance. There are very good systems to take the pupils' and students' views into account.*

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The staff are fully committed to ensuring the well-being, health and safety of the pupils and students.
- Very effective assessment information is used very well to target support where it is needed.
- Pupils and students settle into Year 7 and into the sixth form very well.
- The pupils and students have a voice in the school that brings about change.

### **Commentary**

#### ***Main school***

59. All pupils expressed their appreciation of the excellent support they receive from teachers and in particular from heads of year. They know they are highly valued and are very confident to confide in staff. The pastoral system in school is very strong. It is extremely sensitive to the pupils' personal needs and circumstances and shows a genuine depth of concern. Commitment to child protection is very high and, because of the excellent relationships and the knowledge staff have of the pupils, they are very quick to notice any changes and to take the necessary action. Health and safety issues are a high priority with proper risk assessments taking place where needed and appliances, alarm and equipment tested as required. Parents agree that their daughters are very well looked after in school.

60. The school makes good use of the information it has about pupils before they enter to 'band' them by ability so that those requiring more help are in smaller groups. Its own assessment information is very well used higher up the school to make the best provision for the range of pupils it has. For example, those pupils with special educational needs are very well supported through the very well thought out individual education plans, whilst, from Year 10, the most able pupils take science as three separate subjects. The pupils know what their targets in subjects are, know what they have to do to achieve them and appreciate the support they receive to meet them. Pupils make well-informed decisions about what to do after Year 11 because the school provides good quality information through careers lessons and input from Connexions. The pupils' personal development is tracked through the school and where support is needed it is provided. The school has a counsellor who is able to give help in individual cases. The readiness of staff to provide personal support for individuals, over and above what is required, is very well illustrated through the mentoring system where identified pupils in Year 11, who might benefit from some discrete help, are offered this by a teacher.
61. Year 7 pupils speak enthusiastically about the very smooth transfer they made into the school. Visits by Year 7 tutors to their primary schools ensure that information is passed on and the pupils know some faces when they make their 'taster day' visit. Parents have the opportunity to meet their child's tutor that evening.
62. A very effective system of form, year and school councils ensures that the pupils' and students' views are taken seriously. The councillors are positive about their roles and about what they have achieved. Changes to school meals are under discussion with the catering manager at the council's request. Some new benches have already been installed outside, again identified as needed, by the council.

### ***Sixth form***

63. The same level of attention is paid to the health, safety and welfare of students in the sixth form. The excellent relationships that develop help to ensure that students have someone from whom they can seek assistance.
64. Students feel they receive very good academic support. Their work is marked thoroughly and they are provided with effective feedback that informs them of how they are doing as well as what more they could do. Students appreciate the fact that staff are on hand when examination results are issued and help to resolve any resultant issues. There is a comprehensive programme of careers education in place. However, some pupils who choose not to go on to higher education feel they are not given the same degree of support to find courses or to join the world of work as those who want to go to university.
65. Transfer to the sixth form is very smooth. About two thirds of the pupils stay on at school: others move to other schools or colleges and a smaller number go into employment. In Year 11 good quality information about what courses are offered is available. This process has already started for this year with presentations about courses to Year 11 pupils by students in Year 12. A week of induction activities takes place in July, including sample lessons so students know what to expect. Thus, when they start back in September they can quickly set to work and focus on learning.

## Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

*Links with parents are very good, as is the quality of partnership with other schools and colleges, and with the wider community.*

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are extremely pleased with and supportive of the school.
- Very good quality information is provided for parents to keep them abreast of all that happens in school.
- Links with other schools and colleges, and with the community, are very good.

### Commentary

#### ***Main School***

66. Responses to the Ofsted questionnaire and to the parents' meeting show that parents are pleased with the education provided by the school. They feel their children are happy and well cared for and that they make good progress, both academically and personally, because they are expected to work hard. The inspection team fully endorses these positive comments. However, the parents did raise a number of concerns, one regarding how well the school takes parents' views into account. A questionnaire, similar to the one used by Ofsted, was used to consult with most parents last summer; similar concerns were raised. As a result of analysis of the first questionnaire the school has already put in place systems and changes that will become evident as the year progresses. Arrangements for consultation evenings are under constant review and new procedures are to be trialled. An extra meeting, requested by parents, earlier in the school year has already been introduced for parents with children in Year 7.
67. The school works in close partnership with the parents to provide the very best for the pupils. Parents are encouraged to contact the school with any problems, concerns or information; in return the school aims to get back to parents as quickly as possible. The parents of pupils with special educational needs are fully involved with plans for their child's education. Dissatisfaction with the quality of information provided by the school was identified by parents. However, it was judged by the team to be very good. The main school report has been revamped recently and this, as well as interim and summary reports, will be sent home at times more appropriate to each pupil's year group. General letters, often from the headteacher, which explain procedures and new initiatives, are particularly clear, detailed and helpful. Parents are kept abreast of what is going on by regular newsletters, including one specifically produced for the parents of Year 7 pupils.
68. Links with other schools are very good. These ensure that parents and pupils are aware of the aims and ethos of Presdales School, and that there is a smooth transition from Year 6 to Year 7. Pupils therefore settle into their new school very quickly. There is a valuable exchange of information about those pupils having special educational needs so that appropriate provision can be arranged. There are also good opportunities for primary school pupils to take part in musical activities at Presdales

School, and in English there are joint activities between pupils in Year 8 and Years 3 and 4 aimed at improving the quality of creative writing.

69. There are increasing curricular links with local secondary schools in order to provide wider opportunities in Years 12 and 13; a joint media studies course is already in place. Productive links are in place with a girls' school in the London Borough of Lambeth, proving particularly beneficial to the headteachers and senior staff at the schools. There are also popular social events with a local boys' school.
70. Pupils gain significant benefit from the close links the school has established with the local community. For example, there is a well-organised one-week programme of work experience placements for all pupils in Year 10, providing an introduction to the world of work. Further links have been established through employers' involvement with vocational courses. There are also regular links with a local church, and the Faith Day held for sixth form students during the inspection provided the opportunity for students to learn about and reflect on a number of other faiths. Contact with the wider community occurs through regular educational visits abroad to countries such as France, Italy, Japan and Belgium.
71. In return, the school makes its premises available for adult classes; these are particularly popular and successful in languages. Furthermore, the school is justifiably proud of the large contribution made to both local and national charities as a result of its fund-raising events.
72. The impact of the language college status on the school and its community has been significant and the school has made very good progress in achieving the targets set in its development plan. The shared partnership and reciprocal activities have enhanced learning for students and members of the local community, creating a sense of purpose and engendering pride. The teaching of French is well established in the local primary schools and the initiative developed by Presdales School is seen nationally as a model of good practice. Presdales' staff teach in seventeen primary schools and also provide training for their teachers so that almost all of the Year 7 pupils now arrive with a grounding in French and are highly motivated to study languages. As a result, standards in languages have risen in recent years. There are good links with other local secondary schools where cultural activities and shared foreign exchanges offer opportunities to other students while intensive oral days improve GCSE results for all. The school has supported others in developing new courses, motivating boys, and providing training and teaching advice as well as contributing new language resources so that standards are rising locally.
73. Provision for the local community is now very good. The school offers a broad adult education programme enabling non-certificated language skills to be gained. Day-time language courses are popular and expanding and meet the needs of a wide age range. Links with the local business community are being developed and there is scope for expansion here. Overseas links are especially strong and permeate the international feel that the school has. The leadership of the community development plan is very good and based on vision, enthusiasm, energy and a real commitment to the benefits of an international ethos for all; a value base that is enthusiastically endorsed by the pupils. This strong vision, supported by the high work rate of the staff, has ensured that Presdales is ahead of its expected progress as a specialist school.

### ***Sixth form***

74. The involvement of parents continues into the sixth form, where they go on supporting the school in what it does for their children. Students on vocational courses in the sixth form are provided with very good work experience opportunities: those engaged in applied business studies, for example, are provided with the opportunity to take part in two weeks' work experience. This increases their understanding of the workplace, and of how businesses are run, reinforcing the theory covered in class. Sixth form students make a particularly good contribution to the school's fund-raising on behalf of those in society who require support through charitable organisations.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

*Overall, the quality of leadership and management is very good. The governance of the school, the effectiveness of management, and the overall quality of leadership, are very good. The headteacher's leadership is excellent. Statutory requirements are not fully met for a daily act of collective worship.*

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The outstanding leadership of the headteacher has enabled the school to develop very well.
- There is very good leadership at all levels in the school.
- Inclusiveness throughout the school is excellent.
- The governors bring valuable skills to the school's work.
- The school has been successful in delivering its planned work as a specialist language college.

### **Commentary**

#### ***Main school***

75. ***Governance*** is very good. Members of the governing body have a wide range of skills that are relevant to the school's needs. The governors are fully involved in strategic planning and in formulating policies. They hold the school to account, and are able to do so because they keep in close touch with all the school's work. Governors are fully aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and they use this knowledge to play a full part in development planning, and in helping the school to set its priorities.
76. Governors ensure that this is a very highly inclusive school. They receive reports and presentations on how well pupils from different backgrounds are performing, and they ensure that the school's policies and procedures meet the latest requirements. Within the limits of funding, the school is accessible to those with physical or visual impairment, though the site makes for particular difficulties because of the many different levels, steps and other difficulties. However, plans are in place to address this issue and the school is currently awaiting funding to enable further developments.

77. The very good quality of education the pupils and students receive is underpinned by the contribution made by the governors, ensuring that in almost all respects, statutory requirements are met. The school does not meet the requirement to hold a daily act of collective worship for all pupils: the buildings are very cramped for the numbers now in the school, and there are few spaces large enough for significant gatherings to take place. However, governors and senior staff do what they can to extend opportunities, for example through the one-minute of reflection that the whole school shares simultaneously each morning, supported by the thought for the day programme. Assemblies are of good quality. The excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils shows that achievement is not impaired by this non-compliance. All the required policies, including that on anti-racism, are in place, and are systematically monitored.
78. The overall quality of *leadership* in the school is very good; senior and middle managers share the headteacher's vision, and the school's direction is very clear. This is a major factor in the school's excellent ethos and inclusive nature, and its very good achievement. That the girls at the school have such a positive view of education, and work hard, are reflections of these qualities in its leaders, who act as very good role models.
79. The leadership provided by the headteacher is outstanding. Whilst she would claim that the school's many successes are the result of the collegiate approach to leadership - and there is much truth in that - the various teams in the school are the result of her appointments. For example, the school will not make appointments unless candidates are of the required standard and vision. This is not a complacent school; things are seen to be capable of improvement despite its many successes. This reflects the headteacher's wish to provide the best possible education for all pupils at the school, and results in strong leadership on curricular and teaching matters.
80. The other members of the senior leadership team work closely with the headteacher to ensure that the school's effectiveness remains high. Their leadership, and that of others with responsibility for leading teams in the school, is very good. Leadership in the vast majority of subjects is very good indeed. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very well led and managed. The co-ordinator for special educational needs (SENCO) is dedicated to enabling pupils to achieve very well, and provides an enthusiastic and clear direction for provision. However, the very limited amount of time allocated to the SENCO to fulfil her responsibilities is inadequate and results in her working under considerable pressure.
81. The many teams contribute fully to the school's very good systems for planning for its development. As a specialist college, the school and community development plans lie at the heart of its work; it is a tribute to the quality and delivery of these plans that the school is nearing the end of its third phase of designation, and is seeking approval for a fourth. Unlike many schools, the specialist plan is not duplicated in other plans; there is sensible cross-referencing between them. All plans are rooted in a very careful process of evaluation at all levels.
82. The leadership of the school's specialist language college is excellent, both that of the headteacher, who fosters a strong ethos for language learning and international awareness throughout the school, and of the language college project manager who has established clear educational priorities and a strong team.



