

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **RISING BROOK HIGH SCHOOL**

Stafford

LEA area: Staffordshire

Unique reference number: 124467

Headteacher: Mr M Gledhill

Lead inspector: Mrs C Worthington

Dates of inspection: 7<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> March 2005

Inspection number: 268895

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

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## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 -18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	523
School address:	Wolverhampton Road Stafford
Postcode:	ST17 9DJ
Telephone number:	01785 258383
Fax number:	01785 225913
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Chairman of governors:	Mrs Helen Pooley
Date of previous inspection:	1 <sup>st</sup> February 1999

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

Rising Brook High is a much smaller than average mixed comprehensive school with a sixth form of 52 students. There are slightly more boys than girls in the school. Pupils all come from the local area, which contains pockets of social deprivation. Almost 21 per cent are entitled to free school meals, which is above the national average. Almost all pupils are white British; the rest are of mixed race. All have English as their mother tongue. Thirty per cent of pupils have special educational needs, which is well above the national average. The percentage with statements (4.1) is above average. Most of these pupils have moderate learning difficulty, some social and emotional problems, some dyslexia, and some physical disability. Attainment on entry is well below average. The school holds awards for achievement, careers guidance and Sportsmark. It is involved in the Young Enterprise scheme and has a leadership incentive grant.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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30996	Anne Higginbotham	Team inspector	Mathematics
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18032	Isobel Randall	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
30695	Geraldine Dinan	Team inspector	Art and design
10941	Renee Robinson	Team inspector	Design and technology
19530	Jennifer Bray	Team inspector	Geography
25744	Trevor Osgerby	Team inspector	History
30911	John Barton	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
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19169	Tim Lawes	Team inspector	Physical education; Special educational needs
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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

Rising Brook gives its pupils a satisfactory education. Leadership, management and governance are all satisfactory. Teaching was good during the inspection and pupils learned well. However, some older pupils' learning over time is only satisfactory because the large staff turnover and absences over the past two years have adversely affected continuity. Standards are below average, representing at least satisfactory achievement in most subjects from pupils' attainment on entry in Year 7, except in some aspects of ICT and in sixth form design and technology. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

#### The school's main strengths and weaknesses:

- Weak literacy is a barrier to learning in several subjects.
- Considerable improvement has been made in mathematics in Years 7 to 9.
- Attendance is unsatisfactory and affects the continuity of learning for many pupils.
- Standards in physical education are above average and provision for sport is very good.
- Provision in geography is very good; it is good in mathematics, modern foreign languages and music.
- Pastoral care and personal guidance are good; careers advice and work-related courses are very good.
- Very good links with the community and other schools enhance the good curriculum in Years 10 to 13.

**Since the previous inspection, the school has made satisfactory improvement overall.** Standards dipped in 2004, but inspection evidence shows that they are starting to rise again, particularly in Years 7 to 9. All the key issues have received some attention. Information and communication technology (ICT) resources have improved greatly and general ICT skills are now satisfactory. The library now has more computers, but the quality of books has not improved much. Standards in physical education and music have risen; of the core subjects, there has been most improvement in mathematics, but standards are still too low here and in English and science. There have been many attempts to improve attendance, but it is still an issue. Initiatives to improve literacy are not working in all subjects because of a lack of consistency in monitoring and evaluating them by the depleted senior management team. Provided literacy can be successfully addressed in the whole curriculum, the school has good capacity for improvement.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2002	2003	2004	2004
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	E	E	E	E
Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	C	C	n/a	

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

**Achievement is satisfactory overall and good in Years 7 to 9** where pupils are attaining **below average standards** from entry attainment that is well below average. The school's National Curriculum test results for pupils aged 14 years have been consistently average or below average for the past three years. The improvement in standards in Years 7 to 9 is not usually maintained into Years 10 and 11, and GCSE standards are still too low, particularly in English and science; targets have not been met. The major barrier remains weak literacy, but in subjects that tackle this effectively, such as geography and history,

standards are rising. Standards are also rising in mathematics and in practical subjects such as music, food and textiles where they are average by Year 11; in physical education, they are above average. Pupils with special educational needs do well with help in literacy and numeracy, and achieve satisfactorily elsewhere. Talented pupils achieve well in music and physical education, but gifted pupils, and those of average and higher ability, are not stretched enough in many subjects. Students enter the sixth form with about average attainment, and make satisfactory progress overall towards A level in this school. They usually achieve their predicted grades.

**Attitudes** in the main school are generally good and very good in the sixth form. However, a significant minority of pupils, particularly in Year 10, are disruptive in lessons. Behaviour is satisfactory overall in the main school and very good in the sixth form. **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development** is good overall. The school has worked hard to reduce the absence rate, but **attendance** is still unsatisfactory in the main school because parents do not always take the responsibility to send their children to school. Attendance in the sixth form is good. Punctuality is satisfactory.

### **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

The **quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching and learning are good**, but learning is only satisfactory for Year 10 pupils over time because their progress has been disrupted by a lack of continuity through changes of staff, a higher than usual pupil absence rate and their own limited vocabulary and comprehension. The **curriculum** is good overall, catering for the interests and aptitudes of individual pupils. It does not fully satisfy statutory requirements for ICT in Years 10 and 11 and in religious education in Years 10 to 13. The school's very good provision for the expressive arts and its extensive range of extra-curricular activities do much to enrich its daily life and work. Arrangements for pupils' **care, welfare, health and safety** are satisfactory. The provision of advice, support and guidance is good and pupils are well involved in aspects of the school's development. The school has a satisfactory **partnership with parents** and very good links in the wider community, including other schools and colleges.

### **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership, management and governance** are **satisfactory**. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The head teacher has a good vision for the development of the school which is shared by staff and governors. Senior staff and middle managers have a clear commitment to improvement and are leading their teams well to this end. High turnover of staff and the long-term absence of a member of the senior staff have resulted in inconsistent monitoring and evaluation of provision. Governors are committed and give good service to the school; they are aware of the breaches in the statutory requirements, including that for collective worship, and have plans to rectify them.

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

Parents who completed the questionnaire and those who came to the pre-inspection meeting expressed some very positive views of the school. Pupils are also positive. Parents are particularly pleased with the quality of school leadership, but are worried about the disrupted lessons caused by pupils' bad behaviour, especially in Years 7 and 10, and about the lack of consistency of afternoon registration. During the inspection, disruption was at a minimum, although absence was high in Year 10. Afternoon registration was judged to need improvement.

