

INSPECTION REPORT

RIBSTON HALL HIGH SCHOOL

Gloucester

LEA area: Gloucestershire

Unique reference number: 115751

Headteacher: Mrs A Chong

Lead inspector: Bob Allan

Dates of inspection: 27th September - 1st October

Inspection number: 268893

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Grammar (selective)
School category: Foundation
Age range of pupils: 11 - 18
Gender of pupils: Female
Number on roll: 739

School address: Stroud Road
Gloucester
Gloucestershire
Postcode: GL1 5LE

Telephone number: (01452) 382 249
Fax number: (01452) 308 833

Appropriate authority: The governing body
Name of chair of governors: Mrs I Peck

Date of previous inspection: 19th April 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Ribston Hall High school is a smaller than average girls' 11 - 18 selective school. It serves pupils from a wide range of backgrounds from the city of Gloucester and surrounding area. The sixth form is of average size and includes a small number of boys. The school has Investors in People (2001), Artsmark Gold (2002), Sportsmark (2002) and International School (2003) awards. Over 90 per cent of pupils are white, of British origin. Others are mainly of mixed race with a small number of Asian, Asian British or Black Caribbean origin. There are very few for whom English is not their mother tongue. Pupils' attainment on entry is very high but spans a wider range than is typical for similar schools. Few pupils leave or join the school at other than normal times. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs, including those with statements, is well below the national average. Most numerous are those with hearing impairment.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
19278	Bob Allan	Lead inspector	
19639	Gill Anderson	Lay inspector	
1085	John Laver	Team inspector	English A-level English literature
18967	Brenda Loydell	Team inspector	Mathematics A-level mathematics
32277	Bob Bates	Team inspector	Science A-level biology
30888	Lieve Walsh-Nelissen	Team inspector	French
22491	Lorraine Small	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT)
23324	Sylvia Greenland	Team inspector	Geography A-level sociology
20716	Reg Grogan	Team inspector	History Religious education
8530	John Adams	Team inspector	Design and technology
20533	David Rogers	Team inspector	Art and design
24026	Celia Holland	Team inspector	Music
15971	Mike Pye	Team inspector	Physical education A-level physical education
12179	Laurence Moscrop	Team inspector	Citizenship
11720	Philip Winch	Team inspector	Special educational needs
13048	Tony Boyden	Team inspector	Work related learning A-level business studies

The inspection contractor was:

Tribal PPI
Barley House
Oakfield Grove
Clifton
Bristol
BS8 2BN

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Ribston Hall High School is a good school. Teaching is effective so all groups of pupils learn and achieve well. The school has a very good ethos that embraces all of its pupils. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

THE SCHOOL'S MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES ARE:

- Standards of work in the main school and the sixth form are well above national expectations and in 2003, GCSE results were above those of similar schools.
- The school takes very effective steps to enable all of its pupils and students, from whatever background or of whatever capability, to be fully integrated.
- Pupils and students have very good attitudes to learning. They participate well in all that the school offers so that they are very well prepared for the next stages of their lives.
- The headteacher and senior managers do not work as an effective team to ensure that the best practice is sufficiently widespread.
- Several managers are unable to fulfil their roles effectively because they lack the necessary training, guidance, confidence or firm direction.

Improvement since the time of the last inspection is a balance of strengths and weaknesses. Overall, it has been satisfactory. Good progress has been made in strategic planning. Departments are now more widely involved. Assessment procedures have been introduced but progress in this area has stalled. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is now well managed. Accommodation has improved, although it remains unsatisfactory. Information and communication technology (ICT) resources are much improved, although some are inadequate, so breaches of statutory provision persist.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Achievement is good in all years. Standards are well above national expectations at the end of Year 9, Year 11 and in the sixth form. Whilst standards on entry are well above average, many pupils join the school with results in National Curriculum tests for 11-year-olds that are below those typical of selective schools. Good teaching ensures that pupils make good progress in Years 7 to 9, continued through Years 10 and 11. This leads to GCSE results that are very high in comparison with all schools, indicated by A* in the following table, and better than those of pupils who reached similar levels of attainment in national tests for 14-year-olds two years earlier. Pupils achieve very well in the humanities, the visual and performing arts, science and ICT at the end of Year 11. Standards in music at the end of Year 11 are outstanding. Pupils with special educational needs and those with particular gifts or talents achieve well.

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

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

Students achieve well overall in the sixth form. Their results were above the average for all students in 2003, when the means of comparison was changed, so that the difference in the table above from 2002 to 2003 does not necessarily indicate a fall in standards. Of the sixth form subjects inspected in full, in physical education and business studies, students achieve well and in English, mathematics, biology and sociology, they achieve very well.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their attitudes are very good and they behave very well. Attendance is very good in the main school and the sixth form.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides a **good quality of education** for its pupils and students. **Teaching is good in the main school and the sixth form** and, as a result, pupils learn well in all years. There are some significant variations in teaching and assessment practices so that, although pupils have considerable capacity for independent learning, some are not always encouraged to exercise it. Overall, the curriculum is satisfactory, with some very good features, but it does not meet the full requirements for information and communication technology (ICT) or religious education. In the sixth form, students enjoy a very wide range of options, either in the school or at one of its local partners.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Leadership provides a clear direction for the school but the headteacher and key managers do not work as an effective team. Consequently, some monitoring is not sufficiently searching to identify persisting weaknesses and inconsistent practice. Some managers do not carry out their roles well, due to changes for which they are unprepared, or lack support to follow through intentions with purposeful action. Governance is satisfactory. It plays an important part in school developments. However, since the last inspection, effective action was not taken soon enough to ensure that the curriculum complies with statutory requirements.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents hold the school in high regard. They value the lengths to which staff go in order to ensure that pupils are able to benefit fully from the school's provision. They are pleased with the effective action that is taken to deal with the rare instances of harassment that occur. Several are concerned that the reports that they receive and the assessment scales used fall short of what they need to play a full part in their children's education. This is a view that is broadly substantiated by the inspection. Pupils enjoy school and, for the most part, appreciate their good teaching. A minority express frustration at the restrictions some teachers place on them, feel their voice is not heard and are keen to take more responsibility.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS THE SCHOOL SHOULD DO TO IMPROVE ARE:

- co-ordinate management at all levels to improve the rigour and effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation across the school;

- ensure that the best practice in teaching and assessment is clearly recognised and that action is taken to ensure it becomes more widespread;

AND, TO MEET STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS:

- teach religious education in all years and the full programmes of study for ICT; and
- provide a daily act of collective worship.

THE SIXTH FORM AT RIBSTON HALL HIGH SCHOOL

Ribston Hall High School has an average-sized, mixed sixth form. It provides AS and A-level courses. It offers vocational and other courses in partnership with other institutions.

OVERALL EVALUATION

Ribston Hall High School has a good, cost-effective sixth form. Its students achieve well overall and their results in A-level examinations are regularly above the national average. This is due to the expert teaching from which they benefit and their very mature attitudes to learning. Their very good attendance ensures that they make the best of the good provision that the sixth form offers. Teachers know their students well and generally provide the necessary guidance so that students know clearly how to improve their work.

THE MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES ARE:

- Very good teaching in English, mathematics, biology and sociology results in students achieving very well in these subjects.
- In 2003, A-level results were well above the respective national averages for dance, geography, history, mathematics and physical education.
- Effective teaching enables students to learn productively and regularly achieve results that are above the national averages at A-level.
- Accommodation for independent study is inadequate for the size of the sixth form.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, modern foreign languages and communication	Very good. A-level results are often well above average. Students are taught very well and are currently achieving very well to reach above national average standards.
Mathematics	Very good. A-level results are well above average and current standards are above national expectations because teachers are experienced experts who teach very well. Hence, students' achievement is very good.
Science (biology)	Very good. Students learn and achieve very well because their attitudes to learning and their teaching is very good. Standards are currently well above national expectations.
Humanities (sociology)	Very good. Current standards are above national expectations and students are achieving very well because of their excellent attitudes to the subject and the very good teaching they enjoy.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel (physical education)	Good. Standards of work seen are well above national expectations. Students are well taught so that they learn effectively; their achievement is good.
Business	Good. Standards currently are well above national expectations and pupils are making good progress and achieving well because teaching 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'.

In addition to the subjects that were inspected in full, work was sampled in modern foreign languages, theatre studies, ICT, physics, chemistry, human biology, history, geography, philosophy and ethics, psychology, politics, art and design, music, product design, dance and the enhancement (general studies) programme.

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

The school provides students with good levels of advice, guidance and support. They benefit from a comprehensive guidance on sixth form courses, both those provided by the school and those offered by partner institutions. Their progress is carefully tracked so that they can be given support when needed. They receive good, well-informed advice as they prepare to enter higher education or employment. They receive good levels of care, not only individually, but through carefully prepared components of the enhancement programme.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is **very well led and effectively managed**. Leadership provides very clear and purposeful direction to those who work with students. Management is good and gives, for example, careful attention to issues of recruitment and retention. As a result, the information on which decisions are based is well researched and reliable. Some elements of the inconsistencies, evident elsewhere in the school, such as marking quality, carry through to the sixth form and remain to be effectively dealt with. Promising changes have been made recently but there has been insufficient time for their impact to be felt.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students, including those having recently joined the sixth form from elsewhere, speak highly of their school. They value the open and friendly atmosphere that exists amongst students and between them and their teachers. They enjoy their greater independence whilst remaining closely involved with younger pupils through extra-curricular activities and by taking more responsibility for their welfare. Students find it difficult to gain access to computers for private study. Some feel that not enough of the school's good intentions are followed through.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

All groups of pupils and students achieve well in the main school and the sixth form. Standards of attainment are **well above national expectations** overall and in the core subjects of English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT) at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Standards of work seen in Year 13 are well above national expectations and show no difference between the achievement of males and females.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- GCSE results have been outstanding in recent years, when compared with national averages.
- In 2003, pupils achieved standards in GCSE examinations that were above those of pupils with similar prior attainment.
- By the end of Year 11, work seen indicates that pupils achieve very well in science, ICT, humanities and the visual and performing arts.
- Results of National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science have fluctuated significantly in recent years.

COMMENTARY

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	38.6 (42.0)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	43.2 (44.1)	35.4 (34.7)
science	39.7 (41.1)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 114 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

1. In 2003, test results at the end of Year 9 were well above the national average but lower than in the previous three years, when they had been very high. Standards were well below those of other selective schools but this was because Ribston pupils' attainment on entry is lower than selective schools generally. Considering their attainment on entering the school in Year 7, pupils' rate of improvement corresponded closely with that of similar pupils nationally. The trend in results has been broadly in line with the national trend. Results in 2004 improved significantly.
2. Standards of work seen in English, mathematics, science and ICT are well above national expectations. Standards in English, mathematics and science correspond with the school's 2003 national test results. In ICT, they are better than teachers' assessments suggest. In history, geography and religious education, standards are also well above national expectations. In other subjects, they are above national expectations. This represents good achievement. Pupils are well taught, make good progress and achieve well. However, in Years 7 to 9, assessment is not sufficiently well linked to National Curriculum criteria and pupils are often not clear about what they can do to

improve. Management is not sufficiently effective to ensure that the best assessment practices are followed widely.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	98 (100)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	53.0 (51.3)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 105 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. As had been the case in the preceding three years, GCSE results in 2003 were very high compared to the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more grades of A* to C and pupils' average point scores were in the top five per cent nationally, broadly matching the school's targets. Most significantly, however, these results were above those of pupils with similar prior attainment or in selective schools, showing that Ribston pupils had achieved well in public examinations.
4. In Years 10 and 11, pupils are well taught and achieve well. Standards are well above national expectations in all subjects except for art and design and citizenship, where they are above. Standards achieved by the small number of pupils who specialise in music in Years 10 and 11 are outstanding. Achievement is very good in science, ICT, humanities, and the visual and performing arts (art and design and music). In these subjects, teachers provide expert guidance that enables most pupils to become effective independent learners. Some teaching is too restricting to enable all pupils to exercise their capacity for working independently and management is not successfully addressing this shortcoming. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well, overcoming barriers to their learning, to gain the highest grades in several subjects.

SIXTH FORM

5. In 2003, students' A-level point scores were above the national average. Results were very similar in 2004. In 2003, the average points score in history was very high in comparison with results nationally (in the top five per cent), as it had been in 2002. Results were well above average in dance, geography, mathematics and physical education. In almost all other subjects where there were sufficient candidates to make a reliable comparison, results were above the corresponding national subject averages. However, in drama, they were well below the national average and in biology, they were average. Considering students' prior GCSE results, they made good progress overall to achieve well at A-level. In English, biology and business studies, where there were enough male students for comparison to be reliable, males performed better than females in the examinations.
6. In English, mathematics, biology, business studies and physical education, work seen during the inspection was well above national expectations and in sociology, it was above expectations. These findings represent good achievement in business studies and physical education and very good achievement in English, mathematics, biology and sociology. Overall, sixth form students are well taught and make good progress that results in good achievement. There is no evident difference in standards of work seen, or achievement, between the genders. Students' very good attitudes and their high

attendance rates make a significant contribution to their achievement. Good management contributes to well co-ordinated teaching and learning in Years 12 and 13.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	94.2 (98.9)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	39.1 (50.2)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per pupil	285.9 (315.1)	258.2 (263.3)

There were 51 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND OTHER PERSONAL QUALITIES

Pupils' attendance is very good and they are very punctual for school and for lessons. They have very good attitudes towards school activities and behave very well. Provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- The very productive school ethos promotes very good relationships.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to school so that they enjoy all aspects of school life.
- Pupils of all backgrounds and abilities are very well integrated.
- Behaviour in lessons is very good and sometimes excellent.
- Attendance is very good because pupils want to be in school.
- The school is not sufficiently aware of pupils' views to act effectively in response to them.