83. **Management** is very good. The school's performance is carefully monitored at all levels, and systems are well established and smooth running. Middle managers are monitored by members of the senior team, and audits are rigorous and effective. Findings from lesson observations, data analysis and other evidence are gathered so that the picture of the school's work is accurate. This is shown in the school's self-analysis for the inspection, which was largely accurate.
84. The teachers are well supported by their line managers. The school has very good systems of induction and good arrangements for continuing professional development. There are also very good strategies for the recruitment and retention of staff which have ensured that the teaching staff have the specialisms necessary to support the full range of curriculum subjects. Staff members display a high degree of loyalty and commitment to the school, and when someone leaves - usually for promotion or for family reasons - many vacancies have been filled from within the school itself: part time teachers increasing their commitment, for example.
85. The management of language college aspects is excellent. It provides a firm strategic direction which allows the separate heads of the six foreign languages and of primary French to have considerable autonomy but still to work together very effectively as a cohesive team, providing very good provision in modern languages teaching as well as having a key role in fulfilling the objectives of the language college. In particular, the planning for the exemplary primary French scheme is excellent in its scope and coherence. The project manager has also successfully encouraged and secured the engagement of other subject departments in the school in curricular and extra-curricular developments which promote an international dimension.
86. Financial management is aligned closely to the school's development planning. Spending plans are linked well to educational priorities. Governors and school staff show a good understanding of best value principles, for example in delivering catering, cleaning and grounds services. There is constant challenge to improve, and good use of comparative data, although this tends to focus on a relatively local area rather than using the national figures now available. Overall, although the school receives slightly more funds than average, its many successes, on a very wide frontage, mean that it gives very good value for money.

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

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	4,331,380	Balance from previous year	74,625
Total expenditure	4,331,362	Balance carried forward to the next	74,643
Expenditure per pupil	4,036		

***Sixth form***

87. The sixth form is very well led. Although not a member of the senior leadership team, the head of sixth form is line-managed by the headteacher, and the frequent discussions that flow ensure that sixth form matters are properly understood and acted upon. Governors also play a proper part in the development of the sixth form, for example asking for presentations on its work.

88. Curriculum leadership in the sixth form is high, and the results, the very broad range of courses, and high retention rates, show that provision is successful. The decision to abandon certificated key skills courses, for example, was based on a careful consideration of costs and benefits to the students. As a result, more appropriate programmes have been put into place to meet the needs of the students. As elsewhere in the school, planning for sixth form development is based upon careful evaluation of evidence; the culture here is one of using data well to diagnose potential problems.
89. Management of the sixth form is very good, and uses the same very good systems of monitoring and self-evaluation that are seen in the main school. The sixth form is well staffed, usually with subject specialists, and teachers receive good professional development. At present, there are a few links with other schools, and these are developing. There are some relatively small teaching groups in some subjects, but these are offset by some quite large classes in other subjects. Cost effectiveness in the sixth form is very good.

## **WORK RELATED LEARNING**

*Provision for work related learning (WRL) is good and all statutory requirements are met.*

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The Year 10 work experience programme provides good opportunities to help pupils develop their understanding of the world of work.
- The careers programme effectively guides the pupils towards employability.
- There are not enough explicit references to WRL in lessons.

### **Commentary**

90. The school is successfully building upon its work experience placements for Year 10, links with local employers and contributions from subjects such as business studies, design and technology and science. The pupils value their work experience placements, understanding how these support and complement the work that they undertake in other lessons. Preparation and debriefing for work experience are good. The pupils talk very enthusiastically about their placements while employers, through the well-structured feedback profile, are very positive about the high level of work skills that the school generates, commenting favourably on attitude, initiative, independence and cooperation. Employers visit the school to inform and advise the pupils of the opportunities and challenges of the world of work. A small number of Year 11 students enhance their curriculum and learning by a weekly industrial placement, while the specialist language college offers additional placements in other countries.
91. Standards in the applied GCSE vocational courses are above average. Making good use of the national guidance, the world of work and enterprise education is offered to the majority through experiences in subjects such as business studies, design and technology, modern foreign languages and science. Achievement in these areas is good and the skills of collaboration, problem solving and working in groups are

especially effective. The pupils receive good careers guidance, with teachers showing a detailed knowledge of employers' needs and changes in working practices and requirements, especially in the tertiary sector, which is well represented locally. This enables the pupils to discuss confidently issues of the labour market, retail change, business life cycles and topics such as health and safety at work. This knowledge, along with mock interviews, CVs and practice letters of application, ensures effective preparation for future employment.

92. Leadership and management of the area are good. The school has sensibly established a small team to develop WRL and ensure that appropriate staff training is in place. Improvements needed have been identified and moves made to ensure greater consistency. While several curriculum areas have developed effective links with local businesses and are giving WRL a priority in their development planning, this is not yet the norm. While there is much good practice teachers need to be more explicit in linking subject material and teaching methods to the everyday world of work.

## PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

### SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

#### ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

##### English

Provision in English is **very good**.

##### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average in Year 11. They are currently close to very high in Year 9.
- Achievement is very good throughout the school.
- The teachers' subject expertise is very good. It is greatly enhanced by their enthusiasm, high expectations, challenge and encouragement.
- The leadership and management of the subject are very good.
- The pupils' attitudes are very positive. They fully engage in the process of learning so they can learn independently.
- Provision could improve further through the consistent implementation of recent innovations in schemes of work, teaching styles and assessment.

##### Commentary

93. The results in the 2003 end of Year 9 English tests were well above average. The pupils did better than might have been expected given their earlier results at the end of Year 6. Results were also well above average in the previous two years. Nevertheless, in 2004 the results improved dramatically. They were at a level normally achieved only by the top five per cent of schools. Six out of ten pupils gained level 7: the highest level possible. In the 2003 GCSE English and English literature examinations results were well above average. They were also well above average in the previous two years. Results improved further in 2004. At GCSE pupils have consistently tended to do significantly better than might be expected from their earlier results at the end of Year 9.
94. The pupils in Years 9 and 11 entered the school with above average standards. Their current standards are well above average. Their achievement is very good, for they improve the levels at which they work, and also develop independent learning skills of a very high order, showing unusually mature independence in their learning. In Years 9 and 11 most write with better than expected levels of control and accuracy for their respective ages. Many enhance their standards through the cogent use of a wide range of vocabulary, expression and correctly punctuated complex syntax. Their responses to a wide range of challenging texts are highly detailed and very analytical. Very few pupils in Years 9 and 11 do not reach the expected standards because of inaccuracies in their work. Very good achievement permeates the work of pupils of all attainments, including those with special educational needs. The pupils develop a highly mature approach to learning. They consistently volunteer thoughtful contributions and probing, speculative questions during lessons. They readily initiate and follow through ideas of their own. They develop very effective higher order study skills. They relish the challenge presented by demanding texts and written assignments.
95. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. The teachers' considerable subject expertise has a major impact on the improvement of the pupils' speaking, writing and reading skills.

Teachers ensure the pupils are very well prepared for examinations. They convey a real passion for their subject and for the pupils' learning. Pupils respond very positively to this high level of encouragement. The level of challenge is excellent because of the teachers' very high expectations. These result in the pupils having very high expectations of themselves. This was consistently demonstrated by their enthusiasm, their willingness to share their independent thinking, and their working so well with others. Pupils respond very positively to a wide range of learning methods. Very expert teacher demonstrations of skills backed up by chances to apply them are at the heart of the pupils' effective learning. A few pupils, a very small number, have less effective attitudes and levels of concentration. Lesson planning and organisation do not always take account of them. Although many lessons are brisk and purposeful, supportive learning methods, such as clearly publicised objectives and closing plenary discussions to check learning progress, are not used consistently. Marking is very good, and is precise about strengths and weaknesses. However, pupils in Years 7 to 9 do not yet have enough explicit knowledge of the criteria for their target levels to support progress, despite recent developments on this issue. There was no evidence of the subject contributing to the pupils' numeracy skills. Standards in ICT are above average but pupils do not have enough access to ICT during English lessons.

96. Leadership of the subject is very good. A comparatively new head of department has a clear vision of improvement for an already successful department. This encompasses higher standards and the means to achieve them. Recent innovations are dedicated to this agenda. There is a corporate approach to curricular planning, teaching and formal assessment tasks. The explicit focus on initiatives to raise standards further in Year 9 tests led to the much improved results of 2004. Management is very good. There are secure and effective procedures for monitoring teaching and learning. The evaluation of data in conjunction with other self-assessment procedures results in better teaching and learning. Some innovations regarding schemes of work, teaching styles and assessment are at an early stage of development and require full implementation. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good.

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

97. The provision made by subjects for the development of literacy is very good overall. Standards in literacy are well above average in Years 9 and 11: the pupils' reading skills are fluent and levels of comprehension secure. Speaking and listening are also very good. Very good practice was observed in religious education, citizenship, history, geography, English, science and design and technology. Science teachers provide a range of very good opportunities for pupils to write creatively, for example, and display the results to good effect. In religious education, pupils make very good use of subject specific language and make the most of opportunities to express themselves through their writing. The librarian promotes reading opportunities effectively through initiatives with subjects such as English, history, art and geography, and through strategies such as the avid reader's scheme.

## **Modern foreign languages**

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

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils achieve well above average GCSE results.

- The teachers have an excellent command of the languages they teach and use them to very good effect in lessons to develop the pupils' listening and speaking skills.
- Lessons are characterised by high expectations and high levels of challenge which ensure that the pupils learn very well.
- The pupils benefit from a curriculum of exceptional breadth and quality.