### **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- Ensure that sixth form students of design and technology receive enough intensive tuition to have a reasonable chance of success in their examinations.
- Improve the standard of literacy through a rigorously monitored and evaluated whole-school initiative, especially in Year 7 and the current Year 10, and continue throughout the school for pupils experiencing particular difficulty.
- Continue to improve attendance, especially in Year 10.
- Improve standards in English and science and continue improvement in mathematics by making full use of the school's assessment data to evaluate the progress of all pupils and ensure that they are reaching their potential.
- Improve the monitoring and evaluation roles of the senior management team and middle managers to ensure that whole school policies and initiatives are consistently applied and are helping to raise standards;

**and to meet statutory requirements:**

- Ensure all pupils in Years 10 and 11 receive teaching in religious education and ICT.

**THE SIXTH FORM AT RISING BROOK HIGH SCHOOL**

Caters for 52 students in a limited range of on-site academic and vocational courses

**OVERALL EVALUATION**

The sixth form is much smaller than other sixth forms but, as part of the local Staffordshire collegiate, has a good and relevant curriculum. Teaching and learning are good, except for design and technology where it is unsatisfactory. Leadership and management are satisfactory.

**The main strengths and weaknesses:**

- Provision in mathematics, history and geography is good.
- Teaching is good, except in design and technology where it is unsatisfactory.
- Independent learning is not well developed.
- Literacy is a barrier to learning in some subjects.
- Accommodation for social facilities and for private study is poor.

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

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Provision in <b>English literature</b> is <b>satisfactory</b> . Standards are below average. Teaching is good, but achievement is only satisfactory because students show insufficient independence and some are poor attenders.
Mathematics	Provision in <b>mathematics</b> is <b>good</b> ; standards are average and achievement satisfactory. Teaching is good. The department is very well led and well managed.
Science	Provision in <b>chemistry</b> is <b>satisfactory</b> . Students make satisfactory progress in lessons as a result of knowledgeable and supportive teaching. Standards are in line with national expectations and achievement is satisfactory.
Humanities	Provision in <b>geography</b> is <b>good</b> . Leadership and management are very good. Teaching is good but students do not always demonstrate sufficient initiative and independence in their learning at sixth form level. Provision in <b>history</b> is <b>good</b> . Results are average and achievement good. Teaching is good and the department is well led.



Technology

Provision in **design and technology** is **unsatisfactory**. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory. Students' achievement is below average. Current attainment is below average in Year 12 and Year 13, and students are not making sufficient gains in knowledge and understanding.

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

### **ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

Arrangements for induction into the sixth form are good. Support and guidance are generally good; provision for careers advice is very good. Students have good attitudes to study but social accommodation and facilities for private study are poor.

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

The head of sixth form plays a satisfactory co-ordinating role between provision at school and the Chetwynd Centre. She knows the students and their families well and makes sure that students are following courses appropriate to their aptitudes and needs. The head of sixth form oversees the pastoral and tutorial provision well, but her role does not include monitoring subject provision. Although heads of department carry out their own monitoring, the lack of overall management has caused serious deficiencies in design and technology where the head of department has been absent.

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

Most students are very happy with the sixth form. They appreciate the advice and information they receive about further and higher education from several universities who make presentations in school. Design and technology students are very unhappy with their lack of teaching this term.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

#### Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Pupils are attaining below average standards, which is an improvement on their well below average attainment on entry to the school. Pupils generally achieve better in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11. Weak literacy is a barrier to achievement in many subjects.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Weak literacy is a barrier to learning in many subjects, but there is good practice in some.
- Standards in physical education by the end of Year 11 are above average.
- Standards in core subjects, especially English, are too low by the time pupils leave school.
- Achievement is good in Years 7 to 9, but not maintained through Years 10 and 11.

#### Commentary

1. The school's performance in GCSE examinations in 2004 was well below the national average, as it has been for the last three years. When compared with schools of similar intake, performance has fluctuated year by year between average and well below average, but in general, GCSE performance, as measured by the average points score attained by pupils, has steadily declined, as opposed to the national trend which has been rising.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	28.6 (32.6)	n/a (33.4)
mathematics	32.2 (34.7)	n/a (35.4)
science	30 (32.9)	n/a (33.4)

*There were 93 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	27 (33)	52 (52)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	77 (84)	89 (88)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	92 (94)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	28.9 (32.4)	41.4 (40.6)

*Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

2. Pupils enter the school with well below average standards, and whilst their attainment is raised between Years 7 and 9 in most years to below average in English, mathematics and science, it is not sustained in Years 10 and 11. Even in 2003 – the best year – the percentage of A to G grades at GCSE was well below average,

although the number taking the examinations are relatively small and one candidate represents a high percentage.

3. A similar situation is currently seen in both key stages. Although performance in the Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests in 2004 in English, mathematics and science was lower than in previous years, standards had been slowly rising up to 2003, when they were just short of the national average overall; pupils did particularly well in mathematics that year. In GCSE, however, standards – as measured by the number of pupils gaining five A\*-C grades and also average points score – were well below average in 2004. The school failed to meet its target points scores for Year 9 tests and GCSE in 2004.
4. Standards seen during the inspection showed improvement over those attained in external tests and examinations in 2004. By Year 9, pupils have achieved well and are now below average in English and science, but average in mathematics. Humanities subjects are below average, but physical education and music are above average. Standards in Year 11 are also below average overall, though closer to average in mathematics, geography, history, music and in some aspects of design and technology, and above average in physical education. This represents satisfactory achievement overall, since Year 11 pupils did better than most years when they were in Year 9. Not enough improvement has been made in English and science, however, and the results of staff changes and absences over the past year are seen in the limited progress made by some pupils, especially in Year 10.
5. Achievement is good overall in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. There are significant barriers to higher achievement, which have not been given sufficient attention in the past, but which are now recognised as necessary for school improvement. The major barrier is the very low standard of pupils' literacy on entry to the school. This has not been addressed sufficiently in the past. The current Year 10, for example, made very little progress in English and literacy between Years 7 and 9, and entered their GCSE courses almost two years behind the average standard for their age. In several subjects, especially science, ICT and religious education, literacy remains a barrier to progress, and results in some disaffection, unsatisfactory behaviour and absence from school. Year 10 attendance was particularly poor during the inspection, and there were a few instances of disruptive behaviour in lessons which adversely affected learning and overall progress.
6. Literacy is slowly improving throughout the school in English lessons as a result of the National Strategy for improvement at Key Stage 3 and the determination of the new head of English. There is very good practice in some subjects, such as geography. The monitoring by senior managers of provision such as this, however, is not rigorous enough to ensure that good practices are systematically shared throughout the school, nor is there enough co-ordination of other initiatives to improve literacy, such as the reading periods in Year 7 and 8 form times. These were observed to be inconsistently practised and did not often have a structured approach focused on raising standards. It is because of the lack of a whole-school focus on developing literacy which is rigorously monitored, and of targets set for improvement that standards are not improving fast enough and achievement is often no better than satisfactory.
7. Numeracy develops satisfactorily through the school and pupils use such skills in other lessons, for example data handling in science and geography and measurement in design and technology.

