

INSPECTION REPORT

RALPH THORESBY HIGH SCHOOL COMMUNITY ARTS COLLEGE

Leeds

LEA area: Leeds

Unique Reference Number: 108075

Headteacher: Mr M Edwards

Lead inspector: Dr D A W Biltcliffe

Dates of inspection: 4th - 7th October 2004

Inspection number: 268889

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1,036
School address:	Farrar Lane Holt Park Leeds
Postcode:	LS16 7NQ
Telephone number:	(01132) 259 911
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr I Bond
Date of previous inspection:	26 th - 30 th October 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

This average-size comprehensive school educates about 506 boys and 530 girls aged 11-18 (including a sixth form of around 154). It has had the status of a Performing Arts college since 2003.

Pupils' social and economic background is broadly average overall. Their overall attainment on entry at 11 is slightly above average. Around 80 per cent of pupils are white. The remaining pupils come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds; the largest minorities are of Indian or Pakistani heritage. No pupils are at an early stage of learning English.

The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs (SEN) is a little below the national norm. In contrast, the proportion with official SEN statements is double the national average: the school makes special provision for some 30 pupils with physical or visual disabilities. The enhanced provision for pupils with severe visual impairment caters for three pupils, whilst six other pupils who have visual impairment also have access to specialist support.

In the 2003-2004 academic year, about seven per cent of pupils joined or left the school other than at the usual time at the beginning or end of the school year.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1025	Dr D A W Biltcliffe	Lead inspector	
9034	Ms J W Biltcliffe	Lay inspector	
13452	Mr H Meggitt	Lay inspector	
11479	Mr J A Paine	Team inspector	English; drama
30576	Mr P Bannon	Team inspector	Mathematics
4607	Dr D E Ward	Team inspector	Science; <i>sixth form biology</i>
2048	Mr R D Masterton	Team inspector	Science; <i>sixth form physics</i>
11190	Dr W M Burke	Team inspector	Art; design and technology
16747	Mr A Jones	Team inspector	Special educational needs: <i>visual disabilities</i>
12470	Mr B Greasley	Team inspector	Geography: <i>sixth form</i>
8873	Ms C Evers	Team inspector	Geography; history
17923	Mr M Shaw	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT)
4829	Mr I H C Waters	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
8645	Dr J D Ward	Team inspector	Citizenship; music
13217	Mr M D Butterworth	Team inspector	Physical education; special educational needs
10448	Mr M F Elson	Team inspector	Religious education
1819	Mr R H Crowther	Team inspector	Business education; psychology; sociology

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

This average-sized comprehensive school of 1036 boys and girls on the north-western outskirts of Leeds was inspected on 4th-7th October 2004 by an inspection team led by Dr D A W Biltcliffe.

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a good, effective school. It has many more strengths than weaknesses. By the end of Year 11, pupils' overall attainment is a little above average and a good achievement for most pupils and most subjects. The school's teaching and learning are good overall. The sixth form is sound. Most pupils attend well and make satisfactory progress. The vast majority show good attitudes to school and behave well. The school's provision for pupils with special educational needs is a substantial strength. The performing arts make a strong impact. Not all statutory requirements are met and pupils' spiritual development is weak. Senior management is energetic and effective. On its below average income and expenditure, the school gives good value for money in Years 7-11 and satisfactory value in the sixth form.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- By the end of Year 11, attainment is well above average in mathematics, science and art and design.
- It is below average in German and religious education (RE).
- Science is a notably strong subject in GCSE, but just satisfactory in the sixth form.
- Provision is very good in sixth-form English, art and drama.
- Standards of discussion, note-taking, presentation, handwriting and spelling could be higher.
- Teaching is very good in drama, and in science in Years 10-11.
- The school's provision for pupils with learning difficulties and for those with visual or physical disabilities is very good and a central strength of the school's high inclusiveness.
- Statutory requirements are not met for sixth-form RE and daily collective worship.
- Sixth-form attendance is not good enough.
- The headteacher's leadership and management are very good. Other leadership and management are good, too.

Since its last inspection in 1998, the school has made satisfactory progress overall. It has made good progress in the last two years. Results in GCSE in 2003 and 2004 were around the same level as they were at the last inspection in 1998, but a little better than in the intervening years. The school's results have kept pace with the rise nationally. Advanced-level results are reasonable, but could be higher. In the lessons seen, most pupils achieved soundly and behaved well. Teaching is about the same quality as it was six years ago. Attendance is satisfactory – and slightly higher than in 1998. Leadership and management are good.

The school has made slow improvement in most of the main weaknesses identified in 1998. Good curricular improvement has been made in music. More work is needed to raise standards and achievement in RE in Years 10-11. Sixth-form RE does not exist. Collective worship is still rare. There is more good – but also a little more unsatisfactory – teaching than in 1998. Learning resources are generally adequate, but still poor in the library for sixth formers. Accommodation still has flaws, but rebuilding plans promise much. The impact of the new headteacher has come through strongly in the last two years.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

Key: A – well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E – well below average.

For Year 11, similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.

Pupils' overall achievement is satisfactory. In 2003, pupils' attainment in the Year 9 national tests was above average. This was a satisfactory achievement. Pupils' GCSE performance in 2003 was average and a broadly reasonable achievement; the 2004 results were similar. Grade quality is generally good. The 2003 performance was a reasonable achievement. The current standard of work by the end of Year 11 is above average overall. It is well above average in mathematics, science and art and design, but below average in German and RE. The majority of pupils achieve well. Achievement in RE is unsatisfactory. Most pupils are good at listening and using specialist language. Discussion, note-taking, presentation and spelling are fair, but could be better.

Pupils' personal qualities are developed well. Personal development is promoted well. It is a very inclusive school. Relationships and racial harmony within the school are very good. The welfare of vulnerable pupils is a high, successful priority. Moral and social development are good and cultural development very good. Spiritual growth is unsatisfactory and remains too low a priority. Most pupils show positive attitudes and behave well. Attendance is satisfactory.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of pupils' education is good. Teaching is good overall and in most subjects. It is very good in science in Years 10-11 and in drama. It is satisfactory in citizenship, physical education (PE) and RE throughout the school. The large amount of unsatisfactory teaching in tutorial time needs an overhaul. Nearly one quarter of the school's teaching is very good, but one in 12 lessons seen was unsatisfactory. Most pupils are interested, work hard and want to do well.

The curriculum is generally broad and balanced, though light on vocational courses. The performing arts of dance, drama and music make a major impact. Provision for special educational needs is sensitive and very effective. Extra curricular provision is wide. Library provision is poor. The induction of new pupils is very successful. There are health and safety concerns in art and design and in design and technology. The school council makes a valuable contribution.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school's **leadership and management are good.** The school is well organised and runs smoothly. The headteacher provides very good, energetic leadership and management that are moving the school purposefully forward. Senior and middle management are committed and effective. Judgements are generally well made, but are not guided by a comprehensive management information system. The governing body is experienced, very supportive and committed to the school's welfare. Its performance is, however, unsatisfactory overall, because it has not remedied long-standing breaches in statutory provision for sixth-form RE and daily collective worship.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The vast majority of parents whose views are known believe that the school does well for their children. At least eight out of ten parents agreed with nearly all the positive statements about the school in the pre-inspection questionnaire they completed. The lowest rating was for homework, but even here seven out of ten supported the school's approach. Pupils' views are less favourable than those of their

parents. Although teaching and a climate of hard work are praised, only half say that they find behaviour to be good. Marking, assessment and homework come in for some criticism, too. Inspectors judge that the school's provision on these aspects is, overall, typical of that found in most schools of a similar kind. The school is popular with parents. Despite the reservations above, nine out of ten pupils, too, think that the school is a good place to be at.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- remove the weaknesses in teaching noted in the main body of the report;
- increase the amount of probing, analytical discussion in class;
- raise the overall standard of handwriting, presentation, spelling and note-taking;
- lift standards in RE in Years 10-11;
- establish a comprehensive management information system to evaluate the school's performance;
- formulate and implement a policy for pupils' spiritual development;
- improve the attendance of sixth formers;

and, to meet statutory requirements, provide:

- a daily act of collective worship for all pupils; and
- a programme of RE for all in the sixth form.

**THE SIXTH FORM AT RALPH THORESBY HIGH SCHOOL
COMMUNITY ARTS COLLEGE, LEEDS**

A good range of GCE AS-level and A-level courses is offered to its 154 sixth formers on the school's site and, through a consortium, at three other schools.

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of sixth-form provision is satisfactory. In 2003, GCE A-level grade quality was slightly above average. The pass rate was average. The 2004 results were similar. Where the 2004 results could be compared with earlier GCSE performance, in three-quarters of cases achievement was at least satisfactory (and often good). Achievement was not good enough, however, in the remainder. Results at AS level were below average in 2003, but higher in 2004. Teaching is good overall and most students learn positively. The sixth form is well led and satisfactorily managed. Its cost-effectiveness is satisfactory. Its range of courses is enhanced by a consortium arrangement with three other schools.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Most sixth formers achieved soundly in their 2004 examinations.
- Strong subjects were English, design and technology, drama and economics.
- A quarter could have done better in 2004 – especially in biology, physics and French.
- Of the 11 main subjects inspected, provision is very good in English, art and design and drama.
- Provision is satisfactory in biology, geography, history and physics.
- Teaching was good (or better) in two-thirds of the 55 lessons seen. Only one was unsatisfactory.
- A good range of 19 GCE AS- and A-level subjects is on offer.
- Sixth-form leadership is good and management satisfactory overall.
- Library provision is inadequate and private study facilities limited.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	English language and literature is very good. Students make very good progress as a result of strong teaching and rigorous learning.
Mathematics	Good provision in mathematics . Most students achieve soundly in and out of lessons from sympathetic, hard-working teachers.
Science	Provision in biology is satisfactory . This is a very popular subject, but the drop-out rate is high and a significant minority did not achieve well in 2004. Provision in physics is satisfactory . Current progress from enthusiastic teaching is satisfactory. Recent examination achievement was modest.
Information and communication technology (ICT)	Provision in ICT is good . Students are well taught and achieve well. They enjoy the course and are encouraged to persevere through to success.
Humanities	Geography is satisfactory . An average standard of work here comes from knowledgeable teachers and well-motivated students. Provision in history is satisfactory . Achievement is patchy. Sometimes, teachers do too much of the work and students are content to let them. Psychology is good . Interesting teaching and learning styles hold students' attention well. Assessment is very constructive. Facilities are unsatisfactory.

Visual and performing arts and media	<p>Provision in sociology is good. Lively, well-structured lessons encourage students to contribute their views. Again, facilities are limited.</p> <p>Art and design is very good. Very skilful, enthusiastic teaching ensures that students achieve very well and thoroughly enjoy the course.</p> <p>Provision in drama is very good. Courses are carefully planned. Teaching, including assessment, is very thorough. As a result, students do well.</p>
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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

Students receive a good level of care, guidance and support. Most show a pleasant, positive maturity. Nearly all feel that they have ready personal support available to them. They have a good voice, too, about the school's direction through their own council.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is well led and satisfactorily managed. Most administrative arrangements run smoothly, although both attendance and attendance statistics and procedures are not tight enough. Consortium course provision is an increasing strength. The good ethos in the sixth form stems partly from the enthusiastic, vigilant guidance of the head of sixth form. Departmental leadership is good in English, history, ICT and business education, and very good in mathematics, art and design, design and technology, and drama. It is satisfactory in science and geography. The sixth form is cost effective.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students generally have a good opinion of the sixth form. Most features of sixth-form life score highly. The central aspects of teaching, targets, independent study and helpful advice are all strengths. In contrast, enrichment activities are felt to be weak by around two-fifths of students. A similar proportion of another, small sample felt that guidance on after-school life was thin. Inspectors agree that the range of enrichment activities is modest apart from a good range in the arts. Guidance for the later stages of education or employment is judged by inspectors to be good. Overall, virtually all students say the sixth form is a good place to be and that it meets their expectations.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Pupils' overall standard of attainment is broadly in line with that expected nationally by the end of Year 9, a satisfactory achievement. It is slightly above average by the end of Year 11 and a good achievement for most pupils in most subjects. In 2003, pupils' overall level of attainment was above average in the Year 9 national tests, and average in GCSE examinations. The Year 9 result was a satisfactory achievement. The GCSE results were fair. Results in GCSE are similar to what they were at the last inspection. Students' overall standard in GCE Advanced (A) level examinations in Year 13 in 2003 was, on most measures, above average. For most students, the 2004 results were a sound achievement.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment by the end of Year 11 is well above average in mathematics, science and art and design, but below average in German and religious education (RE).
- Most pupils' current level of achievement is good in Years 10-11.
- Most pupils listen carefully and use appropriate specialist language well.
- The overall standard of discussion, note-taking, presentation and spelling should be higher.
- Sixth-form achievement is very good in English, art and design and drama.
- Achievement in 2004 A-level examinations was lowish in biology, chemistry, physics and French.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	35.2 (36.0)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	37.8 (36.0)	35.4 (34.7)
science	35.4 (34.8)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 187 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for 2002.

Commentary

1. Pupils' overall academic standard on entry in Year 7 is usually a little above average, especially for the proportion of higher-attaining pupils who come to the school. In 2003, the overall standard reached in the Year 9 national tests was above average – and very similar in all the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science. These Year 9 results rose steadily over the 2000-2003 period, but slipped back a little in 2004. The results for Year 9 largely reflect the earlier intake pattern of Year 7 and are therefore a satisfactory achievement.

2. When these 2003 Year 9 results are compared with those in schools which have a similar social and economic background (as measured only by the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals), pupils in this school generally performed much better than the group average. A comparison of the results with the standards pupils had on entry to the school indicates that most pupils made satisfactory progress. Over the 1999-2003 period, the school's results have more than kept pace with the rise in results nationally. Girls tend to be ahead of boys in English by the end of Year 9, although boys are not as far behind here as they are nationally. In contrast, boys tend to do a little better in mathematics than girls. Girls and boys do equally well in science.

3. By the end of Year 9, the overall level of attainment is average# in most subjects. It is above average in mathematics, science, art and design and drama, but below average in German and RE.

Pupils' progress and achievement in their studies over Years 7-9 are satisfactory overall. They make good progress and achieve well in mathematics, science, art and design, geography, modern foreign languages and music.

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	55 (46)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	90 (91)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	96 (96)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	35.6 (34.6)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 171 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for 2002.

4. In the GCSE examinations of 2003, pupils' overall attainment was in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining at least five grades A*-C was slightly above average. Since the last inspection, GCSE results have risen at a similar rate to what they have nationally. The 2004 results were very similar to those of 2003 – and to those at the last inspection in 1998. The 2003 and 2004 results, taken together, represent a satisfactory overall achievement.

5. In the core subjects, pupils' attainment of a grade in the range A*-C in GCSE in 2003 was average in English, above average in mathematics and well above average in science. Science did well. In 2004, English continued to improve, whereas science slipped just a little. The proportion of pupils gaining at least grade C in all of English, mathematics and science in 2004 (45 per cent) was above the 2003 national average of 38 per cent. Science has done particularly well over the last three years in GCSE.

6. No pupil achieved the highest A* grade in 2003 or 2004 in the food or resistant materials aspects of design and technology. In contrast, in both 2003 and (especially) 2004, a larger proportion of pupils gained the top A* or A grades than did so nationally.

7. When the school's results at GCSE are compared with those in schools with a similar "free school meals" background, this school's performance was substantially better than most others in the group in 2003. Pupils from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds usually do at least as well as other pupils in the school. Their performance is also normally at least in line with pupils from similar backgrounds in the local authority area, and is usually higher.

8. Girls achieved only a slightly higher proportion of the higher (A*-C) grades in GCSE than boys in 2003: boys almost closed the gap on girls over the 2001-2003 period. A large gap, however, opened up again in 2004, when boys were 16 percentage points behind girls. The school's analyses show that girls continued to do better in 2004, climbing to their best result ever in the school, whereas boys did not quite match their 2003 performance. In 2003, girls did much better than boys in English. Boys and girls performed equally well in mathematics and science.