## **Commentary**

98. At GCSE, results in 2003 were significantly well above average in French, German and Spanish; results in Italian, Japanese and Russian were similarly high. Pupils tended to do better in French and German than in the other subjects they took. In 2004, results were again high in all languages. The high GCSE standards reported by the previous inspection have been maintained.
99. Standards in work seen during the inspection are above average in Year 9, and well above average in 11. This represents very good achievement overall: it is good in Years 7 to 9, given the pupils' general standards on entry to the school, and very good in Years 10 and 11.
100. By Year 9, the pupils speak, read and write their foreign languages with increasing confidence and accuracy. Their listening skills have developed particularly well because English is rarely heard in lessons. By Year 11, the majority of pupils speak and write confidently and competently, using a range of tenses, with high levels of accuracy. Levels of listening and reading comprehension are high for all pupils. Pupils with special educational needs also achieve highly because they are well supported and challenged.
101. Teaching and learning in modern foreign languages are very good throughout the main school. There were no instances of unsatisfactory teaching observed during the inspection, and there was some excellent German teaching. The key strengths of the teaching which promote very effective learning are the teachers' excellent language skills; their consistent use of the foreign language in all lessons which helps the pupils to make real progress in understanding and in speaking; the high levels of expectation and challenge, which ensure that the pupils work hard and at a good pace; and the excellent relationships between the teachers and the pupils, and between the pupils themselves. Writing, including extended writing, is very well fostered, as is reading, by means of a well-planned reading scheme that offers progression as the pupils move up the school. The pupils have very good attitudes to learning languages, work sensibly, and develop well as independent learners. Aspects of literacy are very well taught, and the pupils have regular opportunities to improve their ICT skills. The teachers use assessment very well to identify strengths and weaknesses, to take appropriate action and to set the pupils realistic targets to help them to improve.
102. Curriculum leadership is very good. The heads of the individual languages have a shared commitment to promoting the highest standards and achievement. Management, too, is very effective, and monitoring of standards and of all aspects of teaching and learning is undertaken assiduously. The curriculum in modern languages is excellent, offering exceptional breadth, and real quality in that breadth.

103. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good: the department has maintained its high standards, while at the same time significantly enhancing its curricular provision, extending the teaching of French in local primary schools, and widening the scope of its programme of study visits, exchanges and work experience abroad.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are well above national averages and achievement is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11, as a result of focused teaching and pupils' positive attitudes and behaviour.
- Departmental strengths include teachers' subject knowledge, positive relationships and strong leadership.
- There is insufficient evidence of catering for the spread of ability, especially in Year 7 where the curriculum does not build sufficiently on the primary phase.

## Commentary

104. In the 2003 national tests in mathematics, results were well above national averages and in line with similar schools based on the pupils' prior attainment in the Year 6 national tests. The 2004 results were similar to those in 2003. On the evidence of the pupils' work and the lessons observed, standards in Year 9 are well above the national average. For these pupils, standards on entry to the school were above the national average and achievement is good. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported so that standards and achievement are similar to those of other pupils.
105. Pupils in Year 9 have a good understanding of trial and improvement methods and make good use of Pythagoras' theorem. Higher attaining pupils can interpret cumulative frequency graphs and identify Pythagorean triples.
106. In the 2003 GCSE examinations, results were well above the national average, and in line with those of similar schools, based on pupils' prior attainment in the Year 9 national tests. The 2004 results were similar to those in 2003 but represented better achievement on the basis of pupils' prior attainment. On the evidence of the pupils' work and the lessons observed, standards in Year 11 are well above the national average. On the basis of pupils' prior attainment in Year 9, this represents very good achievement.
107. Pupils in Year 11 draw quadratic and cubic graphs and calculate lengths and angles in right-angled triangles. Higher attaining pupils have a good awareness of the circle theorems and solve quadratics by completing the square.
108. The curriculum in mathematics is broad and offers an appropriate balance across all of the attainment targets but there is insufficient attention given to using and applying mathematics. The provision for ICT within the department is good and pupils enjoy regular access to ICT through the use of the interactive whiteboard, graphical calculators and opportunities to use computers to demonstrate graphical work or else consolidate taught work. Opportunities for making use of the Internet are under-developed. The provision for literacy is satisfactory and subject specific words are visibly displayed in the classroom although pupils' vocabulary is not sufficiently developed in terms of explaining mathematical words and in supporting pupils in expressing ideas in mathematical terms.
109. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11, where teachers are carefully focused on examination requirements and raising performance in external examinations. Teaching in Year 7 does not always cater for the spread of ability or build sufficiently on the work undertaken in the primary school, so that the pupils repeat, rather than develop, work that they have already done.
110. In general, lessons start promptly so that pupils are quickly engaged. Lesson planning is very full and objectives are usefully shared with pupils. Teachers demonstrate very good subject knowledge and confident exposition. They enjoy positive and productive relationships with their pupils. Homework builds well on the work of the lesson. Marking is regular and supportive. Pupils have a very good awareness of their targets and how to achieve these.



111. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Pupils behave well, concentrate hard and demonstrate enthusiasm and commitment to their studies. They enjoy productive relationships with their teachers and with one another. Attitudes are not so positive in Years 7 to 9 where pupils are talkative and lack focus, especially at the end of the double lessons.
112. Curriculum leadership is very good. There is a clear educational direction for mathematics and a commitment to teaching with a very strong team ethos. The head of department has a good awareness of the strengths of the department as a result of her monitoring of books, and lesson observations. However, this monitoring is not sufficiently rigorous to identify minor weaknesses and take remedial action. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

113. The provision for mathematics across the curriculum is good. The school has a numeracy policy and cross-curricular meetings are used to allow departments to discuss issues such as the timing of topics. Number work is developed well in science, technology and history as well as physical education for scoring and calculating heart rates. Algebraic skills are used well in business education for spreadsheet formulae, in geography for calculating Spearman's rank correlation and in science for calculating average speed and acceleration from given data. Spatial awareness is used well across the curriculum, including measuring in design and technology as well as distance and scale in geography. Pupils demonstrate good spatial awareness in gymnastics and dance. Graphs are used in design and technology and geography as well as in science for calculating acceleration using speed-time graphs. Pupils are good at interpreting economic graphs in business education and analysing available data for their science coursework.

### **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **very good**.

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

- Curriculum leadership and management of the department are very good.
- Standards are well above average in Year 9.
- Teaching overall is good, with a number of very good lessons.
- There are insufficient opportunities for teachers to observe very good practice.
- There is increasing use of computers to enhance learning, but practice is still inconsistent across the department.

#### **Commentary**

114. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were well above average; a high proportion of pupils gained the higher grades. The standards of these pupils were already above average on entry to the school, yet their achievements during Years 7 to 9 were very good. This is because not only do they improve the level at which they work, but they also develop learning skills of a very high order, and a degree of independence in their learning that is unusual for their age. Standards were also well above those of pupils in similar schools. Results were similar to those the pupils gained

in mathematics and English. Results in 2004 remained at a high level. In the GCSE examinations in 2003, results in biology, chemistry, and physics were all well above average, with almost all pupils gaining grades A\* to C. A high proportion of pupils gained A\* or A grades. In the double science examination, results were below average, with a higher proportion of pupils gaining D and E grades than expected. However, overall results were comparable with those of pupils in similar schools. GCSE results in 2004 were in line with those in 2003.

115. Standards of work seen during the inspection reflected the results gained in national tests in recent years. Standards are uniformly well above average in Year 9 due to good teaching and also pupils' very positive attitude to learning. Pupils' pride in the presentation of their written work is particularly good. Standards remain above average in Year 11 and achievement is good, but a tendency by a minority of pupils to chatter while working is not always well managed by teachers. This inevitably reduces the concentration of these pupils, and inhibits their learning. Pupils with special educational needs are well known by their teachers. They are well integrated, and they make very good progress, particularly in Years 7 to 9. Science lessons make a very good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural awareness.
116. Teaching is good throughout the school, and very good in a minority of lessons. Teachers possess a very good command of their subject, they are committed, and the planning of work is very thorough. In the best lessons planning includes devising interesting strategies to involve pupils in the learning process. This encourages pupils to think about their work: for example, to challenge the principles of physics they are being taught. Relationships between teachers and pupils are based on mutual respect, so that teachers can generally relax and enjoy their work. However, insufficient reference is made in lessons to the criteria required for pupils to reach their target grades. There is a good contribution to the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. The use of computers is increasing with the purchase of new lap-tops, but not all pupils have sufficient access during their science lessons. There is still a shortage of data logging equipment, as there was at the time of the previous inspection, and some hardware is out of date.
117. The very good curriculum leadership and management of the science department ensure that schemes of work provide very good guidance for teachers. Examination data are carefully monitored, and action taken where appropriate. There is an effective mix of experienced and more recently qualified teachers, but the sharing of innovative teaching methods is not well developed. Overall, however, teamwork is very good, and the technicians provide efficient support. The accommodation is well maintained, but there is a need for an additional laboratory. Since the previous inspection, the department has made good progress. The upward trend in standards in Years 7 to 9 augurs well for the future.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

Provision for ICT is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good teaching and learning lead to good achievement.

- Pupils use ICT across the curriculum to enhance learning in all subjects.
- Good leadership and management lead to continual development of the curriculum.
- Teachers do not use assessment effectively to support learning in a minority of cases.

## Commentary

118. Standards in the teacher assessments for pupils at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were above average. A high percentage of pupils gained the expected level but few were above this. Standards in 2004 appear similar but with more pupils at the higher level. Standards have improved since 2002 and continue to improve. The school does not enter pupils for a GCSE in ICT.
119. Pupils come into the school with average knowledge and understanding of ICT. Standards in Year 9 are currently above average so achievement is good. However, pupils do not reach the highest levels as they do in other subjects because they do not yet have the opportunities to do so through the teaching and curriculum. Pupils use spreadsheets well to model profit and loss. They can conduct and present research on different topics to different audiences, using presentation and word-processing programs. Pupils also learn simple desktop publishing. The highest attaining pupils do not exercise choice in the use of different types of software or learn any programming skills. Pupils do not learn how to use a paint program but can use design programs in technology lessons. Standards in Year 11 are above average, making achievement in Years 10 and 11 good also. These pupils have had fewer opportunities to develop knowledge and understanding in ICT in earlier years but these are developed well in business subjects at GCSE and through regular opportunities to use ICT in citizenship and in other subjects.
120. Teaching is good overall and sometimes very good. This is equally true whether pupils are taught in specialist ICT lessons or during lessons in other subjects. The well-planned lessons are demanding and create a high level of interest and enthusiasm. Teachers use good visual stimuli to engage the pupils and are able to extend their skills and understanding through expert advice and support. Year 8 pupils, for example, develop some engaging school 'web sites', because the teacher can show them how to use a sophisticated program. However, some pupils do not achieve as highly as they could because the school does not provide opportunities to work at a higher level. The assessment process gives pupils and teachers a good idea of standards at the end of each topic, in line with the scheme of work. However, teachers do not use their assessment of pupils' progress in lessons to provide work at different levels for different pupils.
121. The curriculum leadership of ICT is good. The leader is enthusiastic and committed to the continual review and development of provision. The pupils enjoy a good level of subject staff expertise due to effective monitoring, support and training. The leader has a good overview of ICT as a tool for learning and a clear vision for the future, recognising areas for improvement.
122. The curriculum has recently been improved to help raise standards in line with current demands. It is now satisfactory and managed well. Pupils see ICT permeate almost all aspects of their learning and many turn to the computer automatically to produce

homework or to find things out. Pupils are now taught in specialist lessons in all years, for at least part of the each year. For Year 9, at the time of the inspection, this had not yet taken place and it was clear that continuity is still a problem. Pupils have difficulty in recalling spreadsheet skills, for example, because they have not practised them for a year. Other skills, such as those needed to present written work attractively or to use an Internet search engine, have been used more regularly.