8. Skills in ICT are satisfactory overall and most pupils use computers appropriately, though research often lacks the analytical skill and ability to summarise that demonstrate higher-order literacy. Even older pupils present material which they download piecemeal from the Internet.
9. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress against the targets developed for them. Where pupils receive support from teaching assistants during lessons, their progress is good because the teaching assistants know the pupils well, ensure that they sustain concentration and sometimes adapt resources to meet their needs. For about 30 disaffected or academically weak pupils each year, to take all GCSE examinations is not suitable. In Year 10, some are only doing five, but they have work-based learning and college placements which give them the opportunity to take national vocational qualifications. However, too little use is made of alternative certification for the core subjects.

### **Sixth form**

10. Standards attained in the sixth form are in line with predictions made on the basis of prior attainment in most subjects. Numbers taking examinations are too small to make national comparisons. The literacy barrier still remains. Many students begin Year 12 with below average standards of reading and writing, and this limits clarity of expression in written work. This does not have a significant impact on progress in their work in history and geography because those departments make sure that subject-specific literacy is an integral part of study. In English literature, however, students do not have a wide enough reading base and this affects their critical comparisons of texts.
11. Standards seen during the inspection were below average in English literature but generally in line with those expected for other subjects, except design and technology where unsatisfactory teaching has resulted in below average standards.

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

Attitudes in the main school are generally good and very good in the sixth form. Behaviour is satisfactory overall in the main school and very good in the sixth form. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Attendance is unsatisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form. Punctuality is satisfactory.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good attitudes and behaviour in many lessons support achievement well.
- The life skills programme makes a significant contribution to personal development.
- Good relationships between most pupils contribute to the school's ethos.
- Attendance and behaviour issues restrict learning in many cases.

### **Commentary**

12. Attitudes, behaviour and personal development are good, similar to the findings of the previous inspection. Cultural development is better. Chances for spiritual development are still being lost, for instance, there is little time for reflection and collective worship is lacking. Attendance remains unsatisfactory.

13. Most pupils enjoy school life and show high levels of interest and enthusiasm in their work. Pupils work very hard and take pride in their achievements when teaching is at its best. A good example of this was seen in a Year 11 physical education lesson where very good synchronization of aerobics movements to music reflected pupils' efforts in learning. Many pupils take part in clubs and after school activities with enthusiasm.
14. The school promotes good relationships through personal, social and health education (PSHE) and assemblies. Consequently, behaviour is generally satisfactory in the classroom, in assembly, in the canteen and around the school grounds. However, there is a significant minority of pupils, particularly in Years 7 and 10, who disrupt some lessons. Behaviour management and procedures to deal with bullying are satisfactory. Support staff have considerable sustained success with disaffected pupils in the learning support room because activities are well planned and there is a high level of supervision. Permanent exclusion is low.

## Exclusions

### *Ethnic background of pupils*

### *Exclusions in the last school year*

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No. of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	508	19	1
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	3	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	1	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	6	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	1	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	2	0	0

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

- The school's life skills and citizenship programme is well structured and planned. This ensures that pupils consider many topics, issues and aspects of their personal development effectively. Spiritual development is satisfactory. Opportunities through life skills lessons and in subjects such as science allow pupils to consider feelings, nature and human achievement. Pupils develop a good sense of right and wrong. They often consider issues such as behaviour, discrimination, abortion and animal rights in a moral context. They hold strong views about conflict, war and homicide.
- Pupils accept responsibility well and know that they have an important role to play in the community. Older pupils regularly help younger ones, for instance, by acting as peer counsellors or in the library. Many pupils act as good ambassadors for the school at consultation evenings and other school events. Cultural development is good because pupils have many chances to appreciate their own and others' cultural traditions. School trips make a very good contribution to pupils' appreciation of their own cultural heritage and much work in the curriculum enables pupils to learn about the rich diversity of cultures in Britain.

## Attendance

### *Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)*

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	6.3	School data	2.2
National data	6.9	National data	1.1

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

- Despite a number of positive initiatives in partnership with the educational welfare service, attendance in the main school is below average and truancy is double the national average. Parents are not all taking the responsibility to make sure their children go to school. Attendance during the inspection period was remarkably poor, especially for Year 10. Almost 12 per cent of pupils from the main school were absent, with four per cent unexplained. Afternoon registration procedures are unsatisfactory,

giving rise to a potential safety concern since there is delay in updating the office records.

## **Sixth form**

18. Students have good attitudes to life and studies in the sixth form and their behaviour is very good. These factors make a significant contribution to students' achievements and personal development. Students respond positively in lessons and to chances to take responsibility for their own learning. They try very hard to overcome the problems they have through a lack of school accommodation for personal study. They show much interest in school and sixth form issues through the sixth form council.
19. Personal development is very similar to the main school and is good overall. Opportunities in general studies, other courses and personal and social education make a good contribution; for instance, students consider moral topics such as euthanasia and capital punishment in depth, forming their own opinions and values. Social development is enhanced through much contact with sixth formers from other schools at the Chetwynd Centre.
20. Attendance is good; during the inspection period it was excellent.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**

The quality of education is good. The curriculum is satisfactory from Year 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 to 13. Teaching and learning are good, but learning in the longer term is satisfactory for pupils in Year 10 because of lack of continuity through absence of staff and pupils, and because weak literacy is a stumbling block to higher achievement for many pupils.