9. In GCSE in 2003, taking into account the standard they reached in the national tests two years earlier, most pupils made satisfactory progress in their studies during Years 10-11 in reaching at least five grades A*-C. There was, however, a little slippage in these years by some pupils: absence and incomplete coursework were the major reasons. In both 2003 and 2004, the school reached the GCSE targets it set for itself. The intake data five years previously, however, suggest that the 5A*-C target could have been set a little higher.

"Average" in relation to classwork means that the standard of work is typical of what pupils of the same age produce nationally.

10. By the end of Year 11, the proportion of pupils reaching nationally expected standards is above average overall in most subjects. The proportion is, however, average in citizenship, geography, music, physical education (PE) and business education. It is well above average in mathematics, science and art and design, but below average in RE.

11. Pupils' level of achievement was sound overall during the inspection – satisfactory in Years 7-9 and good overall in Years 10-11. In over half the lessons observed, pupils achieved well (and very well in around one in eight lessons). Their achievement was satisfactory in over one third of lessons. Achievement was, however, not as good as it should be in about one in every eight lessons seen. It is an important task for senior management to raise the level of achievement further, largely by improving a minority of weak teaching.

12. Most pupils with special educational needs make good progress and achieve well. This achievement is made not only by the majority of those who have specific learning difficulties, but also by those who have a variety of physical and visual disabilities. The quality of teaching, care and management from all those supporting these pupils – including a variety of services from outside the school – results in the school's provision and success being a core strength. In 2004, for example, all six pupils with statements who were entered for the GCSE examination attained at least three GCSE recorded grades and one pupil gained seven. The most able pupils, too, generally make good progress. Pupils from ethnic minority groups do at least as well as they usually do throughout the local authority area and most do slightly better. "Inclusiveness" is a notable feature of school life.

13. Across the school, pupils' standard of literacy is average overall. Most pupils are competent readers and listen carefully. Another strength in most subjects is the correct use of specialist or technical vocabulary. Writing tasks are usually planned carefully. Weaknesses are in the amount and skill in note-taking and in standards of presentation, handwriting, spelling and punctuation – especially in design and technology, geography and history. Most pupils speak audibly, but extended discussion is rare or poorly structured in most subjects. A whole-school literacy policy and approach are required in these matters to raise the overall standard to where it should be.

14. Numeracy, sustained by a cross-curricular policy, is average overall. The majority of pupils carry out mathematical calculations competently. Their mathematics is strong enough for their everyday needs in other subjects. Attainment in ICT is average across a wide range of skills and applications.

Sixth form

Standards in GCE A/AS level and VCE examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2003

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	90 (95)	90 (93)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	33 (36)	33 (35)
Average point score per pupil	273 (244)	258 (263)

There were 64 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for 2002.

15. The GCE Advanced (A) level results in 2003 were a little above average, especially for the quality of grades obtained. In both 2003 and 2004, all candidates passed in chemistry, art and design, design and technology, history, French, German, drama, economics, sociology and general studies. No student obtained the top A grade in either year in chemistry or geography.

16. Taking into account the quality of grades that they gained in GCSE examinations two years earlier, most students make satisfactory progress in their studies to Advanced (A2) level. On the 2004 A-level subject grades that could be directly compared with prior GCSE results, students made good

(or better) progress in just under half their subjects, satisfactory progress in about one third, but unsatisfactory progress in around one quarter of subject entries. A high proportion of students made good progress in English, design and technology, drama and economics. English did very well. In contrast, around half the students made unsatisfactory progress in biology, chemistry, physics and French.

17. The GCE Advanced Supplementary (AS) level results were below average overall in 2003 for both the pass rate and quality of grades owing to the low results in a few subjects; in two-thirds, however, results were at least average. The results were significantly better in 2004. In both 2003 and 2004, all candidates passed in English, art and design, geography, French, German and drama.

18. The standard of sixth-form work seen during the inspection was average overall and broadly in line with examinations course requirements. It was well above average in English, art and design, and design and technology. It was below average in information and communication technology (ICT).

19. Students' overall achievement on the courses inspected was satisfactory. It was at this level in mathematics, science, geography and history. It was good in design and technology and in ICT, and very good in English and art and design. The major reasons for high achievement were a combination of stimulating teaching and thorough planning, concentration and hard work from students. Modest or unsatisfactory achievement stemmed from teaching that lacked intellectual sparkle and clarity, from students being "laid back" and unfocused, and from poor access to reference books.

20. Of the small number (13) of students who were able to respond to the pre-inspection questionnaire just before the summer holiday, virtually all felt that they could do well in the sixth form because of the good quality of expert teaching they received and the helpful assessment of their work.

21. Most students are average overall in their use of the key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT applications. They skim-read well and most organise their written work satisfactorily. Too few, however, take adequate notes to crystallise their thinking in classwork or for future revision. Oral work too rarely features extended discussion and classroom presentations. Most students are reasonable speakers and some are very articulate.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attendance is satisfactory in Years 7-11, but unsatisfactory in the sixth form. Attitudes and behaviour, in lessons and around the school, are good. Relationships, including racial harmony, are very good. Provision for personal development, although good overall and very good in the cultural dimension, is unsatisfactory in the spiritual aspect. The school helps students in the sixth form to grow into mature young adults. The level of fixed-term exclusions is relatively high, but procedures are well thought through.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Relationships and racial harmony within the school are very good.
- The school's contribution to pupils' personal development is a cornerstone of its work.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual development is unsatisfactory.
- Attitudes to learning were unsatisfactory in around one in nine lessons inspected.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year, 2003-2004 (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	5.4	School data	2.9
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year. The "national data" percentages relate to the 2002-2003 academic year, the latest year for which such data are available.

Commentary

22. Pupils' attendance is satisfactory overall, being broadly in line with the pattern nationally. In the 2003-2004 academic year, it was 91.7 per cent. This was better than the 90.5 per cent at the last inspection. Attendance has been getting better, very steadily, over the last few years. Truancy is not a problem for the school. Punctuality for school and (usually) for lessons is good in Years 7-11.

23. The pattern of recorded absence has, however, changed. The amount of approved ("authorised") absence has declined to the low figure of 5.4 per cent. The amount of absence recorded as unapproved, however, has increased markedly – from around one per cent three years ago to 2.9 per cent in the last academic year. The reasons for this change are to do with a strict interpretation of the reasons for absence from school and the majority of tutors no longer undertaking the time-consuming task of following up unexplained absences. Now, all absence is assigned to the "unauthorised" category, unless the school is convinced that absence is fully justified.

24. Since the last inspection, the school has worked hard to secure good attendance. It now sets attendance targets for every pupil. It has recently begun to pilot the logging of attendance, lesson by lesson, by a computerised system, having had doubts about the accuracy of its attendance statistics in the past, particularly at afternoon registration.

25. Pupils' interest in school life and the range of activities provided is good. In lessons, pupils are generally attentive to their teachers and willing to learn. The school successfully inculcates in pupils a sense of responsibility for themselves. The school also provides a range of ways of keeping pupils from exclusion – such as through the work of learning mentors and the behaviour inclusion centre. Good opportunities, such as mobility training, are successfully provided to develop independent life skills for pupils with visual impairment.

26. Although most pupils behave well, a small number of pupils are inattentive and sometimes disruptive in lessons. The school has a behaviour management programme that enables members of the leadership team to respond promptly and effectively, when needed. The school has not yet succeeded, however, in reducing the relatively high level of fixed-term exclusions – although the procedures and reasons for exclusion are carefully managed.

27. Within the overall good provision for pupils' personal development, the school's contribution to cultural development is particularly effective. The specialist college status has affirmed the very good impact of art and design, music, dance and drama on pupils' development. The school makes good provision for pupils' moral and social development. Provision for pupils' spiritual development, however, is unsatisfactory. Since the last inspection, the school has discontinued the *Thought for the Day* programme. Furthermore, when pupils attend their weekly assembly, the school provides no opportunity for an act of collective worship.

28. The absence of policy in this area has allowed a serious gap to develop that has not been rectified by governors and senior management. This is the third inspection to report statutory non-compliance and since the last inspection the situation has worsened. The school has withdrawn

systematic tutorial input at the beginning of the day. The value of the alternative – a weekly tutorial period – is not evident for most pupils.

29. During the inspection, attention was drawn to the question of bullying. Most parents and pupils support the school's claim that the way it handles reports of bullying is speedy and effective. Pupils gave examples from their own experience of how they were supported – as, for instance, how the use of the Yellow Box had led to prompt, effective intervention by sixth-form students who are trained in anti-bullying techniques.

30. Relationships between pupils, in lessons and around the school, are very good and give strong evidence of close racial harmony. The school is a community greatly enriched by its diversity of culture and heritage.

Sixth form

31. In previous academic years, the school has not maintained records of the overall attendance of sixth formers – only the attendance of students for individual lessons. This was a weakness. It has only very recently begun to collate such detailed statistics. In the first five weeks of the current academic year, overall attendance was at 90.7 per cent in Year 12, but at the unsatisfactory level of 87.2 per cent in Year 13. On the limited evidence available, the attendance of students in the sixth form is unsatisfactory: already, for example, only 39 students out of 154 have a full attendance record.

32. The school now has a sensible system of recording attendance – the formal registration of all students in the morning, with the opportunity to study at home in the afternoon (after formally signing out) if a student has no lessons after lunch. This provides a reasonable balance between essential record-keeping and allowing students to show suitable responsibility and maturity.

33. The school has satisfactory systems in place to monitor absence by the school's own students. Systems for checking on the whereabouts of students from other schools in the consortium who fail to attend lessons, however, are slow, so posing potential risks. Punctuality for lessons is satisfactory overall, but could be better: a minority of students lack an obvious sense of urgency to get to lessons on time.

34. Attitudes and behaviour are good. In lessons, most students work hard. They behave responsibly and show appropriate levels of aspiration. Students take the opportunities offered to give support to younger pupils. The school is proud of its sixth-form students who are examples of success for younger pupils.

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	654	89	0
White – Irish	1	0	0
White – any other White background	7	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	11	15	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	10	3	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	15	4	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	22	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	37	6	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	21	10	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	1	0	0
Black or Black British – African	0	0	0
Chinese	0	0	0
Any other ethnic group	12	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	258	36	0

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**Teaching and learning**

The quality of teaching and learning are good overall throughout the school. They are similar to what they were at the last inspection: there is more good teaching, but also more that is unsatisfactory. Teaching is at least satisfactory in over nine out of every ten lessons. Nearly a quarter of all the teaching seen was very good. It is occasionally outstanding. The assessment of pupils' work is accurate, but is used inconsistently across the school to guide planning.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good in science and drama in Years 10-11.
- It is also very good in English, art and design and drama in the sixth form.
- It is satisfactory overall in citizenship, PE and RE.
- Nearly one quarter of the school's teaching is very good.
- Some outstanding teaching was seen in mathematics, art and design, design and technology, drama and for pupils with special educational needs.
- About one in 12 lessons was unsatisfactory – a focus for quick improvement.
- Most of the weekly tutorial periods seen were unsatisfactorily taught.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 204 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
5 (2.5%)	40 (20%)	88 (43%)	54 (27%)	15 (7%)	2 (1%)	0

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; the figures in brackets show percentages. The percentages do not total 100 because of "rounding".

Commentary

35. The quality of teaching and learning varies from excellent to (very occasionally) poor, and is good overall. Teaching is satisfactory or better in over nine out of every ten lessons. Teaching quality is broadly at the same level as it was at the last inspection. In 1998, however, 97 per cent of the teaching was judged to be satisfactory or better. Now eight per cent of teaching falls below a satisfactory standard. Sixty per cent of teaching was good (or better) at the last inspection, but that proportion has now increased to 65 per cent. The proportion of very good (or better) teaching has grown from the previous 18 per cent to 22 per cent.

36. The overall picture of teaching is a good one. In most lessons and subjects, pupils make sound progress in what they learn, because lessons are well prepared and taught in an interesting way. As a result, most pupils pay close attention to what lessons have to offer and achieve soundly.

37. This good picture is spoiled, however, by the overall quality of teaching seen in the weekly tutorial period. This ranged from very good to poor and was unsatisfactory overall. This was where around half of all the unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Too many tutorial periods have fundamental weaknesses. In these weak lessons, tasks often lack a clear purpose and structure. Some steadily plod on with unimaginative work. Pupils' answers are frequently brief and undeveloped. Penetrating analysis and discussion are rare. Class management sometimes shows inadequate control or over-dominant teaching.

38. In contrast, in a very good Year 7 tutorial period seen on bullying behaviour, the activities (including a team game) were relevant, interesting and thought-provoking. Pupils were enthusiastically and directly involved in what they were learning. They gained a lot in understanding the range of issues involved and in sensitivity. Overall, however, the flexible and interesting opportunities for teaching offered by tutorial time are too often wasted or inadequately exploited. The teaching and use of time in tutorials require a thorough overhaul.

39. Teachers have sufficient command of their subjects to ensure that pupils learn profitably, with confidence and enjoyment. Most choose suitable, interesting topics, conveying their enthusiasm for their subject to their classes. They use appropriate subject-specific terminology and, in the best cases, insist on similar precision in their pupils. They draw on their depth of knowledge to illustrate topics realistically and to probe and develop pupils' understanding in detail.

40. Most lessons are planned well. In the best lessons, the aims of learning are not only thought through very clearly, but are also communicated from the outset to pupils. Nor are the aims just a series of tasks to be carried out. They are carefully fashioned to move pupils on, at a suitably brisk pace, to a deeper and more secure understanding of content and concepts. Learning steps are spelled out clearly.

41. It is notable in this school that teachers accommodate well the differing learning needs of all pupils – from the very bright to those who learn slowly, and both those who are able-bodied and those who have a wide variety of disabilities. It is a very inclusive school. Pupils invariably respond with interest, active involvement and hard work, when they receive such careful teaching. A specially adapted PE lesson for seven pupils in Years 8-12 with severe physical disabilities, for example, was an outstanding model of good practice and cooperation by a teacher and learning support assistant. The pupils responded with great commitment and enjoyment.

42. Pupils with visual impairment readily access learning materials and tasks. This is because teachers provide clear information and instructions. The good joint planning and preparation between teachers and teaching assistants ensure that pupils receive very effective support. Throughout the school, there is a strong emphasis on pupils learning independently, especially through the well-targeted use of specialist ICT and other equipment.
43. In a few poorly structured lessons, teachers neither explain clearly where the lesson is going nor give the impression that tasks are clearly thought out. In these instances, pupils often have to keep asking for clarification of what they should do, are not set clear time-scales for tasks, plod along on mundane work and do not learn much of lasting value.
44. The level of intellectual or creative challenge provided – coupled to clarity of purpose and pace in learning – is the major difference in the quality of teaching in individual lessons. In the best lessons (and especially in the one in every five lessons that were very good), teachers value above all depth of exploration and understanding.
45. In these cases, teachers ensure, patiently and persistently, that pupils investigate, probe, consider and explain their views and reasoning. They are not content with brief, superficial answers. They emphasise the need – and pupils fully understand its significance – to analyse and explain carefully how they have arrived at their conclusions. They sometimes encourage note-taking (as in business education and sociology) and make time for thorough discussion. Occasionally (as in English), pupils are organised to make formal, oral presentations to the whole class. As a result, pupils listen intently, concentrate hard, show enthusiasm for their work and achieve well.
46. In an outstanding Year 11 lesson in mathematics on linear programming, for example, very high standards were expected and achieved in all aspects of work. The teacher's questioning techniques were exceptionally sharp. Issues were pursued rigorously throughout. Pupils discussed their work avidly. The teacher was extremely vigilant to the slightest inattention. An enormous amount of work was undertaken both in terms of quantity and width. Despite these pupils already having taken GCSE a year early with good results, their progress and achievement were very good.
47. In a few lessons, in contrast, the level of intellectual challenge is low. Lessons go through the motions of learning. Tasks are completed, but pupils learn little. They do not have to think much, can coast along and skate over the surface of issues. Many opportunities for deep learning are unnoticed or lost and progress is slow. In a few cases, pupils' resultant disenchantment and boredom lead directly to poor behaviour.
48. The wise use of a range of teaching methods also marked out the good lessons from the minority that were unsatisfactory. The majority of lessons make appropriate use of different teaching and learning techniques. The best draw on a wide range of such methods and use them convincingly and effectively. In particular, the major parts of lessons are clearly defined, explained and timed. Whole-class explanations and plenary reviews are carefully interspersed with challenging group work and discussions. Pupils are closely involved at all stages of lessons. The vast majority of pupils behave well, because they find their work interesting.
49. In a significant minority of cases, however, teachers talk too much and develop pupils' answers more fully themselves rather than requiring pupils to elaborate their own answers. In others, pupils receive insufficient help in learning how to organise their thinking, discussion and writing.
50. Most teachers manage pupils well. They start lessons as they mean to go on – in a clear, calm and purposeful way. They expect pupils to get down to work quickly and without fuss. They praise good work and attitudes. They give understanding support and rechannel inattention by humour or calm assertion. In a small number of cases, in contrast, teaching does not stimulate pupils sufficiently (leading to restlessness and silliness) or adequately curb misbehaviour, so

slowing down seriously what pupils learn. The level and effectiveness of support for pupils with a variety of disabilities are very good.