COMMENTARY

7. Pupils bring with them very good attitudes that make a significant contribution to their achievement because they want to learn and do well. They develop a very mature sense of social responsibility through their work in the community and generous support for charity. Dance and drama make a very good contribution to developing good levels of confidence and self-esteem.
8. Pupils behave very well as they quickly respond to the pervading ethos that promotes courtesy and friendship. This creates a strong sense of community amongst them. They have considerable capacity to exercise responsibility for themselves and others. They are thoughtful and articulate but have few avenues through which they can routinely participate as partners or leaders in wider school developments. The questionnaire that the school used to canvas pupils' views was not analysed in a way that revealed the increasing sense of frustration by pupils as they mature. Overall, however, they are very happy with their lives at school; even in Year 11, where there is some disaffection following irregular teaching last year, most pupils express satisfaction with the school.
9. Exclusions are rare. Bullying is not an issue as pupils and parents say isolated incidents are dealt with effectively. The school has commenced a thorough review of its behaviour policy involving pupils and teachers in order to develop realistic and appropriate rewards and sanctions.

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

Categories used in the Annual School Census	Number of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	618	0	0
White – Irish	5	0	0
White – any other White background	10	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	12	2	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	3	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	10	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	14	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	7	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	8	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1	0	0
Chinese	2	0	0
Any other ethnic group	3	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	8	0	0

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

10. Very good relationships, combined with very good initiatives to help understand the different lives of fellow pupils, ensure that those from very varied backgrounds and with different abilities are equally valued and very harmoniously integrated.
11. Pupils have good opportunities to reflect in many areas of school life, such as dance, religious education and sociology. Some school assemblies also provide calm moments when pupils can consider issues such as the meaning and purpose of life and consider the quality of life of other peoples around the world. These occasions help the pupils to respect the feelings, values and beliefs of others. There are few opportunities created for them to experience this across a wider range of subject departments.
12. Pupils are taught the principles that distinguish right from wrong through lessons in science, history, English and physical education. The personal, social and health education programme makes a significant contribution to moral development, raising issues connected with personal relationships, sex education, alcohol, bullying, drugs education and smoking. Provision for social development is very good. Pupils are taught how to live responsibly in a community. The pupils engage imaginatively in work for charity. Positive relationships are developed through a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including residential trips away from school. Good opportunities exist for pupils to take responsibility as form officers and charity representatives.
13. The citizenship programme makes a significant contribution to pupils' social development as well as to other aspects of their lives. Provision for cultural development is very good. Visits to museums and theatres enable pupils to appreciate their own cultural traditions. The multi-cultural aspect of school life is strong, both in subject

departments and across the school as a whole. Visitors to the school and trips and projects abroad help the pupils to appreciate the cultural traditions of others. The school has won an award for the multicultural dimension of the curriculum.

ATTENDANCE

14. Attendance has improved since the last inspection because of very good initiatives to monitor absence first thing in the morning. In spite of the shabby environment in parts of the main school, all pupils look very smart in their uniforms and are proud of their popular school.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	5.3	School data	0.1
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

SIXTH FORM

15. The sixth form is a friendly community of male and female students who arrive at school early to enjoy each other's company. They communicate in a mature and articulate way amongst themselves and with teachers and visitors, because the school has cultivated and nurtured their personal development very well. Encouraged by the effective and enthusiastic leadership of the sixth form, students have redecorated and refurbished their common room. They are justly proud of what they have achieved. Students are helpful, considerate and articulate. They provide very good role-models for younger pupils and make an important contribution to the life of the school. Male students say how much they value the ethos of the school and the positive impact it has on them.
16. Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. A general course called the enhancement programme, followed by all students, plays a significant part in this. It covers many moral issues which helps them learn the principles which distinguish right from wrong. It also has a strong social element whereby, through mixing with many groups outside the school, students learn to respect the feelings, values and beliefs of others, as well as learning the responsibilities of living in a community. It also widens their knowledge and understanding of other cultural traditions. Some opportunities occur for students to develop self-knowledge and spiritual awareness but these are fewer than for other areas of personal development. Far-sighted management ensures that issues of importance to students, such as dealing with sexual harassment in the workplace, are dealt with. Students can take responsibility through some committees that exist in the school, as well as through the prefect system.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides a good quality of education for its pupils and students. Teaching is good, with several very good features, but some weaknesses. The curriculum contains a balance of strengths and weaknesses. It is satisfactory, overall. Leadership and management are satisfactory.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching is good and, as a consequence, pupils and students learn and achieve well. Very good teaching is evident in all subject areas. This is more so in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form so that pupils and students are well prepared for GCSE and Alevel examinations. Assessment, though satisfactory, is not sufficiently effective so that many pupils, especially in Years 7 to 9, have little idea how they might improve their work. Pupils apply themselves conscientiously and are enthusiastic so learn well.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- Teachers have high expectations of pupils' work rate and conduct so that well above average standards are maintained throughout the school.
- Teaching is particularly effective in Years 10 and 11 so that pupils make good progress and achieve well when compared to similarly capable pupils in other schools.
- Teachers apply their very good specialist knowledge well to engage and sustain pupils' interest throughout most lessons.
- Pupils are enthusiastic and invest time and effort to learn effectively and achieve well.
- Assessment is not used consistently well to provide pupils, especially in Years 7 to 9, with a clear understanding of what they must do to improve. The overall progress of particular groups of pupils is not as well monitored as their progress towards individual targets.
- Management of teaching is not effectively remedying weaknesses.

COMMENTARY

17. Teachers expect pupils to work hard and behave well. The most successful teaching embodies challenging but realistic objectives for pupils' learning. This shows itself in the productive rate at which pupils develop skills, acquire knowledge or deepen their understanding. The most effective teachers use the introductions to lessons to capture pupils' interest or imagination and build on that with high-quality questioning and debate. In these lessons, pupils rise to the challenge and, encouraged with meaningful praise, work with a very high level of commitment and maturity to achieve very well. In Years 10 and 11, teachers convey a good understanding of GCSE requirements in most subjects so that pupils are able to learn independently.
18. Pupils are keen to do well. This very good attitude to their own learning contributes significantly to their learning and achievement as they go through the school. During an art and design lesson, pupils responded very enthusiastically to the teacher's critical questioning, leading them to concentrate closely on the impact of colour. Consequently, they quickly came to produce impressive work that illustrated their heightened appreciation of both colour and form. Very good relationships develop so that pupils enjoy the appreciation of their peers when they make useful contributions in lessons. For example, both teacher and classmates valued the personal knowledge and experience of a pupil, recently returned from a foreign visit, as it enabled them to appreciate the cultural context of the music that they were studying. Pupils with special educational needs benefit equally from good teaching. Teachers know these pupils' needs well so that they are able to provide different tasks and materials to help them learn well.
19. Common weaknesses are evident, sometimes in otherwise very well-taught lessons. Teachers' planning and methods do not always allow pupils to deepen their understanding by thinking things through for themselves. This arises in different ways. In

some other lessons, the teacher leads activities for too long or provides too much explanation. This prevents pupils or students from developing their powers of deduction or building for themselves on their previous learning. In some lessons, teachers pose very good questions but then go on to answer them themselves or interrupt pupils so that they have little opportunity to voice their ideas. Occasionally, some teachers digress unproductively so the pace of learning slackens significantly or an over-authoritarian approach stifles pupils' questions. In many lessons, the most capable pupils are continually challenged so that they produce their best, but in a few, they are expected to wait while other pupils catch up. These shortcomings are serious when they result in pupils not making the progress of which they are capable and not achieving as well as they should.

20. Instances of very good teaching are widespread so that there are examples of very effective practice in all subject areas. Subjects are often well led but not as well managed. Monitoring of teaching is not sufficiently rigorous to identify weak practice so that effective action can be taken to remedy it. Consequently, the very high quality of teaching in some lessons is not developed by other teachers. Where subject managers do not exercise their authority effectively, shortcomings in monitoring by senior management do not identify and overcome these barriers to improvement.
21. The quality of assessment varies across the school. It is better in Years 10 and 11, where GCSE criteria are better understood, so teachers help pupils know the level at which they are working and how they can achieve higher grades. In Years 7 to 9, the impact of variation between subjects is more marked. Pupils are often unsure which features of their work are best and what they should do to improve. Some subjects, such as English and history, use the National Curriculum's levels and descriptors effectively, with pupils involved in self-assessment to their clear benefit. Some other subjects use test marks without relating them to level descriptors. This leads to wide variation in the extent to which pupils are capable of assessing their own work and progressing independently. The school's system of frequent judgements of effort and attainment, on the basis of expected levels in each year, helps form tutors with their regular monitoring of progress through individual interviews with pupils. However, this internal monitoring system causes confusion when used as a means of reporting to parents, or for making summative judgements on standards. The music department, amongst others, finds comparison of the school's system with National Curriculum assessment unwieldy. Assessment of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory, an improvement since the previous inspection. However, targets and achievement criteria in individual education plans are not specific enough to make overall evaluation of progress straightforward.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 141 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
4 (3%)	52 (37%)	69 (49%)	15 (10%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

Sixth form

22. In the most effective lessons, teachers use the depth of their considerable specialist knowledge to provide rich illustrations in response to students' questions. They direct

learning very well whilst taking full advantage of students' clear capacity for independent learning. They do this readily as students' views and ideas emerge during debate, discussion or when developing hypotheses. Rather than providing clear-cut answers, teachers identify fruitful areas for students to consider so that they in turn respond very well by refining their thinking and understanding. At its best, this shows students how to test their opinions and turn them into compelling argument or to reflect self-critically in order to refine their performance or creation to a high level. This is not always the case, however, as sometimes students are not expected to speculate about alternative outcomes or substantiate their views. In the absence of guidance or sufficiently clear examples from the teacher, some students are reluctant to discuss each other's work critically lest they appear to do so insensitively. The pace of work slackens in some lessons when teachers dictate notes rather than providing guidance for required notes, leaving their detailed development to students themselves.

THE CURRICULUM

The curriculum is satisfactory. It offers a good range of courses in the main school and the sixth form but not all subjects meet their requirements to teach ICT and all pupils are not taught religious education in Year 11. The school offers very good opportunities for enrichment, particularly in sport and the arts. Accommodation and resources are unsatisfactory.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- The broad curriculum in Years 7 to 9 prepares pupils for later specialisation.
- Collaboration with other schools and colleges ensures pupils have a wide range of choice of sixth form studies.
- Participation rates across a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities are high and all sixth form students take part in community service.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory and resources are inadequate for some specialist teaching.
- Some curriculum areas do not make the full statutory provision.

COMMENTARY

23. The school's curriculum is satisfactorily broad and balanced, containing both strengths and weaknesses. There is a good range of opportunities and a good level of challenge to help able pupils achieve well. For example, all pupils between the ages of 11 and 14 study two modern foreign languages. GCSE texts are used with younger pupils in English and physical education theory is taught to younger classes. The extra-curricular programme of music and sport is very popular and has a high take-up rate. The quality of the careers, citizenship and personal, social and health education programmes is good. However, there are some statutory breaches which limit opportunities for a sizeable number of pupils. Fifty per cent of Year 11 pupils are not taught religious education. The provision of information and communication technology throughout the curriculum is unsatisfactory. Although it is good in some areas, like humanities, it is deficient in other areas, such as music, and does not meet requirements in modern foreign languages. Anomalies in timetabling and a relatively large number of split classes have an adverse effect on the continuity of learning in some subject areas, such as mathematics and modern foreign languages.

24. Extra-curricular provision is very good. The school has been awarded the Artsmark Gold Award in recognition of the very well developed extra-curricular opportunities in subjects such as dance and music. The pupils also benefit from a wide variety of sports clubs, as well as the many opportunities to participate in school shows and productions. Visits home and abroad, such as those to Auschwitz, Paris and local theatres, provide good opportunities for pupils to extend and reinforce their learning. A week of special activities gives opportunities for a range of workshops, and for sixth formers to carry out community work. The effectiveness of this very good programme is maximized by the very high attendance rates in the various clubs on offer.
25. The school provides well for its pupils with special educational needs. Their teachers make good use of the information from the co-ordinator so that they take the needs of individual pupils into account when planning lessons. These pupils enjoy full access to the curriculum and follow courses up to A-level, and move on to university or employment accordingly.
26. Accommodation is unsatisfactory, as it was at the time of the last inspection. However, good progress has been made to address a number of the previous shortcomings. A new performing arts suite now provides very good facilities for music and excellent provision for dance. Very good progress has also been made in the provision of specialist ICT facilities, with three rooms now available which accommodate full classes. In addition, the reorganisation of some classrooms has enabled more departments to have their teaching rooms located together. However, geography still lacks adjacent rooms and some art and design lessons are taught in classrooms as there is insufficient specialist accommodation. Also, there are still teachers who have no base and move from room to room. For some, this is exacerbated by poor timetabling. Provision for indoor physical education remains unsatisfactory. There is a lack of social areas for pupils at break and lunchtimes during inclement weather and the dining room is too small, which results in pupils eating packed lunches on the floor of the school hall, constituting a health hazard.
27. Resources are satisfactory. They are good for mathematics, where pupils have access to good textbooks, graphic calculators and computer software, and there is also a good range of resources for physical education. However, they are unsatisfactory for business studies, where pupils have poor access to ICT and good quality videos, and in music, where a lack of music technology limits the range of experiences available. Good access to computers is provided in the three specialist ICT rooms, but most subjects have unsatisfactory access to ICT in classrooms, which limits the extent to which ICT is used to support learning across the curriculum.

