

INSPECTION REPORT

READING GIRLS' SCHOOL

Reading, Berkshire

LEA area: Reading

Unique reference number: 110096

Headteacher: Mrs Ruth Allen

Lead inspector: Bill Stoneham

Dates of inspection: 21st – 24th February 2005

Inspection number: 268891

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

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Terms used in this report

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

At the end of Year 9, students aged 14 take national tests in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. At the end of Year 11, students aged 16 may take examinations in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (**GCSE**). Sixth form students may take further courses leading to awards in the General Certificate of Education (**GCE**) at Advanced level (**A-level**) or Advanced Subsidiary level (**AS-level**), or the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (**AVCE**).

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

Efforts have been made to minimise the use of shorthand notations, though some have been used. Throughout the report, the notation **ICT** refers to information and communication technology. The term **SENCO** refers to the special needs co-ordinator. An **IEP** is an individual education plan. **PSHE** refers to the school's programme for personal, health and social education and **WRL** refers to Work-related learning.

Contextual Statement

Few judgements have been made in relation to improvement since the previous inspection report which was published in November 1998. Since this date, the school has experienced considerable change and uncertainty, including three changes of headteacher, the loss of its sixth form and then its subsequent reinstatement and considerable staff turnover. Few staff teaching in the school now were in post at the time of the last inspection.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of students:	11-18
Gender of students:	Girls
Number on roll:	703
School address:	Northumberland Avenue Reading Berkshire
Postcode:	RG2 7PY
Telephone number:	0118 9861336
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Richard Cunningham
Date of previous inspection:	October 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Reading Girls' School is a single sex comprehensive school serving the Berkshire county town of Reading. Most students live close to the school, with a minority travelling longer distances as a reflection of a parental preference for single sex education. Though the school is comprehensive, some students are selected by means of an entrance examination. The school is considerably smaller than average with 703 students attending, including 89 who are in the sixth form. At the time of the inspection, the school was planning to submit an application to become a specialist business and enterprise college. The school mainly serves areas of high social deprivation. Standards on entry to Year 7 are below average, as are standards on entry to the sixth form. Approximately 40 per cent of students in Year 11 now continue into the sixth form. The sixth form was abandoned in 2000, but has recently been re-established. The proportion of students identified as having special educational needs is above average, though the proportion with a Statement of Special Educational Needs is average. The ethnic mix of the school reflects that of the surrounding area. Approximately 50 per cent are of White British heritage; with a number of other heritages being represented, especially Asian or Asian British Pakistani and Black or Black British African. The percentage of students whose first language is not English is high, with 35 students being at an early stage of English acquisition. There are also small numbers of students from traveller, refugee and asylum seeking families; overall the school's mobility factor is above average.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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19727	Eric Langford	Lay inspector	
20629	John Bryson	Team inspector	English English Post 16
19528	Roland Portsmouth	Team inspector	Mathematics Mathematics Post 16
32804	Mary Chippendale	Team inspector	Science Biology Post 16
2971	Kathy Hooper	Team inspector	Information and Communications Technology
18638	Chris Shaw	Team inspector	Art and Design
22491	Lorraine Small	Team inspector	Design and Technology
11300	Barry Smith	Team inspector	Geography Citizenship
27058	Kathleen Cannon	Team inspector	History
35094	Judith O'Hare	Team inspector	Modern Foreign Languages
15034	Reginald Fletcher	Team inspector	Music
33497	Stephanie Benbow	Team inspector	Physical Education
10807	Paul Quest	Team inspector	Religious Education
7926	James Bowden	Team inspector	Special Educational Needs Sociology Post 16
15277	Chris Vidler	Team inspector	Work-Related Learning Business Studies Post 16
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the school is unsatisfactory. Standards in Year 11 are not high enough and achievement is unsatisfactory, though it is good in the sixth form, where standards are average. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory, as is the value for money offered, including in the sixth form.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Standards are not high enough and the learning of many students is not good enough because of unsatisfactory teaching, though students for whom English is an additional language achieve well because of the support received.
- The progress of a significant number of students, especially in Years 10 and 11, is impeded by high rates of absence.
- The school works hard to integrate students transferring from primary schools and attitudes and racial harmony are good.
- Leadership of some key staff is unsatisfactory and management is ineffective and does not ensure consistent practice across the school.
- The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory; it does not adequately meet all needs or statutory requirements; students do not have enough access to ICT across the curriculum.
- Accommodation is poor and there are some health and safety issues.

The following statutory requirements are not met:

- There is no daily act of collective worship
- The provision of ICT across the curriculum.

Since the last inspection in October 1998, there has been considerable turmoil involving four changes of headteacher, a lack of continuity in the governing body, significant staff turnover, a burgeoning financial deficit and the closure, followed by the re-opening, of the sixth form. There are entrenched shortcomings in teaching, learning, achievement, the curriculum, attendance, leadership and management. The school is failing to provide a satisfactory standard of education.

In accordance with section 13 (7) of the School Inspection Act, 1996 I am of the opinion, and HMCI agrees, that special measures are required in relation to this school.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2002	2003	2004	2004
	E	D	E	D

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

Achievement is unsatisfactory. Standards at the end of Year 11 in 2004 were well below average when compared to all schools nationally and were below average when compared to similar schools. In relation to students' well below average standards on entry in Year 7, this represents unsatisfactory achievement. The achievement of students with special educational needs is also unsatisfactory, but students with English as an additional language achieve well because they are well supported. No national comparisons about the small sixth form. For present sixth formers standards are average and they achieve well. In Year 9, standards are average in English, but are below average in mathematics and science. Achievement is unsatisfactory overall. Achievement is

below average in ICT and physical education and satisfactory in English, French, science, history and design and technology. Students achieve well in mathematics, religious education, art and design, geography, music and citizenship. In Years 10 and 11 standards are average in English but below average in mathematics and science. Achievement is unsatisfactory in physical education and ICT, it is satisfactory in English, French, science, geography and design and technology and it is good in mathematics, religious education, history, music, art and design and citizenship. However, achievement overall is unsatisfactory because of absence, unsatisfactory teaching and too many students leaving with few, or no, qualifications.

The students' personal qualities are satisfactory. Attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory, but attendance and punctuality are unsatisfactory. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The overall quality of education is unsatisfactory. The quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory overall; though it is good in the sixth form. Assessment procedures are satisfactory. The curriculum is unsatisfactory. There are some statutory infringements and in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, the curriculum does not adequately meet needs. Enrichment opportunities and community links are satisfactory. Links with parents are good and students receive good academic support. Induction arrangements into Year 7 are good.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. The leadership and management of the headteacher are satisfactory, but that offered by other key staff is unsatisfactory, though in relation to the sixth form it is satisfactory. The governing body has lacked stability and governance is unsatisfactory. They know there is no daily act of collective worship and that not all statutory requirements are met. They are developing their role but they have had little time to impact.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Most parents and students value the school and believe that it is working hard to improve. Many parents favour single sex education. Most students appreciate the opportunities provided, but they complain that they have no effective means of making their views known.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Ensure higher quality teaching by eliminating unsatisfactory teaching, improving monitoring and sharing good practice.
- Raise achievement by having better attendance, by offering more challenging lessons and a curriculum that more adequately meets the needs of all students.
- Ensure that the leadership and management of senior staff are more consistent and committed to improving standards.
- Ensure that the quality of accommodation offers a stimulating and safe environment in which students can learn.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Ensure that ICT across the curriculum is adequately provided.
- Provide a daily act of collective worship.

THE SIXTH FORM AT READING GIRLS' SCHOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory. The sixth form is far smaller than average but is starting to grow. No national comparisons can be made because in 2004 the numbers entered for national examinations were so small. For current students who attend regularly standards are average. There are issues relating to attendance but course completion rates are good. Students commence their A level studies with below average levels of prior attainment but their achievement is good. Teaching and learning are good but the cost effectiveness of the sixth form is unsatisfactory. Leadership and management are satisfactory.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The sixth form curriculum is too narrow and is not well matched to the needs of students.
- Those students who attend regularly achieve well.
- Students appreciate the school; they feel valued, well supported and involved.
- There is insufficient monitoring of the quality of work, teaching and attendance.

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	Provision is good . Students achieve well because of the quality of teaching offered.
Mathematics	Provision is satisfactory . Standards are in line with expectations. The quality of teaching and learning are good and students' achievement is good. Leadership and management are good.
Science	Good in biology . Teaching and learning are good and the students are achieving well.
Humanities	Good in sociology . Students are achieving well because of good teaching.
Business	Provision in business education is good . The quality of teaching and learning is good and students' achieve well. Leadership is unsatisfactory but management is good.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

The students are cared for well and are well supported and guided. Assessment data is used satisfactorily to set targets and to monitor progress, but such procedures are not consistent and rigorous at departmental level. Students are offered good advice on their futures.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. There is a strong desire to improve opportunities and the quality of the sixth form experience but, at present, the curriculum does not adequately meet the needs of all students. A more consistent stance needs to be adopted towards attendance and punctuality. Weaknesses in these areas are tarnishing achievement.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

The students are appreciative of the opportunities offered to them and regard the teaching they receive as being good and helpful. Some are critical of the advice they receive about courses in the sixth form and higher education, though the inspection team does not fully concur with these views. The students believe that the sixth form is improving, it is a happy community and the students are consulted and listened to.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

The overall achievement of students in the main school is unsatisfactory. Students enter the school with below average standards of prior attainment. By the end of Year 9 standards remain below average and achievement is unsatisfactory because of the lack of improvement made.

By the end of Year 11 standards remain below average and achievement is again unsatisfactory. Achievement in the sixth form is good in relation to prior attainment; standards are average.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- In Years 7 to 11 achievement is unsatisfactory because teaching is not good enough and too many students fail to attend regularly.
- Students for whom English is an additional language achieve well because of the quality of additional support they are offered.
- Sixth form students achieve well because the quality of teaching provided is good.
- Not enough use is made of assessment data by teaching departments as a tool to challenge students and improve their learning.

Commentary

1. The school recruits students into Year 7 from a number of primary schools. Standards on entry are, overall, below average, with many students having poorly developed skills in literacy and numeracy. However, some students, amounting to about 30 per cent of the intake, are selected by examination. Their standards on entry are higher. By Year 9, standards remain below average overall and the students' achievement is unsatisfactory. By Year 11, standards remain below average. There has been little improvement in GCSE results in recent years and too many students leave Year 11 without any GCSE or equivalent qualifications.

2. Levels of achievement are difficult to unravel and teaching in all years is unsatisfactory. In the 2004 National Test for Year 9 students in English, mathematics and science, results overall were in line with the national average for all schools. In terms of prior attainment, standards in English were well above average. In science they were average and in mathematics they were well below average. Overall standards based on prior attainment in the three core subjects were above average.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2004

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	33.6 (34.1)	N/A (33.4)
Mathematics	32.6 (31.9)	N/A (35.4)
Science	31.5 (31.0)	N/A (33.6)

There were 132 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

NB: The figures quoted above are unvalidated. At the time of the publication of the report, no national data for 2004 was available.

3. The contribution made by English to this outcome is significant and indicates what can be done when lessons are well prepared, classes are taught by settled and committed staff and expectations are high. There are other factors at work. Students for whom English is an additional language achieve well because of the quality of support they are offered. Overall, however,

achievement is unsatisfactory because not enough progress is made by all students in all subjects. Teaching is not of a consistently high enough standard and this impedes achievement. Achievement is also impeded because of the problems the school faces in recruiting and retaining staff of a suitable calibre. Attendance is also an issue with a significant minority of students attending irregularly and under achieving as a consequence and, in some lessons, especially in Year 9, the poor behaviour of a minority disrupts the learning of many. Thus, those students who attend regularly, who are taught by the more competent staff and who do not have to tolerate the anti-social behaviour of their peers tend to do well. However, this combination of characteristics is not regularly enjoyed by all students. The quality of education they receive is, therefore, more problematic and this is reflected in the overall judgement of unsatisfactory achievement.

4. For present students in Year 9, standards overall are below average, but evidence from lessons and work scrutiny indicates that for those who attend regularly standards are well below average in physical education and below average in science, French, ICT and music. They are satisfactory in all other subjects including English and mathematics, except religious education where they are above average. In most subjects, achievement is satisfactory, but again this judgement is based on those who attend regularly. When levels of attendance are considered, overall achievement is unsatisfactory. Moreover, by the end of Year 9, most students, with the exception of the well supported cohort for whom English is an additional language, have not made sufficient progress in their standard of work. Achievement is, therefore, unsatisfactory.