123. Since the previous inspection the school has made a good improvement to ICT. Standards and coverage have improved. Most teachers are very competent users of ICT. Pupils now undertake measurement and control. Assessment is now satisfactory and improving.

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

124. The pupils' competence in ICT is above average in Year 9 and in Year 11. Pupils see the value of using ICT now from an early age and the school exploits this interest and enthusiasm effectively. Pupils have very good and sometimes excellent research skills; they use word processing for essays as a matter of course. They are keen to present their work well and use a range of different programs. The Internet is used very effectively for research in nearly all subjects. In design and technology, pupils learn to use two-dimensional and three-dimensional design and circuit design programs. The ICT resources for modern foreign languages are good and enhance learning considerably. In other subjects, such as art, music or science, the lack of space or equipment affects the range of opportunities, and means that they are not doing as much as others to broaden pupils' experience. All departments suffer from the shortage of teaching rooms, which means that sometimes the computer rooms are used for other purposes.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **Geography**

Provision in geography is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils are given extensive opportunities to be independent learners.
- Very good teaching ensures well above average GCSE results.
- Pupils are given very good guidance on how to improve.
- In some lessons the teachers try to cover too much, so restricting the opportunities for extended writing.

### **Commentary**

125. At GCSE results were well above average in 2003 and results for 2004 were at the same level. In recent years the results have consistently been well above average. Pupils do as well in geography as in their other subjects.
126. Standards are broadly average when pupils enter the school in Year 7. In work seen and in the teachers' assessments, they are well above average by Year 9 which represents very good achievement overall. The pupils have a good understanding of

geographical terms and respond enthusiastically to question and answer work, expressing ideas well. At times, the lessons are so full that there is not enough written follow-up of these very good ideas. By Year 11, standards are well above average, which again represents very good achievement as these pupils started their GCSE course in a broadly average position. These high standards reflect not only the quality of teaching but also, through question and answer work and research exercises, the development of the pupils' capacity to be independent learners. The pupils have a high level of understanding and a secure factual base. While the numbers involved are small, the pupils with special educational needs make very good progress, as do the higher attainers. Geography makes a very good contribution to literacy by its use of key words and speaking skills. As a contribution to developing their numeracy skills, graphs are widely used and statistics interpreted. The subject encourages the use of ICT, especially through homework, as access to computers in the school is not always possible.

127. Teaching and learning are very good in Years 7 to 9, where pupils benefit from well planned lessons with a wide range of activities which ensure pace and challenge. In all lessons group work and independent study are encouraged and the pupils offer thoughtful and detailed answers to questions. In Years 10 and 11, teaching and learning are also very good. The teachers' knowledge of the GCSE examination and their skills in presenting this are important factors in the school's success and in the motivation of the pupils. Higher attainers write fluently and at length, linking cause and effect. Fieldwork is strong and contributes well to ensuring high standards in the GCSE coursework. In all years pupils are encouraged to learn by warm, caring teachers who are highly regarded. The quality of relationships shines through. The pupils' awareness of social, cultural and moral issues is very good, and moments for reflection are used well to foster spiritual development. The subject contributes to citizenship through its work on the less developed world. Marking is detailed and consistent, and praise is widely used. The teachers offer pupils very good advice on how to improve their work. Behaviour is very good and the pupils are attentive, energetic and enjoy geography.
128. Curriculum leadership is very good, with teamwork and mutual support being strengths. The departmental team is experienced, has very good subject knowledge and places a strong emphasis on learning. Expectations are high and there is a continuous desire to improve. Management is very good with strong organisation, planning and the effective deployment of resources. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good.

## History

Provision for history is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are very high and pupils achieve very well throughout the school.
- Teaching is very good and some is excellent.
- Work is marked regularly but marking in Years 7 to 9 does not always give sufficiently specific guidance for improvement.

- Very good leadership and management results in a very strong department deeply committed to sustaining very high standards.

## Commentary

129. The Year 9 National Curriculum teachers' assessments have been well above average over the last three years, and GGSE results have been very high in comparison with the national average during this time.
130. Pupils enter the school with average attainment in history. Current standards in Year 9 are well above average and those in Year 11 are very high. These standards represent very good achievement. All pupils, including those with special educational needs and the gifted and talented, achieve equally well.
131. Pupils respond extremely well to the consistently very high challenge and expectations of their teachers. They show very good and often outstanding achievement, resulting in very good historical knowledge and understanding, and a very good range of historical skills. Pupils work at a high intellectual level in lessons. Year 9 pupils worked with a lively curiosity in analysing and assessing the effectiveness of the protests of the suffragettes and suffragists in the early 20th century, making impressive links with current forms of public protest. Year 11 pupils developed further their very good understanding of the need for change in the relationships between world powers in the 1980s, by rapidly and accurately interpreting historical evidence to identify the reasons for bankruptcy in the USSR.
132. Written work strongly reflects pupils' very good knowledge and understanding, their skills in the critical analysis of historical sources of evidence and very good grasp of historical concepts such as cause and consequence, change and continuity. Essays are well structured and usually evidence is used very well to support explanation and sustained argument. It is only in a few cases that this is not the case, and sometimes the work of average and lower attaining pupils in Years 7 to 9 is careless and lacks sufficient detail. Literacy and numeracy skills are very good but there is less evidence of pupils using ICT.
133. In the very good, and sometimes excellent, teaching, lessons are very clearly focused, brisk, purposeful and well planned to sustain very good pace and challenge. Very high expectations are skilfully based on good knowledge of individual pupils' learning requirements. The teachers' very good subject knowledge and clear presentations enable pupils to understand complex issues. Year 11 pupils made excellent progress in understanding Gorbachev's contribution to the ending of the Cold War because changes in personalities and other key factors were explained very clearly, and there was consistent challenge for them to inter-relate the influence of social and international factors. Innovative strategies capture the pupils' interest and inspire them to work at full stretch. Year 9 pupils engaged enthusiastically in analysing the thoughts inside a woman's head at the beginning of the 20th century, comparing these with the changes in the roles of women resulting from World War One.
134. Approaches are often highly interactive with skilled questioning testing pupils' knowledge and understanding, but at times missing opportunities to engage them fully in discussion. This is sometimes the consequence of the pressure of time, especially in

Years 7 to 9. Learning thrives as a result of excellent classroom relationships which foster very good productive group work. Historical skills are promoted very strongly, and literacy and numeracy skills are very well supported but insufficient use is made of ICT. Pupils are very well prepared for GCSE examinations. Homework is set regularly and provides very good opportunities for independent investigative work. Work is marked regularly but not all marking, in Years 7 to 9 especially, provides sufficiently detailed and specific guidance for improvement. Procedures for assessing pupils' progress are thorough and systematic. Data are used very well to track pupils' achievement and to set targets for improvement.

135. The very high standards, very good teaching and pupils' enthusiasm for history are the result of very good curriculum leadership and management. The head of department's exceptionally strong lead inspires other history teachers to share his strong commitment to the highest possible standards of provision and attainment. Curriculum planning includes very good enhancement through a range of visits which deepen students' enjoyment of history. Provision is monitored regularly but arrangements for lesson observation do not provide enough opportunity for the sharing of the very good practice across the department. Very good progress has been made since the previous inspection in building on to the many strengths identified at that time. Standards, teaching and learning have all improved significantly.

## **Religious education**

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

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Because of the very good and challenging teaching, pupils achieve very well to reach well above average standards.
- Pupils work very hard and show a very clear commitment to their learning.
- Religious education makes an excellent contribution to pupils' spiritual development.

## **Commentary**

136. Results in both the 2003 short course and full course GCSE examinations were well above average. Results were at similar levels in 2004, both for the short course that all pupils take in Year 10, and for the full course option group.
137. By Year 9, pupils' standards are well above average. By Year 11, pupils' standards are also well above average. This represents very good achievement in all year groups by all groups of pupils from the average standards with which they enter the school. By Year 9, pupils have very secure knowledge and understanding of the key beliefs and practices of Christianity and of the other world faiths represented in Britain and can appreciate the ways in which such faiths affect daily life. They use specialist vocabulary with growing confidence. Most pupils have developed high-level skills in empathy and reflection. All pupils move beyond the externals of religion to probe deeper questions of meaning and morality.
138. Throughout the year groups there are examples of extended and sensitive writing. Pupils in Years 9 (when they begin the short course GCSE on world religions), Year 10 and Year 11 build very effectively on existing skills and knowledge. They form their own ideas on a wide range of

ethical and religious issues and can apply their understanding to current situations. Pupils are very confident in using ICT to research and present their work.

139. Teaching is very good overall with many excellent features. There are many strengths in the teaching, which have a very positive impact on both pupils' attitudes and on the quality of their learning. Enthusiasm and intellectual challenge are characteristics of all lessons and intellectual demands are high. This means that pupils enjoy their lessons and rise to the challenges they face. Clear exposition, coupled with judicious questioning and prompting, makes pupils think beyond the obvious. Teachers make very good use of a wide range of resources to engage pupils and to clarify concepts. Lower-attaining pupils in Year 7, for example, looked at a clip from 'Bruce Almighty' to help them understand the significance of prayer in Christianity. Assessment of pupils' work is good and has improved considerably since the previous inspection. Pupils understand what they have done well and what they need to do in order to improve their work.
140. Leadership and management are both very good. There is clarity of vision and a shared commitment to improve. All issues raised during the previous inspection have been addressed effectively, although the time allocated to religious education in Years 10 and 11 is still below recommendations. However, all pupils now take a short course GCSE. The department is keen to increase the number of pupils who take a full GCSE course and this is beginning to happen. The subject makes an excellent contribution towards pupils' spiritual development and towards their understanding of what it means to live in a diverse society. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good, and all issues raised have been addressed.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **Design and technology**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards in Years 10 and 11 are well above average because teachers plan lessons well and share their good subject knowledge effectively with pupils.
- The limited time allocated to the subject in Years 7 to 9 restricts the depth of knowledge acquired by some pupils by Year 9.
- Good relationships and pupils' very good attitudes result in a very productive learning environment.