Sixth form

28. Through its wide partnership with other schools and colleges, the school can offer its students the full range of post-16 courses. The success of its arrangements is evident in the increasing number of sixth form students that the school recruits. Overall, it attracts more pupils from other institutions than it loses. Prominent amongst the students that go elsewhere are linguists who wish to take up specialist languages. Students speak highly of the school's extensive efforts to ensure they have access to the courses best suited to their aspirations. Good management is responsible for identifying reasons for some pupils not pursuing sixth form studies or higher education. These are then taken into good account within the particularly effective enhancement programme.

29. Accommodation for the sixth form is unsatisfactory. The common room, built to accommodate 80 students, is much too small for the 180 students now on roll. Also, there is very little accommodation for individual private study. Accommodation for subjects is satisfactory.
30. Resources are satisfactory. A good range and quality of resources support sixth form courses. However, most subjects have unsatisfactory access to ICT and there is also insufficient access to ICT for private study.

WORK RELATED LEARNING

It was not possible in the inspection week, because of school timetable arrangements, to see lessons including work-related learning. The present arrangements for work-related learning are satisfactory. Pupils gain good knowledge and understanding of the world of work through well-structured careers education and work experience but there are few links with business through which the pupils could develop a clearer understanding of the relevance of their subjects to the workplace or to the economy in general. Careers guidance is good but restricted by limited accommodation, lack of computer equipment and very little access to employment services. The various elements of work-related learning do not form a coherent pattern of provision.

CARE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

The school makes good provision for the care, welfare, health and safety of its pupils and students. Its provision of support, advice and guidance in the main school is satisfactory and good in the sixth form. The school takes satisfactory account of pupils' views in its work and development.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- Parents value the high levels of care and concern shown for the wellbeing of pupils.
- Child protection and health and safety procedures are secure.
- Assessment procedures are not sufficiently well established to support, advise and guide pupils.
- The school has few routine procedures allowing pupils to voice their views of the school.
- Targets and achievement criteria for pupils with special educational needs are not sufficiently precise for their progress to be readily monitored.

COMMENTARY

31. This is a fairly small school where pupils are known well by their tutors and directors of learning support and their needs recognised. Year 7 pupils consider teachers to be very friendly and helpful and that they were well prepared for their transfer to the grammar school. Tutorial time is used well to settle pupils into the start of the week, to motivate them to learn and to involve themselves in the life of the school.
32. Staff understand child protection procedures and work effectively within the agreed procedures with outside agencies. Policies follow local education authority procedures. Health and safety procedures are adequate.

33. The school is sensitive to pupils' individual needs, not only when alerted by parents but when pupils appear to be underachieving. The school's recent survey of pupils' views shows that about a quarter of pupils do not feel there is an adult to talk to about their problems and this number increases in Year 10. A smaller proportion are not confident about finding a teacher to help with work. The survey also shows pupils to be dissatisfied with the information they are given about their own progress. Assessment arrangements are not well established and pupils are not always clear about what they need to do to improve, particularly in Years 7 to 9. The school recognises that assessment, reporting and monitoring need a complete overhaul.
34. The school gives good guidance to pupils with special educational needs. In lessons, teachers give very good personal support by encouraging pupils and valuing their achievements. Pupils speak well of how the school has helped them to overcome difficulties and of the useful careers advice they are given. However, the targets and achievement criteria in individual education plans are not precise enough to make evaluation of progress easy. Neither are pupils involved in reviewing their own progress and shaping their plans, so the effectiveness of these plans is blunted.
35. The school lacks a routine system for canvassing pupils' views so that emerging concerns can be identified early and addressed. Whilst during the inspection there was a good choice of healthy food, pupils are unhappy about the arrangements at lunchtime because accommodation is inadequate. It is particularly inappropriate for those with packed lunches who sit on the floor in the hall.

SIXTH FORM

36. Sixth form students receive good support and guidance and are confident in their knowledge of how to improve their work. They say that marking in most subjects indicates A-level grades clearly. The head of sixth form has made herself accessible to students by moving her office to be near them so they have an adult to turn to in addition to their personal tutor. The head of sixth form has worked hard with students to improve their accommodation. Career guidance is readily available and there is a programme of very good support for those not going to university.
37. Students feel well cared for and secure. Consequently, as sixth form monitors, they are very supportive to younger pupils. Sixth form students, both male and female, are very positive about school. The sixth form students are adequately involved in the work of the school, which seeks their views through the sixth form council.

PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS, OTHER SCHOOLS AND THE COMMUNITY

The school has satisfactory links with pupils' parents and carers. Links with the wider community, including other schools and colleges, are good.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- Annual reports are not yet of sufficient quality to involve parents fully as partners in learning.
- The school capitalises well on the expertise and resources in the community to improve pupils' learning.
- Good liaison with other schools ensures a successful transition for Year 7 pupils.

- Strong links with partner schools enable older pupils to take part in learning activities not otherwise available.
- Where their own child is involved, parents can provide exceptional support, for example, in dance productions, where parents make a major contribution to outstanding success.

COMMENTARY

38. Generally, parents are satisfied that they are notified of school events and that the school responds to their concerns, but not with the quality of information provided in reports, particularly in Years 7 to 9. The inspection supports their concerns as reports do not give an adequate picture of what pupils know, understand or can do, or of what they need to do to improve. Neither do reports contain specific targets enabling parents to help pupils achieve them. Reports are not as good as at the time of the last inspection, when parents felt well informed about pupils' progress. Tutorial time is used well in Years 7 to 9 to build a good working relationship with home through good monitoring of planners.
39. The school harnesses the expertise and resources in the community very well to enhance learning. Visits outside are many and varied and contributions from visiting speakers enrich the curriculum. Many people from the community use the facilities regularly. Members of the congregation from the local church are trained to carry out examination supervision, thereby providing teachers with time to train by observing each other's teaching.
40. Good procedures with primary schools ensure a confident and successful transition into the grammar school for Year 7 pupils, who are very pleased with their reception. Pupils are guided well to make appropriate choices about the next stage of education. The careers education programme gives good guidance to Year 11 pupils on how to make decisions about their options post-16. They are strongly encouraged to visit other schools' sixth form open evenings to investigate provision there.
41. Parents provide excellent support for dance. This ensures a professionalism in productions that draws enthusiastic support from public audiences. This enables productions to be self-supporting. The department has built up a substantial wardrobe of high quality costumes made by parents. However, wider links are not so effective. Support for the Ribston Hall association is in decline.

SIXTH FORM

42. The sixth form has good links with the community and satisfactory links with parents. Strong links with the local Member of Parliament give the sixth form a valuable insight into the Houses of Parliament, contributing well to their developing awareness of citizenship. Strong links with partner schools enable students to take part in learning activities and courses not otherwise available. There are reciprocal arrangements for other schools, although more students come into the school than go out. All Year 12 students are involved in work in the community and this contributes well to their development as responsible citizens. There is equality of opportunity for all students, regardless of gender or ethnicity, and the sixth form itself is a very well integrated community.
43. The school is the largest member of the four-strong South of Gloucester Sixth Form Partnership, which enables students from across the four schools to gain access to wider curriculum provision. It particularly suits those students who prefer to stay on at school rather than move to further education college. Only a very small number of students from

the current Ribston Hall sixth form take advantage of consortium arrangements. However, a significant number of students from other schools take advantage of provision in the sixth form and they respond very positively to their experiences. The quality of provision is monitored across the consortium, with the support of the local education authority, and effective means have been developed to transfer information between schools and to keep parents informed. The heads of sixth form meet regularly but there are few other staff links. There are now plans to establish joint provision at GCSE level with particular emphasis on access to vocational subjects.

44. There are effective arrangements, outside the formal partnership, whereby pupils have transferred to other school sixth form courses, particularly in modern foreign languages.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Leadership is satisfactory as it is committed to raising standards but does not monitor performance effectively. Management is satisfactory but has some weaknesses that have led to significant inconsistencies in several areas. Governance is satisfactory because it has secured satisfactory improvement since the last inspection but has not established full compliance with statutory curricular requirements or with the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- The headteacher and senior managers are very committed to ensuring that all pupils and students are fully integrated in the school and its sixth form.
- Leadership in history, religious education and citizenship in Years 7 to 11 is very good.
- The headteacher and senior managers do not work as an effective team. As a consequence, the work of the school is not sufficiently well co-ordinated.
- Some key managers are not effective because they are not sufficiently clear about the extent of their responsibilities.
- Monitoring and evaluation, particularly of teaching and assessment, is not sufficiently rigorous to reveal significant inconsistencies in practice and follow up with firm action.
- In the sixth form, overall leadership and that in English, mathematics, biology and sociology is very good.

COMMENTARY

45. The governing body, the headteacher and other senior managers share the same very high ambitions for the school. This has helped to sustain high standards of attainment and personal care across the school. Standards of attainment in the sixth form have improved since the time of the last inspection. Provision for ICT and religious education is much improved, though does not yet fully meet statutory requirements. There are clear plans to finally overcome the remaining shortcomings in the near future. A local review of secondary provision throughout the 2003/2004 school year has involved governors and key staff in time-consuming consultations to secure the future of the school. This has coincided with significant changes within the senior management team and re-constituting of the governing body, thereby compounding the difficulties they face.
46. Leadership in history, religious education and citizenship provide examples of very good practice and this is widely recognised in the school. An initiative to encourage teachers to observe each other's classroom practices was introduced during the summer term of 2004. This has encouraged professional dialogue about different teaching methods.

Senior management expertise is being developed in partnership with a Leading Edge school to take advantage of this and lay the foundations for further improvements in general teaching quality.

47. Expertise within the leadership team is not effectively shared with the result that the school's capacity to sustain improvement is vulnerable to staff changes. Monitoring is hampered by a poor timetable and the information system to which it is linked. Currently, the information system cannot produce individual pupils' timetables, for example, for tracking purposes. Neither does it allow the performance of specific groups of pupils or students, such as those from ethnic minorities, to be evaluated. The frequency with which management responsibilities have been redistributed in recent years has meant that some important initiatives have not been well developed. For example, improved methods for successful teaching in Years 7 to 9 have not been adopted in those areas where they are most needed.
48. The quality of management of different aspects and subjects in the school varies too widely, from very good to satisfactory, for good progress to be established. Roles are not sufficiently well defined for responsibilities to be clear and effectively exercised. When they need advice and support, teachers often refer to managers with whom they have worked before rather than the manager directly responsible for the aspect concerned. This produces imbalances between managers' workloads and undermines their capacity to fulfil those duties for which they are accountable. Furthermore, it perpetuates uncertainty about who is responsible for what. Some changes, although administratively convenient, do not promote best practice. For example, the individual progress discussions with pupils are now easier to organise than formerly but the new arrangements mean a loss of teaching time and a lowering of the prominence that assessment has. The creation of separate language departments is intended to improve organisation but has created a gap in overall co-ordination of modern foreign languages.
49. Routine monitoring has not revealed the extent of weaknesses in teaching so that these persist. For example, in some lessons that are dominated by the teacher's presentations, pupils' learning is limited and they do not achieve as well as they otherwise might. Some managers have responded passively in the face of reluctance by some teachers to change their teaching methods.
50. Financial planning is prudent and firmly controlled. Comparisons with income and expenditure patterns of similar schools and competition in contracting help the school to ensure that it gives satisfactory value for money. The school is less effective at challenging its practices and consulting with parents and pupils.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	2,643,447
Total expenditure	2,624,794
Expenditure per pupil	3,723

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	104,359
Balance carried forward to the next	123,011

SIXTH FORM

51. Leadership of the sixth form is clear-sighted and very purposeful. Management is effective. Several changes have been introduced in recent terms but there has not been sufficient time for their full impact to be felt. For example, based on the views of former students relating to their experiences at university or in work, an additional day conference has been planned in partnership with the LEA and other schools. This will provide students with valuable insights into the challenges to be faced after they leave.
52. Patterns of recruitment and retention are carefully analysed. This has shed light on reasons why some students leave to follow modern foreign language courses elsewhere and why it is that some very capable students choose not to follow higher education courses. This provides a good basis for information for prospective students. The most recent information and recruitment evening resulted in a significant growth in numbers of students enrolling this year.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

ENGLISH

Provision in English is **good**.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- Standards of pupils in Years 9 and 11 are well above national expectations.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes and achieve well in response to good teaching.
- There is very good assessment, giving pupils a clear understanding of how well they have done and how they can improve.
- Good leadership and management promote improvement.
- More able pupils sometimes achieve less than they could in lessons when too much direction from teachers restricts their independence and initiative.

Summary of key inspection judgements

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above national expectations	Well above national expectations
Achievement	Good	Good
Quality of teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership of the subject	Good
Progress since the last inspection	Satisfactory

COMMENTARY

TEST AND EXAMINATION RESULTS

53. As in mathematics and science, the National Curriculum test results for Year 9 pupils in English in 2003 were well above the national average, as were the unvalidated results for 2004. The 2003 results were similar to those of pupils of similar prior attainment in other schools. The GCSE results for Year 11 pupils in 2003 were well above the national average. Results in literature were above those of schools where pupils are of similar prior attainment, but results in language were below this standard.