51. Assessment is at least satisfactory in all subjects except RE. It is consistently good in mathematics, art and design, and design and technology, because targets are challenging and teachers' marking guides pupils well on how to improve. In RE, assessment is unsatisfactory, because pupils' progress is not reviewed adequately and they receive little useful advice on how to improve. Assessment is not formalised in citizenship. Marking is inconsistent within modern foreign languages and insufficient in ICT. There is insufficient consistency in using assessment to plan future work. In contrast, pupils with special educational needs are assessed regularly and support is very clearly targeted towards continually meeting these needs.

52. Suitable academic targets are set for pupils on the basis of primary school results and pupils' natural ability, using standardised tests. Teachers use their professional judgement to refine targets well. Pupils are usually aware of what these targets are. Not all teachers, however, regularly assess pupils' work against these targets. Staff are now well aware of the range of assessment tools to help to improve pupils' achievement. Methods of self-assessment and peer-assessment, however, are in their infancy.

53. Teaching is good overall in most subjects and year groups. It is satisfactory in Years 7-9 in English, history and ICT, and throughout Years 7-11 in citizenship, PE and RE. It is very good in science in Years 10-11 and in drama throughout Years 7-11. In all other National Curriculum subjects and in year groups other than those mentioned above, teaching is good. Outstanding lessons were seen in mathematics and art and design in Year 11 and in drama in Year 7. One in every four lessons was very well taught in Years 10-11.

Sixth form

54. Fifty-five sixth-form lessons were inspected. The quality of teaching is good overall. It was at least satisfactory in all but one of these lessons. It was good or better in two-thirds of lessons. One lesson in drama was outstanding. Teaching is very good in English, art and design and drama, satisfactory in biology and history, and generally good in other subjects.

55. Most aspects of sixth-form teaching are sound and effective. A particular strength is the depth of subject knowledge that teachers have – as, for example, in English, biology, art and design and geography. In contrast, there are two features of teaching and learning which are satisfactory, but need to be better. The overall level of expectation and challenge for students (though high, for example, in English and art and design) is lower than it could be. As a complement to this, the amount of focused, hard work put in by some students is not high enough.

56. Assessment at sixth-form level is good in English, mathematics, art and design, design and technology, and history. In no subject is it unsatisfactory. There is, however, little marking in ICT and no formal system of assessment is used in geography. Teachers judge accurately when students are ready to move forward in lessons. There is, however, inconsistency in how well teachers use assessment to plan for future lessons. The system of predicting grades from GCSE performance does not take sufficient account of students' prior attainment in specific subjects.

57. The pre-inspection questionnaire, completed by a small number of students, gives a favourable view of sixth-form teaching. Nearly all students feel they are well taught by experts in their fields of study. Teachers are seen as helpful in offering ready assistance with any difficulties encountered. Marking is seen as not particularly helpful by about a quarter of students, but most approve of the systems of target-setting and reviews of progress.

The curriculum

The school's curriculum mostly meets pupils' needs, as a result of thoughtful planning, its performing arts provision and consortium arrangements. Few courses, however, reflect adequately the world of work. Study opportunities for all pupils and arrangements to support those with special educational needs are very good. The school provides a wide range of extra curricular activities in Years 7-11, particularly in the arts. The library provision, particularly for students in the sixth form, is inadequate.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Thoughtful curricular planning results in good study opportunities for all pupils.
- The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.
- There is a narrow range of work-related courses in Years 10-13.
- Pupils benefit from a wide range of extra curricular opportunities outside the school day.
- Library provision for research and study, particularly for sixth-form students, is poor.
- A daily act of collective worship is still not provided for all pupils.
- The statutory requirement to teach RE in the sixth form is still not met.

Commentary

58. In Years 7-9, the breadth and balance of the curriculum are good, reflecting the school's Performing Arts status and enabling pupils to study dance and drama as well as music and art and design. Insufficient time is, however, allocated to drama to enable pupils to study the subject in sufficient depth. All pupils study either French or German and good provision is made for those wishing to study both languages.

59. In Years 10-11, a satisfactory range of subjects is offered. Few courses reflect the world of work or have accreditation other than GCSE. Few pupils have taken up those courses made available in the performing arts. The work-related course for those who may find the full range of GCSE courses difficult has proved successful.

60. All pupils study a personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) programme for one period each week. It includes appropriate education about citizenship, sex, relationships and the harmful effects of drug misuse. This carefully planned course is effectively coordinated and satisfactorily taught by a team of teachers. In contrast, the useful tutorial programme of one lesson each week, taught by form teachers, is unsatisfactory. It is poorly structured, an unacceptable proportion of the teaching is unsatisfactory and it is not closely coordinated with the PSHCE course. Its considerable potential is underexploited.

61. The school meets statutory requirements in all subjects in Years 7-11. This is an improvement on the position at the time of the last inspection. Where two teachers teach the same class of pupils in history in Years 7-9, coordination is unsatisfactory. The requirements for all pupils in Years 7-11 to experience a daily act of collective worship is not met. This failure was reported at the time of the last inspection and, although large spaces are available in the theatre and the school hall, no progress on this issue has been made. This issue requires urgent attention and improvement.

62. All pupils have the opportunity to experience all subjects of the curriculum. The school has successfully timetabled courses into three groups, with option choices specifically to meet the differing needs of pupils. The curriculum is reviewed regularly by well-informed governors, senior managers and staff. Most subjects' schemes of work are planned carefully and are of good quality. Those in mathematics and art and design are very good.

63. The school's provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is very good. This is based on a clear, thorough policy and the careful induction of pupils. Targets for numeracy and literacy are recorded in pupils' planners and thus available to all teachers. A large pool of 26 learning support assistants, carefully arranged into teams, focuses very well on literacy and numeracy, care for physically handicapped and visually impaired pupils, and "inclusion" for those with behavioural problems. Learning support is very well deployed, effectively used and based around an impressive, well-coordinated range of strategies. The school's highly inclusive ethos underpins all that it does.

64. The school takes exceptionally good steps to ensure that pupils with visual impairment gain full benefit from the curriculum. It provides, for example, such supportive facilities as Braille and touch-typing and ensures that pupils have adequate time to complete tasks. Further backup comes from a good range of resources – such as high-contrast rulers and tactile diagrams.

65. The quality of provision to prepare pupils for the next stage of education or employment is satisfactory. A coordinator provides an appropriate scheme of work taught within both PSHCE and tutorial lessons. The co-ordination and monitoring of this arrangement are not strong enough to ensure a consistent approach. Very good quality, impartial guidance is available for all pupils. Progress towards career choice for those with specific needs is reviewed regularly. A satisfactory careers library and computer programs support this work. All pupils participate in a programme of work experience for two weeks in Year 11. The arrangements for pupils to receive placements are unsatisfactory; a new system has recently been implemented. Opportunities are missed to strengthen pupils' knowledge of job application, selection and workplace procedures.

66. The provision for work-related learning is good for Foundation programme pupils in Years 10-11 and satisfactory for other pupils. The Foundation course provides a good opportunity to sample vocational courses at a further education college and to acquire key skills in ICT in addition to other, related elements. A pilot group in Year 10 follows a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 2 course in motor vehicle technology; this involves attachment to an employer as well as the college. *Connexions* staff actively support the Foundation programme throughout. Links with employers are limited, even within vocational subjects, apart from strong links with a small number of local employers.

67. Relevant topics elsewhere in the curriculum sometimes occur naturally within vocational courses like business studies (for example, on the motivation of workers) or leisure and tourism (where the focus at the time of the inspection was on customer service). Elsewhere, they are found only occasionally on the initiative of an individual teacher. For example, an extension lesson for a top mathematics set applied linear programming to industrial and commercial contexts, drawing on the pupils' own experience. The identification of work-related learning opportunities across all subjects has not taken place.

68. A wide range of extra curricular opportunities enhances the curriculum. Over half of the school's subjects offer support outside the school day with, for example, coursework and revision sessions, general interest clubs and assistance for pupils who need additional help. Clubs associated with the performing arts – such as art and design, drama and music – are particularly popular. Pupils participate fully in an extensive spread of residential and day visits to places elsewhere in Europe such as France, Germany and Italy, and within the UK, both locally and as far afield as London. The range of sporting activities, including inter-school fixtures, is modest.

69. The school has a full complement of suitably qualified staff. A generous number of well-qualified support staff such as technicians (except in art and design) and learning assistants working in classrooms give effective help to both staff and pupils.

70. The school occupies an unusual position within a shopping precinct. A well-equipped community theatre and library form part of the school buildings and are shared with the community. The library, however, is inadequate as a centre for research and study for pupils and the provision

made by the school to compensate is inadequate. Resources for subjects are generally satisfactory. The community leisure centre provides indoor sports and PE facilities – such as an appropriate swimming pool and fitness room. Use of the sports hall, however, is unsuitable, as it necessitates two lessons taking place in the same space. The all-weather sports pitch is in poor condition. The fabric of the school is mostly sound, but narrow corridors result in an onerous, one-way system.

Sixth form

71. In partnership with a consortium of other schools, students can choose from a satisfactory range of courses – from up to 19 GCE AS- and A2-level subjects provided directly by the school and three others within the consortium. This arrangement is successful, despite the need for students to travel between schools. All students have equal access to the curriculum offered. The small number of work-related courses offered unduly restricts the curriculum to academic courses. The statutory requirement to teach RE to all students is not met, as no time is allocated to teaching the programme of study specified in the locally agreed syllabus.

72. The majority of students take an external examination in general studies in Year 12 (although there is no taught course) and many continue to study a taught course in Year 13. In addition, students follow a key skills course that focuses on ICT. Continuity between this and the ICT course studied in Years 10-11 is weak and for many the course proves inappropriate.

73. Students also work with their form tutors through a tutorial programme which focuses mainly on study skills, university entrance or preparation for employment. This limited enrichment programme is enhanced by activities that involve higher education institutions and *Understanding Industry*. A modest extra curricular programme is arranged for students outside the school day.

74. Teaching to prepare students for employment or further education takes place during tutorial lessons. The content of the course is sound and is enhanced by visits to universities and colleges and by visiting speakers. Well-informed guidance is provided by the head of sixth form and form tutors. A careers officer provides well-considered advice for those wishing to enter the world of work and there are opportunities to visit workplaces. An appropriately stocked careers library, based in three areas, provides a good range of information for students.

75. The accommodation provided for the sixth form is broadly satisfactory, but there are insufficient facilities for private study. Resources for teaching are adequate and access to computers is satisfactory. The library facilities for private study or research are poor.

Care, guidance and support

Provision for pupils' care and welfare and the procedures to ensure pupils' health and safety are (with exceptions) good. The school's support, advice and guidance to pupils, and to students in the sixth form, are good. The school is committed to seeking, valuing and appropriately acting on pupils' views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Arrangements for induction into Year 7 are very successful.
- Provision for pupils with a wide variety of special educational needs is very good.
- The school council successfully involves pupils and students in the life of the school.
- There are health and safety deficiencies in art and design and in design and technology.

Commentary

76. Parents and pupils agree that the arrangements for transition from Year 6 and for induction into secondary education in Year 7 are very good. Pupils say that they find the school friendly and welcoming and that they soon adapt to the requirements of secondary education.

77. Day-to-day care is good. The school has had the toilets refurbished and facilities are now good. Increased supervision and better cleaning have not only raised standards of hygiene, but also improved the school's general care and welfare for pupils. The school has made other improvements since the last inspection. The installation of the perimeter fence, for example, has not only increased security, but also reduced vandalism by intruders.

78. Teachers know their pupils well and the school effectively meets individual needs. Pupils with physical or visual disabilities receive very good care, not only from members of staff but also from their fellow pupils. Other pupils treat them without privilege or condescension. Their successful integration shows the school's high commitment to inclusion and equality of opportunity in action.

79. Procedures for pupils' health and safety, both on the site and when pupils are on organised trips away from school, are detailed and largely in accordance with requirements. There are, however, deficiencies in art and design and in design and technology. The school also has the valuable benefit of a nurse and a well-equipped medical room for sick pupils. Arrangements for child protection are sensitive and efficient, having been further enhanced since the last inspection by the introduction of learning mentors.

80. The school has made good use of funding available from the *Excellence in Cities* programme to improve support for vulnerable pupils. Good coordination and management, led by one of the deputy headteachers, have ensured that this specific provision has been successfully integrated into the work of the whole school.

81. The school has recently re-established a representative forum for its pupils. The school council now elects its own officers and keeps its own minutes. This type of representation helps pupils to know how democracy works and contributes to their understanding of citizenship. Issues recently addressed include arrangements at lunchtime and school uniform requirements. The school is good at valuing and listening to pupils' views.

Sixth form

82. Students in the sixth form receive a good level of care, guidance and support. They have their own representative council and nearly all said that they have an adult in the school they can talk to if they have a problem. Most students respond positively to the opportunity to do one hour's voluntary work a week and to other opportunities within the school.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The vast majority of parents hold the school in high regard and are happy with the progress their children make. Both pupils and sixth-form students feel it is a good school to attend and that teachers have high expectations for them. There are good, improving links with the community. The school works closely with its contributory primary schools and has a useful partnership with other secondary schools to extend the choice of Year 11 and post-16 courses.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a high level of inclusiveness within the school: everyone matters.
- The induction of pupils from primary to secondary education is well organised.
- Participation in the creative arts is high in both the local and wider community.

- Very strong links exist with parents of those children who have special educational needs.
- The contribution of parents to their children's learning has gaps.

Commentary

83. The school's links with parents are good. Parents generally hold a favourable view about the school. Both parents and pupils like the school and value the high expectations held by staff that children should work hard and do their best. The pre-inspection questionnaire for parents also indicated that they consider the school has good teaching and encourages their children to become mature and independent. In particular, they feel there are good arrangements to help pupils to settle in at the school. As a result of the high regard for the school held by parents and the community, the school is over-subscribed.

84. Parents are kept well informed of their children's progress in a reasonable variety of ways. Parents' consultation evenings are well attended. The recently-introduced system of "predicted grades" gives a clear indication to parents of the standard their children are aiming for. The termly review of these grades and the annual parental reports form a good basis for indicating pupils' progress. Some comments in these reports, however, are bland and do not indicate clearly enough what pupils need to do to improve. The *Pupil Planner*, though flimsy, is generally well used by parents and pupils. A particular strength of the school is its strong contact and partnership with parents of children with special educational needs.