### **Teaching and learning**

Teaching and learning are good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- A high proportion of good and very good teaching was seen.
- Pupils' learning is hampered by their poor standard of literacy.
- Pupils are very dependent on their teachers to facilitate learning and lose continuity quickly when staff are absent.
- Pupils with special educational needs learn well when supported by teaching assistants, but those of higher ability are not always stretched.

### **Commentary**

21. Teaching and learning seen during the inspection were good. Well over two-thirds of all lessons were good or better, with one quarter very good. The best teaching was seen in Years 10 and 11, where over eight out of ten lessons were good or better. A high proportion of the good and very good lessons were seen in physical education, music, art and geography. A small number of unsatisfactory lessons were seen. They either lacked pace or showed ineffective planning, such as in design and technology.

One or two in science, design and technology and ICT were also to do with behaviour management. Apart from these six lessons, pupils learned well and frequently made good gains in acquiring knowledge and skills. This happened most often in subjects where teachers recognised the low standard of literacy in the school and provided many different ways to extend it through paired and group discussion and the learning of specialist vocabulary, as seen in geography, for instance. Good learning also occurred in some subjects where poor literacy is not such a barrier, such as physical education and music. Although learning was seen to be good during the inspection and in pupils' workbooks this academic year, gaps in older pupils' knowledge were evident; further evidence from work samples and from speaking to pupils showed that learning in the long term is satisfactory, particularly in Year 10. The main barrier preventing their learning from being consistently good is their standard of literacy, where the ability to retain knowledge and understanding from lesson to lesson is weak. Other barriers to learning are pupils' high absence rate and the high turnover of teachers.

**Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 118 lessons**

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
0	29 (25%)	55 (46%)	28 (24%)	6 (5%)	0	0

*The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.*

22. Poor literacy is a barrier to learning in several subjects, such as science, ICT and religious education, where standards are not rising fast enough. Despite training in the National Strategy for improvement at Key Stage 3, teachers find it hard to plan for discussion work to improve pupils' speaking and listening. Many pupils find this difficult because of their generally poor vocabulary. Boys in lower sets often show immature behaviour when asked to demonstrate their ability to learn independently because of their poor comprehension. Reading sessions in form time are not structured enough to develop reading skills in the higher levels of deduction and inference. Many pupils, particularly boys, are not even fluent readers and this hampers their understanding of text books. Plenary sessions are often cut short because the 50-minute lesson period is ten minutes short of the recommended Key Stage 3 Strategy time, and this results in learning not being reinforced at the end of lesson.
23. Most teachers recognise how their pupils depend on them and expect them to lead their learning; they often supply notes or model answers to examination questions, as seen in a class beginning their coursework on 'Romeo and Juliet', where the teacher annotated the text for pupils to copy. Handwriting develops well in many cases because of this. Whilst this is successful in enabling pupils to acquire knowledge and, in many cases, to apply it appropriately in coursework, it does not do enough to help pupils tackle their examinations, when they may have to put forward their independent ideas, or argue a case, and that requires more sophisticated language skill.
24. Pupils with special educational needs have detailed and clear individual education plans (IEPs) but their use in lessons is inconsistent. Because of staff changes and the limited monitoring time the co-ordinator has, not all teachers are fully trained. Teaching assistants are well qualified but are used more for literacy and numeracy. Where teachers and teaching assistants are knowledgeable about them, pupils with special educational needs make good progress. They make good use of pupils' IEPs



to adapt lessons, choose appropriate teaching strategies and change resources to suit the needs of the pupils. Higher ability pupils are not always stretched to their full capability, as seen in Spanish, science and ICT.

25. The school has had much disruption in staffing over the past two years, has lost strong heads of department in English, mathematics, science and modern languages to senior management posts in other schools, and has had many temporary teachers to cover long-term sickness. There are currently two senior members of staff away because of serious long-term illness. Many older pupils have lost the continuity of their education several times and this has disrupted their learning. Now, many are learning and achieving well in lessons, but they do not have the secure background knowledge in many subjects to ensure that learning over time is better than satisfactory, particularly in Year 10 where there is much to catch up on. They started their GCSE courses having seriously underachieved in Years 7 to 9, and were between one and two years behind in the core subjects at the beginning of Year 10. This is not helped by their higher than average absence rate; pupils cannot learn properly if they are not in school.
26. Appropriate assessment procedures are in place, but have yet to be embedded fully in all classroom practice. There is considerable variation in teachers' use and understanding of assessment techniques. Very effective practice is found in physical education and modern foreign languages, but significant improvements are needed in science and English where teaching and learning are satisfactory overall because of this. The school recognises this and has introduced a training programme to improve assessment, including ways of using the assessment of pupils' progress better to improve learning in classrooms. The recently appointed deputy headteacher has begun to make good improvements to the systems and procedures used for assessment, but owing to his prolonged absence, progress has been slow and there are inconsistencies in how effectively assessment is used across the school.
27. The marking of work is often thorough but in some subjects does not provide pupils with enough specific advice on how to improve. Because National Curriculum levels are not used consistently, pupils do not have a full understanding of the standards they are required to reach. The school is beginning to encourage pupils to assess their own progress and is investigating ways of helping pupils to assess each other. However, while these are strengths in this regard in ICT, geography and modern foreign languages, they are not common elsewhere.
28. The progress made by pupils over time is assessed well through end-of-unit tests and recorded effectively. Regular periodic checks on pupils' learning are carried out in all subjects and good use is made of the outcomes to set improvement targets for both pupils and departments. The school is beginning to use the information well to improve standards by working with pupils and parents through regular progress reviews. Although more information is now available on how well pupils perform in tests and examinations compared with their prior attainment levels and target grades, added value statistics are not used effectively by all departments. As a result, the drive to raise standards across the school through a systematic evaluation of the comparative achievements of different groups of pupils is not consistently rigorous.
29. The monitoring and evaluation of the use of assessment across the school are not yet effective. The arrangements are too casual and do not identify weaknesses sufficiently or extend the very good practice in some subjects. Although book checks are carried out, for instance, their quality is inconsistent and they are not linked

sufficiently to agreed departmental development targets. At present, because of staff absences, improvements in assessment are not being developed systematically enough to ensure that assessment is integral to raising standards in teaching and learning.