STANDARDS AND ACHIEVEMENT

54. Standards of work in English are well above national expectations for pupils in Years 9 and 11. This is true of all the key areas: speaking, listening, reading and writing. Pupils of all ages speak clearly and confidently and listen well to each other. Pupils also read fluently, accurately and expressively. They write with a high degree of accuracy, imagination and often, flair. Many able pupils, even before the age of 14, produce

sophisticated analyses of major themes, such as courtship in Victorian fiction. Older pupils build on their skills to sustain a high level of critical analysis. Pupils join the school with language and literacy skills either above or well above national expectations. Those of all levels of ability achieve well by the ages of 14 and 16, as reflected in examination results, although the most able pupils sometimes achieve less well in lessons where the teaching is too restricting and teacher-controlled.

Teaching and learning

55. Teaching and learning are good. The best teaching is very successful in promoting active, independent and collaborative learning in pupils of all ages, building upon their very positive attitudes and keenness to participate in lessons. Good learning also takes place when teachers have high expectations of pupils and ask challenging questions. These encourage pupils to reflect, discuss and arrive at a deeper understanding, either in speech or through original, personal writing. These qualities were very evident in a Year 9 lesson in which the teacher used challenging but sensitive questioning, which gave pupils the confidence to discuss the complexities of family relationships arising from the 19th century texts being studied. Teachers also mark in detail and give useful feedback to pupils so they know how to improve. In a minority of lessons, the teaching does not allow more able pupils to achieve as well as they might. This is because the teacher does not allow pupils to substantiate their answers or misses opportunities to allow more active participation in reading or discussion. Sometimes, the pace of activities, such as those at the beginning of lessons, is too slow to allow for good learning.

Leadership and management

56. Leadership and management are good. Although there are some inconsistencies in the spreading of good teaching practice across the department, there is substantial monitoring and evaluation of progress. Considerable strides have been made in developing the use of assessment to monitor progress and to set targets with pupils. A good curricular enrichment programme provides a range of activities, such as the Year 9 Shakespeare evening, which pupils and parents enjoy. Teachers are experienced and there are good opportunities for professional development. The head of department takes a prominent role in developing English, both inside and outside the school. Standards are as high as they were at the time of the previous inspection, although they no longer compare so favourably against similar schools. Progress is still good, but some teachers are too directive. Assessment has much improved. Overall, there has been satisfactory improvement.

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

57. Standards of literacy are well above national expectations. Although the co-ordinator's role does not extend to monitoring the impact of literacy initiatives in subject areas, various departments have begun to consider approaches to developing literacy and using appropriate resources. Pupils develop extended writing skills well, showing a good range of language and accuracy. Standards of speaking and listening are also high and are sometimes encouraged well. For example, during the inspection, there was a good debate in Year 8 geography on the impact of the Kobe earthquake in Japan. In contrast, there are limited speaking opportunities in science and, although pupils are not held back, science teaching does not take sufficient account of pupils' good levels of literacy to promote learning. Pupils achieve well in most subject areas because they have the

language and literacy skills to work confidently and independently in class when given the opportunity. Very good literacy standards also help to make the pupils effective researchers.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Since September 2002, the modern foreign languages department has been split into separate French and German departments. In 2002 and 2003, teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 included both languages. French was inspected in full. German was sampled. GCSE results in German are well above the national average, with the majority of pupils attaining higher grades. Pupils seen in a Year 11 lesson clearly enjoyed their course and spoke vivaciously with minimal prompting from the teacher.

FRENCH

Provision in French is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good and, in some lessons, very good.
- Pupils' attitudes towards their work and relationships between pupils and staff are very good.
- Staff are well qualified and motivated, with high expectations for their pupils.
- Attainment is very good in Years 10 and 11, with the majority of pupils obtaining higher grades at GCSE.
- Good leadership ensured that standards were maintained during prolonged staff absence.
- The department does not follow a common strategy for marking and assessment.
- The use of ICT in Years 7 to 9 does not meet statutory requirements and there are restricted opportunities for pupils to apply ICT in Years 10 and 11.

Summary of key inspection judgements

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above national expectations	Well above national expectations
Achievement	Good	Good
Quality of teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership of the subject	Good
Progress since the last inspection	Good

Commentary

Test and examination results

58. In 2003, teachers assessed pupils' attainment as above the national average by the end of Year 9. These assessments included German and showed that the proportion reaching the higher levels was that expected nationally. GCSE results in French were well above the national average in 2002 and 2003 and have continued to rise year on year since the

last inspection. The proportion of pupils attaining the highest grades fell slightly in 2004. This was partly due to changes in staffing over the past two years; nevertheless, pupils achieve higher grades in French than in most other subjects.

Standards and achievement

59. Pupils speak spontaneously and with confidence when teachers use French during lessons. Pupils in Year 7, for example, can count sufficiently well to answer simple questions about their birthdays. However, there is no suitable extension work for high attainers or for those pupils who studied French in their primary schools. Listening skills are already well developed. Pupils are able to write answers after listening to a tape recording of a native speaker played at normal speed. By Year 9, in work seen, there is much emphasis on accurate and extended writing introducing different tenses. All lessons observed included appropriate use of all four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. The teacher skilfully guided a Year 11 group of reluctant pupils to use different tenses accurately in their writing. All groups of pupils make good progress.

Teaching and learning

60. Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of their subject, including those who teach in their second language. Pupils work confidently in pairs, which reinforces new language concepts effectively. Lessons are conducted at a good pace and pupils are challenged throughout. In the best lessons, teachers refer to previous learning, explain the aims of the lesson to pupils and set out clearly what they should be able to do and understand. This is then reviewed at the end of the lesson. In less effective lessons, teachers do not share their objectives clearly with pupils. In these lessons, pupils do not clearly understand what is expected of them by the end of each lesson, nor can they put that particular lesson in the context of other work. In many lessons, teachers have high expectations of pupils' correct use of grammar in speaking and writing. Some groups who lack the confidence to extend simple conversations benefit greatly from the French assistant's regular help. Most lessons rely heavily on textbooks and are directed strongly by the teacher with few opportunities for independent learning. In addition the lack of ICT equipment within the department restricts independent learning and deprives groups in all years of valuable tools to reinforce their learning. Homework is well used and allows pupils to reflect on and practise what they have learned in class.

Leadership and management

61. There is an ethos of constant striving for improvement among all members of the team. This has ensured that standards have been maintained, despite frequent staffing difficulties over the past two years. The newly-qualified teacher is well supported and, despite a timetable requiring numerous relocations, is already well integrated in the team. Senior management systematically monitors teaching and learning. Apart from the exchange programme, there are no co-ordinated extra-curricular activities during or after the school day. Since the last inspection, GCSE results in French have been regularly well above the national average. All teachers now insist on grammatical accuracy in writing and speaking from Years 7 to 11. Also, pupils from Year 10 onwards are now able to take part in a popular exchange programme with a school in Poitiers. This has resulted in some students, now in Year 13, completing their work experience in France. There is no co-ordinated assessment of National Curriculum levels. This is urgently needed for tracking progress over time and for defining and setting targets for pupils and the department.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- Standards of attainment are high and are improving.
- Teaching is good, with many strengths and some excellent features, but also inconsistencies.
- Leadership of the department is very good, with a supportive team of well-qualified and experienced teachers.
- Pupils' attitudes are very good. They show interest and commitment, and work hard.

Summary of key inspection judgements

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above national expectations	Well above national expectations
Achievement	Good	Good
Quality of teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership of the subject	Very good
Progress since the last inspection	Good

Commentary

Test and examination results

62. Year 9 pupils' national test results have improved steadily and in 2003, were well above the national average, similar to English and science. They were above those achieved by schools with similar prior attainment, and improved further in 2004, particularly for the highest levels. The GCSE results at the end of Year 11 were well above the national average in 2003, equal to those of similar schools but with a very high proportion of A* and A grades. Results in 2004 were slightly improved but with fewer top grades.

Standards and achievement

63. Pupils enter the school with well above average standards in mathematics. Although they achieve well in mixed ability classes in Years 7 and 8, their progress is not consistently good. In a Year 7 lesson investigating angles in a circle, pupils' weak skills using protractors prevented some from seeing the relationships they were looking for. In Year 8 lessons, higher-attaining pupils were often not stretched sufficiently or given extension work, and had to wait while others caught up. In Year 9, when pupils are in classes of similar ability, there is a better match to prior attainment and aptitude, with appropriate challenge or support. Understanding of algebraic expressions and equations is particularly good, and pupils plot and interpret graphs very well. By the end of Year 9, pupils achieve well, resulting in standards well above national expectations.
64. Years 10 and 11 pupils are thoroughly prepared for GCSE examinations. The majority are encouraged to aim for the highest grades and higher-attaining pupils are appropriately stretched, an improvement since the previous inspection. The Year 10 top set showed good understanding of quadratic equations, investigating where graphs cross the axes. Graphical calculators are frequently used to good effect, with high levels of skill by pupils, improving their learning of many topics. Most pupils have good number skills, and use a variety of mental or written strategies, though some resort to their calculators too soon. A Year 11 lower set found the sum of interior and exterior angles in polygons by drawing, measuring and spotting the pattern. All pupils are aware of mathematical terms and their meanings, and could explain methods and answers successfully.

Teaching and learning

65. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and plan well, often including a variety of learning activities, although the lack of easy access to computers limits pupils' use of ICT in lessons. Investigative skills are developed successfully, as a 'starter' activity or to

introduce a topic, improving pupils' ability to spot patterns. Learning objectives are insufficiently shared with pupils, and rarely feature in end-of-lesson summaries. Teachers use very good questioning techniques to assess how well pupils are learning. Discussion is handled very well in class, with an emphasis on correct mathematical language. Teachers have high expectations, challenging the more able and confident, while supporting others with individual guidance. A particularly good feature is the encouragement for pupils to say, "it is", rather than, "is it?", building self-confidence. Teachers monitor work in lessons very well, assessing understanding, and giving praise and encouragement. The policy for pupils to mark their own work sometimes results in books with unmarked work, and constructive diagnostic written comments are rare. Homework is regularly set and reviewed, and teachers record pupils' results in frequent tests. Pupils' attitudes to mathematics are very good. They show interest and often enthusiasm, and are willing to work very hard. Presentation of written work is excellent. However, lessons tend to be dominated by the teachers' expositions and there are too few opportunities for pupils to show initiative and take responsibility for their own learning.

Leadership and management

66. Very good leadership has established an effective team of specialists who work very well together. Ideas for teaching and learning are shared effectively, and staff development is good. Although ongoing assessment is good, and there is thorough preparation for external tests and examinations, insufficient use of National Curriculum levels and descriptors, throughout Year 7 to 9, affects judgements of standards. Policies, procedures and schemes of work are regularly reviewed. The department has a good supply of resources, such as textbooks and equipment, including graphical calculators. There are no computers within the department, other than teachers' laptops, and access to ICT is limited. The timetable this year has not improved effectiveness as part-time teachers move frequently between rooms. Management of the department has brought about good improvement since the last inspection.

Mathematics across the curriculum

67. Competence in mathematics is good. Very good numeracy skills are used in geography, where Year 11 prepare coursework with complex calculations using census data. Numeracy is also used very well in French and German lessons for Year 7 to 9, and in music, for example, when a peripatetic teacher was dealing with time-signatures. The numeracy co-ordinator provides good leadership. Since whole-school training has taken place, many departments have developed policies and procedures. Monitoring and evaluation is needed to ensure more consistently effective practice across the school.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- Standards are well above national expectations and pupils achieve well.
- The quality of teaching and learning are good, with some very good features that enable pupils to learn effectively in different ways.
- Teachers are enthusiastic and supportive, promoting positive attitudes to learning.

- In Years 7 to 9, assessment is not carried out consistently well and marking does not always show students how to improve their work.
- Pupils are not always sufficiently challenged in lessons, but good opportunities are provided for them to extend learning at other times.

Summary of key inspection judgements

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above national expectations	Well above national expectations
Achievement	Good	Very good
Quality of teaching and learning	Good	Very good

Leadership of the subject	Good
Progress since the last inspection	Good

Commentary

Test and examination results

68. As in English and mathematics, the national test results for Year 9 pupils in 2003 were in line with those of similar prior attainment. However, the proportion reaching the higher levels was less than in English or mathematics. The proportion achieving the higher levels was greater in 2004. In 2003, GCSE results were well above the national average. There has been an improvement in the proportion of students reaching the highest grades at GCSE in 2004.

Standards and achievement

69. In Years 7 to 9, pupils acquire a secure knowledge and understanding of key scientific concepts. They show enthusiasm for experimental work and show a high level of skill, with due regard to safety. By the time pupils reach Years 10 and 11, they are able to undertake systematic open-ended investigations with confidence. Teachers understand the different ways in which pupils learn and use wide-ranging methods to help them reach their full potential. However, in some lessons, pupils are given low-level tasks such as copying notes. These make ineffective use of time and lack sufficient challenge for higher-attaining pupils to learn more independently.