85. The termly news magazine, *Spotlight*, is a very attractive, informative and well-produced journal. The school ensures that its circulation goes wider than just parents and school members. The *Head's Newsletter* provides parents with suitable, additional information on the daily life and work of the school. It also, encouragingly, contains an invitation for parents to comment on any issues raised in the newsletter.

86. In its attempts to improve communications with parents, the school now holds *Information Evenings* in partnership with the Parents' Association. These are very well attended and provide the school with welcome views, comments and appropriate accountability. For example, one evening was recently held to explain the process and introduction of the predicted grade system. The school does not, however, provide parents with sufficiently detailed information about the subjects their children take, so limiting the support that willing parents could give to further their children's learning. The school's website is a useful vehicle for information and views, but is out of date.

87. The school's links with the wider community are varied, but predominantly through the performing arts. The very good musical and dramatic events organised by the school bring great enjoyment to members of the community. Since being awarded specialist status as a Performing Arts college, the school has, for instance, conducted a well-received teaching programme with a local primary school. The school makes good use of the adjacent community theatre and leisure centre.

88. The transfer of pupils from primary to secondary education is well organised. Careful consideration is given to personal factors in the construction of teaching and tutor groups. An imaginative part of the induction process for Year 7 is a *Back to School* day for parents and pupils. This offers the opportunity to experience current learning styles and school life in general. The Year 7 Handbook is helpful. It sets out clearly the school's operations and expectations and highlights such issues as the anti-bullying policy that may be of particular concern to parents.

Sixth form

89. Responses to questionnaires indicate that students enjoy being in the sixth form. They feel that teaching is good, that they are expected to work hard and are trusted to do things on their own. They also consider that the school is well run, that students get on well with one another and that they are treated fairly. Whilst students are happy with the ICT resources available to them in school, there are

no links for them to access course data or reference material from home. The sixth-form prospectus contains useful comments and advice as well as information on extra curricular activities provided by the school.

90. The school is a partner in a cluster of four schools sharing post-16 courses and, more recently, some Year 11 vocational learning. This initiative is growing. The movement of students between sites does not, however, have sufficiently rapid monitoring of students' arrival and departure, especially if individuals are missing from lessons. The benefits of this shared provision are thoroughly evaluated by both students and teachers.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership of the headteacher is very good. That of other key staff ranges from very good to satisfactory and is good overall. Management is good and effective in most tasks. Staff provide good role models to pupils. The governing body is very supportive of the school, but unsatisfactory in the overall performance of its duties, because statutory obligations are not fully met.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher provides the school with very good leadership.
- School leaders are very committed to meeting the needs of all individuals.
- The governing body does not ensure that the school meets all its statutory duties.
- The school makes a very good contribution to the initial training of teachers.

Commentary

91. The headteacher leads and manages the school very well. Following a period of rapid turnover of headteachers, the present incumbent swiftly identified and prioritised the needs of the school. He has acted speedily and effectively to ensure that the school develops to meet changing needs. He has ensured that the school's requirements are given full consideration in the current plans for rebuilding. National and local developments have been tackled with imagination and vigour. He has given the school a very clear sense of direction and purpose.

92. The headteacher is well supported by an effective senior leadership team and other key staff. The manifest desire for the school to serve all its pupils is central to planning and explains why the school is so successful in, for example, educating pupils with special educational needs. All pupils feel at home in this school.

93. Teaching and curricular planning are well led throughout the school. Teams are effective. There is, however, scope to increase the effectiveness of the support offered to some smaller teams. Leaders provide good role models for other staff. The school is implementing a policy of self-evaluation. This currently provides more benefit in some subjects and aspects than others, because the quality of data varies. Nor are all staff equally competent in interpreting and acting upon data. In consequence, the school's evaluation of its performance is not always accurate.

94. Governors are strongly committed to the school's aims and to ensuring its success. They have substantial, relevant experience and give very willingly of their time. They have a good feel for the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are, however, over-reliant upon information provided by the school's management. Consequently, although they rightly provide the headteacher and the school with good support, they do not provide the school with an appropriate level of critical challenge.

95. The governance of the school (including the sixth form) is unsatisfactory, because governors have not taken all the necessary steps to ensure that the school meets its legal obligations. Religious education is not provided in the sixth form. Greater exploration of ways by which the

school might provide a daily act of collective worship should have been made. Both these issues were drawn to the attention of governors six years ago at the previous inspection.

96. Overall, the school is well managed. The performance management of all staff (and not just teachers) is well linked to the school's planned development and is being used well to raise standards. Staff development is evaluated. The school has a good system for judging the quality of training providers. It is also actively working on ways to assess the contribution of staff training to the raising of pupils' achievement. It does not, however, have a coherent and comprehensive management information system to guide all aspects of its work.

97. The school makes a very good, extensive contribution to the initial training of teachers. This beneficial partnership is one reason why the school has not experienced any serious difficulty in the recruitment of teachers. The school is responding with imagination to managing the workload of staff – as, for example, by the appointment of a non-teacher to be head of a year group. This person is far more likely to be able to deal with issues as they arise, without the restrictions traditionally experienced by teachers in such posts.

98. Financial planning makes a satisfactory contribution to helping the school achieve its priorities. The governors' policy of ensuring an annually balanced budget has been delivered in recent years. The most recent external audit raised a number of major concerns. Most, but not all, of these issues have now been successfully tackled. One of the contributory reasons for these concerns was the lack of sufficient personnel to handle the school's finances. A very recent appointment has rectified this shortfall.

99. Another consequence is that until very recently the school was not able to take full account of financial implications in its decision-making processes. The costs of extending the curriculum, for example, were not fully assessed. Expenditure is regularly monitored against budget predictions and appropriate action taken, if unexpected costs arise. The school ensures good compliance with the principles of "best value": the obvious current example is the planning being undertaken for a rebuilding of the school under the Private Finance Initiative. The school is only just beginning, however, to use national data when evaluating its financial effectiveness.

100. The school receives less money per pupil than the national average. Additionally, with an average class contact ratio of around two-thirds of timetabled time, teachers in this school spend less time actually teaching than is often found nationally. The school is actively investigating the extent to which teaching time is used to best effect.

101. Taking into account the good quality of education provided, the slightly above average standard of work attained, the satisfactory achievement of pupils during their time in the school and the below average income and expenditure, the school provides good value for money.

Sixth form

102. The sixth form is well led and satisfactorily managed. The school's aims are well reflected in the increasing range of courses offered in the sixth form. Collaboration with other local sixth forms results in students having a wider range of courses than could otherwise be economically provided. The funding arrangements for the sixth form, however, are further complicated by this collaboration. The result is that the school cannot have full confidence that it receives the full amount of money in respect of its sixth form.

103. The school's own evaluation of achievement in the sixth form is limited and requires a more comprehensive and coherent system. Furthermore, its systems for recording the attendance of all students – including those going to, or coming from, other sixth forms – have weaknesses, with the result that the school is not in a position to monitor patterns of absence adequately. The sixth form is, however, cost effective, because it does not draw on money intended for the education of younger pupils to sustain its work. Overall, the sixth form gives satisfactory value for money.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	3,495,290
Total expenditure	3,422,913
Expenditure per pupil	3,263

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	60,680
Balance carried forward to the next	72,377

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The 2004 GCSE results mirror pupils' good progress and achievement in the subject.
- Good use is made of assessment data to monitor pupils' progress.
- Not all teaching reaches the minimum, satisfactory standard.

Commentary

104. The Year 9 national test results in 2003 were above the national average. The 2004 results were slightly lower than those of 2003. Both these results represent a satisfactory achievement for most pupils. In 2003, the GCSE results were in line with the national average. They showed a satisfactory achievement from primary school and from the national test results at the end of Year 9. The 2004 GCSE results show further improvement: nearly two-thirds of pupils gained at least a C grade and fairly similar proportions of boys and girls gained the higher A* or A grades.

105. The standard of pupils' current work in Year 9 is average and indicates satisfactory progress since pupils entered the school in Year 7. Their standard of reading is good: most pupils read aloud fluently and accurately. Pupils frequently annotate texts to help them to deepen their understanding of what they read.

106. Pupils regularly redraft their written work to improve its quality. Careful paragraphing and a range of sentence structures are much in evidence. The quality of pupils' written work is average and satisfactory overall, although it requires more attention to presentation and handwriting. The standard of pupils' speaking and listening is above average. Pupils are usually interested in the subject and are keen to learn and contribute their views.

107. By the end of Year 11, the overall standard of pupils' work is above average. Pupils make good progress from the end of Year 9 and achieve well. Accuracy and fluency when reading aloud are good. Pupils make good use of "writing frames" to structure their written work and appropriately incorporate textual evidence into their writing. The quality of pupils' speaking and listening is good. In a Year 11 class, for example, there was a high level of engagement, as pupils explored the themes of love and trust in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. They deepened their understanding of the play through a combination of critically analysing the text, discussing its significance in small groups and sharing their findings with the whole class.

108. Teaching ranges from good to poor: it is satisfactory overall in Years 7-9 and good in Years 10-11. The majority of lessons are well structured and clearly identify learning objectives at the start. In a good Year 8 lesson, for example, studying *Across the Barricades* by Joan Lingard, pupils made substantial progress as a result of being put into groups to identify key points in the text. Pupils' understanding was extended through a subsequent whole-class discussion of these points. It was greatly enhanced when some pupils emphasised the significance of the different religious backgrounds of the characters.

109. The leadership and management of the subject are good. They are made all the more effective by the impact of two second-in-department colleagues. The implementation of good

policies and practice is greatly helped by the collaborative working of the department. Assessment is well used to monitor pupils' progress, to identify learning targets and, when necessary, provide additional support. The informal curricular links between English and drama require strengthening. Extra curricular opportunities for pupils are good. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

110. The school does not have a policy for cross-curricular literacy and does not cohesively monitor the quality of pupils' literacy. Such a policy and monitoring are urgently required as part of the school's drive to raise pupils' standards and achievement still higher.

111. The standard of literacy is average overall. It could be higher. Pupils' writing is generally of an average standard, although the formal aspects of handwriting, presentation and spelling require attention. Writing in design and technology, geography and history is below average. In contrast, in a Year 7 science lesson, pupils carefully analysed a paragraph to help them to understand the difference between "observe" and "predict".

112. The standard of reading is good in mathematics and science and of an average standard in other subjects. Pupils' clarity of speech is average. Their use of specialist terms is good in most subjects. The standard and frequency of sustained discussion, although above average in science, are lower than often found – and a matter requiring focused attention. In design and technology, geography and history, the quality of speaking and discussion are below average.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good, with the result that pupils learn well.
- The marking of pupils' work is inconsistently done across the department.
- Teachers contribute well to pupils' social and cultural development.
- Good provision is made for pupils with special educational needs.

Commentary

113. The proportion of pupils attaining grades in the range A*-C in the full-course French GCSE examinations in 2003 was in line with the national average. It was below average in German. All pupils in German, and most pupils in French, attained grades A*-G. Girls performed better than boys, but the difference was less than that seen nationally. The 2004 results improved in French, on a lower entry for the examination: half the candidates attained the higher (A* or A) grades – a marked improvement over the previous year. Results in German were maintained at the same level as previously, but more pupils were entered. For both languages, the results represent a good achievement.

114. All pupils learn either French or German on entry in Year 7, with higher-attaining pupils commencing a second foreign language in Year 8. Pupils' overall level of attainment in each language by the end of Year 9 is typical of the national picture. Their understanding of the foreign languages is good, because teachers use them consistently in class. Pupils have good opportunities to improve their oral capability, particularly through work with partners or by responding to questions from their teachers. Pronunciation is mostly satisfactory and often good.

115. Pupils extract information successfully from tasks that involve reading. Many pupils write about different topics at an appropriate level and with reasonable accuracy. However, pupils do not always

copy accurately enough or respond sufficiently to teachers' comments or corrections on their written work.

116. In French, pupils' standard of attainment by the end of Year 11 is above average. In lessons, for example, higher-attaining pupils correctly identified three different tenses in weather forecasts. In their coursework, they write accurately, employing a good range of vocabulary and using the perfect tense. These pupils are more confident than others when they read aloud and their pronunciation is better.

117. Average pupils successfully consolidate their reading and listening skills by, for instance, extracting information about camping. In their coursework, however, they are insufficiently accurate in their use of tenses and constructions. Lower-attaining pupils consolidated sentences with *pouvoir* and *devoir* and learned some interesting and unusual new vocabulary. Year 10 pupils write informatively about their favourite day and can find opposites to different phrases.

118. In German, pupils' overall standard of attainment by the end of Year 11 is below average. In a lesson on healthy eating, higher-attaining pupils showed a good knowledge of food and drink, expressed their likes and dislikes clearly and identified different dishes correctly. In questions about food and drink, middle-ability pupils responded very briefly and at a level that was below average. They identified and linked up words to pictures correctly, but their spelling of some of the German phrases they extracted lacked accuracy.

119. In their German coursework, higher-attaining pupils use vocabulary, constructions and tenses accurately. Middle-ability pupils know the basic vocabulary, but find cases and some word order difficult. Year 10 pupils show a sound knowledge of (for example) types of rooms when writing about home life, use the dative case correctly and spot mistakes in short exercises.

120. Most pupils in Years 7-11 achieve well in each language. Over time, they acquire a wide range of words and phrases. They receive a systematic grounding in the use of verbs, tenses, word order and constructions. Teachers insist that pupils understand grammatical terms. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated into classes and most make good progress. They receive very good support from learning assistants.

121. The quality of teaching and learning in each language is good. Teachers have a solid knowledge of their subject; most teach two languages. They use the foreign language consistently in many lessons to extend pupils' competence. They work hard. Relationships are generally good. Lessons are well planned to include a wide range of activities and skills, so enabling pupils to work productively, either independently or with others. Each lesson begins with appropriate revision. Classroom management is good and homework is set regularly. Most teachers mark pupils' written work thoroughly and regularly, providing helpful comments and setting targets. This high standard is not, however, consistently maintained across the department.

122. The department is well led, with sound management. Teachers contribute well to pupils' social and cultural development. The curriculum is enhanced by Spanish in Year 10 as an after-school option, leading to GCSE in one year. Ideas from the National Languages' Strategy have been incorporated well into planning. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Current Year 11 pupils work at standards well above the national average.
- Consistently good teaching ensures that pupils achieve well.
- The poor behaviour of a minority of boys occasionally disrupts lessons.

- Pupils with special educational needs and those who are gifted regularly achieve very well.
- Leadership and management are very good.

Commentary

123. National test results for pupils at the end of Year 9 were comfortably above the national average in 2003, with an impressive proportion of high grades. These results were a good achievement from pupils' mathematics standards on entry in Year 7. There has been a trend of good achievement in the subject for many years. Results in 2004 dipped slightly. GCSE results in 2003 were above the national average. Boys and girls have achieved equally well in recent years. In 2004, results were marginally lower than in 2003.

124. Pupils currently in Year 9 achieve well. Those with special educational needs are well supported, because they are in smallish groups and are helped by teaching assistants. Pupils have well-defined targets from the mathematics department and regularly perform much better than might be expected. The most able pupils are sometimes entered early for national tests and most progress very well.

125. The most able pupils in Year 11 have already attained high GCSE grades. They are now making very good progress on GCE AS work. Pupils at all ability levels usually achieve well. Those with special educational needs still receive extra support and, where suitable, are entered for examinations with alternative accreditation to GCSE. Many achieve very well. Occasionally, progress is less than satisfactory when pupils (usually boys) are easily distracted, because teaching is not well planned or class management is not firm.

126. Teaching is good. It is often very good and occasionally excellent. Teachers use such resources as dominoes, cubes and ICT well to provide a wide variety of ways to learn. They make the work relevant to real life, where possible. This was well illustrated in an excellent lesson with the most able pupils in Year 11, where algebra was used to find optimum yields in farming.