5. Standards in GCSE examinations in 2004 were well below average when compared to all schools nationally, based on the attainment of five or more grades at A* to C and when based on total GCSE points per student in their best eight subjects. When compared to similar schools based on prior attainment, results were below average on both measures. The proportion gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* - C or above, fell by just over 20 per cent and, though the percentage of students gaining at least one GCSE pass rose, some nine per cent of students still left school at the end of Year 11 with no qualifications. This is indicative of unsatisfactory achievement.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	33 (42)	52 (52)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	79 (77)	89 (88)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	91 (88)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	28.5 (29.4)	34.9 (34.7)

There were 138 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

6. For current students in Years 10 and 11 standards are below average overall. In French, mathematics, science and physical education, standards are below average. They are average in all other subjects, except religious education and citizenship, where they are above average.

7. Levels of achievement in Years 10 and 11 are unsatisfactory overall, but for those for whom English is an additional language, achievement is good because of the quality of support they receive. In most subjects those students who attend regularly achieve well. However, overall achievement is unsatisfactory because of absence and because the teaching diet most students receive is not sufficiently challenging or stimulating. The net effect is that over time students in Years 10 and 11 do not improve sufficiently. Where the quality of teaching is more consistent, as in mathematics, art and design and geography, for example, students do achieve well and their work does improve.

8. Provision for students for whom English is an additional language is good. Good induction procedures support groups of newly arrived students and are effective for all including those who are new to the English education system. Very good and very detailed development records exist and these are regularly updated and amended as students are tested and re-assessed. The provision of specialist teaching for withdrawal classes is good and is helping students to develop their use of English and increase their confidence. Achievement is good in Years 7, 8 and 9 as their acquisition of English picks up pace. Achievement by the end of Year 11 is at least as good as their peers and better than some groups of students whose first language is English.

9. The achievement of students with special educational needs is unsatisfactory but, in all years and in some subjects students, where they are well supported, achieve better. This is particularly the case in art and design, citizenship, geography, music, and religious education and, in English in Years 7, 8 and 9. In ICT and physical education, the achievement of students with special educational needs is unsatisfactory. Assessment data shows that the percentage of students improving by more than one National Curriculum level in English, mathematics and science is improving and in 2004 was broadly in line with all other students.

10. All students in Years 10 and 11 with special educational needs are entered for a range of GCSE examinations and some take vocational courses as part of links with local colleges. In 2004 GCSE examinations, results show that all students with a statement of their needs attained at least one A* to G grade pass and over one third of all students on the school's list of special educational needs attained at least one A* to C grade passes. However, seven per cent of students with special educational needs left without any GCSE qualification.

Sixth form

11. The sixth form is small, far smaller than the average and comparatively few students in the recent past have sat A-level examinations. Indeed, no national comparisons of standards can be made for 2004 as so few students sat A-level examinations.

12. Sixth form work seen during the inspection, based on the five subjects that were inspected in depth, indicated that standards are average and that the students are achieving well in relation to their prior learning, which is below average. Students are achieving well in all subjects inspected mainly because the teaching offered is of a good standard. Assessment procedures, including the setting of target grades and monitoring progress against such targets, is satisfactory.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

13. Attitudes to learning and to school life are good. Behaviour is satisfactory. Attitudes and behaviour in the sixth form are good. Good opportunities are provided for students' personal development. Relationships are good. However a minority of students, mainly Years 9 and 11 display less positive attitudes and behaviour. Student attendance is unsatisfactory and unsatisfactory in the sixth form. Punctuality is unsatisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most students behave well.
- Relationships are good and facilitate an ethos of racial harmony and respect.
- Unsatisfactory attendance and punctuality in school has a negative impact on standards and learning.
- Tutor time is not effectively used.

Commentary

14. Most students enjoy coming to school and the majority display good attitudes. Most listen well, demonstrate good levels of commitment to their work and show themselves to be motivated and keen to learn. However, there is a significant minority of students, especially in Years 9 and 11,

who act immaturely and, where weak teaching takes place, are easily distracted and show little interest in their lessons and their learning.

15. Most students sustain good levels of concentration during their lessons. In most lessons students co-operated well, shared ideas in a positive way and celebrated the achievements of their peers. In a number of lessons where the silly actions of less self-disciplined students were ignored by other students and, when coupled with effective teaching strategies, ensured that progress in learning was maintained.

16. Most students display good standards of behaviour, some very good, as they move in and around the school. However, there is a minority of students whose behaviour is poor and who seek to challenge their teachers and disrupt the learning of all. Where weak teaching and ineffective behaviour management occurs, the irresponsible actions of these students impeded progress.

17. Many students display a good level of commitment to the school ethos of respect for others. Bullying is not an issue. The school takes a positive stance towards bullying and racial harassment and students and parents agree that the school deals effectively with any reported incidents that occur. The high levels of repeat exclusions arise from a wish to give offending students a second and a third time opportunity to improve themselves. The school may need to review the extent to which this strategy contributed to the less than satisfactory behaviour observed on occasions during the inspection.

Ethnic background of students

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	362	48	2
White – Irish	2		
White – any other White background	17	1	
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	22	4	
Mixed – White and Black African	4		
Mixed – White and Asian	6	1	
Mixed – any other mixed background	13		
Asian or Asian British – Indian	16		
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	133	2	
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	9		
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	17		
Black or Black British – Caribbean	16	3	
Black or Black British – African	67	2	
Black or Black British – any other Black background	6		
Chinese	3		
Any other ethnic group	5	3	
No ethnic group recorded	5	4	

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

18. Most students consider incidents of inappropriate behaviour are dealt with fairly by staff. However, a number feel some teachers are too lenient and that sanctions applied are inconsistent and ineffective. The inspection team was particularly careful in investigating the concerns about

poor behaviour and bullying raised by some three-quarters of the students who completed the questionnaire. However, following checks of records and many observations and discussions with students, staff and parents, the inspectors found little evidence to support these concerns.

19. In most instances students work together constructively, form good friendships and settle their differences amicably. They like their regular teachers and think they are fair and are approachable. However, a number expressed concern at the high turnover of staff.

20. The students are provided with a good range of personal development opportunities. Of note are the house activities, Year 7 induction mentoring by sixth form students and the range of extra curricular activities that is eagerly taken up by students to develop and enhance their life skills.

21. Student attendance has been unsatisfactory for at least the last two years. Student attendance in Years 7, 8 and 9 is unsatisfactory and is poor in Years 10 and 11. Unauthorised absence is very high and particularly so for Year 9 and above.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	7.3	School data	2.6
National data	6.9	National data	1.1

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

22. Punctuality is unsatisfactory with far too many students arriving either late to school or late to lessons. Neither are consistently adequately checked by staff.

23. In lessons the attitudes and behaviour of students with special educational needs are generally no different to that of others. Where teaching assistants (TAs) are present to offer support, this is accepted well by all; others often taking advantage of their presence and seeking extra help themselves. The attitudes and behaviour of those students who attend withdrawal sessions and the support option groups in the curriculum support department are good; this results in a calm, productive and purposeful learning atmosphere. Year 10 students, for example, responded very well to the pace and challenge offered in their life skills lesson. Students worked very well together and showed a lively interest throughout. Year 11 students with a statement of their particular needs are appreciative of the help, support and guidance they received from the curriculum support department throughout their time in school.

24. The provision for students' spiritual moral social and cultural development is good. A recent audit of this aspect has enabled departments to review their provision and a significant number now ensure that opportunities are not missed. Though the school does not meet the legal requirements for a daily act of worship it does seek to uphold the spirit of the law by providing well-delivered assemblies which give students good opportunities for spiritual development. However, insufficient use is made of the daily tutor period to reinforce this. Subjects such as religious education music and art and design provide students with good opportunities to explore the spiritual dimension whilst in geography students are encouraged to reflect upon the power of nature.

25. Students are encouraged to distinguish right from wrong through a school code of conduct. In most classes students work well in groups with some subjects, such as physical education and PSHE providing good opportunities to develop a strong sense of corporate responsibility. For some time the school's council has not functioned but plans are in hand to restart this in the near future. The schools active involvement in several charities provides students with opportunities to show their care and concern for people less fortunate than themselves.

26. Students' cultural development is provided for well. Religious education provides students with opportunities to consider the beliefs, values and life styles of major religions. This is reinforced in assemblies that address the major festivals of all religions. Provision is made for a prayer room to

be available at appropriate times. Subjects such as history and English address relevant topics and good coverage is given to music from a number of cultures.

Sixth form

27. Attitudes and behaviour in the sixth form are good. Most students act in a mature and responsible manner and are good role models to the rest of the school. They are enthusiastic about their studies, consider they receive a good quality of teaching and acknowledge the benefits gained from the good learning opportunities provided. However, school statistics show unsatisfactory levels of student attendance. In the year to date attendance is showing improvement, mainly as a result of some poor attending Year 12 students leaving school. However, the continuing practice for some parents to take students on family holidays during term time inhibits significant improvement. Late arrival/non attendance of a number of students to the registration period held prior to lessons have a negative impact on recorded attendance statistics. A small number of students continue to be late to lessons. This casualness is adversely affecting students' achievements.

28. About half of the students who completed the questionnaire did not feel well informed, felt they had no adult to turn to and considered there were elements of bullying and racial tension in the sixth form. Inspectors took the time to examine these views and, while not doubting these concerns, could not find any current evidence to support them. In discussions most students considered they are well advised and made an active choice to come into the sixth form. The head of sixth form regularly meets with students, is considered to be very approachable and, along with the subject teachers, provides a good level of support to students.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is unsatisfactory. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory. In Years 7 to 11 teaching and learning are unsatisfactory, but are good in the sixth form. The use of assessment data as a means of informing teaching, learning and curriculum planning is satisfactory. The curriculum overall is unsatisfactory because in Years 10 and 11, and in the sixth form, it does not adequately provide for all students. Vocational education has not been developed. There are also some statutory infringements in the provision of ICT across subjects. The quality of resources is unsatisfactory and the school's accommodation is poor. Students receive satisfactory care, though there are some concerns about health and safety. The guidance and support offered to students, including those in the sixth form, is good. Relationships with parents are good and the school's work with other schools and its wider community is satisfactory.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory. It is unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 11 but good in Years 12 and 13. Assessment procedures are satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is unsatisfactory and the gains students make in their learning is too teacher dependent.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good, there is a lack of very good and excellent teaching that would serve to inspire and further motivate the students in their studies.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning is in its infancy and is not yet a sufficiently powerful force for improvement.
- Teachers' use of ICT to support lessons is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

29. The quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory. Overall, in excess of 12 per cent of the 111 lessons seen were either unsatisfactory or poor. However, given that the 18 lessons seen in the sixth form were all at least satisfactory and most were actually good, the quality of teaching and learning in the main school, that is in Years 7 to 11, is even worse than the headline figure suggests. In Years 7, 8 and 9 and in Years 10 and 11, only 85 per cent of the lessons seen were satisfactory or better. There was also a lack of high quality teaching. Only one lesson, in science, was deemed excellent and only 15 lessons overall in the main school were very good. There was no very good or excellent teaching in the sixth form.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 111 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1 (0.9 %)	15 (13.5%)	44 (39.6%)	37 (33.3%)	11 (10.0 %)	3 (2.7%)	0

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; figures in brackets show percentages where 30 or more lessons are seen.

30. This is a disappointing outcome and means that the students' learning and the pace at which they improve is far too teacher dependent. Moreover, procedures for securing improvements by systematically monitoring and evaluating teaching, and sharing good practice, are in their infancy and their impact is limited. Though very good teaching was spread across all year groups and departments, the unsatisfactory and poor teaching was similarly widespread. In most subjects at least one lesson was deemed to be unsatisfactory or worse. In part this outcome reflects some of the acute difficulties the school has faced in recruiting and retaining staff of a sufficient calibre. However, not all weak lessons were taught by inexperienced or supply staff. Far too many of the unsatisfactory and poor lessons were taught by more senior and experienced staff. This is a particular worry. In Years 7 to 11, teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in physical education and ICT. They are good in mathematics, geography, art and design and citizenship. In all other subjects, they are satisfactory. The cumulative effect of so much teaching that is either only satisfactory or worse, is that the students are not sufficiently, or consistently, inspired and motivated. This adversely affects achievement. Monitoring and evaluation are not sufficiently stringent to ensure that more lessons, across all subjects, are at least good and that weak teaching is eliminated leading to improved standards.

31. In those lessons where teaching is most effective and students learn at least well, they are challenged, pace is good and the students have opportunities to work both independently and collaboratively. In such lessons behaviour is far better, attendance is frequently higher and the students enjoy themselves. These characteristics were seen in some lessons in English, mathematics, science, art and design and citizenship, for example. These lessons were frequently delivered by younger, more enthusiastic staff, who employed a range of strategies designed to enthuse the students and capture their imagination. Overall, however, the quality of learning was too often teacher dependent. Too many lessons lacked challenge and planning was too concerned with lesson content rather than focussed on how the students could be engaged and enthused. Too much teaching was mundane and the students became bored and restless. In the worst examples behaviour became a challenge and it was also evident that in too many classes attendance was not high. This variability in the quality of teaching and learning is a feature that the school's senior managers have identified in their newly adopted monitoring procedures, but have not yet had time to tackle in a concerted way.