Teaching and learning

70. Very good teaching predominates in Years 10 and 11 and some is excellent. As a consequence, pupils are very well prepared for GCSE examinations and achieve very well. Some excellent teaching was also seen in Years 7 to 9. Most lessons start with particularly interesting activities that ensure pupils' involvement and capture their interest. Teachers know their subject very well and form high quality, supportive relationships with pupils. They make very effective use of models and analogies to help pupils understand difficult scientific ideas and offer high quality explanations. For example, some generate active, visual ways of illustrating complex scientific processes. Pupils have confidence in their teachers and do not hesitate to raise questions or seek clarification. Teachers use skilful questions to establish what the pupils know at the beginning of lessons and build effectively on their replies to advance learning. They explain their aims to the class and, in the best lessons, teachers refer to them throughout the lesson to ensure that pupils clearly understand the key learning points. The impact of otherwise very good lessons is sometimes undermined by ineffective review sessions at the end. Pupils show their capacity for independent research, for example, finding out the value of gravity on different planets of the solar system, by using the Internet. Teachers emphasise key scientific vocabulary well but do not promote speaking and listening skills sufficiently. Although there are examples of good practice, assessment lacks rigour, particularly in Years 7 to 9, so that pupils progress less rapidly in these years compared to Years 10 and 11. Marking comments do not always encourage or advise students on how to improve and assessment is rarely used to inform subsequent planning.

Leadership and management

71. The department is well led. Staff work effectively as a team, sharing a unity of purpose. Teachers share ideas and make effective use of external agencies such as the British Association of Young Scientists Awards. The science club is well attended by students in

Years 7 and 8, and it offers a wide range of activities. Management is sound but monitoring of the work of the department, particularly assessment, is a weakness that leads to different practices within the department. There is good accommodation, although laboratories are spread out, necessitating the transportation of equipment and chemicals. On occasions, lessons are taught in classrooms because there is no laboratory available. Technicians operate most effectively. The department is well resourced but, although ICT facilities have increased since the last inspection, there are insufficient computers available in the laboratories.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- GCSE examination results are well above the national average.
- Good learning resources and accommodation in specialist ICT lessons provide very good conditions for learning.
- Pupils show very good attitudes to the subject and to their work, and they are very well motivated.
- The quality of marking and use of assessment to plan work does not identify individual needs of pupils, particularly higher-attaining pupils.
- ICT is not used sufficiently in subjects across the curriculum, especially in music, design and technology and modern foreign languages.

Summary of key inspection judgements

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above national expectations	Well above national expectations
Achievement	Good	Very Good
Quality of teaching and learning	Good	Very Good

Leadership of the subject	Good
Progress since the last inspection	Good

COMMENTARY

Assessment and examination results

72. GCSE examination results in 2003 were well above the national average and they have remained broadly the same in 2004. They have improved considerably since the previous inspection. Teachers' assessment of pupils' work at the end of Year 9 suggests standards are in line with the national average.

Standards and achievement

73. Pupils achieve well because they enter the school with above average skills in ICT. They make good progress to reach well above the nationally expected levels by the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Teachers' assessments of pupils in Year 9 suggest that standards

are in line with national expectations. However, work seen during the inspection was well above that, especially in the skills of desk-top publishing and the use of spreadsheets and databases. Pupils present information using specialist software as well as acquiring basic skills using 'on screen' control software. They capture images using digital cameras and scanners and use the Internet to research information. Good achievement at the end of Year 9 is evident in pupils' standards of computer-based tasks as well as in their knowledge and understanding of the subject. Pupils in Year 11 achieve very well by completing well above average coursework. They develop a very good level of confidence and work very well in groups and also independently to master more complex skills. All pupils respond very well to the high expectations of the teachers and show very good attitudes to their work.

Teaching and learning

74. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and provide a good range of planned tasks and activities to involve pupils in their learning. Lessons are well structured and teachers ensure pupils' skills are complemented with associated knowledge. This supports pupils well in their learning and enables them to apply the relevant knowledge where it is required in the development of their own ideas. In Year 9, ICT is effectively integrated into the humanities curriculum but pupils have little idea about the standards of ICT that they are aiming for. In the main, teachers effectively support all pupils in lessons. However, the extent to which they provide for higher-attaining pupils, who need more challenging work, is limited. Marking of pupils' work in Years 7 to 9 provides only limited support to enable pupils to know what they have done well and what needs to be improved. The department provides good opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy and literacy skills. In Years 10 and 11, teachers structure the work well to enable pupils to follow the guidelines of the examination mark scheme. This enables pupils to gain marks for each section of the work. Teachers encourage co-operation in lessons and this leads to very good relationships and attitudes.

Leadership and management

75. Leadership provides clear vision for the subject and is supported by a team that is committed to maintaining and improving standards. There has been considerable investment to improve the standard of accommodation and resources, bringing the ratio of computers to pupils close to the national average. This has contributed well to raising standards. The next stage of development is to strengthen the marking, assessment and target-setting procedures. This will enable the department to make better use of more reliable data. It is also necessary to improve the use of ICT in subjects across the curriculum, particularly in music, design and technology, and modern foreign languages. Technicians provide very good support, which contributes well to the daily management of the facilities.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

76. Although the use of ICT has increased in most subjects, it remains patchy. It is well used in geography, history, religious studies and business studies. It is satisfactory in mathematics, English, science and art and design. However, it is unsatisfactory in music, design and technology, and modern foreign languages.

HUMANITIES

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Enthusiastic leadership and teamwork have developed teaching and learning styles that pupils find stimulating and enjoyable, increasing the subject's popularity.
- Successful teaching, promoting skills of independent enquiry, has achieved a significant rise in the proportion of pupils gaining top grades at GCSE.

- Rigorous assessment procedures and careful monitoring of pupils' progress, encouraging self-assessment and target-setting, are ensuring that pupils make the most of their capabilities.
- History is making a significant contribution to pupils' personal development, both in lessons and in extra-curricular clubs and visits.
- The temporary accommodation is barely satisfactory, despite teachers' efforts to improve the drab surroundings with displays.

Summary of key inspection judgements

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above national expectations	Well above national expectations
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Quality of teaching and learning	Very good	Very good

Leadership of the subject	Very good
Progress since the last inspection	Good

Commentary

Assessments and examination results

77. In 2003, teachers' assessments of standards at the end of Year 9 were well above average, all pupils reaching higher levels than are expected nationally. In 2003, results at GCSE were well above the national average, as in previous years, in keeping with standards achieved in selective schools. This year's results recorded a ten per cent rise in the number of A* and A grades, to include nearly two-thirds of the 64 candidates.

Standards and achievement

78. The attention to detail and presentation of work by Year 9 is impressive. In particular, pupils have shown initiative and skill in researching and organising material into diaries of a soldier in the First World War. High academic ability is evident in their essays explaining the causes of World War Two, many of which would pass for good GCSE answers. In lessons, pupils achieve a sophisticated understanding of how careful selection of evidence can be used to justify different interpretations of events. The teachers' emphasis on developing pupils' thinking skills around historical sources has accelerated pupils' progress to higher levels of attainment in the subject. As a result, many more are enjoying the challenge and choosing to study history for GCSE. By Year 11, pupils are producing meticulous notes that give them an ideal basis for revision. The quality of their essay work is high, developed through regular practice of examination questions and their well-developed capacity for expressing themselves in writing. Similarly, the girls' skills at analysing and evaluating historical sources are advanced for their age. They research and organise information intelligently, showing a good grasp of developments over time in recent projects on American popular culture. Pupils demonstrate the attributes of independent learners, applying themselves seriously to their studies and setting their targets high.

Teaching and learning

79. The teachers have been very successful in piloting methods developed in the National Key Stage 3 strategy for teaching and learning. They have extended the range of learning styles for pupils and the depth of questioning to promote higher-level thinking skills in the subject. Pupils have responded well to the challenge. Teachers know their pupils' academic needs and use group activities and extra time with individuals to ensure that all make very good progress. In particular, the skills of independent enquiry are well

promoted through research activities, using the school library and the Internet. The planned programme for teaching ICT skills through humanities subjects in Year 9 means that these pupils have regular access to computers, using the technology to good advantage for learning history. The enthusiasm of the teachers is caught by pupils, who are very positive about their work and enjoy learning. Most lessons are demanding, covering a lot of ground in the time and extending learning through homework. Just occasionally, the amount of source material is not enough to stretch able pupils or they could use it more creatively within the lesson. There are very good arrangements for assessing pupils' progress over the full range of history skills and for involving them in self-assessment and target-setting.

Leadership and management

80. The head of department leads a dynamic team of young teachers, who are keen to popularise the subject and develop new and exciting approaches to learning about the past. This makes possible the open, professional exchange of ideas and close working that characterises the department. It has helped resolve the problems presented by the unfortunate timetabling of split classes this year. Delegation of responsibility for resources is allowing each teacher to contribute creatively to the bank of learning materials. New initiatives have been managed very well. Their success is evident in increased numbers on the GCSE course. Departmental planning sets high targets, which are being achieved in excellent recent examination results.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average in all years.
- Pupils achieve very well in Years 10 and 11.
- Teaching and learning are good overall and very effective in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils' attitudes to their work are very good.
- There are some inconsistencies in assessment and marking in Years 7 to 9.
- The accommodation is unsatisfactory.

Summary of key inspection judgements

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above national expectations	Well above national expectations
Achievement	Good	Very good
Quality of teaching and learning	Good	Very good

Leadership of the subject	Good
Progress since the last inspection	Good

Commentary

Assessment and examination results

81. In 2004, teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 were well above national expectations. GCSE results in 2003 were well above the national average and slightly above the average for selective schools. They were also above the average for other subjects in the school.

Standards and achievement

82. Pupils progress very well to achieve standards that are well above national expectations by the end of Year 9. In Year 7, they acquire a good grasp of map work and begin to formulate geographical questions for investigation based on the local area. Year 8 pupils have a good understanding of plate tectonics and show mastery of geographical skills such as drawing profiles of a local river valley as a result of work done on a field trip to the River Churn. Year 9 pupils very effectively analyse and prioritise the needs of people in different parts of the world. Year 11 pupils make impressive progress, for example, using local census information to build a picture of the future housing needs of the citizens of Gloucester. This involves considerable mathematical skill and use of ICT in collecting and organising the necessary statistical information.

Teaching and learning

83. Teachers apply their excellent knowledge of the subject to ensure that the majority of classes are well taught. Teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9 because of some inconsistencies in marking and assessment, and some didactic delivery, in the earlier year groups. Lessons are well planned with a range of challenging activities that engage and excite pupils and give them the opportunity to work constructively in groups, which enhances their social development. For example, pupils were working in role as council members in Nairobi trying to plan improvements in the nearby shanty town, which enabled them to decide on priorities for themselves. Homework was always appropriately set to extend the learning in the lessons. Teachers are good at using interim assessment of progress during lessons so that they can adjust the pace to ensure pupils learn effectively.

Leadership and management

84. The head of department now has a stable team of teachers, after a hiatus in staffing in the summer term which had an effect on the learning of some groups in Years 7 to 9. She supports her team well through observation, informal discussion and the sharing of practical ideas. Documentation, policies and schemes of work are good but there are inconsistencies in interpreting National Curriculum criteria. At present, there is not enough guidance from senior management about several aspects of management, such as bidding for resources and interpretation of statistical information. Since the last inspection, oral work in lessons has been increased, which adds to pupils' personal development as well as to their learning. ICT is now well developed in the curriculum, though the department does not yet have sufficient access to facilities at the right times. An increasing number of pupils are opting for the subject, both for GCSE and for sixth form study. The problem with the accommodation remains. It is currently unsatisfactory, consisting of two rooms in unconnected mobiles. One teacher has no classroom of her own and teaches from a box of resources. There is no departmental office space. This

is not good enough for a developing department trying to teach a major subject to a high standard.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject is very well taught by specialists, using a wide range of methods that maximise pupils' learning.
- All pupils take the subject at GCSE and achieve high standards.
- Pupils enjoy the many opportunities for discussion and reflection on beliefs and values, which are effectively promoting their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- There is very good use of ICT in Year 9 to research information and present it in a variety of ways.
- There is little enrichment of the curriculum by way of visits to and visitors from faith communities.

Summary of key inspection judgements

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above national expectations	Well above national expectations
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Quality of teaching and learning	Very good	Very good

Leadership of the subject	Very good
Progress since the last inspection	Good

Commentary

Assessments and examination results

85. In 2003, teachers' assessments, based on the criteria laid down in the locally agreed syllabus, show Year 9 pupils achieving levels well above those expected for their age. Results at GCSE were also well above average on both the full and short courses in 2003 and up to expectation for selective schools. They were even higher this year with 100 per cent pass rate at grades A*-C.

Standards and achievement

86. Standards on entry to the school are above national expectations, rather than well above, as there is a wide variation in pupils' background knowledge of Judaism. Pupils' high potential was evident in their capacity for personal reflection and empathy in a Year 7 lesson on the Holocaust. By the end of Year 9, pupils' knowledge of the six major religions in Britain is well above national expectations. Their detailed notes on Islam and Buddhism are well researched and show a mature ability to reflect on the relevance of religious ideas to their own lives. The girls' attitude to their studies is excellent. They participate fully in discussions and use their initiative over independent enquiry. The quality of the Year 9 assignments on prejudice is most impressive, showing advanced skills in researching information and evaluating the issues raised. In the last two years, pupils in Years 10 and 11 have achieved outstanding results on the GCSE short course after only one year of study. Pupils are highly literate and articulate in expressing their views, taking account of religious teaching on moral and social issues. Year 11 pupils, resuming their religious education studies after a year's break, engaged in lively discussion about ageism and their essays on euthanasia show very good understanding of the issues involved. A small group of highly motivated Year 11 pupils is making very good progress on the full course in a lunchtime lesson, after having achieved top grades on the short course.