127. Teachers assess work well and challenge pupils to think for themselves. Homework is often imaginative – such as work on capacity, using everyday household containers, or forming smaller words from longer mathematical ones. A minority of lessons are inadequately planned: work is undemanding, because teachers do not differentiate the work sufficiently to match it to pupils' abilities. Occasionally, pupils (mainly boys) waste time, because they are allowed to sit where they like and distract their friends.

128. Leadership and management are very good. Within a few years, the head of department has done very well to improve some aspects of the provision that was more than adequate at the previous inspection. The rate of improvement is good. She has a vision for all pupils to achieve well and enjoy mathematics. She is a very good teacher herself. Owing to the support, challenge and empowerment she has given her colleagues, teaching is now (apart from a few poorly planned lessons) consistently good. Almost all pupils now progress well throughout their time in school.

Mathematics across the curriculum

129. Pupils have above average competence in mathematics in most other subjects. They use graphs well in science (as when determining velocity) and equally well in ICT to represent and interpret data in various forms. Graph work and tables are used satisfactorily in geography and history. In design and technology, pupils have good spatial awareness, use graphs well and are more than adequately numerate. Work in art and design with a mathematical content is identified clearly in planning. There is no evidence of mathematical skills being used or developed in English, music, PE or RE and little in modern foreign languages.

130. The whole-school policy for mathematics across the curriculum contains good advice as to how and where mathematics can be used. It is a factor in the good standard of numeracy. There

is, however, no monitoring of the extent to which numeracy is used in subjects other than mathematics.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' attainment in Years 10-11 is well above the national average – a good achievement.
- GCSE results in 2003 were well above the national average.
- Pupils usually do better in this subject than in most of their other subjects.
- Pupils have limited access to ICT during lessons, but staff extensively use interactive whiteboards.
- Pupils are well motivated as a result of imaginative, high-quality teaching.
- Laboratories are bright and attractive – a contributory factor to the good GCSE results.

Commentary

131. Pupils' overall attainment on entry to the school in Year 7 is above the national average. By the end of Year 9, their overall attainment in the national tests remains above average. Boys and girls do equally well here, whereas girls do better nationally. Pupils from ethnic minorities achieve the same as other pupils. The improvement in results over recent years has been greater in this school than nationally.

132. In 2003, GCSE results were well above the national average. The results in 2004 were fairly similar, although slightly lower. In 2004, the proportion of pupils gaining the top grades at GCSE was double the national picture. Pupils tend to do better in science than in most of their other subjects. Achievement in Years 10-11 is good, because pupils continue to build on their already good achievement in Years 7-9.

133. In the current Year 9, standards are above average, because the majority of pupils of all abilities work hard in lessons. In Years 7-9, pupils respond well both to the large amount of practical work and to the extensive usage of active, engaging methods of teaching that all regular members of the department employ. Pupils have many opportunities to share what they know. Furthermore, the better teaching ventures into probing investigations that allow pupils to give reasons for their answers. All classes in Year 7 are of mixed ability: the more able do not always, however, experience activities that stretch their curiosity.

134. All teachers have adopted strands of the national science teaching strategy for classes in Years 7-9. In only a minority of lessons, however, is there an emphasis on the correct use and spelling of scientific and technical words. Few key scientific words are displayed in laboratories. Exercise books reveal little evidence of extended writing. The quality of marking pupils' exercise books varies widely: some is full and precise, whilst other marking is superficial and lacks comments or praise. Lower school science provision has been extensively reviewed. The teaching approaches used are exemplary.

135. By the end of Year 11, the overall standard of work is well above average. This is a good achievement. For pupils in mid-range sets in Years 10-11, teachers employ strategies that fully engage even those pupils who require immediate, continuous attention. These pupils, whilst remaining a "handful", enjoy their science, because they interact well with teachers and sensibly discuss what they are learning.

136. Pupils with special educational needs generally make good progress, largely because they receive excellent, additional in-class support. In one lesson, cooperation between the teacher and the special educational needs department had resulted in many paragraphs being transferred to

Braille script for a visually impaired pupil. In another lesson, a pupil who communicated by means of a voice synthesiser had a central role in a discussion. The class patiently understood her need to type in her responses. Pupils with special educational needs are fully integrated within this subject.

137. Teaching is good in Years 7-9 and very good in Years 10-11. One lesson was unsatisfactory, because pupils were insufficiently engaged. Teachers have very good command of the subject and plan their lessons well. The wide variety of teaching approaches used is a notable feature of the department.

138. The department's subject leader is absent through ill-health and currently the role is shared between two other members of staff. In these circumstances, the leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. There is much promise for the future. The two acting leaders head up a team of committed teachers, all of whom display a love of their subject.

139. The department has clearly identified priorities to build on its strengths and address areas for further improvement. A comprehensive package of assessment procedures that also tracks pupils' attainment and achievement accurately is being actively and enthusiastically implemented. The collection of data is good, but the analysis of trends is less well evaluated. Pupils are hesitant about their actual targets; often, these are not recorded in their books. Marking, however, indicates whether pupils are on target or not.

140. Curricular links with primary schools and industry are limited. There are opportunities for some pupils to visit a local university. Teachers use ICT resources (such as computers and interactive whiteboards) particularly well. In one Year 10 lesson, able pupils used a digital projector to give presentations. The evidence of lessons, books and wall displays indicates, however, that insufficient class time is used to enhance scientific methods and skills through the use of ICT.

141. A team of technicians offers an efficient, much appreciated service. The suite of seven laboratories is bright and attractive. There is sufficient equipment, although use of the three interactive whiteboards and projectors entails a continuous swapping of rooms. The small amount of datalogging equipment is coming to the end of its useful life. Corridor displays contribute to the department's positive learning culture. Since the last inspection, there has been a good, steady improvement in all aspects of the department's work.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well, because they are well taught.
- Some teachers' lack of experience in teaching the subject holds back younger pupils' progress.
- Good leadership has ensured that the examination course meets pupils' needs well.
- Pupils do not have enough information about their progress.

Commentary

142. Pupils enter the school with average standards. The work of pupils in Year 9 is in line with that normally seen. This represents satisfactory achievement. The highest-attaining pupils explore complicated features of new computer programs – as when producing an animated time-line. Pupils of average attainment extract information from various sources to produce a leaflet, but do not evaluate their work in detail. Lower attainers combine text and graphics attractively, but do not always select the best program to use for a given task.

143. The work of pupils in Year 11 is better than often seen. These pupils achieve well. Current standards are higher than those recorded in GCSE examinations in recent years, because a new

course meets pupils' needs more appropriately. Higher-attaining pupils take a course leading to a qualification designed for students aged 18. They research and analyse complicated unit costs, for example, but do not always keep detailed records of the development of their work. Pupils of average attainment explore appropriate sources of information from the Internet, but do not know when they have enough information. Lower attainers present information in a basic form, but do not use such features as headings to add clarity to their work.

144. At all ages, boys and girls achieve equally well. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as other pupils, because the work is well matched to their needs. Pupils have the mathematical skills needed for the tasks they undertake, but many do not readily write at length about their work, although they do give full oral descriptions. Pupils from minority ethnic groups achieve well because, like others, they have good attitudes to work and appreciate its usefulness.

145. Overall, teaching and learning are good. They are good for Years 10 and 11, whilst satisfactory in Years 7-9. The older pupils learn better because, unlike those in Years 7-9, they are nearly always taught by teachers with extensive experience of teaching the subject. The best teaching develops pupils' independence.

146. Pupils very readily realise the use and value of what they learn. They respond well to demanding challenges. For example, when a class was told about a new program which had additional features but was not easy to use, nearly half the class chose the demanding task and achieved pleasing results. Pupils learn well from sharing ideas. Good reference is frequently made to the implications of the subject, as when a teacher asked his class to think about the risks of Internet auctions.

147. When teaching is less effective, teachers' explanations take over too much from pupils' explorations or pupils spend too long repeating the same skill, when they are ready to move onto something new. Pupils' work is marked satisfactorily, but rarely do comments help pupils to assess the progress they are making or give information about how to make further improvement.

148. The subject is well led. The area leader has made a good choice of examination course and supports inexperienced teachers well. Management is satisfactory. Administration is sound, but the inconsistencies in teaching have not been fully tackled. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection, because the standards of work in Year 11 have risen, adequate time is now given to teaching ICT and the requirements of the National Curriculum are now fully met.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

149. The school has an average number of computers for a school of its size. A minority of these computers are, however, nearing the end of their useful life and cannot handle such tasks as design packages. Skilful ICT technicians provide good support to learning, but are frequently required to attend to less reliable equipment.

150. Many teachers have good levels of ICT skill. The subject makes a good contribution to learning in design and technology, where pupils design products using computers and then use computer-controlled machinery for manufacture. Computer-assisted learning helps pupils with special educational needs to improve their reading, spelling and mathematics. Some other subjects make little use of ICT. The development of skills across subjects is not effectively coordinated, with the result that the development of pupils' ICT skills across the curriculum is not as effective as it could be.

151. The school ensures that pupils do not have access to unsuitable materials when using the Internet. This filtering is undertaken by another organisation on behalf of the school. The process is, however, frequently over-restrictive: pupils often cannot access material that is entirely suitable to their studies, resulting in frustration and demotivation.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers expect pupils to work hard and behave well.
- Lessons interest and motivate pupils.
- Teachers make good use of ICT to enhance teaching and learning.
- The head of department does not have a clear enough knowledge of standards in Years 7-9.
- The number and range of books in the library are unsatisfactory.

Commentary

152. By the end of Year 9, pupils' overall attainment is average. Teachers have assessed pupils' work over the past three years as being from below to above average. The standard of work seen during the inspection was in line with what is expected nationally. Most pupils achieve well and make good progress through Years 7-9. Pupils with special educational needs usually achieve well, because they receive well-targeted support.

153. Most pupils in Years 7-9 have good knowledge and understanding about geographical processes. They explain well the relationship between human activities and the physical landscape. They understand and explain well the reasons for the differing impact of the physical environment on humans – as, for instance, in their work on earthquakes. They interpret graphical and statistical data satisfactorily to compare, for example, climatic variations across the world.

154. The overall attainment of pupils by the end of Year 11 is average. The proportion of grades A*-C obtained in the GCSE examinations of 2003 was average. The 2004 results were higher overall than those of 2003. The work seen during the inspection was in line with that expected nationally. A significant minority reach the highest standards. Pupils achieve well, because they are taught well and most work hard.

155. The geographical knowledge and understanding of most pupils in Years 10 and 11 are good. Pupils have a good knowledge of aspects of the physical development of the landscape. This was seen especially in the work of Year 11 pupils, following their fieldwork. Pupils were confident in their use of correct geographical vocabulary and in their explanations of geographical processes associated with a limestone landscape. They use ICT well to present their findings. They understand the processes of demographic change. Most interpret graphical data well.

156. Teaching is consistently good and focused on promoting good learning. The good relationships between teachers and pupils create a purposeful atmosphere for learning in lessons. Teachers use a suitable range of activities that motivate and involve pupils well. Pupils then respond with positive attitudes to work. They work together in groups cooperatively, supporting one another well. Good use is made of fieldwork and ICT to enhance pupils' knowledge and understanding. Teachers set appropriately demanding work that leads the highest attainers towards suitably high standards. Marking is done regularly, but there is some inconsistency in the quality of the comments added.

157. The leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. Since the previous inspection, the department has made satisfactory progress. The head of department also has other leadership and management responsibilities. He does not teach in Years 7-9. As a result, he does not have a clear enough view of the standards reached by pupils in these years. There is no fieldwork for pupils in Years 8 and 9. This means that pupils who take GCSE geography do not have sufficient continuity of experience when they begin fieldwork in Years 10 and 11. The number and range of books in the library are unsatisfactory for helping pupils to learn independently.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teaching of pupils in Years 10 and 11 is good: pupils learn well.
- The very good support for pupils with special educational needs helps them to achieve well.
- The arrangements for sharing the teaching of classes in Years 8 and 9 are unsatisfactory.
- The number and range of suitable books in the library are unsatisfactory.

Commentary

158. By the end of Year 9, pupils' overall attainment is average and most pupils achieve satisfactorily during Years 7-9. Pupils with special educational needs usually achieve well, because they receive very good, appropriate support. A very small proportion of pupils do not achieve as well as they should, because they behave in an immature way. Very occasionally, this poor behaviour is not dealt with firmly enough by the teacher.

159. Most pupils in Years 7-9 have sound knowledge and understanding of the past. They see and explain changes over time. Most see and understand adequately the reasons for past events. The highest attainers have good understanding about the past and write well at length. They understand that there may be differing views of past events. Most pupils use sources successfully for information. Higher attainers make valid deductions from a range of sources, something which the lower-attaining pupils find difficult.

160. The overall attainment of pupils by the end of Year 11 is above average. Results in the GCSE examinations in 2003 were below average for A*-C grades, although a higher than average proportion gained the top A or A* grades. The results in 2004 were significantly higher than those of 2003 and were well above the 2003 national average. The work seen during the inspection was above the range usually seen nationally. The majority of pupils achieve well. This is because pupils are taught well and because they are prepared to work hard in order to succeed.

161. The majority of pupils in Years 10 and 11 have a good knowledge of the topics they study and understand well why events happened. The highest attainers use historical sources to make valid deductions about the past. Lower attainers have sound knowledge about events, but do not use sources selectively. They tend to copy information rather than use it.

162. Teaching in Years 7-9 varies from very good to unsatisfactory and is satisfactory overall. Most pupils learn satisfactorily. In Years 10 and 11, teaching is more consistently good and pupils learn well. The best teaching is characterised by good subject knowledge, high expectations of behaviour and hard work, and effective classroom management. These create a purposeful learning atmosphere. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, the management of poor behaviour is not firm enough.

163. In most lessons, teachers use a suitable range of activities that motivate pupils and keep them actively involved in their learning. Some, but not all, lessons end with pupils being asked to summarise what they think they have learned in the lesson. Teachers' comments on the work of pupils in Years 10 and 11 give them clear guidance on how to improve further. Pupils' literacy standards are supported by teachers' emphasis on correct historical vocabulary. Pupils do not, however, build up a glossary of these terms in their books.

164. The department is managed satisfactorily and led well. As a result, there has been satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection. All lessons are now taught by specialists. Resources and the use of ICT have improved. The head of department's planning shows a clear

commitment to improving standards still further. The arrangement whereby some classes in Years 8 and 9 are shared by two teachers is unsatisfactory. It makes continuity of teaching and learning difficult, despite teachers' efforts to manage the system effectively. The number and range of suitable books in the library are unsatisfactory for developing pupils' independent learning, especially in Years 10 and 11.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The match of teachers to the curriculum is good.
- The attainment and achievement of pupils in Years 10-11 are lower than they should be.
- Procedures for assessment are unsatisfactory.

Commentary

165. By the end of Year 9, pupils' work is at the standard expected by the locally agreed syllabus. Pupils know the beliefs and practices of Christianity and of the other religions they study. They understand how religious belief makes a difference to a person's life. They relate what they learn to their own lives and reflect on religious questions that are difficult to answer. They develop their own views by considering other points of views and giving reasons. Pupils make steady progress during Years 7-9. Their achievement is satisfactory.

166. By the end of Year 11, pupils are below average in attainment. In Years 10-11, pupils follow the GCSE short course on Religion and Life. They show understanding of personal and social issues. They recognise how people may have conflicting values between, for example, the sanctity of life and the quality of life. They gain from the course, but most fail to develop the depth or detail of knowledge and understanding of which they are capable. This is the first year that all pupils have followed the GCSE short course and many are not sufficiently positive in attitude: attainment is below average, because too many pupils do not learn enough in lessons.

167. Teaching is satisfactory. Learning is satisfactory in Years 7-9, but unsatisfactory in Years 10-11. Most teachers have sufficient command of the subject and plan their lessons appropriately. They have suitable expectations of pupils. Teaching methods and learning resources are adequate. There is enough teaching time for the course.