## **The curriculum**

The curriculum is good overall. It satisfies the legal requirements for National Curriculum subjects in Years 7 to 9. It does not satisfy the legal requirements for religious education or ICT in Years 10 and 11, because a significant minority of pupils are withdrawn from those subjects to study Spanish or music. The school makes good provision for the enrichment of the curriculum.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The breadth, balance and flexibility of the curriculum ensure that the needs of pupils of all capabilities and backgrounds are met.
- Collaborative working with the 14 to 16 Stafford Partnership results in very good vocational provision.
- Very good provision for the expressive arts and for sports studies in Years 10 and 11 enriches the learning of all.
- Religious education and ICT are not taught to all Year 10 and 11 pupils.
- Partnership with other post-16 providers ensures a broad, balanced and flexible curriculum that meets students' individual needs.
- Good provision for the expressive arts and sports studies enriches learning in all areas.
- Sixth form students are not receiving their entitlement to be taught religious education.

## **Commentary**

30. In Years 7 to 9, the programme of study includes all the subjects of the National Curriculum. Higher ability pupils may study two modern languages. From Year 9, pupils have a variety of coherent pathways towards continuing education, training or employment. In Years 10 and 11, pupils' basic needs are met through pursuit of a common core of subjects. They then build on this foundation to construct a programme tailored to their individual needs, aptitudes and interests, by choosing four further subjects from a wide range of traditional GCSEs, applied GCSEs and vocational courses.
31. Provision for vocational education is very good. Around 30 per cent of pupils pursue a variety of vocational courses through the 14 to 16 Partnership with Stafford College. The Alternative Curriculum, organised jointly with Walton High School, and the recently introduced Work-based Learning programme, further ensure that the vocational needs of all are met. The school monitors off-site provision very well.
32. The school is committed to enabling pupils of all capabilities and backgrounds to fulfil their potential. Provision for those with special educational needs is good, but the school needs to monitor provision for higher ability pupils and those who are gifted and talented more carefully to ensure that they are fully stretched. Pupils with special educational needs have satisfactory access to the curriculum. Teachers identify pupils in their classes whose needs are different but they do not always refer to their individual education plans in order to plan adequately to meet their needs. However,

when teachers do consider these plans, and when they are supported by the highly experienced and effective teaching assistants in the school, pupils participate more in lessons and they make good progress.

33. The very well planned Life Skills programme forms an effective framework for the delivery of careers education and guidance, citizenship, work-related learning, and personal, social and health education. The programme is enriched with whole-school activities and the use of outside organisations and specialists. The school does much to promote pupils' moral and social development, but does not do enough to develop their understanding of the multicultural nature of contemporary British society.
34. The school makes good provision for the enrichment of the curriculum, with a wide range of visits and activities that broaden pupils' experience both in general and also of subjects that they learn in school. Participation in sports is particularly strong. Teachers arrange residential and day visits involving all year groups, linked in the main to school subjects but also helping pupils to research higher education possibilities. The school encourages pupils to organise fund-raising events for charity, and participates in events to raise ambition such as "Take your daughter to work" day. The music department has six performance groups that meet weekly. All subjects hold revision sessions after school for pupils approaching examinations, and the computer rooms are open daily so that pupils have equal access to the technology.
35. The school's careers education and guidance programme, delivered in partnership with the Staffordshire Connexions Service, prepares pupils very well for the later stages of continuing education, training or employment. Skills of action planning and self-assessment are more highly developed than at the previous inspection. The Key Stage 3 Strategy is more securely embedded than at the previous inspection, and in most subjects teaching and learning show close attention to the recommended lesson structures. The school's very good provision for the expressive arts, its extensive range of extra-curricular activities, and its very good community links, do much to enrich its daily life and work.
36. Accommodation is generally satisfactory in the main school. It is good for music and ICT and very good for PE. Accommodation for science is poor and restricts the practical work pupils may do. Sixth form accommodation is unsatisfactory: there is no dedicated area for private study, for instance, and the common room is too small and unwelcoming. It does not encourage pupils to stay on after Year 11. Resources are satisfactory for most areas of learning. They are good in geography, ICT, mathematics and music. Resources for modern foreign languages and physical education are very good.
37. Staffing is satisfactory. In spite of previous problems, most departments are now well staffed with sufficient specialist staff to cover the curriculum. It is very good in physical education; science, geography, mathematics and modern foreign languages staffing is good. In English, communication with the non-specialists is a strength. Long-term illness is a problem, particularly in design and technology in the sixth form where it has affected standards.

### **Sixth form**

38. This small sixth form is a partner in the Stafford Collegiate, comprising seven high schools, the Chetwynd Centre, and Stafford College of Further Education. By 2006, all aspiring post-16 students in Stafford will receive a single, global offer of courses from

the Collegiate, irrespective of their main school location. The Collegiate will build on each institution's distinctive strengths, to ensure diversity of choice for all Stafford's students.

39. At this stage of the Collegiate's development, Rising Brook's sixth form curriculum is offered in collaboration with the Chetwynd Centre. This joint provision affords students access to a wide range of academic and vocational courses. The flexibility of the curriculum ensures that students can successfully mix and match their courses. They can thus determine their pathways to higher education, training or employment through academic and vocational combinations that reflect their interests and aptitudes. This ensures equality of access and opportunity for students of all capabilities and backgrounds.
40. The three-day residential induction course for aspiring sixth form students does much to ease their transition to post-16 life and work. The core Life Skills programme supports students well, and ensures that their progress is effectively monitored. The school's good extra-curricular provision enriches students' learning, especially in the expressive arts and sports studies, while the Young Enterprise scheme enhances their understanding of the world of business and commerce. The school is not, however, meeting its statutory obligation to provide for the Staffordshire Agreed Syllabus for religious education to be taught to students.