### **Commentary**

141. GCSE results show that overall, standards in 2003 were well above average by the end of Year 11. There were variations in the GCSE A\* to C grades obtained between the different materials. Results in food, textiles and graphics were well above average, resistant materials average and electronics below average. Overall, standards in 2004 were higher. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2003 and 2004 indicate standards well above average. In Years 7 and 8, the pupils' achievement is very good with standards above and well above average. However, even though achievement in



Year 9 is good and standards in work seen are above average, these are not as high as they could be because of the low time allocation for design and technology, which inhibits the depth of knowledge and the use of analytical and investigative skills. The department is aware of this and has strategies in place to improve the situation.

142. Pupils enter the school with average standards in design and technology. They are given good opportunities to use a variety of materials and they develop confident and competent skills using a range of tools, equipment and materials. They develop a good understanding and application of a design brief, developing specifications and planning to produce a quality product. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is very good. Pupils build effectively on skills and develop a deeper understanding of the designing processes, applying them creatively and imaginatively to produce high quality project work. Pupils use ICT well to develop designs and enhance coursework in all years. The development of technical and extended language is good, helping pupils to apply it to a range of writing in coursework.

143. Teaching is good, with examples of very good teaching in Years 10 and 11. Lessons are effectively planned, offering a variety of activities to motivate pupils. When teaching is very good, learning objectives are shared effectively so that pupils are clear about what they are doing. Teachers' enthusiasm, good subject knowledge and high expectations make a valuable contribution to very good achievement. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have a thorough understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to obtain higher grades. In Years 7, 8 and 9 assessment procedures are not, as yet, planned effectively enough into the units of work, resulting in pupils not building effectively on work done in previous units. Relationships are very good and pupils have positive attitudes towards the subject, creating a safe and productive working environment.

144. Curriculum leadership is very good and management is good. The head of department, with a hard-working team of teachers, has a strong commitment to high achievement and sustained improvement. There is a strong direction for the future and a clear awareness of the strengths and weaknesses within the department but strategies to ensure consistency in all areas are not yet specific enough.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

*Art and design and music were inspected fully and drama was sampled.*

In a Year 11 **drama** lesson, standards were well above average and the teaching, learning and achievement were all very good. The pupils' work in the lesson was very well supported by a clearly defined framework. The teacher's probing questions on how they were going to develop dramatic impact resulted in thoughtful and well-informed responses. The pupils worked with very high levels of independence and collaboration in their groups. Attitudes were excellent. Many wish to continue the subject when they embark on post-16 courses. Drama activities make an excellent contribution to the extra-curricular life of the school.

### **Art and design**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- GCSE results have been well above average in recent years.
- Pupils learn two-dimensional skills effectively; painting and drawing are well above average.
- Very large classes and lack of storage space limit the range of media pupils use, particularly for three-dimensional work.
- Good teaching and learning lead to good overall achievement.
- Provision of ICT has improved within art and design, but pupils do not use computers creatively in their work.

## Commentary

145. Pupils' standards on entry are above the national average and above the average for girls. They learn two-dimensional skills well in Years 7 and 8 and make good progress. By Year 9, standards in two-dimensional work are well above average. Pupils' achievements using two-dimensional media are often very good. Their three-dimensional experience is limited because most are in large classes in small rooms and the department has too little storage. Pupils' standards in knowledge and understanding about artists and their work are also well above average. They apply this knowledge well in critical annotations about their work. The department is experimenting with changes in the Year 9 curriculum, to prepare pupils better for the demands of GCSE. This is very helpful for most pupils, introducing them effectively to project work, but the minority of lower attaining pupils in small classes would benefit more from developing their skills in a richer range of media instead. Achievement to Year 9 is good overall.
146. Fewer pupils than average take art for GCSE. Results have been well above girls' averages in the last two years. In 2003, they were very high. Pupils generally do better in art than in their other subjects. Standards have improved significantly in Year 11 since the previous inspection, and are well above average, particularly in two-dimensional work. Pupils annotate sketchbooks well, making clear their own responses to artists' work, linking ideas with their own work. Pupils achieve well overall. Able pupils and those with special educational needs achieve as well as others.
147. Teaching and learning are good. Class management is good, with good demonstrations and effective one-to-one help during lessons. Pupils learn two-dimensional skills very effectively and three-dimensional ones satisfactorily. Group sizes and limitations in resources combine to make large-scale, or three-dimensional work very difficult to accommodate. Pupils' experience of these is, therefore, limited. Although provision of ICT in the department has improved, pupils do not learn well enough how to incorporate ICT creatively into their visual work. They now use computers well for research. Although classes are sometimes noisy, girls work while they chat and achieve a good quantity of work in lessons. They also enjoy good relationships with staff and gain significantly in confidence because of the improvement in their drawing and painting. More consistent reference to the National Curriculum would help younger pupils understand how to improve all aspects of their work to reach higher standards.
148. Leadership and management are good. The department has improved well since the previous inspection, particularly in standards and achievement in GCSE work. Good

improvements to the Year 9 curriculum are helping higher attaining pupils to prepare well for the expectations of GCSE and are motivating higher attaining pupils who have not selected art for their examinations.

## **Music**

Provision in music is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Leadership of the department is very good.
- Very good teaching in Years 10 and 11 leads to very good achievement.
- The quality of extra-curricular music is excellent.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good.
- Peripatetic instrumental teaching is effective in helping to raise standards.

### **Commentary**

149. Standards in the GCSE examination were well above average in 2003 with the majority of pupils gaining an A\* or A grade. Pupils have achieved these high standards in music for the past few years and the 2004 results were similar. In work seen, standards in Year 11 were also well above average.
150. Standards are above average when pupils enter the school, especially in their knowledge of instruments, aural skills and well-developed musical vocabulary. By Year 9 standards are well above average and this represents good achievement. Pupils showed very good written and appraisal skills when comparing the music for the film 'The Dambusters' with Penderecki's 'Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima'. In a Year 11 lesson, pupils showed very good knowledge of composers, forms and devices. They could sing back melodies effectively and identify changes of key as well as balanced phrasing and symmetry when listening to music.
151. Overall, teaching and learning are good. Teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 to 11. Teachers have very good, often excellent musical knowledge and are very enthusiastic about their subject. There is a commitment to high standards and the development of pupils as musicians. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good, often excellent. In a Year 9 lower ability group, the pace of the lesson and the activities for pupils were skilfully adapted to keep pupils' interest, motivation and concentration. In a minority of lessons, planning is not sufficiently detailed, opportunities are sometimes missed to use musical examples to illustrate explanations, and it is not always made clear to pupils how their performances and compositions will be assessed, so that their appraisal skills are not always developed as fully as they could be. In Years 7 to 9, target setting is in its early stages. Pupils enjoy their music lessons and show very good attitudes towards the subject. Homework is well used to extend learning.
152. Curriculum leadership is very good. The head of department is committed to high standards and has excellent subject knowledge as a practising composer himself. Part of his vision is the encouragement of the pupils to develop as musicians. Teaching and

learning need to be monitored more closely to ensure consistency between teachers. The real strength of the department is in the quality of the extra-curricular work, particularly the choral work, which is outstanding. The department has performed in numerous prestigious venues such as Westminster Abbey, St. John's College Cambridge, The London Palladium and Wembley Stadium. The school has a deservedly high reputation in the quality of the music making. Nearly a third of pupils learn instruments and the department is well supported by a team of dedicated peripatetic teachers who enter an impressive number of pupils regularly for external music examinations.

153. Improvement has been good since the previous inspection with high standards maintained and the excellent quality of extra-curricular music still evident and permeating the life of the school. Accommodation is unsatisfactory: there is little space for group work, and ICT is not fully exploited. Greater flexibility of pupil experience and activity could be achieved by equipping both music rooms for practical work. The department continues to make a very important contribution to both the pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development and the school's ethos, which is excellent.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

Provision in physical education is **good**.

### **Main strengths and areas for development**

- Very good teaching promotes above average standards in examinations.
- Teachers' high expectations underpin pupils' excellent attitudes in Years 10 and 11.
- Limitations in accommodation constrain pupils' achievements in indoor games.

### **Commentary**

154. In 2003, standards in GCSE examinations were above average for A\*-C grades; the proportion achieving higher grades was well above average. Overall results for 2004 are similar, but have risen significantly at the top, with 41 per cent gaining A\* or A grades. Pupils' results tend to be broadly similar to those they achieve in their other subjects.

155. Standards on entry to the school are average in the subject. Teachers' own assessments in 2003 were that standards were above average by the end of Year 9, and similar in 2004. In work seen, standards are above average overall, representing good achievement by Year 9. By Year 11, standards in core lessons are also above average overall and in evaluation, coaching and officiating. Achievements in personal development and leadership aspects are very good. Pupils' performance is better in fitness work and netball than in basketball and badminton, where inadequate indoor accommodation limits achievements. In examination classes, theory and practical work are well above average by Year 11. Higher attaining pupils in Year 10 display flair in performance and choreography in the dance component of the GCSE expressive arts course. At all levels, oral work is well above average. In competitive sport, school teams are successful up to regional level. Several pupils are members of county squads; a few compete at national level.

156. Teaching and learning are good overall. Pupils take increasing responsibility for their own learning as they move through the school because most teachers establish positive foundations at an early stage. Thus, in dance, younger pupils lead class routines confidently. In Year 9, they cooperate to adapt group gymnastic sequences to music. Good teaching in Year 8 helps pupils to develop their netball skills and apply the rules as umpires. Most lessons begin well, but in the 45 minutes available, there is rarely time at the end for pupils to learn the importance of cooling down.
157. Teachers assess pupils' knowledge and understanding by careful questioning. However, explicit feedback to help them gauge their progress in relation to national benchmarks is underdeveloped. Some very good teaching in Years 10 and 11 inspires excellent commitment amongst older pupils, who appreciate the department's efforts to provide a relevant curriculum, so far as facilities permit. In games, pupils coach one another without prompting; they organise tournaments successfully, benefiting from teachers' supportive approach. In both physical education and dance, teachers' competent grasp of GCSE requirements enables them to prepare pupils very well for the final examinations.
158. Curriculum leadership and management are good. Sportsmark redesignation reflects a clear vision for the subject. Good curriculum plans include the introduction of a Junior Sports Leaders' Award course. Monitoring and evaluation are good in most respects. A review of Year 7 schemes of work should help teachers to build more efficiently on the skills which pupils learn at their primary schools. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Standards in National Curriculum activities have risen. Examination results remain above average, with a significant rise in higher grades. However, there has been no improvement to accommodation, nor has there been a reduction in class numbers.