32. There are other impediments that serve to constrain the quality of teaching and learning. Some of the school's accommodation is poor. Classrooms are poorly designed, have been poorly maintained and do not offer an inspiring environment in which youngsters can work and study. The use of ICT in many subjects of the curriculum is limited and this restricts the opportunities students

have to work independently, to undertake research and to develop work-related learning skills associated with communication, presentation and analysis.

33. In the questionnaires completed by parents and students, there were some criticisms of homework. The main criticisms centred on its regularity, quality and marking. The overall opinion was that the school's approach to homework lacks consistency and that it is too teacher dependent. The inspection team agrees. In some cases the quality of homework was high and was carefully planned to enhance learning. In other cases, homework was either infrequent, or was set with little thought about how it would further extend learning. Marking was also variable in both quality and quantity. Where standards were high, marking was thorough with helpful comments added to the students' work. Some of the marking and assessment of work seen in English, for example, was exemplary. The standard set by the head of English clearly shows what can be done and indicates the level that the rest of the school should aspire to. In the worst cases, exercise books had either not been marked, or had only been marked occasionally. In some instances the students were lavishly praised for the efforts they had made, rather than for the quality of their work. This approach has little success in raising standards.

34. There are some good practices in place for the teaching of students for whom English is an additional language. Useful guidance packs and individualised learning plans are made available for all teaching staff. They assist non specialists to recognise the characteristics of each stage of learning, offer helpful suggestions for classroom management techniques and give detailed lists of all students for whom English is an additional language and their current stages of learning. The individualised language learning plans are detailed but, in some subjects, particularly geography, history and science; these are not used effectively enough to ensure that teachers are sufficiently informed about the students' precise learning needs.

35. Students at an early stage of learning English are withdrawn from lessons in small groups. In these lessons teaching is good. Students are well supported and are able to develop their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills appropriately. These lessons are well planned. However, accommodation for withdrawal lessons is poor and there is limited access to ICT to enhance teaching and learning.

36. Teachers have copies of students' IEPs as well as other useful information as regards special educational needs. As a result, teachers are well aware of the needs of these students and strategies they can use to make their teaching more effective. Targets on IEPs are clear and help teachers plan their work to meet the needs of these students. In geography, materials are well matched to the needs of students and they are also given well-structured guidance to help them with their writing. In English, work is well adapted by experienced teachers and, as a result, students make good progress in their lessons. Very good teaching and learning in a Year 10 life skills lesson meant that students were fully involved throughout and developing very well their knowledge and understanding of technical issues connected with personal hygiene.

37. Most support for students with special educational needs is within normal lessons. However, when students are in the curriculum support department, they are well supported in their work as well as in the development of their literacy and numeracy skills.

38. Following the deliberations of a school working party, an assessment policy has been developed though it is still at a stage of being refined further. Very good central systems are now in place for collecting assessment data and for analysing results and producing value-added data. This information is now available for all subjects to use.

39. Teachers marking and assessment of students' work are satisfactory. In the majority of subjects, teachers use National Curriculum levels to assess students' work and, in Years 10 and 11, the examination marking scheme. These assessments are fed into a school assessment record system which all teachers can access. However, the monitoring of students' progress is not sufficiently based on close analysis of students' attainment on entry to school to identify accurately how far teaching is taking students forward in their learning. The use of assessment data by subject teachers to ensure that their planning is accurate and to monitor students' performance is

unsatisfactory. Assessment as part of the learning process is not yet fully embedded in all subjects. 40. Targets are not used sufficiently well in a number of subjects as a way of helping students raise their standards further. Procedures for assessment are unsatisfactory in ICT, geography and modern foreign languages. It is used very well to support students with special educational needs. Good procedures can be seen in English, mathematics and religious education. In other subjects the quality of assessment is satisfactory.

Sixth form

41. The good quality of teaching offers those students who attend regularly an opportunity to develop intellectually and to improve their future prospects, whether this is in employment or in further or higher education. Overall, the standard of teaching and learning is good. In approximately three out of every four lessons, teaching and learning were good. Though there were no unsatisfactory, or worse, lessons, there was no very good or excellent teaching. This is disappointing. Nevertheless, the quality of teaching enables regular attenders to achieve well in most lessons. In the five focus subjects, the quality of teaching and learning was good in every case.

42. Teaching and learning are better in the sixth form than in the main school because staff are more confident and lessons are usually taught by the better quality teachers. In lessons, staff show good subject knowledge and there are good relationships with the students and this helps learning. Staff plan well and are more prepared to encourage independent working, though this approach needs to be further developed. Those students who regularly attend and who complete their courses of study benefit from a sixth form education and achieve well. In the best lessons, students are engaged in suitable activities that help them develop intellectually as well as personally.

43. Based on the student questionnaire and inspectors' discussions with students, it is clear that students greatly value the opportunity to study at sixth form level. They grade the standard of teaching as good and they particularly appreciate the fact that teachers are available to provide additional help and advice when it is required. The inspection team endorses these views.

44. The main features of the school's assessment systems are used in the sixth form. Students are given good feedback about the quality of their work on an individual basis. They are clear about their own individual strengths and weaknesses. The use of assessment is good in English and sociology. The quality of assessment in other subjects is satisfactory. The overall monitoring of sixth formers' progress is satisfactory.

The curriculum

The curriculum is unsatisfactory. Though it is satisfactory in Years 7, 8 and 9, in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form it does not adequately provide for the needs of all students. Opportunities for enrichment are satisfactory, but accommodation and resources are unsatisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 does not meet the needs of all the students.
- The provision for ICT does not meet statutory requirements: students do not use ICT to enrich learning in all subjects.
- The music curriculum is very good and the religious education programme works well.
- The curriculum is not monitored effectively to see whether initiatives work as planned.

Commentary

45. The curriculum is satisfactory in Years 7, 8 and 9. It includes all the subjects of the National Curriculum except that subjects such as mathematics, science and design and technology do not provide sufficient opportunities to enrich teaching and learning using ICT. In addition, the design

and technology curriculum does include electronics or computer assisted design and manufacture. However, the coverage of food technology is good. The music curriculum is very good: broad, balanced, detailed and particularly rich in its range of ethnic and cultural diversity. The religious education programme follows local recommendations and is adapted well to meet the range of different backgrounds and religions found in the school. Religious education fits in well with the school's humanities scheme for Years 7 and 8. The setting of students into ability groups, including the 'selective' stream, generally works well. Most subjects are able to use this system to set work at an appropriate level for the different groups. In ICT this opportunity is lost as all groups do the same work, limiting the students' achievements. In physical education, the setting arrangement works against the department's interest as it means that only one activity, say tennis or badminton, can be offered at any one time.

46. The curriculum for students in Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory. The provision for ICT does not meet statutory requirements. The students not taking an examination in ICT are not adequately catered for; their progress is not tracked or measured. The school provides a range of GCSE options including statistics, Urdu and a short course in citizenship. However, the number of opportunities for vocational study is small. There is only one level 2 course, ICT, and an opportunity for a few students to study nursery nursing on a Level 1 course. The school has a comparatively high proportion of students who would benefit from a vocational alternative but, because little is offered, they become disaffected with school. The fall-out tends to come in Year 11 when these students find themselves failing to meet the course and examination requirements. The options provided in subjects such as design and technology, where students not entered for the examination are supposed to sit at the back of the class reading or doing English are disruptive and inappropriate. Switching to another subject, such as art and design, works only because of the aptitude of the students and the patience and dedication of the teachers. Otherwise, as during the inspection, it is disruptive. Neither is it appropriate, when students fail to hand in course work, to enter them for a course that tests students by examination only, as in modern foreign languages. An unacceptable number of students do not gain any qualifications by the end of Year 11, with some subjects, including English, not entering a significant minority of students for any examinations.

47. The school has attempted to address the problems in Years 10 and 11 by providing access to several schemes. These take selected students out of the mainstream and into colleges and/or work-experience for part of the time. However, this suits only a few students and is difficult to administer. The school often finds it impossible, for instance, to synchronise its timetable with other institutions.

48. The school's PSHE programme is satisfactory and does include careers education and guidance but, taken with the overall curriculum and lack of ICT, students are not prepared effectively for later stages of education or employment. The school provides effectively for the wide range of ethnic backgrounds, religions and special educational needs found in the school and all are treated equally. There are no aspects of the curriculum that exclude particular groups and in this respect the school is satisfactorily inclusive.

49. The provision of extra-curricular activities is satisfactory. The school provides a good selection of sporting activities including football. The music department runs a successful choir and a good range of instrumental tuition. Some students play regularly in assembly. Most departments run booster classes or homework clubs. The school organises some visits and field trips as part of subject provision and a 'bonding' week for Year 7 but the school says costs prohibit a more extensive programme. There are some good opportunities for the gifted and talent students. These include the area magistrates' court challenge and classes in Chinese and philosophy.

50. The leadership and management of the curriculum are unsatisfactory. No effective monitoring of the curriculum takes place to see whether the initiatives and developments are having the desired effect. Many of the decisions taken by individual departments go unchallenged. In the parental survey, only two thirds of respondents think that, "There is a good range of activities that my child finds interesting and enjoyable". The school does not have an overall vision that would mean, for example, that its stated aim to raise achievement might be explored through matching its curriculum more closely to the students' needs. Some departments, such as English, art and design

and music, seek to build on the students' interests and strengths, but others simply attempt to shift the 'problems' elsewhere.

51. In recent years the school has suffered severe difficulties with the recruitment and retention of staff. Although staffing numbers are now satisfactory, the match of staff to the needs of the curriculum is unsatisfactory, and this is reflected in the quality of teaching. Nevertheless staff induction and training programmes are good. Systems for the induction and mentoring of newly qualified staff are very well managed and all staff have good opportunities to attend courses or receive advice from local authority specialists

52. The accommodation and resources are unsatisfactory overall. Indeed, the quality of the school's accommodation is poor. In most subject areas they are satisfactory, however they are unsatisfactory in English, science, design and technology, music and drama and this is reflected in the standards of students' learning and achievement. Although the school has made the best use of its premises through modern reception areas, displays and an attractive internal garden, many classrooms have antique inkwell desks and dilapidated cupboards. The drama studio and science laboratories are ill equipped and unsuitably designed, and the school library is small and inadequate. Despite the good ratio of computer resources, computer suites are used as teaching areas which restricts computer usage for other subjects, thereby restricting teaching strategies.

53. Overall, curricular provision for students with special educational needs is good. Alongside the traditional range of GCSE courses on offer, some students take vocational courses in a local college and an extra option group in Years 10 and 11 enables students to follow a life skills course. Students with special educational needs also have access to special literacy and numeracy support session during morning tutor time. The strong ethos of involvement and support for students with special educational needs has a positive impact on the social development and learning experience of these students as well as that of all other students in the school. Formal extra-curricular activities run by TAs means students with special educational needs have the opportunity to ask for and receive extra subject and specific support and guidance during the week. A small games club also broadens the learning experience of younger students with special educational needs.

54. Along with experienced leadership and management, learning support teachers and a behaviour support mentor, there are sufficient TAs to support those students with a statement of their particular needs as well as other students on the school's list of special educational needs. TAs are enthusiastic and committed to working with students with special educational needs and their effective deployment ensures the curricular needs of these students are met.

55. The needs of students with limited mobility are poorly met. There are no lifts and, therefore, these students cannot attend lessons above ground level. This impedes their learning since they rely on work being provided in the library where they have little specialist teaching help. There is wheelchair access to the main reception entrance, but many corridors are narrow and barely passable, being blocked with banks of students lockers. Externally, footpaths and walkways are uneven with broken steps and flagstones having faded safety markings. The school site is very open and there are too many external doorways. This poses a significant health and safety issue.

Sixth Form

56. The curriculum is unsatisfactory. It provides a narrow range of A-level courses but only one AVCE course. The numbers on some courses are good, for example in sociology, business studies and English. More than a third, however, has five students or less. Only a small proportion of students stay after the AS-level one-year course to take the full course and the numbers of students on different subject courses varies greatly from year to year. Most students who begin a course stay and finish it although not all gain the qualification. There is limited joint provision with another sixth form nearby. This is for a German course, taught in the other school.