168. In some lessons, however, teachers do not do enough to engage pupils' interest and involve pupils actively in learning. Similarly, teachers' management of pupils' behaviour is sometimes inadequate. As a result, some pupils, having made little effort in the lesson, make little progress and have gaps in their exercise books where work should be.

169. Assessment is unsatisfactory. It is not clear enough what learning is intended in lessons. The department has no agreed system to measure attainment. Pupils lack understanding of how well they are doing and of what they need to do to improve. The match of teachers to the curriculum is good, because there are two specialists in the department. The department's location, however, is unsatisfactory, in that the two specialist rooms are at some distance from each other.

170. Leadership is satisfactory. The new head of department has made a good start to improving the subject, introducing new schemes of work and the GCSE short course. Management is currently unsatisfactory, however, because without procedures for assessment, the department lacks the capacity for self-evaluation. Monitoring performance, reviewing evidence and taking appropriate action are all activities planned for the future.

171. The school now meets the statutory requirement to provide RE teaching for all pupils in Year 11. The introduction of an accredited course in Years 10-11 has improved the curriculum, but not yet led to higher standards. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory overall.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching in Years 10-11 is good: as a result, most pupils achieve well.
- The subject leader has a clear vision for the subject and standards are rising.
- The provision and use of ICT are strong.
- Pupils have little knowledge of new materials and their uses.
- The cutting room and adjacent workshop have health and safety weaknesses.

Commentary

172. The overall standard of work on entry to the school is below average. By the end of Year 9, the standard is average. Pupils attain best in practical work and designing. In a Year 9 graphics lesson, for example, the majority of pupils designed an appropriate logo for a CD cover, because they were assisted well by the workbooks provided.

173. By the end of Year 11, the overall standard is above average. This is a good achievement. Pupils use ICT efficiently for research, data analysis and design purposes. They present their work well. Above average standards of research, analysis and refinement of ideas are evident in the textiles and graphics courses. Results in GCSE are broadly average. In recent years, there has been a steady improvement in performance in all aspects of the subject.

174. Achievement in lessons in Years 7-9 is generally satisfactory. Pupils with physical or other disabilities achieve as well as other pupils: the use of specially raised preparation and cooking facilities in the food room, for instance, aids their acquisition of practical skills. The provision of Braille worksheets helps those with visual impairment to gain the required knowledge and understanding.

175. Most pupils listen well. They particularly enjoy practical tasks, as was evident in Year 7 when pupils learned about electronics to design and make a mini-torch. Year 9 pupils know key technical words. Lower achievers and many of those with literacy difficulties amongst pupils with special educational needs, however, do not copy accurately. Their basic spelling errors are not always corrected by the teacher. The presentation and handwriting of this group of pupils in their food and resistant materials folders are often unsatisfactory.

176. Achievement by the end of Year 11 is generally good. Gifted pupils benefit from such enrichment activities as an out-of-school robotics club. All pupils enjoy the textiles programmes available to them. Higher-attaining girls on the graphics course evaluate their work against the examination objectives in order to produce work of a higher quality. Those lower attainers who have poor attendance records or time-management problems are given extra help to catch up and improve the quality of their coursework. Not all pupils make full use of the support offered and some pupils are poorly motivated. In food, textiles, graphics and resistant materials, all pupils use their knowledge and understanding of ICT well to research and develop designs. Computer-aided design and manufacture is an important aspect of this success.

177. Teaching and learning are generally good and occasionally very good. They are sometimes unsatisfactory. The strengths of teaching lie in subject knowledge, understanding of "inclusion" issues

and ICT skills. The strengths of learning lie in many pupils' desire to gain new practical and designing skills. The best teaching fully considers pupils' needs, but in a minority of lessons, learning opportunities are missed – as, for example, through group or paired discussion or allowing pupils to read aloud.

178. Assessment procedures are good. The practice of self-assessment and target-setting helps most pupils to understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further. The department does not, however, have any baseline assessment of standards attained when pupils start the subject in Year 7.

179. Leadership and management are good. The new leader is well supported by an effective team, including a multi-talented technician. There is a shared vision for improvement, as shown by the departmental development plan. Monitoring and support for new members of staff are effective. Documentation, including schemes of work, indicates a clear understanding of what has been achieved as well as what still needs to be done.

180. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. The food room has been refurbished, ICT resources are much improved, and food and textiles results are better at GCSE level. Dust extraction is minimal and requires attention. The air quality in the cutting-room and adjacent workshop, during periods of intense wood-cutting activity, is a health and safety concern.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

181. The main focus was on art and design, drama and music, but three lessons of **dance** were also sampled. Since the school received Performing Arts status, dance has been provided as a discrete subject in all years. All pupils have lessons in Years 7-9 and there is an option to pursue the subject at GCSE level in Years 10 and 11.

182. In Years 7-9, the overall standard of performance seen was average, although girls generally performed better and showed more sensitivity to the requirements of the subject than boys. In a Year 7 class, the pupils worked hard to improve their group presentations and sense of timing.

183. Year 11 girls worked extremely hard in the lesson seen and produced work at an above average standard. They concentrated well throughout and made substantial progress in refining their group presentations. When given the opportunity, they were constructively critical and showed considerable interest in their work. In 2004, a small group of seven pupils took the GCSE course: six achieved good grades, including three at grade A level.

184. Teaching is good and often very good. The teacher has extensive knowledge of the subject and demonstrates well. Sound technical explanations help pupils to progress and achieve good standards of performance. The enthusiastic teaching inspires pupils. The dance studio is fully equipped with mirrors, bars and an interactive whiteboard.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average by the end of Year 11.
- The quality of teaching is good: as a result, most pupils achieve well.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- The lack of technical help puts undue strain on teachers' efforts.

Commentary

185. The standard of work on entry to the school is average. By the end of Year 9, the overall standard is above average. This is a good achievement. Pupils draw well from observation and have a clear understanding of the reasons for studying the work of such artists as the Singh twins. They have a clear understanding of the qualities they are aiming for in their own work.

186. By the end of Year 11, the overall standard is well above average. Higher attainers draw well, using ICT regularly for researching such artists as Georgia O’Keeffe and David Hockney, or for recording images. Lower attainers understand what they need to do in order to improve the quality of their work, but sometimes lack the motivation to improve. In 2003, the GCSE results were a little below average for grades A*-C. Three out of every five candidates gained at least grade C in 2004.

187. Achievement in lessons in Years 7-9 is good overall. All Year 7 pupils, for example, gain confidence in being creative and exercising choice in the “sunburst” project. Higher achievers reveal good understanding of what they have previously learned, because they enthusiastically answer teachers’ questions. Some lower achievers yawn in these sessions and most remain silent. All Year 8 pupils understand lesson objectives and work hard to achieve them. This was evident in a lesson on still-life drawing. There is no difference in standard and achievement between boys’ and girls’ drawing and painting, although boys do indicate a preference for drawing and three-dimensional work.

188. Achievement by the end of Year 11 is generally good. Most pupils are articulate and, when they have the opportunity, give extended answers or enter into critical, evaluative discussion. Sketchbooks are well used to record personal research or for experimental purposes. The physically disabled and those with other special educational needs are very well supported and achieve as well as other pupils when drawing, painting or undertaking work in clay, card or other materials. Higher achievers recognise the pressure that they are under to complete coursework in this subject. Lower achievers tend to shrug off these concerns, indicating a mismatch between course requirements and these pupils’ needs.

189. Teaching and learning are good overall and occasionally outstanding. The strengths of teaching lie in the complementary subject knowledge and skills that teachers possess, and in their enthusiasm, rigour and promotion of equal opportunities. These qualities draw pupils into the department and ensure that most of them apply themselves fully to the tasks set and produce quality work. A weakness is that too little time and attention are given to class discussion and working in pairs or groups.

190. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The leader is a very good role model as a reflective practitioner. Sketchbooks for Years 7-9 are innovative and effective tools. All pupils have access to gallery visits and artists who visit the school. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. The provision for talented pupils and those with special educational needs is now a strength. Access to, and the use of, computers is good. The subject has no technical help – a gap highlighted in the previous report. The lack of fume extraction for the kiln and of health and safety training require urgent attention.

Drama

Provision in drama is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers’ enthusiasm and subject knowledge are very good.
- Leadership and management are effective in achieving good standards.
- The low amount of timetabled teaching in Years 7-9 limits what pupils can do.

Commentary

191. The subject is taught to all pupils in Years 7-9 and as an option in Years 10 and 11. The overall standard of work is above average. In the GCSE examination in 2003, 70 per cent of the candidates obtained a grade in the A*-C range. This represents a good achievement from Year 9. In 2004, the percentage of pupils gaining grades A*-C was slightly lower than in 2003, but 16 pupils (an equal number of boys and girls) gained either A* or A grades.

192. Teachers are enthusiasts and have substantial knowledge of the subject. Teaching is very good in all the Year groups. In an outstandingly taught Year 7 lesson, the teacher's quietly enthusiastic style of teaching ensured that all pupils responded positively to drama conventions. At the same time, she focused their concentration very effectively before going on imaginatively to explore facial expression and dialogue.

193. In a Year 11 class, studying Jim Cartwright's *Two*, the teacher's structured and evaluative approach sustained pupils well as they improvised such roles in the play as the old man and the old woman, and helped them to deepen their understanding of the characters.

194. The leadership and management of the department are very good. Extra curricular opportunities are extensive. They include drama clubs for Year 7 and Year 8 which are run by students in Years 12 and 13. Although timetabled provision in Years 7-9 limits the attainment of pupils in these years, the subject makes a strong contribution to the Performing Arts status of the school. This is a very strong department.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The assessment of pupils' achievement is thoroughly done.
- A very good range of extra curricular activities is provided.
- Teaching is thorough and imaginative.
- There are no significant weaknesses in the department.

Commentary

195. By the end of Year 9, pupils' overall attainment is in line with the national average. In teachers' assessments carried out at the end of 2003, around 80 per cent of pupils were judged to have achieved the national benchmark of at least Level 5, a good achievement that is reflected in current work.

196. All pupils play keyboards confidently by the end of Year 9. They read staff notation with the help of some added letter names and acquire a good understanding and practical usage of the rudiments of music. They have a fair background knowledge about, for example, instruments, musical styles and well-known composers.

197. In Years 7-9, pupils' achievement is good. They enter the school with varied experience in the subject. They quickly learn the basic elements of music through singing, rhythmic movement and playing simple instruments. They use notation well. Higher-attaining pupils have good opportunities in class to use their main instruments (as, for example, the trumpet) to accompany songs. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress as a result of teaching and support that are well coordinated.

198. By the end of Year 11, pupils' attainment in GCSE is close to average. In the 2002 and 2003 GCSE examinations taken together, 12 out of 26 pupils gained grades in the range A*-C. Two pupils gained grade A*. Results were very similar in 2004.

199. In work seen during the inspection, the overall standard of performance, composition and listening was in line with the national average by the end of Year 11. Pupils play a fair range of instruments. They also use computer programs well as an aid to the study of music from the main historical periods as well as present-day, popular styles.

200. In Years 10-11, most pupils achieve well. This is partly because lessons (especially in Year 10) have a keen focus on pupils acquiring a sound working knowledge of musical terminology and rudiments – a vital ingredient for their analyses of set works. Pupils' attitudes to work, too, are good overall. They are very good in Year 10.

201. Teaching is consistently good throughout Years 7-11. Lessons are well planned and thoughtfully organised, with regular opportunities to check that material is properly understood. Teachers ensure that pupils recognise musical intervals, rhythm patterns and chord progressions by ear before attempting formal analysis. Pupils' work is assessed well by means of clear criteria that pupils understand. Assessment data are used well to track pupils' progress.

202. As a result of the good teaching they receive, pupils learn well. In particular, they acquire good aural skills through focused listening activities and through singing. They also retain good knowledge and skill, as they follow carefully organised schemes of work that allow for frequent revision. In all year groups, pupils' attitudes to the subject are good.

203. Around 100 pupils take part in choral and instrumental groups. These have developed very well since the recent arrival of the new curriculum leader. She leads and manages the department well. Sufficient time is now allocated for music in Years 7-9. This was a key issue for action from the 1998 inspection. The department has improved well since the last inspection.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.
- Some teaching that is too strongly led by teachers constrains pupils' learning.

Commentary

204. By the end of Year 9, standards in games are average. Most girls perform essential basic skills in volleyball, for example, but have no pronounced tactical awareness. In gymnastics, about a third of boys perform basic vaults and agilities. Not many, however, control body weight on their arms. In one observed lesson, about half the class made fair progress in performing the headstand. Overall achievement is satisfactory.

205. The standard of practical work by the end of Year 11 is average. About a quarter of the boys have good badminton skills and play the game with tactical awareness. They can, for example, sustain rallies. Most of the pupils (and particularly girls) who take the GCSE course effectively organise their written coursework: some is of very good quality. The more able pupils develop their homework to high levels, with good standards of writing and spelling. Some pupils have a good range of ICT skill. The GCSE results in 2003 were broadly in line with the national average, a reasonable achievement. Many more pupils than nationally gained high grades. The 2004 results were similar.

206. Teaching varies from very good to unsatisfactory, but is satisfactory overall. It is very good in those lessons specially arranged for pupils with special educational needs. Some practical lessons are well prepared and have clear learning objectives that are shared with pupils. In a few lessons, where teaching is unsatisfactory, the relationship between teachers and a minority of pupils breaks down.

207. When theory was taught in the Year 10 lesson seen, information was simply handed out and pupils were denied opportunities to reflect on issues. Written coursework is monitored. Some (but not all) work is marked thoroughly, promptly and in detail. When most teachers require pupils to cooperate and collaborate, they do so effectively. In a few practical lessons, too many pupils sit out and do not participate.

208. Most pupils, including those with special educational needs, have good attitudes and strive to improve. Both the teaching and learning support provided for pupils who are physically disabled or who have severe learning difficulties is excellent. Pupils find much fulfilment in the specially adapted lessons provided. They work hard and achieve very well.

209. Leadership is largely satisfactory. Documentation is limited and some important policies are missing. The assessment of pupils' work is effective: pupils' predicted grades for GCSE in 2004, for example, were accurate. The day-to-day running of the department is efficient, but teachers are not helped by having to teach GCSE theory lessons in different rooms. Whilst some accommodation is good – as, for example, the pool and the fitness suite – the main indoor teaching space is too often used by two classes at the same time. This creates considerable difficulties for both teachers and pupils.

210. A course for the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme runs successfully. There is however little competitive sport provided. Since the previous inspection, the curriculum has been improved by the addition of examination courses. Provision for pupils with special educational needs has also been improved.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL SUBJECTS

Business education

Provision in business education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Well-paced lessons ensure that pupils have a firm grounding in the subject.
- A small minority of pupils in Year 10 do not behave appropriately in class.
- The pass rate in GCSE examinations is below average.

Commentary

211. Examination results in GCSE are a little below average. In 2002, 39 per cent gained a grade in the range A*-C and 74 per cent gained A*-G grades. In 2003, the proportion of higher grades (43 per cent) was similar, but only 63 per cent gained at least grade G. The corresponding figures in 2004 were 36 per cent and 71 per cent. There has been an improvement of late in actual, as compared to expected, performance. In 2004, boys outperformed girls in gaining the higher grades. Overall, recent results represent a satisfactory achievement.

212. The standard of written work (including coursework assignments) is generally average and sometimes higher. Students complete well-designed worksheets and interleave these with their own and the teacher's notes. Together, they form a good basis for revision. Most pupils use appropriate technical vocabulary and show accurate recall of earlier work.

213. A Year 10 class, for instance, was briskly led through a sharp review of previous work before tackling a worksheet on the issues surrounding the change from being a sole trader to a limited company. Boys predominated in the oral responses to the teacher's questions. Some, in asking their own questions, demonstrated an ability to think beyond the immediate point at issue.