Teaching and learning

87. Highly productive relationships between teachers and pupils are fostering very good learning, giving pupils confidence to express their views in discussion. Teachers make use of a variety of stimulating activities to interest and engage all pupils in learning, challenging the most able and giving extra support to individuals with special needs. There are many well-planned opportunities for pupils to reflect on the spiritual, moral and

cultural aspects of different religions. Particular attention is also given to developing pupils as independent learners, through well-organised assignments that require them to research from reference books and the Internet. Close co-operation with the ICT department in Year 9 has produced ideal opportunities for pupils to advance their learning of religious education by using computer technology. Expert guidance and organisation of pupils' work at GCSE ensures that pupils master the examination techniques that will earn them high marks. There is a good framework for assessment of pupils' progress against clear criteria, through common assignments in Years 7 to 9 and practice questions at GCSE. Teachers are developing their use of level descriptors recommended by the agreed syllabus and are keen to make more use of other available assessment data to set appropriate targets for pupils.

Leadership and management

88. Very good management of the subject carried the department through a period of staffing turbulence last year, maintaining high standards in examinations. Clear vision and thorough planning for advancing the subject are evident in the development of courses at all levels, taking account of pupils' views. The subject leader is an excellent role-model in her enthusiasm for new ideas to improve teaching and engage pupils actively in learning. The environment for learning is barely satisfactory in the temporary buildings. The school was in breach of statutory requirements by not providing religious education throughout Key Stage 4. It has remedied this deficiency in Year 10, providing a two-year course for all pupils, giving them the option of choosing an accelerated route to full GCSE in the time, with provision for pupils of different faiths. The resolution of staffing problems and the improved allocation of time in Year 10, rolling through to Year 11 next year, is already having a significant effect on raising standards even higher.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results were well above the national average in 2003 and improved further in 2004.
- Too few pupils reach grade A at GCSE.
- Pupils have very good linguistic ability which they use well in their design work, particularly to analyse, evaluate, explain and develop their ideas.
- Pupils show good attention to detail when planning and putting their ideas into practice.
- Pupils do not achieve as well in systems and control work in Years 7 to 9 as they do in other areas.
- Pupils do not use computers sufficiently for design and manufacture.

Summary of key inspection judgements

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above national expectations	Well above national expectations

Achievement	Good	Good
Quality of teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership of the subject	Satisfactory
Progress since the last inspection	Satisfactory

Commentary

Assessments and examination results

89. In 2003, the proportion of pupils who achieved grades A* to C in their GCSE examinations was well above the national average. They also achieved more A and B grades than pupils did nationally. However, few of those who gained A grades in their other subjects reached a similar standard in design and technology. In 2004, the proportion of pupils who gained A* to C grades was even higher at 95 per cent. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 suggest that standards are well above national expectations. However, inspection evidence shows that this is not consistently the case as standards vary between different aspects of the subject.

Standards and achievement

90. By the end of Year 9, pupils have very good knowledge and understanding of most aspects of the subject and they use this well to design and make products in a range of different materials. They have very good research skills, analyse problems well and use their very good literacy skills to explain their thinking and the ideas they have drawn up. Their design work is often very well presented with very good graphical work. Pupils are confident in using tools and equipment to make products in food and textiles, where their manufacturing skills are well above average. However, pupils' skills in designing and making products that depend on using mechanism, computer control, electronics or structures are underdeveloped as few opportunities are provided in Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11, standards in lessons are generally well above national expectations in designing and making, and pupils apply their knowledge and understanding of the subject well in their Year 11 coursework projects. Here, they plan their work well and evaluate and refine their designs to reach very good standards. Standards are highest in food technology, where more pupils achieve A grades, than in resistant materials and textiles. Pupils of all ages have limited experience of computer-aided design and manufacture and their ability in this aspect of the subject is below national expectations.

Teaching and learning

91. Teachers enjoy the subject and share their enthusiasm with the pupils. Lessons are orderly and well organised, which ensures brisk starts to sessions and promotes confident pupils who often show good levels of independence in practical lessons. Pupils are clear about teachers' expectations in Years 10 and 11, where teachers often use assessment well to help pupils know what they have achieved and how to reach a higher grade. However, in Years 7 to 9, the pupils are often unsure of the standards they are achieving, or how to improve, or the standards of work they should aim to achieve. In Years 10 and 11, the target grades for which the pupils aim are sometimes too low, which contributes to fewer pupils gaining grade A at GCSE than in their other subjects.

Leadership and management

92. The current subject leader has held the post for a year and has made good progress over that time to improve standards, particularly at GCSE. The curriculum for Years 7 to 9 is currently unsatisfactory. This is because there are insufficient opportunities provided for pupils to apply principles of systems and control in order to design and make products that work. Monitoring systems are used to identify underachieving pupils and to review work in the classroom. However, the outcomes of monitoring and performance data need to be used more diagnostically in order to track the progress pupils make and the success of the teaching strategies used. There is limited access to computers for specialist applications in classrooms, which limits opportunities and pupils' expertise in this central aspect of the subject.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good, often very good, and students learn well as a result.
- Standards in Years 9 and 11 are above national expectations.
- Behaviour and attitudes are very good.
- Students in Years 7, 8 and 9 need to be better informed of the levels they are achieving in relation to the standards set out in the National Curriculum and ways of improving on these.
- Learning outcomes are not effectively monitored and evaluated as an aid to raising standards further.

Summary of key inspection judgements:

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above national expectations	Above national expectations
Achievement	Good	Very good
Quality of teaching and learning	Good	Very good

Leadership of the subject	Good
Progress since the last inspection	Good

Commentary

Assessment and examination results

93. GCSE results in 2003 were above the national average when compared with other selective schools, and very significantly above average when compared to all schools. The percentage of students gaining the highest grades increased again in 2004, maintaining the trend of recent years.

Standards and achievement

94. Pupils join the school with standards that are in line with national expectations. From the outset, there is a strong emphasis on the development of drawing and colouring skills. Pupils respond well to the learning opportunities provided by good teaching to achieve standards in Year 9 that are above national expectations. In Year 11, standards of observational drawing and representational painting are very good overall, when examination achievements are also considered. Pupils learn to manipulate a wide range of two and three-dimensional media successfully. Very effective teaching methods that emphasise research skills and increasing experimentation with form and colour contribute to pupils' growing confidence and their very good achievement.

Teaching and learning

95. Good planning, as well as the effective use of visual aids and demonstrations, supports learning and has a positive impact on achievement. Pupils learn to draw, use colour and manipulate a wide range of other media, including clay, with confidence and success. Students with special educational needs made the same good progress as others as the result of good class management. Additional learning opportunities and community links are good. However, in some lessons, pupils are not sufficiently challenged to accomplish more in the time available, and reviews at the end of some lessons do not rigorously evaluate learning. Pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 do not have a clear idea of what standards they are aiming for or how to achieve them. Homework, linked to classwork, supports learning and is set and marked regularly. There are insufficient planned opportunities to challenge gifted and talented students as a means of enabling more students to achieve the highest grades in examinations.

Leadership and management

96. The department is well led by an experienced and enthusiastic specialist who sets and maintains high standards. Management is satisfactory. This year, there are four non-specialists teaching in Years 7, 8 and 9, and non-specialist rooms are also being used. Monitoring and evaluation procedures need to be more thoroughly and consistently used to identify areas for improvement, and to more accurately inform development planning. The department’s strong emphasis on the development of skills is reinforced by a better than average time allocation. Provision for ICT meets statutory requirements, although resources are extremely limited. Improvement since the last report has been good, and includes the good displays of work in public areas which make a significant contribution to the school ethos. Accommodation overall is unsatisfactory.

Music

Provision for music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above national expectations at the end of Year 9 and GCSE results are outstanding.
- Teaching is good, and sometimes, very good.
- Extra-curricular provision is very good and about one-third of the school take part.
- The department now has new, purpose-built accommodation.
- Resources for music technology are insufficient.

Summary of key inspection judgements

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above national expectations	Very high
Achievement	Good	Very good
Quality of teaching and learning	Good	Very good

Leadership of the subject	Good
Progress since the last inspection	Good

Commentary

Assessment and examination results

97. In 2003, teachers' assessments of standards of attainment in Year 9 were above the national average, with about half of pupils reaching very high standards. Assessments were similar in 2004. Work seen in the inspection mostly supports this judgement but finds fewer pupils at the very highest levels. Those pupils learning instruments achieve standards well above national expectations. In Year 11, the results in recent years have been very high, with group sizes in line with the national average. 90 per cent of pupils regularly attain A* to C grades and in 2004, three-quarters of the pupils achieved the very highest grades.

Standards and achievement

98. Pupils enter the school with only average ability in music and their previous musical experience varies widely. Some have only experienced singing whilst a few instrumentalists are above national expectations. By the end of Year 9, pupils have a good understanding of a variety of musical styles and can use terminology appropriately to describe them. In performance, they can play melodies and chords and most can sustain a good ensemble in group performances. They also improvise using the blues scale. In composition, they have a clear understanding of the musical elements and can use them in different styles. Resources for music technology are very limited and pupils do not have opportunities to realise their compositional ideas or develop skills in manipulating their motifs. Performing is a particular strength in Years 10 and 11 and pupils play a variety of instruments in various styles. They often perform their own compositions but also use music technology for this. Listening and appraising skills are very good and pupils discuss musical features accurately and in detail. Standards and achievement in instrumental lessons are good and numbers involved are double the national average. Extra-curricular work is particularly good. Pupils join in the groups very enthusiastically and over one-third of the pupils take part in the large productions. In the sixth form, the choir leaders also take responsibility for running their own choir.

Teaching and learning

99. Teaching and learning are good in the classroom and in instrumental tutorials, and very good in Years 10 and 11. Lessons are well planned with a variety of tasks that help develop good all-round understanding of the topic. Tasks of varying levels of difficulty ensure that all pupils achieve equally and pupils know how to improve their work. Explanations are very clear and teachers use their good skills and knowledge of music to demonstrate and explain. Teaching is lively and good humoured, encouraging pupils to respond with considerable enthusiasm and energy. Pupils enjoy their lessons, work very co-operatively in groups and so learn effectively. Teaching is brisk and ensures that lessons move at a good pace. Teachers use skilful questioning to check, consolidate and extend pupils' understanding, and they take care to involve all their pupils. In some lessons, the practical sessions overrun and the end-of-lesson review is rushed. In the best lessons, there is a very good atmosphere for learning, with all wanting to improve.

Leadership and management

100. The subject leader has good plans for the department and is aware of the areas that are still to be developed. The visiting instrumental teachers are well managed. Assessment is thorough at all ages but in Years 7 to 9, it is confused by the fact that the department has to use the school's assessment levels and then convert them to levels identified in the National Curriculum. Some precision and accuracy is lost in this process. Nonetheless, pupils are aware of how they can improve their work and, in the upper years, pupils are given the examination board guides to gain further insight into the expectations of the boards. Resources for music technology are insufficient and pupils have very limited opportunities to develop skills to support their composition work. Some world music is studied in Years 7 to 9 but there is scope to develop this area further with more instruments. With the necessary resources and developing systems in place, the department is well poised to move even further forward.

Dance

Dance was sampled.

Dance is taught separately from physical education. It is a strong subject where pupils achieve very well as a consequence of some very good teaching and pupils' positive attitudes. The attainment of pupils when they enter the school is in line with national expectations. They achieve well and teachers' assessments, confirmed during the inspection, show standards are above the national expectation in Year 9. Those pupils that take GCSE dance achieve very well and examination results are consistently well above average. A high proportion of pupils obtain the highest grades. Teaching in the lessons seen was very good and there are very good relationships in the lessons. Pupils know the high expectations that teachers set and are extremely committed to improving their standards of performance. They work very hard in lessons and benefit from the expert coaching and support that the specialist teachers provide. At the core of the high standards of teaching and achievement is the way that, from the very start of Year 7, pupils are encouraged to take decisions and accept responsibility for their own learning. The pupils benefit from the excellent and committed leadership of the subject. This has resulted in very high expectations, and a deservedly high reputation in the community. Community links are very strong, with pupils and students performing in local schools, the local Cathedral and the school shows.

Physical education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards achieved in GCSE examinations are well above the national average.
- Pupils have very good attitudes and apply themselves very well in lessons.
- Pupils have very good opportunities to participate in sports clubs and attend in large numbers.
- The procedures for assessing and recording achievement are satisfactory but the pupils' awareness of National Curriculum levels and how to use them to improve their performance requires further development.
- Pupils' benefit from teachers' expertise that results in high quality coaching and a good mix of activities in lessons.
- Lesson introductions and conclusions are not consistently good.

Summary of key inspection judgements

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above national expectations	Well above national expectations
Achievement	Good	Good
Quality of teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership of the subject	Good
Progress since the last inspection	Good

Commentary

Assessment and examination results

101. In 2003, results of the statutory teachers' assessments for Year 9 were above the national average. This demonstrated a good improvement in relation to the pupils' prior attainment. In line with previous years, the 2003 GCSE results were well above average. Significant numbers gained the highest grades. The 2004 results show a similar pattern of achievement. There are no national comparisons for teachers' assessments for non-examination pupils in Year 11.