57. There are only two GCSE courses and two Level 2 vocational courses. Approximately 30 per cent of students from the 'selective' stream in the main school, that is the most able students, choose to stay on to study in the sixth form. The senior managers and governors say that this is

because they prefer to move into the independent sector but no research has been done to discover what the school could do to attract higher ability students. As it stands, the sixth form is not cost effective as it has to draw funds from the main school.

58. The sixth form enables Muslim students to continue their education beyond the age of 16 in a single sex environment. However, the school does not have a clear vision for improving the provision to meet the needs of these and all the other students, whether they require a 'traditional' academic education or one which offers a vocational alternative. Links with colleges and universities are being set up but these have not yet had time to bear fruit in terms of raising standards or attracting students. As in the main school, there is insufficient monitoring of departmental decisions and their effect on student achievement.

Care, guidance and support

The school makes appropriate provision to ensure the students' care and welfare. It provides them with good pastoral support and guidance. However, there is no formal provision to involve students and respond to their views. Governors have no formal involvement in monitoring attendance and health and safety. There are also some health and safety issues that have not been adequately addressed.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good induction systems enable smooth transition of Year 7 students into school.
- Good child protection procedures ensure students' best interests.
- The management of health and safety is inconsistent.
- The systems to canvas the students' views and respond to them are inadequate.

Commentary

59. Good child protection procedures have been established and secure systems ensure the best interests of the students at all times. Good arrangements are in place to provide teachers and support staff with regular updates in child protection. Staff are aware of, and familiar with, the need for vigilance in monitoring the well being and welfare of the students in their care. Risk assessment techniques are beginning to be embedded into school routines. However, there are no formal procedures in place for the recording and management of health and safety issues. There is no formal practice for staff and governors to be involved in the auditing and reporting on health and safety matters.

60. Good induction procedures ensure new students and parents are quickly and effectively introduced to the routines of school life. School staff link up with pupils in their primary schools and the close liaison developed with the students and their parents underpins preparation for the new academic year. There is a good practice in a Year 7 residential weekend to facilitate student and teacher bonding. There is a good range of information packs and parent and student briefings. The close collaborative working between Year 7 students and their sixth form student mentors has a significant effect on how well the younger students settle into the routines of school life.

61. Many students resent the school's refusal to consider trousers as part of the uniform and feel frustrated that the school has no formal practice to canvas their views or involve them in the running of the school.

62. The curriculum support department has very effective relationships with most outside professional agencies it works with, enhancing further the quality of support and guidance. Annual reviews are effective and support student progress as they move through the school. Students' views are taken into account because they are involved in the setting and reviewing of their targets at annual reviews and reviews of IEPs. Parents are invited to annual reviews but leadership recognises the need to ensure more parents attend these and is taking steps to improve the

situation. The school meets fully the curricular requirements as outlined in students' statements of their particular needs.

63. Leadership and management draw on a wide range of assessment data to help guide the appropriate placement of students on the school's list of students with special educational needs. Whole school data enables the tracking of the progress made by students with special educational needs. The analysis of this data is well developed and shows, for example, whether students with special educational needs are making adequate progress or where there are weaknesses, particularly in English, mathematics and science in Years 7, 8 and 9. There are effective arrangements for the induction of students with special educational needs into the school.

Sixth form

64. Students' value the good quality of support and guidance provided. Good practice is evident in the way that self-assessment targets are agreed and reviewed with tutors. Subject teachers are generous with their time in supporting students' learning as they pass through the sixth form. Students have access to good levels of impartial career and vocational guidance and all are offered one-to-one personal interviews to aid their decision making. Students readily support and contribute to the sixth form council and have been successful in influencing beneficial changes in study leave arrangements and improved learning resources.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Most parents are supportive and involved in their child's education. Parents are provided with a good level of information. Links with the community and with other schools and colleges are satisfactory and recognised by the school as areas for improvement.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most parents are supportive, involved in their child's education and value the school's work.
- The school provides a good level of information to parents about students' progress and achievements.
- Links with the community and other schools and colleges have yet to have a significant influence on improving the quality of learning experiences offered to students.
- Parental involvement and support to the school in general is less than good.

Commentary

65. Most parents are positive about the school and made the choice for their daughters to attend this school. Nine out of ten parents who completed the questionnaire consider the school expects students to work hard and to make good progress. Most parents consider staff to be approachable and always responsive to their queries. A number of parents expressed concerns about the end of day crowding at the school entrance. The inspection team agrees that there are serious health and safety road hazards associated with the school exit arrangements. Ironically, many of these problems are caused by parents who inconsiderately park their cars.

66. There are good arrangements for the involvement of parents in the regular review of students' progress and information provided to parents is good. In particular, parents praised the emphasis given to supporting the development of less able and under achieving students and provided examples of successful parent – teacher collaboration in developing student learning skills. End-of-year progress reports provide good levels of information on what students have achieved and outline areas for development. However, there are inconsistencies between subject teachers in detailing targets for improvement. The school has a good practice for surveying parents' views; however, there are no arrangements for providing feedback on the school's response and development plans.

67. During the inspection many examples were provided of teachers and parents working together in a collaborative manner to help improve their daughter's learning in school. Most parents are happy with the way the school is run. However, the school suffers from a low level of interest shown by most parents to supporting the school in general. The school's attempt to organise a parent – teacher association failed through lack of support. Few parents attend organised meetings, other than those related to discussing student's progress and only a minority are interested in giving general support towards improving the school.

68. Links with other education institutions enable smooth student transition arrangements and the local business links provide students with valuable work experiences. The school has recognised the need to develop further its links with the local business community and plans are well advanced to enhance student learning opportunities through "Connect Reading", a local initiative to enrich education and business partnership working.

69. There are effective links between the curriculum support department and the parents of students with special educational needs. They are invited to, but only 60 per cent regularly attend, annual reviews. Their views are recorded; hence they are fully involved and informed as to their child's progress towards the targets set out as part of the review process. Parents are sent copies of IEPs and are invited to comment and attend future reviews as well as being kept fully informed of procedures for support. Leadership and management have close links with primary feeder schools and, as a result, provision for incoming pupils is planned in advance.

Students' views

70. Sixth form students are mostly positive in their views about the sixth form; they feel well supported and that they receive quality learning opportunities. Many enjoy the personal development and vocational education experiences gained through the developing links established with local primary schools and businesses.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are unsatisfactory overall. They are satisfactory in the sixth form. The head teacher provides satisfactory leadership. The leadership of other key staff is unsatisfactory. Governance is unsatisfactory. Management is unsatisfactory. The school does not fulfil the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship and the teaching of ICT to all students in Years 10 and 11.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership on a wide range of important school issues is unsatisfactory.
- Action taken to remedy shortcomings is not effective enough.
- The new governing body is not yet exerting a strong enough influence to secure improvements in standards.
- New teachers feel very well supported.
- The quality of leadership and management of departments is inconsistent.
- Financial management is improving, though the sixth form is not cost effective.

Commentary

71. The school aims to provide a high quality education to all its students, serving the diverse needs of families from across Reading. It works hard to provide an education for girls from minority ethnic families. Their needs have, in part, led the school to re-establish the sixth form to encourage girls, who might otherwise leave school, to continue their education. The bid for Business and

Enterprise specialist school status is aiming to meet the future employment needs of the students and the community that the school serves. The headteacher provides satisfactory leadership in promoting the school's aims and most teachers and support staff have a shared commitment to the welfare and success of all students.

72. After a period of considerable turmoil, a new governing body was established in July 2003. On taking office this newly constituted body had to accept a significant budget deficit. As yet this body is not yet sufficiently effective in its duties, though the inherited deficit has been greatly reduced. Governors are committed to the school and its improvement and the team has been strengthened through valuable experience of governance in successful local schools. They are not, however, involved enough in decisions about the school's strategic development. Though the governors have a broad grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the school these are not detailed enough to support and challenge the school on its strategies for improvement. This is partly because performance data is not presented in a form that is easy for governors to interpret or question. Furthermore, governors do not receive regular reports on some important matters such as health and safety or attendance. Some governors are linked with departments and regularly visit the school. However, this practice is patchy and the picture gained is incomplete. Governors take a keen interest in finances and have assisted the school in its efforts to improve its budget.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	2,826,331	Balance from previous year	-28.957
Total expenditure	2,817,461	Balance carried forward to the next	-20,087
Expenditure per student	4,077		

73. Financial management is satisfactory. The school's budget is carefully planned to match the priorities in the improvement plan. The school has agreed with the local education authority a loan to cover the deficit and to balance its budget in four years time. It has successfully moved towards this target during the last financial year. Governors monitor expenditure effectively.

74. Governors take part in training and are concerned to fulfil their statutory duties, though the school does not provide all students with a daily act of collective worship. Additionally, the school does not provide all students with a course of study that meets the requirements of the ICT National Curriculum in Years 10 and 11.

75. The leadership of senior and middle post holders is unsatisfactory overall. There are many areas in which standards are not high enough because the leadership of improvement is not sufficiently robust. These include raising achievement and improving the qualities of learning, teaching, attendance and curriculum provision. Overall the standard of the leadership team is not good enough to lead on improvements in these vital areas. These weaknesses in the school's senior management team mean that the headteacher is too often deflected from a strategic role to covering day-to-day matters. This adversely affects the effectiveness of the school because planning suffers as too much time is spent ensuring that delegated duties have been adequately undertaken. The departmental leadership of English and music is very good and in special educational needs, art and design, mathematics and citizenship, it is good. However, there are too many departments in which leadership is unsatisfactory. These include modern foreign languages, business studies, WRL, design and technology and ICT. While some departments are well supported by senior managers, overall line management of departments is weak and ineffective.

76. The school has a diverse intake that includes students from disadvantaged backgrounds and a significant proportion with special educational needs or behavioural difficulties. The school has a satisfactory commitment to inclusion and seeks to ensure that all students have their educational needs met and reach their potential. It has created a learning support base that is effective in providing additional help for students who have difficulty coping in lessons. Gifted and talented

students are provided with additional opportunities and their progress is monitored, though not all students take up the opportunities. The school has a satisfactory race equality policy.

77. The school pays due regard to the Code of Practice for special educational needs and statutory requirements are met. Leadership and management of this provision are through the curriculum support department. This provides a clear focus and direction for the provision for these students. This has resulted in a very good whole school ethos for the involvement and support of these students. Leadership has ensured the ethos of provision and support has a high profile and that staff are fully involved in the overall provision for them. Development planning is well linked to whole school areas for improvement.

78. Management has ensured TAs are deployed effectively to provide the required support for statemented students as well as those students at the school action stage of the Code of Practice for special needs. This provides the breadth and level of support required for these students. The monitoring and evaluation of the work of the support staff is well embedded as a result of the appraisal system of which they are part.

79. Planning and self-evaluation are satisfactory. The school improvement plan clearly states the school's priorities. Responsibilities are allocated appropriately, but the plan does not indicate exactly what the success criteria are. However, progress on many of its priorities is poor because leadership and management are weak. The improvement plan is backed up by departmental action plans that are, in some cases, well-written and helpful documents. However, in too many departments improvement plans are either unsatisfactory or non-existent.

80. Performance management is not effective in bringing about improvement. The school is not using the results of performance management to assist in planning or to guide professional development. The school has re-established performance management this year for all teaching and non-teaching staff. The process is satisfactorily managed. There are firm plans for the process to be linked with school improvement and professional development in the near future.

81. Newly-qualified teachers (NQTs) and other new teachers are provided with very good induction and support. After appointment NQTs are employed at the end of the summer term to allow them to become familiar with procedures. NQTs meet weekly with the school professional tutor and this is very effective in developing their skills. They feel very well supported and encouraged by their departments.

Sixth form

82. Leadership and management of the recently reopened sixth form are satisfactory. The governors, leadership team and head of sixth form have shared aims to provide a sixth form for students who wish to stay at the school after age 16. This ensures that some students who would otherwise leave school can continue with their studies. Relationships are good and there is mutual respect between tutors and students. Leadership is firm and fair, with clear lines of responsibility. The work of students is regularly monitored and their views sought. When problems are identified appropriate action is taken to bring about improvement.

83. As numbers are low, the income generated is insufficient to meet the full cost of provision. The governors agreed to subsidise the cost from main school income while it became established. In the first year the subsidy was small and acceptable but in the current year the subsidy has risen to one-tenth of the main school budget. This is too high and is diverting much needed resources from teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11. Thus the sixth form is not cost effective. Moreover, shared curriculum links with other schools are limited and curriculum provision is too narrow. The school is working closely with a number of neighbouring schools to provide, from September 2005, a wider range of courses, some of which will be taught at Reading Girls' School. These arrangements are well advanced and are being well managed.