### **Work-related learning**

41. Provision in work-related learning is very good and very well led and managed, with innovative developments for the future of the subject. Off-site provision is good and has a good impact on pupils' understanding of work. No curriculum audit has been formally conducted across all subjects to match against the work-related learning framework.
42. All pupils benefit from a very good programme of careers education, which helps them to gain an understanding of employment and the world of work. For Year 11 pupils, this knowledge is added to by a week of work experience in their chosen area of interest. Work experience is well prepared for and appreciated by the pupils; it makes a valuable contribution to their personal development.
43. Careers education as part of the Life Skills Programme in Years 9 to 11 is good. Many additional activities are offered, such as Year 9 Careers Week, Year 10 Insight into Industry (three days' team-building, skill-based event) and the Year 11 work experience mentioned above. Pupils' progress is well monitored and assessed by staff to meet the criteria for the Certificate in Careers Management. Work experience, Young Enterprise and Management Challenge are some activities arranged for sixth formers.
44. The school has well-established partnerships with local colleges. In conjunction with the Stafford College and off-site providers, Years 10 and 11 pupils participate in a wide range of 'increased flexibility courses'. The provision is good and courses in beauty, engineering, plumbing, agriculture, brickwork and hairdressing are supported by pupils. These courses have been developed to meet the wide range of interest of pupils in the schools locally and to enable them to achieve an NVQ Level 1 qualification in Year 11. These courses are well valued by the pupils taking them.

45. The well-constructed programme of study outlines the key skills that Year 10 pupils on the one-day-a-week work-related learning placements will cover. Organisation of placements is well documented. Placements are wide-ranging and cover pupils' interests, such as veterinary surgery, fire service, pre-school, and garden centre. Many subject departments have identified curriculum activities that connect with the world of work. In physical education, the Junior Sports Leaders award is run as part of the GCSE course. Pupils undertake traffic surveys in mathematics and visit a car factory at Coventry in modern foreign languages. The school has not undertaken a formal audit of subject contribution to work-related learning.
46. Work-related learning is very well led and managed and consequently the school is very well focused on retaining and improving its provision.

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

Arrangements for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety are satisfactory. The provision of advice, support and guidance is good and pupils are well involved in aspects of the school's development. These factors show that the school has largely maintained its work in these areas since the last inspection.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Year 7 pupils settle into the school quickly because of the good induction procedures.
- Pupils and students feel secure in their learning because there is a strong pastoral care system.
- Very good guidance on further study and careers helps older pupils to make choices.
- Pupils feel valued because their views are taken seriously.

### **Commentary**

47. Prospective pupils are given good chances to experience the learning routines at two effectively planned pre-school induction days. On the first day of each new school year there are only Year 7 and 10 pupils in school, reflecting the gradual and sensitive approach to induction. Year 9 'buddies' help many pupils to settle in as the school year unfolds. Year 9 pupils themselves receive good and timely information about their subject options and the increased learning demands in Year 10.
48. Arrangements for child protection and for those in public care are satisfactory. The designated officer for child protection is fully trained. Good information and basic training is given to all staff. The school is looking to train more staff to designated officer standards as soon as possible. Arrangements for first aid and fire procedures are satisfactory. Risk assessments are undertaken regularly to ensure a safe learning environment and safety at educational visits. Although assessments in each of the departments meet legal requirements, streamlining is necessary to ensure consistency, for instance, different departments use different styles and forms. The school has addressed the health and safety matters identified at the previous inspection.
49. The school's pastoral support system ensures that all pupils are offered good advice, support and guidance based on monitoring. The system is organized well with heads of Year, form tutors, teachers and support staff making a good contribution to pupils' achievement and personal development. The progress of all pupils, including those with special educational needs, is monitored effectively. Both pupils and parents are

involved well in setting future learning targets. Progress reviews and target-setting days are becoming increasingly effective. External agencies, such as the educational welfare and psychological services, provide good additional support to both pupils and adults; the impact on pupils with special educational needs is good.

50. The school has made positive improvements to further study and careers guidance since the previous inspection. Staff work closely and effectively with the 'Connexions' agency based in the school to ensure that pupils receive very good information and guidance. Many Year 10 and 11 pupils attend part-time courses at Stafford College each week. This gives them first-hand opportunity to find out about the many different types of courses that the college offers.
51. Discussions with pupils indicate that they have good, trusting relationships with staff. Most pupils are confident that staff will do their best to resolve any individual concerns or worries, for instance, about bullying. Relationships between canteen staff, pupils and students are very good, with a very strong family atmosphere at the breakfast club and break-times. The school council is well established and provides many chances for pupils to learn about democracy and decision-making. Elected members represent pupils' views well at meetings. Senior staff, including the deputy head in charge of pastoral care, play an effective role. The school has taken on board many of the pupils' ideas, such as those regarding fundraising, and changes to lunch and accommodation matters.

### **Sixth form**

52. Arrangements for induction into the sixth form are good. A series of timely lessons is taught regarding the increased academic demands and how to develop study skills, for example. Support and guidance are generally good. Provision for careers advice is very good. Sixth formers appreciate the advice and information they receive about further and higher education from several universities who make presentations in school. The sixth form council holds meetings regularly. Members also attend whole-school council meetings. However, sixth form involvement in whole-school matters is less apparent than other pupils' involvement.

### **Partnership with parents, other schools and the community**

The school has a satisfactory partnership with parents and very good links in the wider community, including other schools and colleges. These factors represent good improvement to school, college and community links since the previous inspection.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school actively seeks parents' views and acts upon them.
- Parents are satisfied with the school because there are good procedures to deal with their concerns.
- Community links help to enrich the curriculum and support learning very well.
- Links with other schools, colleges and universities have a positive effect on learning.

### **Commentary**

53. The school recently commissioned consultants to give advice on parents' issues and how the parental partnership can be further enhanced. The result was a questionnaire which was sent to parents to seek their views on issues such as the race equality

policy, arrangements for parents' evenings and health matters. Parents can, therefore, influence the school, its policies and practices. The school is well aware of parents' concerns about behaviour and accommodation and has included these matters in its school improvement plan. The breakfast club was established following parents' suggestions.