Standards and achievement

102. Pupils enter the school with standards in line with the national expectation. Achievement is good and, by the end of Year 9, standards are above the national expectation. GCSE pupils achieve very well and their examination results are consistently well above average. Non-examination pupils in Years 10 and 11, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds, continue to achieve well and by Year 11, standards continue to be above national expectations. Pupils' attitudes are very positive, and they willingly work hard to improve their performances. In GCSE classes, a very high standard of skills, together with knowledge of tactics, is apparent but opportunities to evaluate their own and others' performances are missed. Relationships are excellent and pupils co-operate very well. The standards of pupils' work are improved by their uptake of the very good extra-curricular clubs and fixtures on offer, including football and trampolines, so that overall, they achieve very well.

Teaching and learning

103. Teaching is good and, in some lessons, very good. Teachers are all subject specialists and pupils benefit from very good coaching, based on accurate ongoing assessment by teachers. Lessons are well planned with a good mix of appropriate activities but some do not plan work for pupils of different abilities. Very good relationships exist with mutual respect shown in all lessons. Consequently, pupils are confident to make suggestions and are eager to participate. Teachers do not consistently make clear the lesson objectives to pupils. Summary sessions at the end of lessons are often rushed with little time for pupils to reflect on their learning or to evaluate their progress. Marking is very supportive but the setting of targets for improvement is inconsistently applied.

Leadership and management

104. Leadership is good, with the development plan for the subject reflecting very appropriate priorities. The good curriculum, for example, has been well extended to include health and fitness theory in Years 7 to 9. An effective team has developed with teachers committed to improvement. Management is satisfactory and teachers benefit from clear policies and procedures. Programmes of work are good, although they insufficiently highlight where aspects, such as citizenship, might be introduced. Teachers have received appropriate training, although not all have knowledge of the National Key Stage 3 Teaching Strategy. The lack of a dedicated theory classroom and of easy access to interactive whiteboards limits the opportunities to develop the use of computers and video analysis. Improvement since the last inspection has been good with improved standards, leadership and teaching, although further work is needed in developing assessment.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business education

Provision in business education is **good**.

MAIN STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

- Standards have steadily improved in recent years, with results now well above the national average in GCSE examinations.
- Well-planned and well-informed teaching helps pupils to make good progress in developing their understanding and skills.
- Assessment is accurate and pupils are very clear about how well they are performing and the targets they need to set themselves.
- Although pupils use ICT well in parts of their work, they are disadvantaged by lack of ready access to computers.
- The pupils do not receive enough written guidance on how they might improve the quality of their work.

Summary of key inspection judgements

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	n/a	Well above national expectations
Achievement	n/a	Good
Quality of teaching and learning	n/a	Good

Leadership of the subject	Good
Progress since the last inspection	n/a

Commentary

Examination results

105. All pupils gained at least a C grade pass in the 2004 GCSE examination. As yet, there is no form of national comparison available but the results were well above national expectations. Whilst these results are similar to those in the previous two years, a smaller percentage of pupils gained the higher grades than in the previous year.

Standards and achievement

106. Most Year 11 pupils are working at levels well above national expectations and nearly all are making good progress. They work hard to produce neat and thorough work. They use technical vocabulary well. They apply it accurately when analysing current business situations, showing a good grasp of how producers assess their potential success in the market and adjust their prices accordingly. They generally apply mathematical and computing skills well in explaining their answers. The most able pupils analyse problems effectively. Nearly all the students have steadily improved the quality of their work over the past year but the least able continue to find it hard to analyse business situations and give an overall judgement on issues.

Teaching and learning

107. Lessons are well planned and the teacher provides good support for the pupils, making sure that they are clear as to the targets they need to achieve. The teacher uses a range of approaches that help engage and maintain pupils' interest. For instance, in a lesson introducing the notions of cost, revenue and profit, the teacher interspersed presentation of the main points and guided note-taking with short, sharp individual and group activity and discussion, to help the pupils develop and consolidate their understanding of how the terminology should be applied. Work is assessed accurately and pupils are well informed about why they have gained particular grades. However, pupils do not have sufficient written feedback on their work, to which they can refer later. Good use is made of ICT when the suite is available but the pupils are disadvantaged by lack of ready access to computers.

Leadership and management

108. The department is well led and managed. Business studies has grown in popularity as a GCSE option in recent years and there has been a substantial improvement in results. The teacher ensures that relevant and up-to-date learning resources are used, although she has to produce most of the non-text book materials herself. The department uses data well to review performance and to modify approaches to teaching and assessment.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Citizenship is well established throughout the school.
- The scheme of work and lesson plans are detailed and well prepared.
- Arrangements for the assessment and reporting of citizenship are already in place.
- Involvement in the community could be stronger.
- Learning about political issues is insufficiently broad.

Summary of key inspection judgements

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above national expectations	Above national expectations
Achievement	Good	Good
Quality of teaching and learning	Good	Good

Leadership of the subject	Very good
Progress since the last inspection	n/a

Commentary

Standards and achievement

109. As well as being taught as a discrete subject, citizenship is taught within the personal, social and health education programme, as well as in science, mathematics and the humanities. The pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of many aspects of the three main strands of citizenship. The standards of attainment are above national expectations. For example, pupils can talk knowledgeably about the diversity of identities in the United Kingdom and they know the importance of resolving conflict fairly. Their knowledge and understanding of the political aspects of the subject are less strong. Pupils display a wide range of skills in analysis, discussion and debate. Pupils participate actively in the community, though there is still scope for further development in this area. In personal, social and health education, the learning includes issues like drugs education, sex education, bullying, alcohol and smoking. The standards of attainment are also above national expectations. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve well.

Teaching and learning

110. The lessons seen during the inspection were mostly in personal, social and health education, though these included many aspects of citizenship. All lessons are well prepared and they include a wide range of imaginative methods to put across the subject matter. Clear objectives ensure that learning is purposeful and that good use is made of the time. Occasionally, when pupils are not required to formulate ideas and discuss the

issues, the pace of lessons is insufficiently demanding. Assessment and reporting arrangements are already in place. The teaching and learning in citizenship make a very significant contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Leadership and management

111. Leadership is strongly committed to providing good quality citizenship and personal, social and health education in the school and works hard to bring this about. The documentation is of a high quality and it ensures that all the statutory requirements of the two subjects are being met. It also ensures that other teachers of citizenship and personal, social and health education are clear as to what they have to do.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The tables below show entry and performance information for courses completed in 2003.

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
English literature	9	100	85.9	44	19.1	39	30.2
German	1	100	81.5	0	19.3	40	28.9
mathematics	2	100	61.9	100	17.1	55	22.1
biology	2	100	65.2	50	11.1	35	20.6
human biology	3	100	n/a	0	n/a	40	n/a
chemistry	1	100	72.7	0	13.9	20	24.1
physics	4	100	68.8	50	14.4	45	22.7
ICT	1	100	67.0	0	10.9	40	21.4
history	2	100	80.7	100	19.5	55	28.6
geography	3	100	74.3	33	19.8	43	26.5
religious studies	3	100	80.2	0	22.6	37	29.8
physical education	1	100	73.2	0	11.4	40	23.1
sociology	5	100	71.8	40	18.4	42	25.4
politics	2	100	n/a	50	n/a	45	n/a
business studies	2	100	76.4	0	16.3	30	26.2
psychology	19	100	69.7	21	16.7	39	24.1

Level 3 GCE A-level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
English literature	21	100	99.5	47.6	46.5	88.6	86.5
French	2	100	98.8	50.0	51.5	100.0	87.6
mathematics	11	100	96.7	81.8	55.6	100.0	88.8
biology/human biology	15	100	96.4	40.0	39.2	74.7	78.6
chemistry	4	100	97.6	50.0	49.0	90.0	84.9
physics	3	100	96.7	100.0	44.6	106.7	81.7
ICT	4	100	95.6	50.0	24.6	85.0	69.5
history	13	100	99.0	92.3	44.6	109.2	84.6
geography	7	100	98.7	42.9	44.5	91.4	84.0
religious studies	1	100	98.8	0.0	46.7	60.0	85.6
design and technology/product design	2	100	97.8	50.0	35.0	90.0	77.9
music	1	100	98.8	0.0	38.9	60.0	81.1
theatre studies/drama	5	100	99.5	20.0	40.1	72.0	83.6

physical education	5	100	98.0	60.0	30.9	92.0	75.2
dance	8	100	98.5	87.5	44.9	110.0	83.9
sociology	21	100	98.2	57.1	44.3	90.5	83.6
politics	3	100	n/a	33.3	n/a	79.3	n/a
business studies	9	100	98.7	33.3	36.8	82.2	80.1

ENGLISH, MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English literature was inspected in full. The theatre studies course and modern foreign languages were sampled. In the lesson of theatre studies seen, students were well taught learning techniques of improvisation effectively. In the French lesson seen, students achieved well in response to good, lively teaching. In the German lesson observed, very good teaching promoted a high degree of independent learning and students made very good progress refining their skills of speaking the language.

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards of work in Year 13 are well above national expectations.
- Very committed students achieve very well and learn very well in response to very good teaching.
- There is very good leadership and management in this successful department.

Summary of key inspection judgements

	Year 13
Standards	Well above national expectations
Achievement	Very good
Quality of teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership of the subject	Very good

Commentary

Test and examination results

112. Examination results in A-level English literature were above the national average in 2003. The proportion of students gaining grades of A or B was significantly higher in 2004.

Standards and achievement

113. Standards in English literature in Year 13 are well above national expectations in all areas, but particularly in the quality of critical analysis and the ability to communicate it effectively. Well-developed literacy enables students to discuss a range of texts confidently and articulately. They show a very good understanding of authors' techniques in texts as diverse as *'The Handmaid's Tale'*, the poetry of Philip Larkin, and the plays of Shakespeare and Marlowe. Students articulate their own individual responses very well and their contextual understanding is very good. This is partly because the students have very positive attitudes towards the subject, and are prepared to read a range of other texts in order to increase their general understanding.

Teaching and learning

114. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject, and succeed in getting students to participate through questioning, research and collaborative work. This was seen to good effect in a Year 13 lesson in which students made their own selection of First World War poetry and combined a strong personal response with sustained critical analysis to develop a good understanding of how the nature of war poetry changed. Students are keen to participate in discussion and this promotes very good learning.

Leadership and management

115. Leadership and management are very good. The department successfully adapted its approach to relatively new syllabuses and evaluates its progress effectively. The teachers are knowledgeable and experienced. Standards of attainment and the progress made by students have improved significantly since the previous inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

116. The literacy skills of sixth form students are very good. Teachers emphasise the importance of precise use of language in other subjects, so students become effective in the use of specialist vocabulary. Speaking and listening are very well developed, especially in those lessons where discussion plays a prominent part.

MATHEMATICS

Mathematics courses in the sixth-form include modules of pure mathematics, statistics, mechanics and further mathematics.

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Consistently high standards at A-level.
- Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject. They research topics well, although a greater range of learning styles would better prepare students for life after school.
- The power and beauty of mathematics are emphasised by teachers and appreciated by students.
- Students have very good attitudes, show interest and enthusiasm, and work hard.

Summary of key inspection judgements

	Year 13
Standards	Well above national expectations
Achievement	Very good
Quality of teaching and learning	Very good

Leadership of the subject	Very good
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Commentary

Examination results

117. Although the size of A-level groups has varied, results have been consistently high. In 2003, results were well above the national average, with 90 per cent achieving grades A or B and all passing. Results were lower in 2004, with 50 per cent of students achieving a high grade. Considering their GCSE results, this group achieved well. Year 12 AS results were equal to the national average in 2003 and rose in 2004.

Standards and achievement

118. Students in Year 12 have only just started their course and standards are well above national expectations. Knowledge and understanding of equations from former work helps all students make rapid progress. Year 13 students deal with pure topics, quickly becoming familiar with the sigma notation and arithmetic sequences. By the end of one lesson, students were able to derive and prove the formula for the sum of an arithmetic series, and had the skills to prove other facts from basics. All students show interest and commitment, although some are rather passive, and all worked hard, compiling comprehensive high quality notes and exercises that help reinforce their learning.

Teaching and learning

119. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject, research topics thoroughly and plan lessons well. Most lessons begin with the teacher presenting a topic and then building on students' existing knowledge and understanding by discussion, question and answer. Although such exposition was excellent in many cases, students have few opportunities to show initiative, research for themselves, or practise presentation skills. Teachers use overhead projectors with graphical calculators well, and students are proficient with all types of calculator. Insufficient access to, or use of, computers again limits styles of teaching and learning styles. An excellent feature of lessons is the teachers' enthusiasm, and their promotion of the power and elegance of mathematics, which students appreciate. The story of the young mathematician, Gauss, speedily finding the sum of numbers to 1000 caught students' imagination, as did the application of statistics to the phenomenon of freak waves. Instant assessment, using whiteboards, is an innovative approach that is enjoyed by students. Assessment of students' work is good, based on examination criteria and teachers' thorough knowledge of their students.

Leadership and management

120. The head of department is an excellent role-model as a teacher and she inspires staff and students alike. The change in A-level criteria this year has been handled very well, with review of schemes of work and assessment methods. Textbook resources are good, and students buy their own essential calculators. Although improved since the last inspection, there is insufficient access to, or use of, ICT. Staff development is taking place, by passing on ideas from the two teachers who have attended external courses on teaching methods. Monitoring of teachers' and students' work is well organised. Formal and informal meetings are frequent, cordial and effective.