Work-related learning (WRL)

The provision for work-related learning is **unsatisfactory**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school has yet to produce a plan to guide the development of WRL.
- Work experience is well organised and managed to give students a better understanding of the world of work.
- Leadership is unclear and staff roles and responsibilities have yet to be established.
- Only a minority of departments include the development of employability skills within lesson plans and schemes of work.

Commentary

84. An audit of current provision has been undertaken but little progress has been made in terms of producing a development plan to ensure that all students in Years 10 and 11 learn about and from the world of work. Similarly the school has yet to determine priorities and allocate roles and responsibilities to staff. Currently elements of WRL are incorporated within the PSHE programme. Some aspects, such as work experience, are well organised. Preparation for this is good and students are issued with log books to record what they learn both about work and about the development of their own skills and aptitudes.

85. Other features such as careers education are less well developed. Not all students have access to independent career advice. Similarly there were considerable variations in the effectiveness of different lessons designed to inform students about pay and training requirements of various jobs. Good use is made of outside organisations to contribute to this aspect of learning about work but these are not always managed effectively.

86. There was little evidence of WRL having an influence on individual subjects. Good practice included the explicit development of enterprise skills for Year 10 students taking business studies, and the art and design department make good use of contacts with local artists. However, WRL has had very limited impact in all other subjects.

87. The school does have a good relationship with the local business community and the educational business partnership, but the lack of a clear development programme limits the potential effect of these valuable links. The weaknesses of this aspect of provision are directly related to unsatisfactory leadership and management. The current post holder has too many other responsibilities giving her little time to plan and monitor the quality of WRL in the school.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

The focus was on English and French. However one lesson was observed in Urdu and work was sampled in Spanish and Urdu in Years 10 and 11, Standards in Urdu are above average. Standards in Spanish are below average.

English

Provision in English is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are very good.
- Schemes of work have been rewritten to incorporate well-planned opportunities for citizenship, PSHE and WRL.
- Assessment is very thorough, constructive and responds to students' individual needs.
- Graduate trainees, non-specialist supply teachers and unqualified staff do not have sufficient knowledge of the curriculum and how to teach it.
- The learning environment lacks inspiration: classrooms are unclean and the furniture is old and in a poor state of repair.

Commentary

88. In 2004, National Curriculum test results at the end of Year 9, GCSE English language, and GCSE English literature results were average. These results represent very good achievement for students in Year 9 and satisfactory achievement for those in Year 11. In Years 10 and 11 absences have a negative effect on achievement.

89. Students join the school in Year 7 with levels of literacy that are below average. By Year 9 the standard of their work is good; by Year 11 it is still good. Overall, this represents satisfactory achievement. However, some students' exercise books and coursework folders show that the quality of their work has deteriorated in the current school year. This is because their teachers do not have sufficient knowledge of the curriculum and how to teach it and because too many students are too frequently absent.

90. By Year 9 students speak confidently to communicate ideas and to give opinions. They can understand the main points of what they hear and respond to listeners. Students read accurately and independently. Higher attaining and average students understand ideas, themes and characters and can identify key features. Higher attaining students can read between the lines. The writing of higher attaining students is organized, clear and correctly punctuated. They sustain and develop ideas, using words and sentences for effect. The writing of middle attainers is organized; clear and correctly punctuated; ideas are sustained and developed. The work of lower attaining students, many of whom have special educational needs, or English as an additional language, is organized and clear. They are beginning to sustain and develop ideas. They do not always use full stops, capital letters and question marks correctly. By Year 11 students speak purposefully. They can make personal and critical responses to what they read. The writing of more able students is coherent, controlled and thoughtful. Middle attaining students develop their ideas and match their style to the purpose of their writing. Lower attaining students create correctly punctuated sentences, develop their ideas and attempt to match style to purpose. In the better lessons, students were

productive and worked at a brisk pace. At the time of the previous inspection the development of the use of ICT was limited. Although each unit in the scheme of work now provides planned opportunities for students to improve their computer skills, access to ICT facilities still hinders their development.

91. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. There was some evidence of excellent teaching and learning in some students' exercise books and coursework folders. In these folders, the marking of formal assessment tasks encouraged students by recognising their strengths and setting out clear targets to improve their learning. There were too few good lessons seen. This is because the large proportion of graduate trainees, non-specialist supply teachers and unqualified staff who teach English do not have sufficient knowledge of the curriculum and how to teach it. Unsatisfactory and poor teaching was observed in Years 8 and 9. In these lessons, teaching lacked the challenge needed to capture students' interest and little account was taken of what they already knew. Consequently, some students were easily distracted and lacked the motivation to work. In the better lessons teachers created activities that encouraged students to work well on their own and learn effectively in partnership with others.

92. Marking and assessment is a strength. Specialist teachers mark students' written work carefully, drawing attention to errors in literacy. Comments are accurately related to National Curriculum levels and offer clear guidance on what students need to do to improve their work.

93. Leadership and management are very good. The new head of department took up her post in September 2004 along with five new teachers. More than half of the teachers in the English department are graduate trainees, overseas trained teachers, non-specialist supply or unqualified teachers. Therefore, the match of teachers to the curriculum is poor. The head of department is currently supporting these teachers by planning lessons and assessing coursework. The head of department is committed to ensuring the highest possible standards. She has a clear vision for her subject and a strong sense of purpose. She has met the challenge of supporting new staff with enthusiasm and meticulous planning. Schemes of work have been rewritten to incorporate planned opportunities for citizenship and WRL. She has worked closely with local education authority advisers to support teachers new to the school. Evaluation is embedded in the department's practice. Therefore, the head of department is aware of weaknesses and is working with her colleagues to remedy them.

94. Poor resources hinder students' learning. It is difficult for the head of department to create an inspiring learning environment. Classrooms, corridors and stairs are unclean; furniture is old and in a poor state of repair.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

95. Standards of literacy are average. The literacy framework is in place in English classes. In recent terms the teacher responsible for literacy across the curriculum has changed twice. The teachers who have lately accepted shared responsibility for co-ordinating literacy strategies across the school are new to the role. Consequently, there has not been any recent effective leadership or management.

96. Most subjects make satisfactory provision for the development of literacy skills. Students are confident speakers. Teachers emphasise the use of technical vocabulary and students use it accurately. For example, unfamiliar English language and foreign terms are carefully developed in music. Students read accurately and independently. The development of students' writing is inconsistent. In geography students are encouraged to experiment with a wide range of writing styles, including poetry, letters and essays. In some other subjects there is little or no support to improve students' writing.

French

Provision in French is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in French are well below average, with too few gaining high grades.
- Teaching is mostly satisfactory but in some lessons, especially in Year 7 and 8, it lacks pace and challenge, thereby restricting achievement.
- ICT is used well to enliven teaching and learning.
- Policies in place for the assessment of students' work and the monitoring of their progress are not consistently applied across the department.

Commentary

97. Results in the 2004 examinations for students in Year 11 show that standards in French were well below average with too few students gaining higher grades. The picture was similar in 2003.

98. Standards of work during the inspection were below average at the end of both Year 9 and Year 11. In Year 9, though students can write in French with reasonable accuracy, they are less confident in speaking and responding spontaneously or writing independently of notes and models. However, given that students enter the school with no prior knowledge of French, this represents satisfactory achievement. Where teaching is satisfactory or better, students speak confidently and have good accents. In Year 11 they can give long answers to questions in French, offer opinions and use past and future tenses. Standards remain below average in Year 11, though this too represents satisfactory achievement in terms of prior learning.

99. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. In individual lessons it varies from good to poor. Where teaching is good, teachers have high expectations of students' work and behaviour. They clarify aims and objectives systematically at the beginning of lessons and conduct effective plenary sessions thus ensuring students are clear about their learning. Planning in these lessons takes into account students with special educational needs and EAL, as well as those gifted and talented students. Consequently these lessons match the needs and interests of all students, with frequent change of task and activities and good coverage of key skills. This enables all students in these classes, including those with special educational needs, to achieve well. However, in classes where teaching is unsatisfactory or poor, teachers use too much English in lessons thereby restricting students' access to opportunities to develop their own use of French. In these classes teacher expectations of students are too low, learning objectives are not made clear, there is an over emphasis on mundane reading and writing tasks and a lack of suitable pace and challenge. This depresses achievement. Good practice within the department is not being shared which means that not all students are achieving as well as they could.

100. Leadership and management of the department are unsatisfactory. The recently appointed head of the department has not been in post long enough to have effected a significant change in results. The monitoring of teaching and learning are not systematic enough to ensure consistency across the department. The department is well resourced. Improved accommodation and attractive displays of students' work is a valuable aid to teaching and learning. ICT is very well used to enliven lessons. There is good provision for extra curricular activities and trips abroad. There is currently no provision for WRL.

MATHEMATICS

The focus was on mathematics, but statistics was sampled; one lesson and students' work was seen. This is a new course for the current Year 10. Standards seen in the work of the higher attaining students are in line with the higher grades of GCSE because of good teaching. All students are achieving well.

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good because of very good, hardworking and supportive staff who plan and teach lessons well.
- Good procedures enable teachers to assess students' understanding well and take appropriate action.
- Rising results of students in Year 9 indicate good achievement on prior attainment.
- The use of ICT in lessons does not satisfy fully National Curriculum requirements.

Commentary

101. In the 2004 national tests for students in Year 9 results were below average. However, the work of these students was well below average when they entered the school, therefore, their achievement was good. The GCSE results in 2004 were also below average but, when compared to their prior levels of attainment, the achievements of these students was good.

102. The standards of work when students enter the school are below average overall. Standards for the students in the selective stream are above average but they only account for a small proportion of the year group. Work seen during the inspection confirms this. Standards of work seen by the end of Year 9 indicate that standards are rising with a majority of students broadly in line with national averages and some above. This is indicative of good achievement. Higher attaining students in Year 9 confidently use indices and surds; their work is well above average. Average attaining students confidently substitute positive and negative numbers in expressions and lower attaining students use co-ordinates in all four quadrants to plot points and draw graphs. Standards of work in Year 11 are below average with only a minority of students aiming for the higher-level examination. Higher attaining students confidently use probability space diagrams, applying their knowledge of decimals and mentally evaluating answers to questions. In the past absenteeism and non-completion of coursework has meant that students could not be entered for the GCSE examination. These difficulties have been resolved and the aim is to enter all students. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as their peers; as do those for whom English is an additional language. A learning support assistant, dedicated to the mathematics department, gives effective support. In relation to their prior learning, most are achieving well.

103. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Good teaching is the foundation of the good progress made by students. Grouping students by ability means that the ability range within classes is narrow. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan and prepare lessons well presenting material in a clear but challenging manner. Teachers use good question and answer techniques to introduce topics but often restrict input from students. In one Year 7 lesson on algebra, the teacher grouped the students in pairs and used a board game to reinforce substitution. The enjoyment and enthusiasm shown meant that the class worked very hard during the lesson and became very confident in being able to substitute numbers in expressions. There is a "traffic light" system in operation; students self-assess their work at the end of lessons giving teachers instant feedback on their understanding. This means that prompt action can be taken to cover misunderstandings. Using this in the middle of a lesson enabled the teacher to give work that was more challenging to those who showed understanding and to give extra help to those who were unclear. Homework is regularly set and marked; this generally reinforces or extends classwork. There is a good assessment system in place with all formal assessments referenced to National Curriculum levels. Students have self-assessment booklets, which teachers use to set students targets to sustain their improvement. Discipline is firm but fair. Students respond well to good teaching; they arrive to lessons promptly, settle quickly and work hard. Good relationships exist between students and their teachers; this gives students' confidence to ask for help when needed.

104. Leadership and management are good. The head of department is an enthusiastic teacher who leads by example. Staffing has stabilised after a period of disruption and this consistency of

teaching is helping to raise standards. A strong, mutually supportive team of teachers is now established; all have a common desire to raise standards and this has helped overcome the shortcomings of shabby accommodation. Regular monitoring of teaching and learning enables the sharing of good practice. The scheme of work is comprehensive and contains all necessary references to National Curriculum or GCSE grades; this helps planning. There is a lack of access to computer facilities. This means that the department cannot fully cover the requirements of the National Curriculum. Discrete ICT lessons do not cover sufficient work to meet these requirements fully. Attractive displays of both students' work and some commercial posters depicting the wider nature of mathematics enhance the atmosphere of the department.