214. Teaching and learning are mainly good. Class management is firm. A small number of pupils in a Year 10 class were determined to be disruptive, but the teacher showed considerable patience in bringing this under control: the majority of the class worked steadily to complete work on registered companies in a soundly constructed lesson. Year 11 classes also required firm control from time to time. Relationships were, however, generally good. Pupils reacted well to high-paced lessons in which they were pressed for accurate use of data in balance sheets, relating judgements on the motivation of workers to their own experience. Criteria for the grading of work are prominent in the front of exercise books. Work is regularly checked, although not always with full rigour.

215. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The organisation of the subject is clearly set out in a handbook. Teachers take appropriate charge of the separate courses and have specific assessment responsibilities related to each course. There is a clear policy for regular assessment, recording and review. The handbook also provides a departmental interpretation of school policies. The problem of the low pass rate at GCSE has not been resolved. There is satisfactory access to ICT, but it is not widely used for the GCSE course.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most pupils show respectful, helpful attitudes toward others.
- Pupils have substantial opportunities to take part in activities that benefit the community.
- Insufficient attention is given to pupils' skills in formulating argument and debate.
- Procedures for assessing pupils' work and monitoring overall provision of citizenship are weak.

Commentary

216. There are no national norms available for this subject, against which pupils' attainment and experience can be measured. Available evidence indicates that pupils' overall attainment is broadly average by the end of both Year 9 and Year 11.

217. Throughout the school, the achievement of pupils is satisfactory in all elements of the subject. In lessons, they demonstrate proper concern for such issues as crime and punishment, the use and abuse of drugs and bullying. Although most pupils are keen to contribute in class, most lessons do not give them sufficient opportunity to hone their thinking and speaking skills. They are not trained well enough to formulate clear opinions in argument or to present their case at length.

218. Class teaching is satisfactory overall. Teachers generally succeed in imparting or reviewing information by means of worksheets, by some discussion in pairs and by questioning. Many lessons do not, however, engage pupils adequately in such approaches as researching material or formulating their own presentations of it.

219. Learning is satisfactory, but with weaknesses. Overall, pupils have good attitudes to the subject and take a genuine interest in topics. They listen well to instructions. What pupils learn, however, is limited, because many lessons do not require them to think or discuss deeply enough. During the inspection, only one lesson was judged to be very good. In it, the pupils rose well to the

challenges provided, to the brisk pace of the teaching and to the very active participation that was expected of them.

220. Pupils contribute to the running of the school by their involvement in the school council and, for pupils in Year 8, by undertaking duties as school receptionists. Pupils have undertaken only a limited number and range of practical projects. Of these, a meeting with the local Member of Parliament and a sponsored walk have been valuable. There are, however, good opportunities for learning about their immediate community – as, for example, as a result of the location of a library in the school that is open to the general public and of the inclusion of disabled pupils in the school. This latter provision provides a substantial, well-taken opportunity to foster caring relationships.

221. Procedures for assessing all aspects of pupils' work and experience in the subject are weak. There is, for instance, no formal monitoring of the teaching of citizenship topics in other subjects. Only a few examples of topics such as recycling and ethnic identity were in evidence in one subject (art and design) during the inspection.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 11 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

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

Level 3 GCE AS-level courses – Year 12

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	7	100	80	57	24	42.9	29.9
Biology	32	75	65	19	11	25.9	20.6
Business studies	4	75	76	0	16	22.5	26.2
Chemistry	15	60	73	7	14	19.3	24.1
Design & technology	8	75	75	38	15	35.0	25.3
Drama	7	100	87	14	20	38.6	30.6
Economics	20	100	89	40	32	42.5	35.0
English language and literature	24	100	83	67	18	46.7	28.7
French	9	100	85	78	35	48.9	34.9
General studies	72	53	74	6	18	15.6	25.7
Geography	9	100	74	33	20	40.0	26.5
German	2	100	82	100	19	60.0	28.9
History	8	75	81	25	20	26.3	28.6
Information technology	30	17	67	0	11	4.0	21.4
Mathematics	24	75	75	25	25	28.8	22.1
Other languages	1	100	83	100	43	50.0	36.2
Other social studies	4	75	70	25	17	27.5	24.1
Physics	12	83	69	33	14	32.5	22.7
Psychology	24	67	83	17	33	24.2	37.8
Sociology	18	61	72	22	18	25.0	25.4

Level 3 GCE A-level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	7	100	99	86	50	108.6	87.5
Biology	8	100	96	25	39	75.0	78.6
Business (VCE)	4	57	65	0	15	45.7	60.1
Business studies	13	100	99	46	37	89.2	80.1
Chemistry	2	100	98	50	49	100.0	84.9
Classical studies	1	100	99.5	0	56	40.0	90.9
Construction (VCE)	1	0	n/a	0	n/a	0.0	n/a
Design and technology	10	100	98	60	35	94.0	77.9
Drama	10	100	99.5	50	40	90.0	83.6
English language and literature	25	100	99	48	36	90.4	80.9
French	3	100	99	67	52	106.7	87.6
General studies	5	100	95	40	31	88.0	73.1
Geography	14	100	99	43	45	78.6	84.0
German	2	100	98	50	48	90.0	84.8
History	9	100	99	11	45	75.6	84.6
Information technology	5	100	96	20	25	64.0	69.5
Information technology (VQ)	1	0	78	0	23	0.0	64.9
Mathematics	15	100	97	47	56	85.3	88.8
Other languages	3	100	97	100	65	113.3	93.8
Physics	7	100	97	14	45	77.1	81.7
Psychology	14	93	97	43	43	77.1	81.8
Sociology	11	100	98	46	44	83.6	83.6

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English language and literature

Provision in English language and literature is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The A level results in 2003 and 2004 were a good achievement.
- Both the AS and A2 courses are well planned and managed.
- Students make very good progress in the subject.

Commentary

222. English language and literature is a popular subject in which most students do very well. Forty-eight students currently study the subject at either AS or A2 level. The overall achievement of all students is good. In 2003, seven students gained A grades in the AS examination, whilst 16 students gained A or B grades in the A-level examination. All students achieved well in the 2004 A-level examinations.

223. Students in Year 13 have well above average standards. In a lesson on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, they were confident and vocal in their interpretation and analysis of the characters of Lysander and Hermia. The teacher used probing questions to tease out students' understanding, but the students themselves were determined to challenge one another constructively – including special educational needs students, who took a very active part in the lesson and made good progress.

224. Students in a Year 12 class, at the beginning of their AS course, used their knowledge of language and form to good effect while studying humorous texts. The teacher's careful intervention to support and enhance students' perceptions of the use of language in some of the texts, such as that of Evelyn Waugh in *Decline and Fall*, helped to ensure good progress, as students went on to use 'spidergrams' to identify and record pertinent examples.

225. Teaching and learning are always at least good and are very good overall. Learning is characterised by students' enthusiastic interpretation and understanding of literature, which are rigorously based on textual evidence. Students learn effectively, because teachers foster an analytical approach, teasing out different perceptions and nurturing the development of independent learning. The assessment of work is very good. It provides excellent feedback, so ensuring that students know how they can improve their work.

226. Leadership and management of the subject are good, with some very innovative features. Schemes of work are detailed and carefully designed to meet the requirements of examinations. Teachers share the teaching of the two courses, so ensuring that students can make the most of specialist knowledge and the different teaching and learning strategies used. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

227. The overall standard of literacy across sixth-form subjects is average overall. Writing skills are a strong feature of students' work in ICT, business education and social studies. The quality of students' speaking and listening is a prominent feature in art and design. There is often good discussion in mathematics. Writing is a good feature of art and design and ICT.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

228. There was no major focus in this domain, but one off-site, consortium lesson of **German** was sampled in Year 12. The five students had a wide range of attainment at GCSE. Teaching and learning in the lesson were good. Most of the lesson was conducted in German and the teacher sensitively ensured that all students participated in the discussion about family relationships. Students acquired new vocabulary and went on to express opinions in two constructions that required changes in word order. They completed these tasks satisfactorily, a reasonable achievement.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students regularly attain the highest (A) grade at GCE A level.
- Students learn well in and out of lessons from hard-working teachers.
- Occasionally, students show inadequate determination to succeed.
- The most able students achieve well.
- Leadership and management are very good.

Commentary

229. Results at GCE A-level were broadly in line with the national average in 2003. The proportion of A and B grades obtained was slightly lower than nationally, but all students passed the examination. Results were very similar in 2004. Before 2003, results were often above the national average. The department recruits students well and the most able students always attain the top grade.

230. During the inspection, students in Year 13 were revising mechanics. They enjoy the work and show a sound understanding of how to calculate forces and momentum. As a whole, they achieve satisfactorily. The most able students achieve well and are motivated by the study of further mathematics. Occasionally, a few students lack confidence and determination. Teachers are always ready to give of their time out of lessons and many students take good advantage of this opportunity.

231. Students in Year 12 are only a few weeks into their course. They achieve satisfactorily in algebra and make good progress in statistics. They work confidently to determine permutations and combinations in real-life situations, using the helpful resources made by the teacher.

232. Teaching is good overall and often very good. It is characterised by sharp questioning, well-used resources and clearly differentiated planning that extends all students. Occasionally, teaching is less fruitful. This is where note-taking is too extensive, pace drops a little and work is not targeted at the priority needs of individuals. All lessons, however, are at least satisfactory. Teachers have substantial subject knowledge and are very familiar with examination practice and technique. Students have confidence in their teachers and benefit from much more than just the classroom experience.

233. Leadership and management are very good. The schemes of work are helpful. Students are actively encouraged to study the subject in the sixth form by their early entry for GCSE. The introduction of further mathematics has given the department increased status and good recruitment. The head of department has rightly identified the need to improve the less challenging teaching occasionally seen through a sharper focus on planning for individual students. There has been satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection.

Mathematics across the curriculum

234. The standard of mathematics in other subjects is average. Students draw and interpret graphs satisfactorily in science, geography, ICT and psychology. A number of comparatively weaker students, however, have found some of the mathematics in biology too difficult and dropped out of the course. In the finance unit in business education, students demonstrate adequate numeric and data-handling skills. They have a sound spatial awareness in art and design and in design and technology.

SCIENCE

235. The main focus was on biology and physics, but **chemistry** was also sampled in two lessons. In both lessons, the teaching was good, students learned well and attitudes to work were positive. An innovative feature of the Year 12 lesson was the positioning of students in rows in order to model ionisation energy levels. The students were closely engaged in their work, partly as a result of the teacher's enthusiasm and humour and the variety of teaching techniques used during the lesson. In the Year 13 lesson, students showed secure knowledge of aromatic and aliphatic compounds, although with some reticence to seek clarification of core points.

Biology

Provision in biology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Biology regularly attracts a large number of students at both AS and A-levels.
- Many students leave the subject during, and at the end of, Year 12.
- There are few opportunities to use ICT.

Commentary

236. Biology is a popular subject at the beginning of Year 12. In 2002, 38 students began the AS course. During the year, 12 students discontinued the subject and only three of the six students finishing the course at the AS stage gained a pass (E) grade. This is an unsatisfactory outcome.

237. The achievement of the 20 students who progressed from AS to A2 varied widely. Two made very good progress (one with an A grade). Six students gained a grade B – a satisfactory achievement from their A* grades at GCSE. Four other students made satisfactory progress on the course, but eight (40 per cent of the candidates) did not achieve well enough. The overall pattern of A-level results in 2004 shows sound progress for the majority, but an unsatisfactory level of achievement for a substantial minority.

238. The department allows all those that are interested to commence studies in this subject. Whilst this open-entry inclusivity is a commendable strand, the result is that a minority of students do not experience appropriate success – often studying biology as their only AS science subject and having taken the mathematics GCSE examination at Intermediate level. A review is needed of the mix of course entry-levels, alternative course provision and additional mathematical support in order to enable students to achieve success commensurate with their abilities.

239. In the five lessons observed, teaching varied between satisfactory and good, and was satisfactory overall. Teachers plan lessons carefully and use an appropriate variety of teaching methods. In a good Year 13 lesson on the eye, students participated in a series of tests that explored a range of ocular characteristics. This approach checked both students' knowledge and understanding of the workings of the eye. The teacher's friendly approach and imaginative exercises engaged students' interest and curiosity. In some other lessons, students' analytical techniques were weak and issues were not always pursued in the depth required to gain high grades.

240. The students' files that were scrutinised during the inspection contained less factual information and fewer worked examples of past examination questions than usually seen. Work is also light on the use of ICT. Although individual students have limited access to computers and the Internet within the science block, they feel that they can gain sufficient use of them elsewhere in the school.

241. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Two teachers work well as a team, sharing both theoretical and practical lessons. Students appreciate the different strengths that their teachers offer. Assessment is satisfactory. There has been satisfactory improvement overall since the last inspection.

Physics

Provision in physics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Physics is taught by enthusiastic teachers who know their subject well.
- A significant proportion of AS-level candidates do not achieve any examination success.

Commentary

242. The overall standard in physics at A-level is average. In 2003, seven students sat the A-level examination and all passed. In 2004, nine out of ten students completing the course were successful. These levels of success are in line with the national pass rate. The overall standard of work seen in lessons matches recent examination performance. Some written coursework is of a high standard.

243. The achievement of students completing the A-level course in 2004 was unsatisfactory overall: about half performed soundly, but the achievement of the other five was unsatisfactory. Students on the current A-level course, however, are making satisfactory progress in acquiring a suitable level of knowledge and understanding, as revealed in their work and through answers to questions. In contrast, eight of the students who studied physics in Year 12 in 2003 ended up without any certificated achievement. There were three similar cases in 2004.

244. Students in Year 13 have a reasonable base of knowledge and understanding. They are confident, for example, in using the mathematical statement of Newton's Laws of Gravitation and the mathematically similar formulation of electrostatic attraction. They are able to apply these laws to the circumstances of orbiting satellites and to estimate whether gravity could offer an explanation for nuclear stability. Formulae are used well and order of magnitude calculations used to check answers for plausibility. Year 12 students graphically investigate the behaviour of an image-forming lens and begin more investigative problems in optics and materials.

245. Teaching is good. Work is well planned and intellectually challenging. The pace of learning is brisk. Teachers have very good knowledge and facility with their subject. In consequence, students learn confidently. They concentrate, are genuinely interested, participate well and seek to take full advantage of lessons. Students' work is marked and corrected satisfactorily. Teachers match work well to students' individual needs and make clear what they need to do to improve their standards.

246. The leadership and management of the subject are good. The two teachers share responsibility for course progress and assessment. Some lessons are not taught in laboratories, so preventing access to apparatus that may be needed at short notice. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory: a new A-level course has been introduced and the laboratories refurbished.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus of the inspection was on the vocational A-level course in ICT, but the key skills course was also sampled. Students' achievement was unsatisfactory in this key skills lesson, because the work was not sufficiently demanding for them and did not meet the needs of their other studies. The standard of students' work in this lesson was below average.

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good, because students are well taught.
- Students develop the ability to plan and organise their own work well.
- Recently, few students have continued into the second year of the course.
- Students start the course with low standards, but then achieve well.

Commentary

247. Students start the course with standards well below those normally found. In many schools, some of these students would not be permitted to take the course. A year later, although standards are still below national expectations for that age, they have improved noticeably, reflecting good student achievement.

248. There are very few students currently taking the subject in Year 13. By this stage, students have gained confidence with their work and plan tasks systematically. They readily explore features of computer programs – such as when designing web-pages. They learn well from one another – by, for example, explaining their work to their classmates. Students do not, however, analyse their work in depth: records of the development of their work lack the detail required for the higher examination grades.

249. In 2003, examination results were average and those for 2004 were similar. Standards are currently lower than those reflected in these results, because students started the course with lower levels of attainment. At the time of the inspection, students in Year 12 were less than six weeks into their course, but their work to date shows that they are developing their skills at the expected rate. Students from minority ethnic groups achieve as well as other students. All students have the levels of numeracy and literacy required by the course.