MATHEMATICS ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

121. Standards of numeracy are high and have been so over many years. Competence with calculators is good, graphical skills are high, and notably so in sociology and geography, with good use of numeracy in business studies. Most departments have policies and procedures, with examples of good practice, but these are not consistently applied. Monitoring and evaluation across sixth-form subjects does not ensure effective application.

SCIENCE

Biology was inspected in full. Lessons in physics, chemistry and human biology were sampled. In the physics lesson seen, students responded well to the good, well-planned teaching. The teacher's use of everyday examples succeeded in deepening students' understanding of challenging concepts. Students' files indicate that they make good progress and achieve well. In chemistry, students' skills and their persistence in learning enable them to make steady progress. In the lesson seen, the teacher made good links between practical work and theory so that students were able to make sense of new learning. In human biology, the teacher uses models and analogies imaginatively to clarify and extend understanding. Very good achievement is evident in students' work. Teachers' incisive comments ensure that students are well informed about how they are doing and what actions they need to take in order to improve.

Biology

Provision in biology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very high quality teaching based on very good knowledge of the subject.
- Excellent relationships that contribute to a positive learning environment.
- Highly effective use of models and analogies to assist students' learning.
- Develop further strategies to encourage students to increase their oral contribution to lessons.

Summary of key inspection judgements

	Year 13
Standards	Well above national expectations
Achievement	Very good
Quality of teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership of the subject	Very good

Commentary

Examination results

122. In 2003, results in A-level biology were in line with the national average. They corresponded closely with the school's targets and students' earlier GCSE results. A higher proportion of students gained the top grades of A or B in 2004. Students achieve well in external examinations at the end of Years 12 and 13.

Standards and achievement

123. Year 13 students are achieving very well. The standard of their work is well above national expectations. In the lessons observed, students listened intently to their teacher and were very involved with their learning. Students, although a little reticent in speaking, provided good, individual written responses on whiteboards when the teacher asked

them to draw cycles and flow diagrams to represent complex biological and ecological processes.

Teaching and learning

124. The quality of teaching is very high and student learning is correspondingly high. The teacher has excellent knowledge and is conversant with the latest developments in the subject. She makes very good use of external agencies to broaden students' learning experience. Students are encouraged to undertake independent research and they confidently use a range of resources, including ICT. Students are supported in their learning by reference to everyday examples and relevant applications of important biochemical processes. Following the teacher's well-executed demonstration, students show good acquisition of high-level practical skills as they undertake a precise analysis to separate amino-acids. As in the last inspection, the acquisition of analytical and evaluation skills is a strong feature. Students' work is marked with considerable rigour and includes helpful comments on how to improve and progress towards their targets. Students take good account of these comments in their subsequent work. This contributes to high levels of learning and achievement.

Leadership and management

125. The subject is very well managed and led, with very effective use of resources. The subject leader provides a useful induction programme to improve students' key skills so that they can benefit from independent learning methods from the beginning of the course. The department has a good range of computer programs for simulating biological processes. The success of this approach is reflected in the high retention rates in the last two years, although the numbers recruited are small.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Work in ICT was sampled. In the lessons seen during the inspection, students in Year 13 reached above nationally expected standards and they achieved well. Teaching and learning were both very good. This was evident in students' competence to master the more advanced ICT skills and in their ability to work independently.

HUMANITIES

Sociology was inspected in full. Work in politics, history, geography, philosophy and ethics, and psychology was sampled. In 2004, over three-fifths of students achieved a high grade of A or B in politics. In the politics lesson that was seen, students achieved well as a result of the very good teaching and their enthusiastic attitudes. In history, the A-level results have been outstanding in the last three years, with over three-quarters achieving a grade A or B. In the two lessons observed, highly effective teaching structured students' analysis of events around stimulating historical sources, using group work and discussion to great effect to maximise learning. One Year 13 lesson was seen in geography. The teaching was very good because the teacher used up-to-date and interesting resources to develop students' understanding about how far the prediction of and preparation for earthquakes can reduce damage and deaths. Students were encouraged to think for themselves and they achieved very well. Examination results show good achievement in relation to students' GCSE results. A-level results in 2003 were well above the national average. In 2004, three students achieved 100 per cent marks at AS level. Students' attitudes to their studies are excellent and they are

developing their capacity for learning independently very well. In the lessons of philosophy and ethics seen, students made very good progress. Year 13 students confidently presented their research into various beliefs about life after death. Year 12 students were well challenged by work of different complexity so they learned very effectively. Very good teaching is promoting students' scholarly approach to their studies, as well as providing ideal conditions for stimulating group discussion of religious and moral principles. In psychology, brisk, authoritative and lively teaching, supported by very good resources, provided the challenge to which students responded very well in the lessons seen. They worked energetically and, prompted by probing questions from the teachers, deepened their understanding significantly.

Sociology

Provision in sociology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are well above average.
- Students achieve very well.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- The department is very well led and managed.

Summary of key inspection judgements

	Year 13
Standards	Above national expectations
Achievement	Very good
Quality of teaching and learning	Very good
Leadership of the subject	Very good

Commentary

126. In 2003, A-level results were above the national average, with all students gaining a pass grade, which represents considerable achievement for students who have not studied the subject at GCSE. The few male students did not perform as well as female students. These standards improved in the 2004 examinations, with a greater proportion of students achieving the higher grades.

Standards and achievement

127. Standards of work seen during the inspection were above national expectations. Students are efficient note-takers and Year 12 students have very quickly accumulated a good knowledge of specialist sociological terminology. By Year 13, they can identify, compare and evaluate the contribution of different sociological viewpoints to the topics being studied. Their discussions are well disciplined and well informed and make a strong contribution to their learning.

Teaching and learning

128. The teacher's excellent knowledge of the subject enables her to present the lessons with clarity and to structure them so that students have to think for themselves, rather than being fed information. Time is well used and lessons unfold in a developmental way, taking students through a range of experiences that can be seen to be changing their understanding in a very tangible way. This was especially apparent in an excellent Year 13 lesson using an actual case study from a *Panorama* programme to illustrate the effects of "labelling" on the life chances of a youth from a deviant family.

Leadership and management

129. Management is very good and the teacher in charge maintains close links with the teachers of psychology, politics, religious education and geography. Students' progress is closely monitored and students are offered individual support, as and when necessary. Students enjoy their sociology studies and most believe they will find the subject useful in their future careers; about 25 per cent go on to further sociology-related study. They believe that their studies have changed the way they think about the world. Retention rates are very good. Nineteen out of 23 students completed the AS course last year and all who continued to A-level, completed it. The subject was not reported on in the last inspection so there is no evidence on which to base a judgement about improvement. However, there is no reason why such a well-managed subject, with such good results, should not continue to be strong in the future.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Work in product design (textiles) was sampled. The students seen in a product design lesson were working at standards which were well above the national expectations, maintaining the very good standards and progress achieved in their AS level examinations in the subject last year. The standard of teaching was very good.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and design and music were sampled. In the art and design lesson seen, teaching was good, with an imaginative approach to observation and recording work. Students' attitudes were very positive and standards were above national expectations. In music, standards vary according to students' abilities but are in line with national expectations; some are above. Teaching is good and numbers on the course are rising. Special opportunities are arranged for students to give recitals and this sense of occasion helps to produce best efforts from them.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education was inspected in full and dance was sampled. In dance, by Year 13, students achieve well and reach well above average results at A-level. In the lessons seen, the teacher set very high expectations, to which the students responded very well. In one, students taught others in the group, showing great respect for each other's views, as they did in the Year 13 lesson. Students are extremely committed to improving their standards of performance.

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards achieved in 2003 GCE examinations were well above the national average.
- Students have very good attitudes and apply themselves very well in lessons.
- Students benefit from good oral and written feedback on their work.
- Learning objectives are not made consistently clear to students, nor are they provided with time for reviewing their learning at the end of lessons.

Summary of key inspection judgements:

	Year 13
Standards	Well above national expectations
Achievement	Good
Quality of teaching and learning	Good

Leadership of the subject	Good
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Commentary

Assessment and examination results

130. Results in the 2003 A-level examinations were well above the national average and this constitutes good progress, given the prior attainment of these students. In 2004, the number of students gaining the higher grades was lower. Results at AS level have similarly been mixed in recent years, although there is a trend of improvement in the numbers of students obtaining the higher grades. Entry levels, though above the national averages, have been mixed, with some students not having a qualification in GCSE physical education.

Standards and achievement

131. By the end of Year 13, standards are well above the national expectations, with achievement overall being good. Students in Year 12 are making good progress in acquiring knowledge and understanding about the factors that affect sporting performance. They understand the influence of Victorian public schools on the development of British sport. Students achieve well in sport psychology. Students find the detail in the physiology aspects of the course the most difficult to understand. Non-examination students benefit from a good and varied programme of recreational sport, and demonstrate standards above average expectations.

Teaching and learning

132. Teachers have very secure knowledge of the subject and guide students' learning well in lessons. Very good relations exist within the classroom, and students are eager to participate and contribute their ideas. This was well illustrated when students became motivated by the task of identifying where various sports would be positioned on the open / closed continuum of performance. Teachers generally have high expectations of students and present them with some challenging work. Learning is not so secure when students become passive learners. This happens on occasions when teachers' presentations become too prolonged, when they dictate notes, or when students are asked simply to copy down notes from the board. Students learn best when learning objectives are made clear to them and when lessons conclude with effective summaries. Students benefit from the good course booklets that teachers have produced.

Leadership and management

133. Leadership provides clear vision for the development of the subject. The curriculum is good and presents opportunities for both examination and recreational purposes. Students following the Community Sports Leader Award help run in-school clubs as well as visiting primary schools. Computers and modern technology are increasingly used for research and for video analysis of student performance. The lack of a theory classroom means teachers are not always able to make full use of this technology. Management is satisfactory, with clear guidance given to teaching staff. Monitoring of the subject is not sufficient for inconsistencies in practice to be overcome. Feedback on students' performance in practical and written work is good and praised by students. Teachers' marking is regularly carried out and accurate, but there are inconsistencies in the degree to which students are informed about their progress against targets set for them. The clear commitment to improvement has resulted in improved standards since the last inspection.

BUSINESS

Business education

Provision in business education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have steadily improved over recent years and examination results are above the national average.

- Students respond well to effectively planned, positive and well-informed teaching and they make good progress.
- Students' work is accurately assessed and they are clear as to the progress they are making and the targets they need to set themselves.
- The department uses data very effectively to review and make steady improvement to its provision.
- Students lack sufficient written guidance on how they might improve their work.
- The department has a limited range of teaching resources and little ICT equipment of its own.

Summary of key inspection judgements:

	Year 13
Standards	Well above national expectations
Achievement	Good
Quality of teaching and learning	Good

Leadership of the subject	Good
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Commentary

Examination results

134. In 2003, A-level results were above the national average. In 2004, as was the case in 2003, all students gained A to E pass grades. Though there are, as yet, no national average grades to compare them with, these results are above the national average grades for the previous year. The students made good progress and more of them gained higher grades than in the previous year.

Standards and achievement

135. The standards of work seen in Year 13 are well above national expectations. They have a very good working knowledge of topics such as consumer behaviour, market research and the importance of effective communication to business success. They show good understanding of the most appropriate ways in which different forms of business can raise capital. The most able students translate their grasp of business ideas and terminology into well-argued written and oral analysis of contemporary business trends. However, a few still struggle to use supply and demand analysis effectively. Virtually all the students work hard. They use mathematical and computing skills confidently and accurately, and most write fluently. A small number of students, however, tend to produce work that is more descriptive than analytical. Overall, the A-level students are making good progress. At this early stage of the course, Year 12 students have already shown an ability to build on previous knowledge to develop a very good understanding of 'added value' in the production process. In the lesson seen, they all made very good progress in applying theory to practical business examples and identifying the constituent elements of brand image.

Teaching and learning

136. The teacher uses a range of approaches and materials that help students develop independence and initiative. All lessons are purposeful and positive and the students

appreciate the support the teacher gives them. The teacher seeks feedback from students on their preferred teaching methods and accordingly adjusts her approach to the needs of different groups. For instance, a Year 12 lesson introducing added value began with a Powerpoint presentation, swiftly moved to small group discussion and then to individual work on computers. This met a range of different learning preferences, sustained students' interest and helped them to develop a very good understanding of the topic in a relatively short time. Students' work is accurately assessed and they are clear as to why their marks have been awarded. However, they receive little specific written guidance to refer to when looking to improve their work in future. A small resource budget also means that the department has only one computer, and pupils have to rely on access to the nearby ICT suite. They rely heavily on course textbooks or assignments produced by the teacher. The department does not fully exploit the potential benefits to be gained from links with local businesses.

Leadership and management

137. The department is well led and managed and its priorities match the school's plans for development. Business studies has become a significantly more popular sixth form option under the current head of department and careful review of past performance has led to substantial improvement in results over time. It makes good provision for the increasing number of pupils opting for business courses from other schools. It is a department with a clear sense of purpose and direction, constantly making use of data to analyse past performance and to modify practice accordingly.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

The enhancement programme

The general course for all students that the school calls the enhancement programme was sampled. This incorporates personal, social and health education and citizenship. In the lesson seen, good teaching provided students with worthwhile opportunities to discuss human rights issues. They came to a deeper understanding of how conflict can arise and how difficult it is to resolve.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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