## **BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES**

### **Business studies**

Provision in business studies is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are very high in business studies/economics.
- Business studies is a very popular option for GCSE.
- Teaching and learning are good and pupils achieve well on both courses.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good and they become highly independent learners.
- Assessment objectives are not used consistently to focus learning in lessons.

### **Commentary**

159. The two courses in Years 10 and 11 are business studies/economics and business studies/communication. The latter includes a large ICT component and far greater numbers of pupils study this option. Pupils' selection of their course is determined by their strengths, interests and career aspirations and they are well guided in this choice. Standards are different between courses. Higher attaining pupils generally take

the economics option. These GCSE results in the two recent years have been well above average, with 100 per cent A\*-C grades in 2004. No results for business studies/communication are available before 2004, but results then were above average.

160. Year 10 pupils starting the economics option are well above average in underlying abilities such as literacy and mathematical competence. Those starting business studies/communication are average. All begin with ICT skills that are adequate for the course.
161. In work seen, Year 11 standards with this particular group of pupils are well above average in the business studies/economics course. In Year 10, pupils are well able to understand the ideas of calculating and comparing profit margins. Discussion showed them very able at making links between ideas; for example, about marketing or branding and sales in the supermarket sector. Year 11 pupils understand quickly aspects of growth, or otherwise, in various countries' economies. They sustain discussion well - for instance, about the likely implications of investment in education - as a class or between themselves. These higher attaining pupils are achieving well.
162. In the business studies/communication groups, pupils achieve well from an average start. By Year 11, their understanding of business studies aspects is above average, as are their ICT skills. Pupils show good application of their learning of new ICT processes such as transferring web-pages into a word-processing program for further manipulation. Standards overall are above average by Year 11.
163. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers are well qualified and use their knowledge effectively in lessons, particularly through good questioning which makes pupils seek and discuss the links between business ideas. Planning is good, so lessons include a good variety of activity, with plenty of time for pupils to work on the computers. Pupils' responsiveness to teachers' high expectations leads to very good levels of independent learning. Assessment is accurate, but more consistent use could be made of assessment objectives in lessons, particularly in business studies/communication, to focus pupils on precisely how to raise their achievement.
164. The department is well led and managed. Careful selection of courses has provided a very good curriculum range, well suited to pupils' needs. Good delegation of aspects of course responsibility provides well for staff development. There was no business studies report at the previous inspection.

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

*Citizenship was inspected in full, and personal, social and health education was sampled.*

No lessons in **personal, social and health education** were taught during the period of the inspection. The well-planned programme is valued by pupils and covers all the required aspects. The improvement in this aspect of the curriculum has been very good since the previous inspection, when the provision was judged to be uneven and irregular.

### **Citizenship**

Provision for citizenship is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Achievement is very good and most pupils reach the expected standard or above.
- The curriculum is challenging, topical and is an important part of the school's ethos.
- ICT is used well to support citizenship lessons in Years 10 and 11.
- Teachers do not yet use assessment effectively to support learning.

### **Commentary**

165. Pupils enter the school with average knowledge and understanding of their roles as citizens. Standards in citizenship in Year 9 are above average. Achievement is good because pupils play an important part in the learning process. They become particularly adept at finding out about their rights and responsibilities and taking part in discussions. These skills are further developed in Years 10 and 11, where standards are well above average. The pupils' interest in current events and enthusiasm for learning ensure that achievement is very good. Pupils participate in all sorts of school community activities and many outside school. Pupils have a very good understanding of civil institutions as well as their rights and responsibilities. They also develop a very good understanding of the historical events which have led to today's society.

166. Too few lessons were seen to make an overall judgement on teaching. However, teaching in Years 10 and 11 is very good. History and religious education lessons in Years 7 to 9, which included elements of citizenship, were also very good. There is lively interaction between the teacher and pupils, who choose very good examples and problems to challenge the pupils. For example, in Year 9 history lessons, pupils discussed the suffragette movement in the UK, and women's rights in the USA. Pupils in Year 11 already had very good knowledge and understanding of the civil and criminal justice system and extended their understanding through debate and research. They use above average scanning and skimming skills to select information and present it in a mature and concise way. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are also skilled in using the Internet to locate information and produce reports or presentations for a particular audience. The formal test at the end of each year is satisfactory but the lack of ongoing assessment means that teachers rarely develop different levels of challenge in lessons to suit different pupils' needs. It also means that pupils are not always clear about the specific citizenship objectives.

167. Leadership of citizenship is very good and the subject is very well managed. The leader shows very good vision and commitment to the development of citizenship. He has ensured that it is integrated effectively into many areas of the pupils' learning such as in English, history, religious education and geography. Monitoring and development are ensuring that weaknesses are spotted and improvements are in the pipeline. These include an audit and improvement to the coverage in Years 7 to 9. The tests, plus pupils' self-evaluation, reveal that National Curriculum targets are largely being met.

168. The citizenship curriculum is very well integrated with the personal, social and health education and careers programmes, both in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11.

Pupils experience a seamless progression in knowledge and understanding in all these areas. In Years 10 and 11 ICT is also part of the programme.



## 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, the latest year for which national comparisons are available.

### *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
Biology	7	100	65	14	11	37	21
Chemistry	11	73	73	18	14	27	24
English Literature	8	100	86	25	19	31	30
French	11	91	79	27	19	29	28
German	6	83	82	33	19	35	29
Mathematics	7	57	62	14	17	17	22
Other Social Studies	8	88	70	25	17	31	24

### *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
Biology	18	100	96	61	39	92	79
Business Education	12	100	99	33	37	77	80
Drama	6	100	99	17	40	80	84
English literature	24	100	99	46	46	92	92
French	15	100	99	33	52	81	81
Geography	18	100	99	28	45	82	84
German	6	100	98	50	48	87	85
History	30	100	99	60	45	95	85
Mathematics	9	100	97	44	56	91	89
Other languages	6	100	97	83	65	110	94
Other social studies	35	100	97	46	43	83	82
Physics	6	100	97	67	45	100	82

Religious Studies	15	100	99	33	47	79	86
Sociology	14	100	98	71	44	96	86
Spanish	8	100	98	0	50	58	84
Sports/PE Studies	11	100	98	46	31	89	75

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

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business Studies	12	100	65	52	15	93	60
Information and Communication Technology	12	100	80	40	23	89	65

## **ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

### **English and modern foreign languages**

*The focus subjects were English literature and French. Lessons in English language, German and Spanish were also sampled.*

Students' standards were average during a Year 12 **English language** lesson; teaching, learning and achievement were satisfactory. During a **German** lesson standards were above average and students achieved very well; teaching and learning were excellent. During a **Spanish** lesson standards were above average; students achieved well and teaching and learning were very good.

### **English literature**

The provision for English literature is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is very good. Subject expertise is strong and the teachers' methods and enthusiasm motivate the students most effectively.
- Procedures for assessment and marking are very good.
- The students' attitudes are excellent. They work very hard with considerable independence.
- Leadership and management are very good and secure a high level of consistency of provision.
- There is not an explicit enough approach to helping all students develop a better application of the conventions of assignment writing at this level.

### **Commentary**

169. Results in the 2003 A-level examination were above average. Given the students' average standards on entry, they did better than expected. Results improved significantly in 2004. These students did much better than expected, especially higher attainers. A very small number of below average students did not do as well as expected. The 2003 AS examination results were well above average; the results in 2004 broadly matched those for 2003. The courses are popular and recruit from a wide range of attainments. There are over 40 students in Year 12. The rate of retention is very good.
170. Standards in the current Year 13 are well above average. Students show considerable strengths in their knowledge and understanding of the socio-historical contexts of the literature they study. Many are very analytical in their assignments. They enhance their very secure knowledge and understanding by making well-substantiated independent judgements. Their writing is very mature, accurate and, crucially, consistently evaluative. Students not reaching these standards reveal shortcoming in the depth of their insights. They tend to describe and summarise in their assignments rather than analyse. There are also technical weaknesses in their writing. They tend not to cover the required assessment objectives proportionately when writing assignments. However, overall, achievement is very good. Attitudes are very positive across the wide attainment range. Most students have developed considerably advanced study skills, annotating and classifying relevant information from a range of texts most effectively and efficiently. They apply high levels of conceptual thinking when responding to texts. Lower attainers work with great focus, determination and perseverance. They achieve very well because the teaching supports them very well, and is sensitive to the challenges these students face. In Year 12, standards are well above average. Students are developing the qualities observed in Year 13. At this stage their oral responses tend to be stronger than written work.
171. Teaching and learning are very good. The subject expertise of the teachers is very good. They are most assured about their subject, its skills and its assessment requirements. A wide range of methods ensures that students participate very well in lessons and work hard. The accommodation for one very large Year 12 group restricts the range of learning activities available to the students. Teachers challenge students very well by making effective use of techniques such as targeting specific students to answer questions. They effectively draw out enhanced responses by the use of subsequent and probing supplementary questions. All teachers observed develop their students' positive attitude to the subject through their clearly demonstrated passion for literature. They effectively encourage students of all attainments to participate very well in lessons. Well-structured tasks effectively help lower attainers to develop better analytical skills. Marking is very good. However, there is not enough explicit and continuous emphasis on helping students acquire, practise and apply a better understanding of the evaluative conventions of assignment and essay writing at this level.
172. The course makes a very good contribution to the development of the students' communication skills and a good contribution to their ICT skills. There was no evidence of developing application of number skills.
173. The curriculum leadership of the subject is very good, as is its management. There is an effective collaborative approach to planning. Standards are monitored closely

during the course of the year. Strengths and weakness in different modules are closely analysed. This leads to effective action in planning, teaching and learning to secure improvement. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good.

## French

Provision in French is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well and standards in work seen during the inspection are well above average.
- The teachers are very well qualified to teach the subject, and have excellent linguistic skills, so that the students work confidently in the language, with increasing fluency and accuracy.
- Lessons are characterised by very good planning, consistent challenge, and excellent teacher-student relationships, which are all key factors in the students' very effective learning and their increasing independence.
- Leadership and management are very good.