54. Staff are approachable regarding individual concerns and complaints. The school works hard to investigate and resolve issues. Complaints to the governing body are very low, demonstrating staff's effectiveness in dealing with complaints.
55. Parents receive satisfactory information overall about the school and their children's standards and progress. Good information includes booklets about study options in Year 10. Interim progress review reports about academic and personal development are also a strong feature. Pupils' annual reports are satisfactory overall – a few reports give too many general comments or simply describe the work done rather than how well. The school fulfils its statutory responsibilities for the annual review of pupils who have statements of special educational need.
56. The contribution of parents to pupils' learning at school and at home is satisfactory. The parents, teachers and friends association give their time generously to the school through organising many social and fundraising events. The group regularly makes contributions towards additional learning resources and decoration.
57. A community lunch during the period of inspection demonstrated the strength of support and quality of links that this school has. Links with the religious community make a strong contribution to personal development. The police and health adviser make a very good contribution to life skills lessons. Links with the fire service include provision for personal skills and confidence building through a few places on locally agreed courses. Many charities and voluntary agencies support the school very well by offering counselling, advice and support services for pupils and families. This school plans educational visits and trips very well. Many experiences enrich learning, for instance, in art, music, sport, history and modern foreign languages. The school puts much back into the community. An elderly persons group enjoy subsidised lunch in the canteen each week, much fundraising for charities takes place and pupils often help in the adjacent nursery school. The physical education department runs a youth club two evenings a week and the community is welcomed.
58. Links with other schools include many primary, secondary and special schools. The school has a very productive link with Walton High School by way of an alternative curriculum for older pupils at both schools and the use of their Advanced Skills Teachers in maths and science. The alternative curriculum comprises specially designed courses, including vocational skills training and work experience. The link with Stafford College enables many Year 10 and 11 pupils to receive nationally recognised vocational skills training and tuition in many areas. The school has established a very good project to raise aspirations in Year 8 and 9 through the 'aiming high' initiative with Keele and Staffordshire Universities.

### **Sixth form**

59. Parental partnerships are satisfactory in the sixth form. The sixth form has a separate brochure and this gives appropriate details about what is on offer. Information to parents about their children's progress and standards is satisfactory. Links with universities and colleges are very good. University staff regularly makes

presentations to students about university life and courses of study, for example, and give good advice on completing university application forms. Sixth form staff have established very close links with the Chetwynd Centre where many students attend for lessons. Wider community links are also very good.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership, management and governance are satisfactory.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The headteacher has good vision for the school's development and shows good judgement when appointing staff.
- Good subject leadership is evident in English, mathematics, modern foreign languages, geography, history, physical education, expressive arts and music.
- The senior management team is currently depleted and its monitoring role has been curtailed.
- The absence of the head of design and technology has not been covered adequately in the sixth form.
- Governors work well with the school and are particularly challenging regarding funding of new projects.

### **Commentary**

60. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The head teacher has a good vision for the development of the school which is shared by staff and governors; senior staff and middle managers have a clear commitment to improvement and are leading their teams well to this end. This is particularly noticeable in English, mathematics, music, physical education, French, geography and history. The headteacher shows good judgement when appointing staff into positions of responsibility, whether from outside or from within the school. Often the school does not have enough well-qualified external candidates for certain posts, but has found talent from within which is working successfully in most cases. The school's turnover of subject department managers in particular has been rapid over the past few years. Leadership of all three core subjects has changed because previous postholders, responsible for the improved test and examination performance in 2003, all left for promotion. New appointments this year are working well with support from the Local Education Authority in developing the head of department role.
61. The monitoring and evaluation responsibilities of senior and middle managers have suffered setbacks through illness and absence, particularly in the curriculum deputy and the head of design and technology. A major weakness has occurred as a result in the provision for nine students of design and technology in the sixth form who have not had enough teaching and guidance this term to enable them to approach their



forthcoming examinations with any degree of confidence, despite a supply teacher being engaged and a few visits from an advanced skills teacher from outside school.

62. The absence of one deputy head has resulted in insufficient attention being paid to the monitoring and evaluating role of senior managers. The school has attempted to remedy this by employing an outside consultant to do an analysis of the school's 2004 performance in external tests and examinations, and another one to do department reviews. Whilst this has been useful, there has been a shortfall in the monitoring of new initiatives concerned with literacy and assessment. A class reading session has been introduced for Years 7 to 9 which could make a contribution to improving literacy if it were more structured on the lines of guided reading in the National Literacy Strategy for all pupils. The only pupils who have the chance to read to an adult in most classes are those with special educational needs. However, the reading session is inconsistently overseen by form tutors, and the lack of clarity and structure, together with the lack of monitoring by senior staff or literacy co-ordinator, has made it less than effective.
63. The school has collected a good deal of assessment data and has appointed a Key Stage 4 performance co-ordinator who has provided good analyses – including the effects of attendance rates – and predictions for progress from the end of Year 9 to Year 11. The monitoring and evaluation of its use in departments to set targets for improvement of performance is the remit of senior managers. This has not yet been done enough to ensure that weaknesses in subject provision and pupils' achievement are picked up early, or that strengths are recognised and built upon, particularly for average and above average pupils. The school's performance in external examinations and tests, whilst being close to average in Key Stage 3 for some time and having risen in 2003, has not kept pace with that of schools in similar circumstances. Measures to improve this are not being consistently monitored and evaluated.
64. The headteacher and senior managers produce the school development plan which is ratified by the governing body who checks its progress satisfactorily. It is an adequate document which puts the standard of teaching and learning as the school's first priority, but does not come out clearly with strategies to improve literacy and core subject standards. Success criteria are not always easily measurable and focused on raising standards, but are generally based on analysis of performance and funding directed appropriately towards them. The school acknowledges that literacy across the curriculum needs to be improved, but there are no clear, measurable performance or success indicators in its planning. This needs to be addressed urgently.
65. The special educational needs co-ordinator manages the department well and ensures all statutory requirements are met. However, his teaching timetable restricts him from ensuring that pupils' needs are effectively met during lessons and, therefore, gaining an overview of provision across the school. This is recognised by the school and plans are in place to rectify the situation.
66. Performance management is satisfactory; there is a good programme of professional development for staff. One day of the five is devoted to performance management for the whole staff and departments. Staff absence on courses for professional development has a serious impact on teaching and supply cover is expensive for a small school. The use of the Leadership Incentive Grant supports the programme well, but this will be difficult to sustain when current funding expires. Use of external consultants for departmental reviews is effective. Detailed policies lay down clear lines

of responsibility and action. Training, review and objective setting are all regular and clearly linked to teaching and learning through the school development plan, but monitoring of teaching is not always carried out by department heads, because of lack of time or other external factors, such as in design and technology. Some departments, such as science, do not consistently link performance management with their own development plans. Objectives are not always clearly defined and not always measurable, so the impact is not as strong as it might be.