250. Students achieve well, because they learn proficiently in lessons as a result of good teaching. Teachers know their students well as individuals, understanding how each student prefers to learn and supporting them accordingly. Students are encouraged to learn, because they feel at ease as a result of good relationships. Vivaldi, they realise the importance of the human face of ICT and so are not deterred by perceptions of technological impenetrability.

251. A key factor in students' success is their understanding that failure is not permitted: success will result from perseverance. Students gain regular detail of the progress they make, because good use is frequently made of the course's assessment requirements. They develop far more than ICT skills, too, because they learn how to learn.

252. The subject is well led and managed. The course has been well chosen to meet students' needs. It is making a significant contribution to encouraging students to continue with their education beyond the age of 16. The subject leader provides a good role model to students. In 2004, very few students chose to continue with their studies into Year 13. Steps need to be taken to ensure that when making such a choice, students do so for positive reasons.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

253. Students have the necessary ICT skills for the demands of their other studies. In physics, computers are used extensively – as, for example, to draw graphs of data from experiments. In geography, ICT is used to analyse data from fieldwork. Students use the computer facilities well, especially for research from the Internet.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan lessons well.
- Students are well motivated and fully involved in lessons.
- Assessment is not rigorous enough to show students clearly how to improve.
- The library is inadequate for research and further study.

Commentary

254. The overall standard of work is average. Results in the A-level examination for 2003 were in line with the national average. This standard was maintained in the 2004 examination. No student in 2003 or 2004 gained an A grade. Results in the AS-level examination taken at the end of Year 12 were average. Similar results were achieved in 2004. These results represent satisfactory achievement.

255. Students in Year 12 have a good knowledge of the weather and climate in the UK, interpret weather maps accurately and use their understanding to forecast trends in the weather. Students in Year 13 clearly understand the factors affecting migration. They have a good knowledge of the types of soils found in the UK and the reasons why they may change.

256. Throughout the sixth form, students understand geographical terms and use them effectively. They have a good knowledge of exemplars to illustrate the topics they study. Statistics are analysed and used confidently. Students make steady progress in using their understanding to answer geographical questions set in unfamiliar contexts.

257. Teaching is good overall. Teachers use their deep knowledge of the subject to plan lessons well. They act as good role models – as, for example, in their appropriate use of geographical terms during discussions, so encouraging students to use them fluently. Teaching is no better than satisfactory when students are simply provided with information by their teacher and not given the opportunity to either engage in research or discuss their ideas with others. In such lessons, the potential of resources is under-exploited.

258. Students are well motivated. They effectively apply their knowledge to new contexts and persevere with challenging work. Homework is used well to extend lessons and as an opportunity for students to prepare and research topics. Essay work is marked thoroughly, with useful comments. Assessment, however, is not rigorous enough. It does not provide the basis for regular, formal discussion with students, nor give a clear indication of the standard reached, the progress made or how to improve.

259. Both leadership and management are satisfactory. There is a sense of purpose about the department, but rigorous self-evaluation and innovation are limited. No formal monitoring takes place to underpin decisive strategies to drive standards higher. Good opportunities are provided for fieldwork and the use of ICT. Resources have been improved since the last inspection, but library resources for research and study remain woefully inadequate.

History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers use their good subject knowledge well to support students' learning.
- Too many students in Year 12 do not take enough responsibility for their own learning.
- The number and range of books in the library are totally inadequate for A-level work.

Commentary

260. The standard of work is below average in Year 12 and average in Year 13. The AS- and A-level results in 2003 were below average. The results in 2004 were similar to those of 2003. Few pupils gain the highest grades. A small proportion of students did not achieve as well as they were expected to. The standard of work seen during the inspection from students in Year 12 was below that normally found nationally. That from students in Year 13 was in line with the national expectation at this level. The achievement of students in Year 12 is unsatisfactory; that of Year 13 is satisfactory.

261. Although most students in Year 12 generally have sound knowledge and understanding of the topics they study, that of a minority is patchy. They use sources for information, but do not make meaningful deductions from them. Having, for instance, studied a range of sources about changes to the franchise in the 19th century, most found it difficult to say how democratic Britain was by 1900. Most do not achieve the standards they should, after gaining good grades at GCSE. A key reason for this is a lack of real commitment to work from a significant proportion of students. They do not, for example, prepare for lessons sufficiently well or complete homework.

262. The majority of students in Year 13 have good knowledge and understanding. Most use correct historical terminology confidently and accurately. They explain well the motives for actions taken in the past. Although they answer questions readily when teachers ask them, they rarely pose questions themselves in order to widen their understanding. This limits the achievement of the higher attainers.

263. Teaching is satisfactory. Teachers are confident with their subject and provide detailed information for students. They give suitable feedback in lessons on set tasks, so checking students' progress effectively. In some lessons, teachers engage students actively in learning, but too frequently teachers do most of the work while students listen passively. The activities in lessons do not ensure often enough that the students take some responsibility for what they are learning. The department is hindered in its attempts to encourage such independent learning because of the very poor provision in the library: there are virtually no books suitable for students working at this level. The department does, however, encourage students to make use of ICT for research.

264. The leadership of the department is good and its management broadly satisfactory. The head of department has analysed carefully the reasons for the below average examination results over the past three years with the aim of raising standards. Although some reasons for under-achievement have been identified, the strategies to remedy the problem have not had significant impact.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The wide variation in teaching and learning styles holds students' attention well.
- The emphasis on self- and peer-assessment clarifies for students the standards that are required.
- The base room and resources are limited.

Commentary

265. Attainment was broadly average in recent A-level examinations, but below average at AS level. The overall standard of current work is sometimes above average, but broadly average overall. It encompasses the full range of A-level pass grades. The best students in Year 13 write and work at a level that is well above average. Year 12 students, while still coming to terms with the standard required of them, have produced initial written work that is mostly well above a bare pass standard. Attention in class and the ability to recall and apply earlier work is at least average. The majority show considerable interest in, and enthusiasm for, the subject and achieve satisfactorily.

266. A large (and mainly enthusiastic) Year 12 class produced satisfactory results from their preliminary textbook research on stress. Their presentation of findings, however, requires greater clarity. Their analysis of the work of others, too, and its use to enhance their own notes on the subject, are limited.

267. In another Year 12 lesson, developing the same topic, considerable attention was given to examination criteria. Students discussed sample answers and the marks they would award and then applied the same criteria to one another's work. Many useful messages about examination techniques were learned. The lesson finished on a particularly stimulating note. The teacher had worn a heart-rate monitor on the first day of the inspection and students were given a blank chart showing his activities that day, so they could predict the effect on heart rate of what he had experienced.

268. Students in Year 13 are encouraged to define their own work targets and to achieve them with the support of their peers and the teacher. They work cooperatively on their research projects. Although some have difficulty in applying statistical techniques to their results, all produced coherent reports about their experiments on word recall.

269. Teaching and learning vary between good and satisfactory, and are good overall. Work is marked and targets are set according to the recently revised school system. The use of peer- and self-assessment is actively encouraged. A review of teaching and learning methods is being undertaken, with the intention of making greater use of ICT.

270. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The subject is shared between two teachers. The subject handbook provides a clear picture of work objectives and practices. There is no main teaching base, however, or specific resources for the subject other than textbooks.

Sociology

Provision in sociology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Lively, clearly structured lessons lead to students acquiring solid subject knowledge.
- Students contribute expertly to lessons.
- The absence of a base room and centralised resources hinder teaching.

Commentary

271. Attainment was average overall and a sound achievement in the 2003 A-level examinations: 46 per cent gained grades A or B and everyone passed. In 2004, there was a similar level of performance. At AS level in 2003, 22 per cent of grades were A or B, but only 11 of the 18 candidates passed – a low pass rate. The average points scored were in line with the national average. The results were similar in 2004. Suitable steps have been taken to try to improve the pass rate.

272. The standards currently attained in the early stages of both courses are average overall. Some written work is of a higher standard: it demonstrates fluency, clear presentation and appropriate referencing, and is enhanced by very full, relevant feedback. Notes are highly structured in such a way that core facts are accurately recorded. The recall of previous work during lessons demonstrates that students retain a good grasp of the subject and are beginning to develop their thinking beyond a basic level.

273. Teaching and learning are good. The teacher led a lively discussion with a Year 12 group on the nuclear family, drawing well on the students' own experience and supporting this with well-chosen extracts from the writings of major researchers. Students subsequently used the information to propound alternative views about the effect the family has on behaviour and health.

274. Year 13 students were deeply involved in a highly structured introduction to feminist perspectives on religion. A thorough revision of preceding work led on to clear note-taking from a variety of written resources as well as drawing on the religious knowledge of members of the group. Students work well together and respond enthusiastically to the teacher, showing a good understanding of the material presented. Occasionally, their attention and energy diminish, if plenary discussion takes up too great a proportion of the lesson. Expertise within the group (for example, on Islam) is integrated well into the lesson content. The teacher places appropriate emphasis on the need to interpret and make judgements about research, and not just to record it.

275. Leadership and management are satisfactory. A thorough analysis of performance and teaching in the 2004 AS-level course has led to changes designed to correct perceived deficiencies in course delivery. Improvements continue particularly in the rigour of monitoring and assessing students' work. The subject is hindered by having no base room or any centralised resources other than textbooks.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

276. Two lessons were observed in **design and technology** and other evidence scrutinised. The school's provision in the subject is good. Standards are well above average and the number of students taking the subject is increasing. Over the past few years, all students have passed at A level and a larger than usual proportion have gained high grades. All students use ICT very well for planning, word processing and designing.

277. In an excellent Year 13 lesson on product design in high technology, students achieved outstandingly well. This was because of a combination of extremely thorough teaching and a highly committed response from students. The teacher's very high standards and expectations were well

reflected in his continual checking that students fully understood the content and concepts of the lesson. Students responded very well by, for example, quick discussions and efficient note-taking. They enjoyed the lesson thoroughly. In a Year 12 lesson on shaping and joining materials, in contrast, students were not always challenged sufficiently. Both their motivation and achievement, though broadly satisfactory, were lower than they could have been.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

278. The major focus was on art and design and drama, but one lesson of dance and two lessons of music were also sampled. Both **music** lessons were well taught. The class activities were carefully planned and graduated, with the result that students learned with confidence and showed a good recall of previous work. The standard of work is well in line with course requirements. The teacher is well equipped to handle the requirements of challenging work in Year 13 on Stravinsky's score for the ballet, *The Firebird*. Students asked very pertinent questions about definitions and joined well in extended discussion on the finer points of analysis. Lessons are well founded on thorough aural perception: students successfully identified melodic modes and repeating motifs in the "lullaby" from *The Firebird*.

279. **Dance** is taught at AS and A-levels. The first group of three students took AS level in 2004: all passed. In the Year 12 lesson seen, the six students showed exemplary attitudes and commitment. The very good teaching was characterised by dynamism, leading by example and by high expectations. Students achieved well, displaying considerable aesthetic sensitivity. The standard of work was well above average.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' high expectations and skill lead directly to students' very good achievement.
- Standards are well above average.
- Students are very knowledgeable about art and artists.
- The lack of storage space limits the scale of work undertaken.

Commentary

280. The standard on entry to the course is above average. The performance of Year 12 students at AS level was above average in 2003. In 2003, students also attained well above average grades at A-level. By the end of Year 13 also, standards are well above average. Students show an appropriately high level of independence of approach and a deep understanding of the artists whose work they have studied. The overall level of achievement in the sixth form is very good.

281. Achievement in Year 12 in drawing, research and experimental studies is good and often better. Students make good progress in enhancing their skills, knowledge and understanding – as in the work on "self-image" they were undertaking. They appropriately use ICT for research and for recording images, but only a little for "layering" and "distortion". Students enjoy the subject and feel well supported by the complementary teaching styles offered by their teachers.

282. Achievement in Year 13 is very good. By this stage, students make realistic judgements about their work in terms of GCE objectives. They enjoy the opportunities offered to them, but feel frustrated by the lack of space available to undertake large-scale work. The best work is very expressive and spiritual in nature. Students' work shows a high degree of personal and social consciousness.

283. Teaching and learning are very good. Enthusiasm for the subject, a willingness to give time and high expectations are all strengths. Assessment is good, but teachers do not always clarify the complexity of examination board language from the students' point of view.

284. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. This is a very effective team. Display is a very strong feature, both in art and design areas and throughout the school. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good: numbers taking the subject have increased and standards have risen. The lack of storage space is a handicap.

Drama

Provision in drama is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The AS and A2 courses are carefully planned and managed.
- The A-level results in 2003 and 2004 were a good achievement.
- Students make good progress in the subject.

Commentary

285. Drama is a popular subject in which students do well. Twenty-nine students currently study the subject at either AS or A2 level. The overall attainment of all students is well in line with the requirements of both courses and the majority of students achieve well. In 2003, ten students took and passed the A2 examination: five of them obtained either A or B grades.

286. Students in Year 12 have above average standards. Their enthusiasm and commitment to the subject was reflected in a lesson which they voluntarily extended into a lunch-time. In a lesson studying Samuel Beckett's play, *Waiting for Godot*, the students edited Lucky's thinking and then became immersed in rehearsing their interpretations. These were then evaluated. During this time, the teacher quietly but rigorously probed students' thinking to establish the essential elements of the original speech and then drew the students into further analysis of the process they had gone through.

287. In a Year 13 lesson, students worked in groups on "devising", while the teacher encouraged them to reflect on what they were doing. In one group, the teacher challenged their assumptions and teased out the question "Is that what you want to.....?", whilst at the same time encouraging them to review the appropriateness of movement and music. Throughout the lesson, the gentle but persistent questioning of the teacher enabled students to grapple more effectively with their devising work.

288. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. It is manifested in the expert knowledge and understanding of the teacher. These permeate the work of the students, who keenly respond to his prompts and queries as they extend their skills and understanding. Students learn effectively as a result. The assessment of students' work is thorough and rigorous. It ensures that all students have a clear understanding of their relative strengths and weaknesses.

289. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. Schemes of work have been meticulously developed to ensure the syllabus is well covered and that students can be successful. The range and quality of extra curricular activities is very good and includes a residential experience at the National Student Drama Festival. The students make a very valuable contribution to the performing arts status of the school.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

290. There was no major focus in this domain, but two lessons in AVCE **travel and tourism** were sampled. Students ably and confidently presented information, based on Internet searches, on short- and long-haul holiday destinations for their assignment on world travel. All students showed a positive motivation towards their work, settled quickly to tasks and listened carefully to their peers. A tendency of students simply to transfer Internet information rather than to interpret and reorganise it for their own purposes slightly lowered the standard of work. Teaching was good and students achieved satisfactorily.

BUSINESS

291. There was no major focus in this domain, but lessons in A-level **economics** and **business studies**, and the GNVQ (Intermediate) course in business, were sampled. In all cases, lively, well-informed teachers established good rapport with their classes and ensured that average (and sometimes better) work was achieved on current topics. Lessons were brisk and well structured.

292. A-level students held discussions and practised written answers about the implications of European Union funding and of joining a single currency system for the UK as an international trading nation. Students showed excellent concentration, a good knowledge of the issues and the ability to debate them perceptively. Students on the GNVQ course worked at a more modest, but appropriate, pace on constructing job descriptions based on real-life, vacancy advertisements.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school	4	3
How inclusive the school is		2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	4	4
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	4	3
Overall standards achieved		4
Pupils' achievement	4	4
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		3
Attendance	5	4
Attitudes	3	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		3
The quality of education provided by the school		3
The quality of teaching	3	3
How well pupils learn	3	3
The quality of assessment	4	4
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	4	4
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		3
Accommodation and resources	4	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		3
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		3
The quality of the school's links with the community	3	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3	3
The leadership and management of the school		3
The governance of the school	5	5
The leadership of the headteacher		2
The leadership of other key staff	3	3
The effectiveness of management	4	3

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