### Commentary

174. At A-level, results in 2003 were average, and in line with expected levels. Although the 2002 results were above average, the students concerned did less well than their GCSE results would have predicted. In contrast, the 2004 picture is much stronger, with almost all students doing markedly better than expected. In recent years, no student has failed to gain an A to E grade. The trend in the number of students gaining grades A or B has remained broadly static since the previous inspection, but in terms of individuals' achievements, the trend is a rising one over the last three years. Retention rates are high, with nearly every student completing the two-year course.
175. Students make the transition from GCSE to A-level very effectively, and by the end of Year 13, standards in work seen during the inspection are well above average overall. This represents very good achievement given individual students' average GCSE standards on entry to the course and the much more sophisticated level of French required at A-level. By the end of Year 13, the students write accurately, although they understandably still make some errors when handling more complex structures in extended writing. They speak with confidence, clearly and fluently, and are able to discuss effectively and intelligently their views about general topics, as well as about the French literature they are studying. They have a growing mastery of grammatical structures, and have acquired a broad range of vocabulary and idiom with which to express themselves in speaking and writing. In interpreting exercises, they demonstrate very good listening comprehension skills and a good ability to render the French they hear into English.
176. Teaching and learning are very good. The teachers are very competent linguists, using French all the time in lessons, so that it is natural – and required – that the students do the same; as a result, confidence and competence in speaking French develop very well. The teachers plan and structure their lessons very effectively to ensure that the

students are well supported, but at the same time are consistently challenged and required to think and work hard. In this way the students acquire the linguistic skills needed at this level. They also develop very well as independent learners. Relationships between the teachers and the students are excellent, and the students bring to their work the excellent attitudes already developed in the main school. The teachers give time to students to express their own ideas and opinions, and encourage and engage them very well. The marking of written work is conscientious, and the teachers' comments demonstrate high expectations of the students' intellectual effort and attention to detail; this is clearly a strong factor in the very good progress that the students make. Aspects of literacy, such as reflecting on functions of language, are well taught, and the students have good access to computers to enable them to improve their linguistic skills as well as their ICT skills. There is no evidence of the use of application of number in French.

177. Curriculum leadership in French at this level is very good. The department has high aspirations for each student and very clear educational objectives for the subject. Management is very effective, and there are very good assessment and monitoring procedures to underpin continuous improvement. Many students have benefited linguistically, culturally and socially from study visits to France during their school career, and in the sixth form they have further opportunities, including good arrangements for work experience in Brittany. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are improving as a result of focused teaching and the students' positive attitudes and commitment to their work.
- Departmental strengths include teachers' subject knowledge, productive relationships and strong leadership.
- Teachers talk too much in many lessons.

### **Commentary**

178. In 2003, the AS results were average; the A-level results were above average. The unconfirmed results in 2004 show an improvement on these results. On the basis of students' performance at GCSE, achievement in these examinations is good. Students can manipulate algebraic fractions and have a good understanding of co-ordinate geometry. They can calculate the mean and variance of a distribution in statistics and make good use of trigonometry to resolve forces in mechanics. On the evidence of the students' work and the lessons observed, standards are above average in Year 12 and well above average in Year 13. Thus students' achievement is very good. Retention rates are good, and at the same level as in most other subjects.

179. The curriculum in the sixth form offers options in pure mathematics, mechanics, statistics and decision mathematics. Further mathematics and GCSE retake classes are

also offered in the sixth form. However, the curriculum does not provide sufficiently for those who make use of mathematics in their other choices, but who do not take AS or A-level mathematics. The provision for ICT in the sixth form is satisfactory, and students report too few opportunities to use ICT within or outside their mathematics lessons. Enrichment opportunities to research mathematics or make use of revision programmes are under utilised. The provision for literacy is satisfactory.

180. Teaching and learning are very good. Lessons start promptly, so that students are quickly engaged. The pace of lessons is fast. Lesson planning is very full and objectives are usefully shared with students. Teachers demonstrate very good subject knowledge and a good awareness of examination requirements. They enjoy positive and productive relationships with their students and give their time freely outside of lessons to give additional support to students. Marking is regular and supportive with exemplar solutions offered. However, teacher talk dominates too many lessons so that students' independent thinking skills are not sufficiently promoted.
181. The students' attitudes and behaviour are very good. They concentrate hard and demonstrate enthusiasm and commitment to their studies. Students enjoy productive relationships with their teachers and with one another. They co-operate and support one another well and involve themselves fully in the lesson where they are given the opportunity.
182. Curriculum leadership is very good and ensures a clear educational direction for mathematics in the sixth form. There is a very strong team ethos, and a commitment to raising standards and helping students realise their aspirations. The head of department has a good awareness of the strengths of the department as a result of her monitoring of books and lesson observations. The department response to recent curricular changes has been good, but schemes of work deserve further development to provide a more coherent framework for teaching in the sixth form. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good.

## SCIENCE

*The focus subject was physics, but work was also sampled in biology and chemistry.*

Recent examination results in **biology** have been well above average, with many students exceeding their target grades. In work seen during the inspection, the work of students in both Years 12 and 13 was well above average, due to very good teaching and students' very positive attitude and enjoyment of learning. Results in **human biology** have been below average, with fewer students; most of their results are below their target grades.

In **chemistry**, examination results are generally average. In both the lessons seen, students responded positively to the very good learning opportunities. Take-up is increasing.

### Physics

Provision in physics is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The leadership of the subject is good.
- Teaching is very good; teachers have very good command of their subject.
- There is good use of data to monitor performance.
- Examination results are improving steadily.
- There is a low take-up for the subject in Year 12.

## **Commentary**

183. Standards in the 2003 A-level examinations were well above average; two thirds of the students gained grade A. Results were higher in 2004, continuing the upward trend in overall performance. In the last two years, at both AS and A-level, students generally performed at or above their target grades. Overall, achievement is very good. A small number of male students join the A-level course; they are well integrated, and their standards are similar to those of the female students.
184. Work seen during the inspection confirms that standards are well above average and achievement is very good. Although the numbers of students at present studying physics in both Years 12 and 13 is relatively low, many of them are keen to continue to follow physical science courses when leaving school, and they are aiming for high A-level grades. Students clearly enjoy the challenge provided by A-level work, and retention rates are high. The quality of written work is very high; when undertaking calculations, students indicate clearly how they arrive at their answers.
185. The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers have good command of their subject, and their planning is detailed. Students are challenged to think about their work, and to develop an understanding of the principles of physics. Students are encouraged to play a full part in the progress of lessons, and they readily respond to this opportunity; this helps to improve their communication skills, particularly when they are asked to justify their answers. There is increasing use of computers to enhance learning, but further improvements are required in both computer hardware and in the availability of equipment such as data projectors. The subject also makes a significant contribution to students' ability in the application of number; a high proportion of lessons involves the use of formulae, graphs and calculations.
186. A new head of department joined the school in September. Curriculum leadership is good; a review of the work of the department has already indicated a need for more detail in the scheme of work, and more regular testing during the two-year course. There is an established system for monitoring data in order to compare school standards with national figures, and effective use of target setting to track the progress of individual students. Insufficient lesson observations take place in order to replicate good practice and improve overall performance.
187. Since the previous inspection, there has been satisfactory progress. There are now fewer students, but overall standards have improved.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

### **Information and Communication Technology AVCE**

Provision in ICT is **very good**.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching and learning are very good leading to very good achievement.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Students benefit from a range of experienced and qualified teachers who bring considerable expertise to the subject.
- Assessment practices serve the students very well, but are not as consistent or as streamlined as they might be.

## **Commentary**

188. Standards were well above average in the 2003 AVCE award, and results were higher in 2004. Standards have varied over the last three years but have not been lower than above average. The numbers of male students entered is too small to assess any difference in performance between the sexes. Analysis of examination results shows that students do as well as they do in other subjects that they take. Retention rates for the course are very good.
189. Students enter the course with average standards in their GCSE examinations, which is below the level expected for entry to an advanced course. In addition, most students did not take a GCSE in ICT. Current standards of work are above average for Year 13 and this means that achievement is very good. Students are assiduous in their study and research; they work hard to refine and improve their submissions. They do particularly well in using ICT to solve business problems. Communication skills are good, as is their standard of written English. Students also make good use of mathematical skills.
190. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers plan lessons very well. They use very good visual examples and personal experience to bring the subject to life. As a result, students are keen, enthusiastic and develop excellent independent learning skills. The best lessons are lively, with teachers urging students to think for themselves. A Year 13 lesson in preparation for an examination provided a striking example of this: the teacher would not answer students' questions but forced them to discuss their own experiences of the Internet to come up with different types of security requirements for a business customer. Teachers also give very good explanations of the coursework, mark schemes and examinations so that the students are in no doubt about how to get extra marks and meet deadlines. Assessment procedures are thorough; teachers give detailed handwritten analyses of students' work. However teachers are not using software that consistently tracks students' progress. This is important, as up to three teachers deliver the course at any one time. As a result, students are not always able to get an overall picture of their progress.
191. Leadership of the AVCE course is very good. The committed and enthusiastic course leader has a very clear vision based on the students' needs. The school provides a course that is suited to well-motivated students who are not highly academic. Linking this course with AVCE business or other vocational courses adds to the wide range of sixth form options. There is a very good team of experienced and skilled teachers with expert knowledge. The four teachers are used flexibly to cover the different aspects of the course. This process is managed very well because of the high level of planning and interaction. The school did not provide an advanced ICT course at the time of the previous inspection. The provision for the development of all students' ICT skills has improved well since then.

## **HUMANITIES**



*The focus subjects were geography, psychology and sociology, but government and politics was sampled during the inspection.*

In a Year 13 lesson on **government and politics**, the teaching was very good and provided students with high levels of challenge. Because of this, they were able to reach high standards and showed a clear commitment to their learning.

## **Geography**

The overall provision in geography is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good question and answer work develops thinking skills well.
- Higher attainers produce detailed written answers.
- Constructive comments in the marking enable students to improve.
- Lower attainers need more help in order to develop their writing skills.

## **Commentary**

192. In the AS and A-level examinations in 2003, results were average. In the unvalidated results for 2004, results have risen, and a rising trend has been the trend in most recent years. Students' performance on entry to the sixth form is broadly average, and they gain results in line with expectation. Retention rates are very high, with all students completing the course.

193. In work seen, standards are above average and this represents good achievement given the grades that the students gained in their GCSE examinations. The results do vary between years because of the different abilities of the cohort, with some students taking the subject without having studied it at GCSE. All achieve in line with expectations or above. Students extend their knowledge and develop good skills in interpretation, evaluation and analysis. They have a detailed factual base and good spatial awareness. Communication skills are enhanced by very good oral work and an emphasis on the technical vocabulary. Students can apply an appropriate range of number techniques and have good ICT skills in word processing, graph work and use of the Internet for research. They are becoming confident independent learners.