Mathematics across the curriculum

105. Students' skills in mathematics are sufficient for them to access the curriculum. There is a co-ordinator for numeracy and there has been whole school training. Some departments do not appear to have integrated number work into their schemes of work. A cross-curricular numeracy group meets twice a term to discuss emerging issues. There is a scheme to reinforce mental skills during one tutorial time per fortnight and the co-ordinator follows up on students as required. Teachers have two guides, one for vocabulary and one for techniques. Good use of these by some teachers ensures that correct mathematical techniques are in use in some lessons. The use of numeracy in subjects other than mathematics is variable. In physical education, science and geography students collect, display and analyse data correctly and in ICT and citizenship students use simple spreadsheets to analyse data.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The new head of department has instigated new procedures and developed a cohesive team of staff committed to the improvement of standards.
- The learning of the least able students is well supported by a teaching assistant attached to the department.
- Opportunities to enhance students' learning are limited by lack of ICT and WRL within the science curriculum.
- The lack of pace and challenge in some teaching contributes to unsatisfactory behaviour which slows the pace of learning and impedes progress in some lessons.

Commentary

106. Standards at the end of Year 9 in 2004 were below average. Standards at the end of Year 11 in 2004 were below average for the double award and well below for the single award; this shows a slight improvement on the previous year. As standards on entry are well below the national average this represents satisfactory achievement overall.

107. Current standards in Years 7, 8 and 9 are variable but are broadly below average. Students in the higher ability sets show good literacy and numeracy skills and their standard of work is above average. The standard of work in the lower ability sets is below and sometimes well below average. As standards on entry were well below average this represents at least satisfactory achievement. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are also variable and are adversely affected by absence. Overall, however, standards are below average. For more able students studying for the double award standards are average; they have a good understanding of scientific concepts and apply their knowledge well, both orally and in their written work. Less able students, especially those studying for the single award, are less well motivated and the standard of work seen is below and in some cases well below average. They find it difficult to use scientific terminology in extended writing. For most students standards are improved by well developed practical skills. They tackle practical

coursework competently, handling and analysing data well; more able students also evaluate their coursework well. As the standards on entry are well below average achievement is satisfactory.

108. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Most seen in Years 7, 8 and 9 were satisfactory or better. Lessons are well prepared, with the best teachers employing a wide range of teaching strategies to stimulate interest and provide pace and challenge. Starter activities are particularly well planned and encourage an immediate focus on learning. The attitude and behaviour of students in Years 7, 8 and 9 is generally good, with good student-teacher relationships in most lessons. Students are able to express their ideas confidently and, in at least half of the lessons, were good or better as a result of good or better teaching. In Years 10 and 11 teaching and learning are more variable, with less effective lessons being taught by more senior staff. In lessons that are good or better students respond well to the high expectations of the teachers and are able to articulate well what they have learned. In lessons where the teaching is unsatisfactory, pace and challenge are lacking or are not matched to students' potential and learning is unsatisfactory. Poor behaviour by a significant few in these lessons is not managed well and disrupts the learning of others. In lessons where the teaching assistant supports the least able students the pace of learning is considerably enhanced. Students for whom English is not their first language also respond well when additional support is offered. Good use is made of text books and good quality hand-outs, but in some lessons there is too much reliance on these. Opportunities to stimulate student interest and explore different learning styles are missed through lack of use of ICT as an integral part of the curriculum. Further opportunities to encourage independent learning are missed as there is also a lack of WRL in the curriculum.

109. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The appointment of a new head of science has had a stabilising effect and the department is now committed to improving standards. The recently introduced behaviour management policy is improving teaching and learning and teachers are sharing resources and supporting each other well; in particular, good support is being given to a newly qualified teacher. Comprehensive and accessible schemes of work are in place for Years 7, 8 and 9 but these are under developed in Years 10 and 11. Marking is inconsistent but the positive impact of the literacy policy on marking and standards can be seen in Years 7, 8 and 9. In some books marking provides no guidance on what students need to do to improve and in most there are no comments on what they do well. Good use is made of national data to set targets but the opportunity to challenge individual students by monitoring their actual performance against expectations is missed.

110. The work of the department is well supported by two capable, part time laboratory technicians; their ability to ensure an adequate level of practical work is limited by time and their difficulties in moving equipment around the department. Standards are affected by poor laboratory facilities and resources, particularly in physics, although teachers and laboratory technicians work well together to minimise this and interesting displays of students' work improve the environment.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are too low and achievement is unsatisfactory because the teaching is unsatisfactory.
- In the better lessons students are engaged and they make good progress.
- Students' have too few opportunities to use ICT in many subjects.
- The acting head of department is trying to secure improvements, but leadership and management are unsatisfactory.

Commentary

111. Standards are below those expected nationally. Approximately half of the students in Years 10 and 11 take ICT. Prior to 2003, there were no examination entries. There were no GCSE entries in ICT in 2003 and only two thirds of those entered achieved a pass in the Intermediate GNVQ. In 2004, three students out of 13 entries achieved a pass in GCSE, in a full or short course. Approximately two thirds of the students entered achieved a pass in the GNVQ Intermediate or Foundation level.

112. Standards on entry are below average. By the end of Year 9 and Year 11, standards remain below average and students' achievement is unsatisfactory. This is because there has been considerable staff turnover and not all students in Years 10 and 11 have enough access to computers. The word processing and slide production work of some students in Years 10 and 11 is above average. Students handle data competently and use desk-top publishing to design flyers and make multimedia presentations. However, too many students opt out of learning in lessons and their attendance rate is unsatisfactory.

113. By the end of Year 9, students use text and graphics to present appropriate images, for example, of celebrations. They handle spreadsheets and collate evidence to address hypotheses. They do not have sufficient opportunities to apply their skills to relevant contexts but this is improving as the schemes of work are developed. There are too few opportunities to develop an understanding of control and monitoring. Standards are, therefore, below average because students have not covered the work to sufficient depth. Students' weak literacy and numeracy skills limit their achievement in some lessons because teachers do not reinforce these systematically. Achievement for those with SEN, EAL and gifted and talented students is unsatisfactory because work is not modified to meet their individual needs.

114. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory overall. Too many lessons lack challenge and fail to grasp students' imagination. Teachers' planning is too general, there is too much teacher talk and too little feedback to students to help them to improve their work. In some lessons that are unsatisfactory, there is a lack of firm management and students are not required to complete set tasks. As a result, students become disruptive and the pace of work is too slow. In good lessons, students understand the relevance to them of the activities set by the teacher. Learning is directed by measurable objectives and students make discoveries for themselves. Teachers ensure that students understand previous learning before moving on and questioning is used well to check and extend the learning of all students. Assessment is unsatisfactory. Although the department is beginning to make use of prior achievement data to predict levels and grades, students receive too little feedback on how to improve their work and the information from marking is not used sufficiently to adapt lessons planned for the future.

115. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, there have been recent improvements because of the involvement of outside support and the temporary involvement of a teacher in charge of the department. The National Curriculum is not fully implemented. There are still too few opportunities to use computers in other subjects.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

116. Provision is unsatisfactory. Despite a favourable complement of computers, students have too few opportunities to practise and develop the skills they have learned in their ICT lessons. However, the network manager has recently devised a plan for the use of the computer facilities by all subjects across the curriculum. Some good use was seen in English, modern foreign languages and the curriculum support department. However, there is not enough use of computers to support learning in other subjects. There is a lack of equipment for teaching aspects of control and CAD/CAM.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and achievement in Years 7, 8 and 9 are good.
- The positive attitudes and behaviour of the majority, coupled to good relationships, enhance learning.
- Certain areas of the curriculum and management are not in place. In particular, the lack of ICT is significant.

Commentary

117. At the end of Year 9 the proportion of students attaining the national expectation in 2004 was average. The GCSE results were well below average, though a much enlarged cohort saw an appreciable improvement over the previous year in A*-G grades. Work seen in lessons and books in Years 7, 8 and 9 confirm that students, by the end of Year 9, are in line with the national expectation. Students in top sets are working at above average levels. These standards represent good achievement when the below average levels of attainment on entry in geography skills and knowledge are taken into account. In work seen in the current Year 11, standards are higher than is suggested by previous examination results. Higher attaining students were recruited into Year 10 and they are now working in line with the national average. This represents satisfactory achievement.

118. In Year 7 basic geography skills, including a good knowledge and use of number, are learned by students. This is the basis for the growth in understanding of place, themes and patterns and processes that gains momentum in Years 7 to 9. Written skills are varied, but develop well over time, with students demonstrating imaginative and extended writing in letters and poems as well as notes. Higher attainers reach high standards of written work and lower attainers and those on the SEN register use writing frames to help them develop the ability to write in sentences and paragraphs. Project work, such as that on rivers in Year 8 and weathering in Year 9, allow students to develop investigative skills that are put to good use in coursework in Years 10 and 11. In work such as 'Is Swallowfield a sub-urbanised village?' students are able to hypothesise, create a methodology, gather and analyse data and reach useful conclusions. Some coursework is improved through use of ICT but, overall, the lack of ICT in students' work is a serious omission. Students, regardless of ethnicity, are able to develop their skills equally.

119. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall; but it is good in Years 7, 8 and 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Teachers are knowledgeable and present work in a way that motivates and interests students, much of it accompanied by humour and instructive anecdote. A variety of strategies are used to engage and challenge students including audio visual aids and Powerpoint presentations. Students with SEN are well supported by teaching assistants and use of specially prepared materials. They achieve well in lessons. Students behave well and the great majority are attentive and remain fully engaged, working well in groups or individually. Students are encouraged to think for themselves and this often results in good, confident verbal responses. Reinforcement is an integral part of all lessons. Challenge and high expectation are present in most lessons, but students in top sets could be stretched even further.

120. There has been much disruption in the department recently and only since the beginning of the academic year has a satisfactory regime been in place. There are new schemes of work and good plans in place, but much development work is still necessary, especially in the areas of assessment, fieldwork and the use of ICT. Leadership and management are currently satisfactory. With new staff, the management and leadership roles, and workload, can be more fairly shared and good plans made more effective.

History

The provision for history is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' subject expertise is good.
- Learning opportunities are restricted by the limited use of ICT.
- The needs of gifted and talented students are not always well met.

Commentary

121. The GCSE results in 2003 and 2004 reflect students' absenteeism and previous staffing difficulties. In both years standards were below average, though this outcome indicates satisfactory achievement. Teacher assessment and an analysis of students' work indicate that in Year 9 standards are average. Students achieve well, which reflects the quality of teaching. Improvements in the departmental staffing have encouraged more Year 9 students to consider history as an examination choice.

122. Students enter the school with a basic knowledge of history. They quickly learn to identify primary and secondary source evidence and, by Year 9, some students provide referenced sources in their work. Lower achieving students in Years 7 and 8 follow an integrated humanities course and have a satisfactory understanding of the development of the Roman Empire and the Norman Conquest. By Year 9 students begin to examine the problems of the Weimar Republic, categorising these into political or economic influences leading to World War 1. In Years 10 and 11 students complete in-depth essays on topics such as the development of medicine or events in 20th century Ireland. Their work on slavery makes a positive contribution to their understanding of human rights. However in all years, high levels of absenteeism and lateness to lessons has an adverse affect on students learning because aspects have to be repeated or they have missed essential preparatory work.

123. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, but it is good in Years 7, 8 and 9. Specialist teachers are enthusiastic and well-informed, consequently students are motivated to complete their research and written tasks with genuine interest. Relationships are good and most students respond well to the teachers' behaviour expectations. When present, teaching assistants provide effective support. Literacy skills are well promoted through historical terminology and discussion sessions. Students' work is marked with positive and encouraging comments and regular homework is used effectively to extend or prepare for lessons.

124. Departmental documentation is satisfactory, although there is no planned use of ICT and there are too few opportunities for students to conduct independent research. The department has made a good start in revising the curriculum and setting up assessment procedures. Although it is too early to judge the effect of these innovations, indications are that assessment is beginning to inform the curriculum and record students' progress. There are good links to citizenship through human rights issues and topical events, but currently there are no activities to enrich the curriculum. Although the needs of less able students are adequately met, there are insufficient opportunities for gifted students to extend their talents.

125. The department is satisfactorily led and managed. Accommodation is satisfactory although some rooms are cramped because of large classes. Although the staffing situation has now stabilised, other resources are unsatisfactory. There are no computers and few text books to support learning. The school library has a small but inadequate history section with a limited range of reference material.

Religious education

The provision for religious education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well in the GCSE examinations obtaining results that are above the national average.
- The subject makes a good contribution to the students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.
- There is considerable variation in the quality of teaching and learning with some lessons lacking pace and challenge.

Commentary

126. Most students are entered for the short course GSCE examination. Results are above the national average. Most students gain results that are above those predicated.

127. Standards on entry are below those set out in the local agreed syllabus. Students achieve well and by the end of Year 9 standards are above average. Students have a good understanding of the major beliefs and practices of the main religions found in society. They are also developing good skills of evaluation and have a sensitive appreciation of the role that religion plays in peoples' lives. The inclusion of religious education in the humanities course for lower attaining students in Years 7 and 8 provides a secure and supportive environment in which students achieve well. In the current Years 10 and 11 students are on target to gain grades that are at least in line with predictions. They have a good understanding of the teaching of Christianity and Islam on a number of contemporary social and moral issues.