194. Teaching and learning are good and sometimes very good. Teachers have a strong knowledge base, plan lessons well and understand the needs of the examinations. Lessons have good pace, high expectations and challenge. A good range of learning strategies is used, with an emphasis on oral work. Question and answer work is used very effectively to encourage students to analyse, develop ideas and think about issues in both physical and human geography. This is well developed through pair and group working, as illustrated by discussions on flood prevention and the damage caused by tourism. Students are well supported on note taking, while the higher attainers write detailed extended essays making good links between cause and effect. Lower attainers find this hard and need to develop their writing skills for the examination. Learning takes place in a warm and supportive atmosphere where good relationships, trust and mutual respect lead to good outcomes. The students hold their teachers in high regard. Geography makes a strong contribution to the students'

personal development and their social, cultural and moral awareness. It ensures that they value others and are confident, articulate young adults.

195. Leadership is good, with a strong sense of purpose and a determination to ensure that all students are successful. Management is also good with thorough planning and an effective use of resources. Particular emphasis is given to the demands of the examination specification and particularly the skills and fieldwork section. Learning is well supported by strong assessment methods. Marking is detailed and valuable diagnostic comments are widely used to ensure that students know how to improve. Teachers know the students well and encourage them to achieve. The previous inspection report saw sixth form teaching in geography as a strength and this has continued.

## **Psychology**

Provision in psychology is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are average and students' achievement is satisfactory. Achievement is improving.
- Teaching and learning are good. Students make good progress in lessons.
- The curriculum is well planned to match the syllabus specifications.
- The psychology teacher provides an enthusiastic and clear direction for provision in psychology.
- The support of leadership and management by the newly formed social sciences faculty has the potential to be valuable, but it is too soon for it to be fully effective.

## **Commentary**

196. Standards at A-level have been broadly average over the last three years. Students' achievement has been satisfactory, and in line with their earlier overall average standards at GCSE. They have tended to do less well in psychology than in their other subjects. Current standards are average in both Years 12 and 13, and reflect the students' earlier attainments at GCSE; achievement is therefore satisfactory. However, there are clear indications of improvement in achievement especially in Year 12; this reflects improved teaching. Retention rates are good.
197. Students have good knowledge and understanding of a range of psychological concepts, theories, studies and research. This is shown both in their work in lessons and their written work. Year 12 students had a good grasp of psychological theories of obedience and made good links with their wider knowledge to illustrate points. For example, they readily quoted Stalin when describing how charisma can influence obedience. They also showed good understanding of how the impact of charisma on obedience can be measured through observing the arousal of emotional responses. Students are confident in relating psychological approaches to their own experiences, but they tend to be too reliant on these in supporting their explanations and argument rather than drawing on psychological theories and studies. For example, Year 13 students became caught up in discussing their own experiences when exploring the influence of early experiences on mental disorders making no reference to the theories of Sigmund Freud. Written work shows good progress in understanding the reliability and validity of psychological methods, and in forming hypotheses. Essays are comprehensive and generally reflect good research but they vary in the extent to which studies and research

are analysed, evaluated, and used to back up points. There is no evidence of an emphasis on the application of number or ICT in psychology.

198. Students respond very well to the teacher's high expectations and challenge. They enjoy their learning and are inspired by the teacher's very good knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject. This results in clear presentations and explanations, and lively exchanges. Lessons are well planned to achieve their objectives. A good range of activities ensures that all students are fully involved. Well monitored and supported group and pair work is used effectively to foster discussion. Case studies are chosen well to guide students' understanding and evaluation of the usefulness of psychological theories. Learning thrives in a very good atmosphere. Classroom relationships are very good. A good momentum in learning is sustained throughout the lesson, but sometimes the pace is too fast to ensure that all students have fully assimilated the often difficult subject matter. Moreover, questioning is not sufficiently well targeted and probing in testing understanding. Whilst planning provides for the cover of a wide range of psychological theories and studies, students are not reminded enough of the importance of drawing on these in discussions in lessons. Students are given good feedback on the quality of their essay writing, but need more practice of essay writing, especially to help them to develop their evaluation skills and use of theories as evidence. Assessment procedures are not sufficiently well developed to ensure the close tracking of students' progress and the secure setting of targets.
199. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The subject leader is very enthusiastic, very hard working and has clear, well-founded views for the provision to be made for psychology. She is well qualified and though relatively inexperienced, has achieved much in the short time she has taught the subject. This has resulted in improvements in teaching and learning. The curriculum is well planned to cover the examination syllabus but is not sufficiently enriched through wider opportunities for learning through, for example, visits and conferences. Schemes of work give useful guidance for teaching and learning, but along with lesson plans, they do not give enough specific detail of teaching and learning strategies, and assessment procedures. Teaching is monitored within performance management arrangements, but this needs to be extended to ensure further support of teaching and learning. The inclusion of psychology in the recently formed social sciences faculty is appropriate in supporting the leadership and management of the subject, but arrangements are at too early a stage to be fully effective. Psychology was not reported on at the previous inspection.

## **Sociology**

Provision in sociology is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching and learning are very good; therefore, students achieve very well and standards are well above average.
- Students have very positive attitudes because teachers provide them with a relevant and challenging curriculum.
- Leadership and management are good and there is a clear commitment to high standards and improvement.
- Students need more help with note making so that they write shorter, more structured notes.

## **Commentary**

200. Standards are well above average, both in recent examination results and in work seen during the inspection. Students' essays are well above average and they are able to make very good use of their ICT skills to research and produce their work. Students in Year 13 build very well on what they learnt in Year 12 and are beginning to develop a very good understanding of sociological theory, which they are beginning to apply to unfamiliar situations. Students in Year 12 have made a very good start to the course. They have not previously studied this subject and have already made very clear gains in their knowledge and understanding. Achievement in both years is very good. Retention rates are very good.
201. The combination of very good, occasionally excellent, and enthusiastic teaching results in a very good work ethos. The students want to do well, are intellectually curious and are prepared to work hard. Lessons are challenging and lively, and teachers work hard to ensure that content reflects current issues and concerns. During the week of the inspection, for example, students looked at 'Fathers 4 Justice' and animal rights' activists as examples of pluralism in western democracies. Teachers are particularly good at providing students with the right degree of support so that they develop independence within a secure environment. As a result, students clearly enjoy their lessons and work very hard. Teachers on most occasions make very good use of discussions to take students' learning forward and to help them clarify and extend their arguments. There is scope to provide more help to students in their note-making skills so that they get out of the habit of writing too much. Students have good skills in word processing and the use of the Internet for research. They make good use of statistical evidence to analyse concepts such as educational underachievement.
202. Leadership and management are both good. Staffing instabilities have improved and very few lessons are now taught in sessions after school. The introduction of the new social science department means that common expectations and procedures, including better monitoring procedures, are beginning to be put into place across several subjects. Teachers work very well together, sharing good practice as well as concerns. The head of department has a clear vision of how to improve the department and has a good understanding of how to achieve this. Departmental procedures are supportive and effective. Sociology makes a very good contribution towards students' personal development, particularly in the area of developing their understanding of what it means to live in today's society. Sociology was not inspected in the previous inspection.

## **ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING**

No subject in this area was inspected in detail, but one lesson in **product design** was sampled. In the Year 13 lesson observed, standards were average. Teaching and learning were good, providing opportunities for students to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in this course. Students were attentive and had very positive attitudes towards learning.

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

No subject in this area was inspected in detail.

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

No subject in this area was inspected in detail.

## **BUSINESS**

The focus subject was business studies.

### **Business studies**

Provision in business studies is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students show very good learning skills and positive attitudes to their work.
- Students following the AVCE in business show very good achievement.
- Teachers have high expectations of what students should do.
- The cramped accommodation for the subject limits what can be taught.
- Assessment is used well to raise standards.

### **Commentary**

203. Two courses are offered. One leads to AS and A-level in business and economics, whereas the other leads to the AVCE award in business at either 3, 6 or 12 units. In all courses, retention rates are high.
204. The trend in examination results in recent years has been one of some variation about an above average position, depending on the intake profile. Overall, students starting the A-level course have similar GCSE scores to those seen in sixth forms nationally; the students following the AVCE tend to have below average GCSE grades. In 2003, the most recent year for which national data are available, the AVCE results were well above average whilst A-levels were average. The 2004 figures show similar results for AVCE but a marked improvement at A-level. In relation to the students' earlier GCSE scores, lower attainers on both courses tend to do better than would be expected; higher attainers gain results that are in line with expectations.
205. In work seen during the inspection, standards are above average overall in Year 13. However, scrutiny of evolving work in students' portfolios suggests that by the end of the course, examination results may well be higher than this. Achievement is good overall, but is very good for lower attainers, particularly on the AVCE course. This is because they reflect the school's strong culture of working hard, and believing in success. Students on both courses show secure knowledge and understanding of a wide range of business concepts and techniques. What marks them out is their better than average ability to apply knowledge in a range of contexts. They display an interest in the wider business scene, one that is cultivated by their teachers. Students show above average communication and ICT skills; this helps to raise the standards of work in portfolio assignments. Whilst application of number skills are average, they do sometimes limit the rate of learning, as when students learning about international trade could not 'see' the relationship between the outputs of different countries.
206. Overall, the quality of teaching is good; learning is very good. The mismatch occurs because although teachers plan to use a range of styles, the cramped accommodation often limits what can be done in practice. For example, during the inspection, unreliable equipment, or poor sight lines in rooms, meant that the teacher had to rely

on talking rather than showing for long periods. However, the very good learning skills of the students meant that they achieved well, by asking pertinent questions, or offering examples for comment. A real strength is the way in which students turn to each other for help; mutual teaching helps both parties to gain a deeper understanding. Teachers expect students to do well, and maintain pressure on them; for example, there is an insistence on using technical vocabulary with precision. Lessons are well planned, with clear learning objectives, although performance against these is not always tested as the work unfolds. Overall, assessment is very good, and helps the students to improve their work, particularly in AVCE assignments. Teachers have a good knowledge of course requirements, and in lessons, they point to how grades can be improved.

207. The curriculum leadership of the subject is very good. There is a clear sense of wanting to see students achieve, and there is a good culture of analysis of data to identify how to improve. The development plan contains relevant targets, although these are rarely quantified, nor do they indicate what outcomes are expected. The subject was not reported on in the previous inspection.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

No subject in this area was inspected in detail.

## **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES**

No subject in this area was inspected in detail.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
<b>The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
How inclusive the school is		1
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
<b>Overall standards achieved</b>		<b>2</b>
Pupils' achievement	2	2
<b>Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities (ethos)</b>		<b>1</b>
Attendance	2	2
Attitudes	1	1
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	1	1
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		1
<b>The quality of education provided by the school</b>		<b>2</b>
The quality of teaching	2	2
How well pupils learn	2	2
The quality of assessment	2	2
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	2	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		1
Accommodation and resources	3	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		2
The quality of the school's links with the community	2	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	2
<b>The leadership and management of the school</b>		<b>2</b>
The governance of the school	2	2
The leadership of the headteacher		1
The leadership of other key staff	2	2
The effectiveness of management	2	2

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