128. There is considerable variation in the quality of teaching and learning. Overall it is satisfactory with some very good lessons being seen. In the better lessons, teachers have a very good knowledge of both the subject and of the methods needed to teach effectively. Well-planned lessons that use a good variety of teaching methods ensure that students are motivated and challenged to produce high standards. As a result students respond well in discussion; their responses indicating a mature and sensitive awareness of the beliefs and life styles of others. Written work is well prepared with good literacy skills. Textbooks and worksheets are used well, but there is little evidence of the use of religious artefacts, audio visual aids and ICT. Suitable homework is set and well marked. In a minority of lessons teachers talk for too long and do not use methods that engage students sufficiently. As a result students lose interest and become inattentive and listless. Classroom management is generally good, but when lessons lose pace students tend to become restless and consequently disengage; behaviour deteriorates and classroom management becomes confrontational. Though the overall quality of teaching is satisfactory, achievement is better. This is because the more experienced staff have ensured that problems associated with staff turnover have had minimal effect on learning.

129. Currently the leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory but a recent period of instability in staffing has meant that day to day tasks have been maintained by the head of faculty. The current new head of subject has yet to become settled in the department. Planning has been delayed though there is now a clear vision for the future. Good assessment procedures are in place with students being given opportunities to evaluate their own work; however, this is not embedded in the attainment targets that are stated in the Agreed Syllabus and students are not fully aware of the standards that they have reached. Overall, the subject contributes well to the students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.

TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well in the GCSE food course.
- Students do not experience sufficient work in electronics.
- There are insufficient opportunities for students to develop skills in computer-aided design and manufacturing.
- Insufficient rigor in monitoring Year 11 students' attendance and progress with GCSE coursework lead to a significant minority being withdrawn from the examination because they fall behind.

Commentary

130. The overall GCSE results in design and technology subjects in 2004 are well below the national average. Students in design and technology achieve well below average levels compared to girls nationally. Results in the GCSE food course are well above average and these students achieve very well. GCSE results in the home economics child development course are above average. Overall, in Years 10 and 11, students achieve satisfactorily. Standards in Year 9 are broadly average, which is reflected in teachers' own assessments of students' work. In Years 7, 8 and 9 students achieve well.

131. Students in Year 7 enter the school with below average standards in design and technology. Students work in a range of materials, though there are insufficient opportunities for them to design and make products in electronics, computer-aided design and manufacturing. Drawing and freehand sketching skills are weak though higher attaining students are now developing their drawing skills well. Standards are weaker in designing than in making because less emphasis is placed on designing. This aspect is much stronger in food technology where students show the stages of developing their products. Lower attaining students find this aspect of the work particularly difficult and there is insufficient use of ICT to improve the quality of design work. In the work seen, standards are steadily improving and are now closer to average. This is particularly evident in the newly introduced GCSE graphics course in Year 10. A significant minority of students underachieve because their attendance to school is poor. ICT is used to present portfolio work and to process the data they collect from potential product users, but there are insufficient opportunities for students to experience industrial processes involving computer aided design and manufacturing because of the lack of ICT resources.

132. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teachers have good knowledge of their subject and work is structured to develop students' skills. In the majority of lessons, teachers set appropriate tasks and this enables students to work in a variety of materials. Students cover the main stages of the design process and make products of a satisfactory standard. In food technology, product development has a high profile and basic skills are developed in Years 7, 8 and 9 and these are refined further at GCSE, which results in high standards in the subject. However, there is less opportunity for students to develop more specialist design skills in other areas, where much of the lower GCSE results are because of staffing difficulties and insufficient monitoring of coursework. This leads to students falling behind and being withdrawn from the examination. This minority of students lose interest and this has an adverse impact on the progress of others. Electronics and computer aided manufacture are underdeveloped. Consequently, students are disadvantaged in their GCSE coursework, particularly in resistant materials where industrial manufacturing processes are an important element of the coursework. In Years 10 and 11 teachers use the examination mark scheme well though there is still insufficient rigor to guide students through the process. For example, very few students analyse what they have learned from their research before writing a specification. In the work seen, there are good examples of marking which is helpful to students. Assessment overall including the work of students with special educational

needs is satisfactory. However, assessment is not used effectively enough to plan work for the learning needs of individual students.

133. Leadership is unsatisfactory but management of the subjects on a daily basis by the newly appointed head of department is satisfactory. Weaknesses in leadership are linked to insufficient ICT resources, monitoring of teaching and learning, staffing and coverage of the National Curriculum. The head of department has established better working relationships amongst staff particularly following a period of staffing difficulties. The department is now focused on raising standards, which are steadily improving. A graphics course has been introduced at GCSE with a view to improving standards further. More use could be made of data analysis to target work more precisely to students' individual learning needs.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

134. The focus was on art and design and physical education. Drama and music were both sampled. The 2004 GCSE results in drama were well below average. In two of the three lessons seen, students learnt well because the teacher planned the time well and her specialist subject knowledge enabled her to explain and challenge the students effectively. The other lesson was poor because the teaching lacked challenge. Consequently, students disengaged and misbehaved and little progress was made. Music was also sampled, with three lessons being seen. No instrumental music lessons were seen although performances by students receiving them were of a good standard. However, other evidence seen and provided by the school in the form of policy documentation, the departmental handbook, schemes of work and students' work indicates that standards in music are well below average in Year 9 and satisfactory in current GCSE course in Years 10 and 11.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and learning leads to good achievement.
- Committed and enthusiastic teachers create a good climate for learning.
- Assessment of work is not yet providing all students with the information they need in order to improve.
- There are too few opportunities for the students to develop their work through the use of ICT.

Commentary

135. In 2003 teachers assessed standards at the end of Year 9 as well above average and in 2004 standards were assessed as average. Teachers agree that these were inaccurate owing to problems in developing a consistent assessment strategy. Standards in the 2003 and 2004 GCSE examinations were well below average compared with national results.

136. Students come into the school with below average knowledge and skills in art and design but reach average standards by the end of Year 9. Achievement is good because good teaching ensures students develop an understanding of how art from different times and cultures can enhance their work. They develop skills in a good range of media and work is usually lively and colourful. Current standards in the Year 11 are average. A good proportion of students are doing well because of the high expectations and encouragement from the teachers. Achievement is good as students began the course with lower than average standards. In addition, the current Year 11 suffered from severe staffing problems in the earlier part of their course. Nevertheless overall achievement is limited by the high level of absence; in one session this was nearly twenty percent. Students with special educational needs are supported well and make good progress. There was no discernable difference in achievement between students from different ethnic backgrounds. Students' ICT skills are underdeveloped: the department has only recently gained access to

computers. Skills in speaking, listening and writing are good because teachers encourage these skills in every lesson.

137. Teaching and learning are good, and sometimes very good. Teachers have very high expectations and their knowledge and enthusiasm for art and design is infectious: students work hard and pursue individual interests such as religion, pop culture or fashion design. This not only enhances creativity and provides an exciting environment to work in, but is making the subject popular as an examination choice. In lessons students are clear about what is expected of them and work with interest and enthusiasm. Teachers usually provide models for students to work towards or opportunities to draw from observation, so improving their skills and understanding. In less successful lessons, these are not in evidence and students produce too much work based on limited experience or second-hand sources, such as magazine illustration or Internet searches. Teachers are particularly patient and understanding with lower ability students and build good relationships with all. In Year 11 some students who have failed in other subjects have switched to art and design and are beginning to make progress; their sometimes difficult behaviour is managed well despite limited support. Teachers are good at measuring students' progress and, in lessons, provide sound advice on how well students are doing and how they can improve. However, practice is not consistent, particularly in Years 7, 8 and 9. The marking and assessment is not linked to National Curriculum levels, so students are not clear what is expected and are less able to take charge of their own learning. At GCSE, practice is also inconsistent. Less experienced teachers are not always able to give appropriate advice, particularly for higher ability or gifted students; this limits achievement.

138. The leadership of the department is good. The head of department is committed and hard working. She has improved the integrity and status of the department despite the difficulties in staffing and providing resources. The teachers work very well as a team and this is evident in the joint planning and the effective use of complementary skills. There is a shared vision for improvement based on an assessment of need. This is driven by the desire to raise achievement and provide a range of alternatives for the students. The department is beginning to analyse trends from the data on standards and examination results but more training is needed to make this an effective tool for planning and development.

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- New fully staffed department with a shared vision for department development.
- Good working relationships between staff and students result in productive atmosphere in most lessons.
- The quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent and has not yet resulted in any marked improvement on achievement.
- The review of schemes of work has not identified clear cross curricular links designed to improve standards of teaching.
- Insufficient challenge and lack of detail in teachers' feedback to students results in students not achieving at higher levels
- As a result of non participants not being fully included in lessons they are not making progress.

Commentary

139. Standards at the end of Year 9 are well below average. When compared to their standards on entry in Year 7, these results represent unsatisfactory achievement. In 2004 results at GCSE were well below average but when related to standards on entry this represents satisfactory achievement. However, numbers were small and the department has experienced considerable staff turnover in the recent past.

140. Students join the school in Year 7 with standards that are well below average. By the end of Year 9 the standard of their work remains well below national expectations. This represents unsatisfactory achievement because few improvements have been made. By the end of Year 11, in the common course, students work remains well below average and their achievement is unsatisfactory. GCSE students' work is below national expectations and their achievement is satisfactory. By Year 9 students are able to link a number of movements together to perform short sequences but movements lack control and precision. For example, students were able to sustain a short rally in badminton and use a very simple scoring system. In dance students could link a number of simple movements to perform a sequence using different stimuli. Students, including those for whom English is an additional language, need to be provided with more challenge in their work to allow them to achieve at higher levels. Activities to ensure inclusion of non-participants needs to be considered in teachers' planning. At present, too many students do not regularly participate in lessons. There is a lack of strategies to include them in what takes place and, as a result, their progress is minimal.

141. The quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory overall. It is unsatisfactory in the common courses for students in Years 7, 8 and 9 and in Years 10 and 11. In the examination course in Year 11, it is satisfactory. Students work co-operatively with the teachers and each other in most lessons. In a minority of lessons student behaviour and attitudes to learning remain unsatisfactory and result in disruption to learning. Schemes of work are being reviewed, but they do not sufficiently identify a range of challenging activities for students or link with other cross curriculum areas to provide detailed guidance for teachers to use in planning. Feedback to students needs to be developed so that students understand how to improve further. There are new processes in place to monitor teaching and learning and these now need to be more rigorous and analytical to provide detailed development information for staff.

142. After a period of considerable turmoil, staffing in physical education is now more stable and all teachers are subject specialists. The new leadership and management of the department are satisfactory, though new policies and ideas introduced since the start of the academic year have not yet had a chance to have a concerted effect on standards.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

143. No courses were inspected in depth in this curriculum area, but one business lesson in Year 11 was sampled and examples of students' work in both Years 10 and 11 were reviewed. The appointment of a new teacher has resulted in a dramatic improvement in standards in Year 11. The work of students in Year 10 already shows the positive effect of high expectations, stimulating teaching and the development of enterprise skills.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

144. The focus was on citizenship, but three PSHE lessons were sampled. There are differences in expertise that means that the quality of teaching is variable and the students' experiences are not equitable. In a good lesson with low ability Year 10 students, the teacher explored the notions of aggression as against assertiveness through some lively rôle play. This suited the needs of the students very well and learning was effective. In an unsatisfactory Year 11 lesson about routes into employment, the teacher assumed too high a level of understanding of finance and failed to adapt her approach to the students' responses. Some students ignored the teacher, others sat passively and some sat chatting; little learning occurred.

Citizenship

The provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good and very good teaching leads to good levels of achievement.
- A good, practical reorganisation of the delivery of citizenship has led to improving standards.
- Full assessment and recording of progress not yet in place.

Commentary

145. After a very thorough evaluation of how citizenship was being delivered in the school, a new and more effective system has been in operation since the beginning of the academic year. Citizenship is now taught as part of the PSHE programme. Each student in Years 7 to 11 is taught citizenship for one term each year. This is still not ideal, but a great improvement on the previous model of trying to offer the subject in tutor time. A major improvement has been the appointment of a trained citizenship teacher as co-ordinator of the programme. In addition to carefully identified lessons the subject is now taught by a more expert staff. Schemes of work have been re-written and are comprehensive in the way they cover the programmes of study and the three main elements of citizenship. They present many opportunities for student presentations, individual research and theme days, such as those given over to charity work.

146. By the end of Year 9, students' knowledge and understanding of responsible citizenship and communication and enquiry skills match the national expectation. Standards are higher in Years 10 and 11. Regardless of ethnicity or level of attainment, the majority achieve well and sometimes very well. Evidence from students' written work and from lessons seen confirms this. However, assessment techniques are not yet fully developed and the department is working on providing a better test of achievement at the end of Year 9 than the one used under the old system. Recording and reporting of achievement are not yet developed far enough but this is reflected in the development plan.

147. Teaching and learning are good overall and sometimes very good. Teachers are conscientious in following schemes of work. They are also flexible enough to take opportunities when they are offered such as using network rooms to increase the use of ICT. Lessons are pacy and offer high levels of challenge. Students are well motivated and participate well, having the confidence to speak fluently in presentations. In a Year 7 workshop students in the bottom set paid rapt attention and worked enthusiastically. The lesson was full of fun and the students achieved well in improving their understanding of communications. The students were very well supported by TAs and teachers and the lesson was delivered by a visiting actor. In Year 10 a higher attaining group reacted positively to dynamic teaching in preparing a project in which they were setting up a radio station, having won a BT citizenship award. Students were able to put a whole range of ICT skills to work in this lesson. Stimulating teaching, full of enthusiasm and expert knowledge gives all students the chance to make good progress.

148. The subject is well led. The head of PSHE has worked hard to improve the delivery of citizenship and it now has gained much more credibility with the students. The newly appointed co-ordinator and the well qualified teachers involved are fully committed to the subject and able to carry it forward. There are good, achievable plans to improve further the status of citizenship and the team is actively working to improve those areas, such as assessment where procedures are not yet fully in place. Some elements of citizenship are offered in subject areas such as history, geography and ICT, but they are not specifically identified.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

149. In the inspection, five 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. **In the academic year 2003/04, the sixth form was very small and no courses had enough students to enable valid national comparisons of performance to be made.**

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English literature

Provision in English literature is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are very good.
- Good teaching enables students to achieve well.
- The number of students studying English literature has increased.

Commentary

150. In 2004 the number of students who sat AS Level English literature examinations was too small to make a judgement about their performance. No students were entered for the A-level English literature examinations.

151. For present students the picture is different. The number of students studying English literature has increased. In an enthusiastic Year 13 class, eleven students enjoyed explaining the connections between texts, contemporary attitudes to war and present opinions. Standards in Year 13 are above average and students' achievement is good. The writing of most students is evaluative and analytical. More able students have a detailed knowledge of the themes and narrative structure of texts. They evaluate the contemporary values that influence authors and comment astutely on how interpretations of texts change over time. Most write accurately and persuasively. The written work of less highly attaining students shows some flaws in expression and accuracy and their analysis of the author's use of language lacks detail. In Year 12, students are beginning to develop analytical skills in lessons.

152. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers are experienced and well read. As a result, students make good progress in improving their skills of analysis and their argumentative writing. Challenge and high expectations are features in all lessons. Learning is highly interactive, with many opportunities for whole class and small group discussion. Students are expected to work independently through research and delivering presentations, as well as through their note-taking and written assignments. The variety of learning activities encourages and motivates students. Students of all abilities carry out their essay work with enthusiasm and enjoyment. Marking and assessment are very good. Teachers use written and spoken comments to clarify what each student needs to do to improve.

153. Leadership and management are very good. The recently appointed head of department has vision and a steely determination to improve standards. Members of the department have a shared commitment to teach students a love of literature and language. Planning for success is at the heart of the department's work. The sharing of assessment objectives clarifies for students what they have to improve to achieve their goals.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

154. Students' communication skills in writing and speaking are average in all sixth form subjects. Their general expression is clear. Research skills are average. Teachers provide very good support for students' communication skills. Students write well to communicate information, ideas and opinions to intended audiences.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Lessons are taught well because the teachers are knowledgeable and prepare well.
- Those students who attend regularly and work hard achieve well.
- Too few students are following A level courses.

Commentary

155. There were no candidates for A-level mathematics in 2004 and only one in 2003. Thus no national comparisons of performance can be made. One Year 13 student and seven Year 12 students are currently studying mathematics at A-level. From work seen, all students are at suitable levels for their course. Standards are thus average, with students achieving as expected given their prior levels of attainment.

156. Teaching is good and if attendance rates were better, the students' achievements would be greater. Lessons are well prepared because teachers have very good subject knowledge; expositions are clear and challenge students well. Consequently, students work hard and develop their understanding. Students use and apply skills in algebra in a range of modules; one class used these skills to solve problems on centre of gravity by resolving moments. Teachers support students well, they give detailed oral and written feedback on work to correct errors and confirm understanding. Lessons have pace, but a lack of computer facilities means that there is little independent learning or discovery. There is a positive atmosphere in lessons and there is mutual respect between teachers and students.

157. Leadership and management are good. The modules chosen for the course suit students' needs and there are sufficient resources to support learning except for a lack of computer facilities for use within the classroom. There is a bridging course at the end of Year 11 for students to ensure that algebraic skills are sufficient for the demands of the course. This has been effective as from work seen these skills are applied confidently in all topics.

Mathematics across the curriculum

158. Owing to the small size of the sixth form, there are, at present, no courses to support students who need a greater knowledge of specific areas of mathematics or to develop Key Skills for vocational courses. Inspection evidence indicates that students' skills are adequate for their needs. In business education, skills are as expected and there are good opportunities for reinforcement built into the course. In biology, there was good use of percentages and equations to calculate ecological efficiency.

SCIENCE

159. The focus of the inspection was on biology, but chemistry was sampled. There are no recent results to comment on as this course was only reintroduced this academic year. Teaching and learning are good and lessons are taught by an enthusiastic subject specialist. Students are working at an average standard.

BIOLOGY

Provision in biology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teachers' good subject knowledge and the students' motivation both contribute to good achievement.
- Opportunities to encourage independent learning are not always seized.
- There is insufficient use of assessment data to monitor individual performance against expected target grades.

Commentary

160. Results in 2003 were below the national average at A-level. Numbers in 2004 for both A and AS level were too small to allow national comparisons to be made. Standards of work seen in Year 13 are below average but in Year 12 they are at least average and improving. Standards on entry to the sixth form for the current Year 13 were well below average and for the current Year 12 below average; overall achievement is good.

161. Learning is good because of good teaching. In Year 12 the students' high level of motivation leads to interesting discussions between students and teachers in which they explore new scientific ideas. They respond to the high expectations of their teachers and have developed confidence in their ability to achieve well. In Year 13 students are less able to work independently and some find it difficult to apply skills and knowledge and to talk fluently and confidently about what they have learned; the scientific knowledge of this cohort of students is much less secure than in Year 12. Lessons are well prepared with a variety of tasks that stimulate interest and encourage learning. Students are well provided for with text books and good support material that backs up class notes. However, opportunities to challenge students and encourage and develop independent learning skills are missed, particularly through the lack of use of ICT in teaching and in practical work; although students are able to carry out individual research well.

162. Leadership and management are good. The curriculum is well organised and appropriate for most students, but there is no provision for students to follow any vocational courses. Teachers share expertise and good practice and coordinate their work well. Marking is thorough with useful diagnostic comments and good use is made of previous examination questions. National data is used to predict performance and set the students challenging target grades. However, actual performance is not monitored against these targets and some, particularly in Year 13, are unsure how these relate to current standards and what they need to do to improve.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

163. No courses were inspected in depth in this curriculum area. Two lessons in AVCE ICT were sampled. Achievement was satisfactory. Students work with independence and application. Their designs, for example, for a logo, floor plan and accompanying stationery for a new night-club are well conceived.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

164. Students have too few opportunities to make use of ICT in their work. Planning for the use of ICT is not sufficiently robust and the lack of equipment for more specialist uses limits the students' progress.

HUMANITIES

165. The focus was on sociology, but one lesson of history was observed in Year 13 and a sample of students' work was examined. The work seen was of an above average standard and there was evidence of the students using their own computers to undertake research work at home.

Sociology

The provision in sociology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards of work in Year 13 are above average.
- The quality of teaching and learning are good and result in good achievement in lessons.
- Very positive student attitudes in lessons result in a productive working atmosphere.

Commentary

166. No students entered the A-level examination in 2004. Of the four entered in 2003, half attained higher-grade passes and all passed. National comparisons are not possible because of the small numbers involved. The course has improved in popularity with increased numbers opting to follow the AS course in the present Year 12. For present students, standards in Year 13 are above average. Students achieve well. They have developed a good understanding of traditional and contemporary theoretical sociological perspectives, which they apply well, for example, in the sociology of religion.

167. The quality of teaching and learning are good. Short, lively lesson introductions ensure good consolidation of previous learning. A very good command of the subject ensures they are challenged to think sociologically and refer to different theoretical perspectives. As a result, students are also growing in confidence and are well prepared for their examinations. Lessons are demanding, but a variety of structured activities means students are involved and deepening their knowledge and understanding. In a Year 13 lesson, for example, students worked hard when developing their knowledge and understanding of how to define and measure 'consensus' using different research styles. Effective questioning ensures all contribute to lessons and students are encouraged to work with different peers in pair and small group work. Sometimes, students are not encouraged enough to strengthen the quality of their work by referring to appropriate empirical research and the sources of this. The very good quality classroom working relationships, along with students' positive views of the subject, lead to a very productive learning atmosphere in lessons. Effective use of homework extends students' learning and they are encouraged to use the internet to support their own research. Good quality marking and oral feedback, particularly of essays, is much appreciated by students because their strengths are identified and they are told what they have to do to improve.

168. The subject is part of the humanities faculty. Leadership and management at this level lack focus and direction for the development of the subject and there is no monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning. However, day-to-day leadership and management are effective. Sociology was not reported on at the previous inspection.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

169. No subjects or courses were inspected in this curriculum area.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

170. No subjects or courses were inspected in this curriculum area, though a lesson was sampled in art and design. In the Year 13 art and design lesson, teaching and learning were good. Overall,

standards are below average. Designs are often simplistic because students do not have the depth of understanding of form and structure based on analytical drawing from observation. Achievement is good as students began the course with well below average knowledge and skills.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

171. No subjects or courses were inspected in this curriculum area, though a physical education lesson was sampled. This was a good lesson and the students achieved well because of the good teaching offered.

BUSINESS

The provision in business education is **good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The business teacher has excellent planning skills and has set high expectations for the students.
- Class and homework activities are very well designed to encourage students to become independent learners.
- There is no head of department and unclear senior responsibilities for business education. This limits the sharing of good practice and inhibits progress.
- Class relationships are excellent and the students' responses are enthusiastic.
- Though subject knowledge is very good, there is a lack of understanding of course assessment requirements.

Commentary

172. Business AVCE and office skills are newly established courses in the sixth form and it is not possible to compare standards with national benchmarks. Students taking business courses include new arrivals to the sixth form; the majority started the year with limited language and business skills. Their current standards in work seen are in line with national standards and their capacity to work independently is better than would be expected at this early stage of their course. Achievement is, therefore, good.

173. Students are encouraged to find out about local businesses for themselves. They are provided with good guidance and clear structures in order to help them develop research skills. Within two months of starting their course they were able to submit detailed studies of businesses such as Marks and Spencer. This approach helps them develop a thorough understanding of basic concepts such as business organisation and marketing. They are encouraged to develop detailed records of what they have learned and they are becoming more confident learners.

174. The quality of teaching and learning is good. The business teacher is highly experienced and has excellent planning and organisational skills. Her communication skills are also very good and she has high expectations. Students respond positively and have a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve. They work well together and make rapid progress in their learning. There are, however, weaknesses. There is a lack of understanding of the standards required in examinations and coursework and there are few links with other providers of business courses.

175. There is no head of business studies. Roles and responsibilities of senior staff are not clear and leadership is unsatisfactory. The day to day management of business courses is, however, sound as the newly appointed teacher has made rapid progress in developing effective schemes of work, and has a good understanding of her own development needs.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

176. No subjects or courses were inspected in this curriculum area.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

177. No subjects or courses were inspected in this curriculum area.

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	5
How inclusive the school is		4
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	0	0
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	5	5
Overall standards achieved		5
Students' achievement	3	5
Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		4
Attendance	5	5
Attitudes	3	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3	4
Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		3
The quality of education provided by the school		5
The quality of teaching	3	5
How well students learn	3	5
The quality of assessment	4	4
How well the curriculum meets students needs	5	5
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		4
Accommodation and resources	5	5
Students' care, welfare, health and safety		4
Support, advice and guidance for students	3	3
How well the school seeks and acts on students' views	3	5
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		3
The quality of the school's links with the community	4	4
The school's links with other schools and colleges	4	4
The leadership and management of the school		5
The governance of the school	5	5
The leadership of the headteacher		4
The leadership of other key staff	4	5
The effectiveness of management	4	5

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