67. Continuing professional development is satisfactory. It is good in mathematics and improving in English and science. The mathematics teachers have benefited from courses and the support from the neighbouring Beacon school. English and science teachers are now taking part in more professional development, which is having a positive effect on their teaching. However, in ICT, staff teaching throughout the school do not avail themselves of the opportunities offered for development, so ICT is not well developed in the wider curriculum.
68. Governance is satisfactory. Governors have worked hard under the direction of the competent chairman, who has a good working relationship with the headteacher. Parents are represented well; some have educational experience of other schools and this school's community partnerships. Governors have a sound knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses; they are very supportive of the school, including its current sports college bid. Several long-serving governors are particularly challenging to the school when allocating funding for special projects, and joint planning with the head of modern languages has been effective in establishing the multi-media laboratory. Whilst they acknowledge that there are some breaches in statutory requirements in religious education and ICT provision in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form daily worship, they have carefully balanced this with the demands of the small school curriculum and have clear plans to rectify the failings.

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

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	2,253,100	Balance from previous year	41,650
Total expenditure	2,121,970	Balance carried forward to the next year	175,330
Expenditure per pupil	3,837		

69. Financial management is satisfactory. The budget is tightly controlled and all spending is satisfactorily monitored by the governing body's financial committee. The large balance carried forward was due to be spent on ICT development, but the on-site nursery took over the proposed accommodation. The school manages to achieve best value for goods and services, well exemplified by the governors' challenge on the multi-media language laboratory. It also regularly consults parents and pupils and acts on the results. The school is beginning to compare itself with schools in similar circumstances and see how its provision could be improved, particularly for literacy and attendance. Despite the small size of the sixth form, funds are carefully managed so that it is not subsidised by the main school. Currently, the school has a relatively large carry forward which is mostly earmarked for accommodation projects. The school has average funding and gives satisfactory value for money.

**Sixth form**

70. The head of sixth form satisfactorily co-ordinates provision for the 50 students who spend part of their time in this school and part at the Chetwynd Centre. She effectively monitors their pastoral care and guidance, which includes good induction, a tutorial programme and preparation for future careers or further education. Academic progress is monitored in departments and the head of sixth form has no responsibility in monitoring classroom provision, although she does receive regular information on progress.
71. The sixth form is small and part of the wider provision by the Staffordshire collegiate; its development is planned satisfactorily through the school development plan.

## **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 **satisfactory**.

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

- Pupils in Years 7 to 9 achieve well because of good teaching.
- Pupils with statements of special educational needs receive high quality individual support.
- Pupils in Year 10 are too dependent upon their teachers and are not achieving as well as those in Year 7 to 9.
- Weak listening skills are affecting the pace of learning in lessons.
- Pupils' written expression is limited by their weak vocabulary and difficulties with constructing different kinds of sentences.
- Good leadership is motivating staff and helping them to improving teaching and learning.

##### **Commentary**

72. There has been a declining trend in Year 9 National Curriculum test results since 2002, when they were average compared with all schools and well above average when compared with schools with a similar intake. Overall, results in 2004 were well below the average for all pupils nationally, and the percentage gaining Level 6 and above was very low. Girls outperformed boys, but the difference between them was much less than it is nationally. GCSE results in both English and English literature over the past two years have been well below average. Fewer pupils are entered for literature than are nationally and only half of the boys because they struggle with English language. Many pupils perform worse in English than they do in most of their other subjects because the development of literacy has been interrupted by absence of staff and pupils.
73. Standards on entry to the school are well below the national average. Overall standards of work seen were below average. By the end of Year 9, speaking skills are approaching average and are stronger than reading and writing because pupils have regular planned opportunities to use speech in lessons to develop, refine and share their ideas. However, listening skills of both boys and girls are often poor, especially when teachers give pupils instructions. This sometimes affects the pace of learning in lessons. Reading is below average. Pupils are encouraged to read for enjoyment, but many are reluctant readers and their deductive and inferential skills are weak. Writing standards are also below average. There are frequent errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar, particularly among middle and lower ability pupils who often have difficulty constructing and varying their sentences and using paragraphs, even in Years 10 and 11. Creative writing of both boys and girls is sometimes lively and entertaining and is much stronger than their critical writing, which tends to be descriptive rather than analytical, with argument undeveloped. In literature, even higher ability pupils do not show a close awareness of writers' techniques and how

these influence readers. Average and below average pupils enjoy narrative writing but, because of their limited vocabulary and experience of a range of formal writing styles, they have difficulty with writing to persuade, analyse, instruct and inform.

74. Achievement is satisfactory overall. It is good by the end of Year 9, but only satisfactory by the end of Year 11. This represents an improvement over recent years. A good extra-curricular and support programme, which includes booster classes, competitions and theatre trips and visiting theatre groups, is helping achievement, but regular opportunities for all pupils to use computers to improve their writing, presentation and research skills are limited. Pupils with statements of special educational needs receive high quality individual support and guidance from their teachers and teaching assistants, who work well together to ensure that they make good progress, but many without statements do not achieve well because of their passive attitudes. This is particularly evident in Year 10 where most pupils are over-reliant upon their teachers and generally lack independence and motivation. Unsatisfactory attendance in Years 10 and 11 is a further barrier to good achievement.
75. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There is much good teaching, especially in Years 7 to 9. In the good lessons, teachers clearly identify the skills and understanding which they wish to develop and fully involve the pupils in their own learning and in evaluating their lesson outcomes. They challenge and build confidence and self-esteem, making learning rewarding and enjoyable. However, in some middle and lower sets, pupils are not well motivated and expect teachers to 'spoon-feed' them. As a result, they are over-dependent upon their teachers and are not developing as independent learners. In Years 10 and 11, teachers are rightly concentrating more on the critical reading and writing skills which pupils need, and modelling them well in lessons but, as yet, few pupils effectively analyse texts for themselves. Teachers in these years are also beginning to make greater use of pupils' performance data to set targets for them and to use National Curriculum levels and GCSE assessment criteria to plan their learning objectives. Marking in all years is very positive, but pupils are not always shown exactly what they need to do to improve. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is aided by the experienced teaching assistants whom the school has allocated mainly to English lessons. The school recognises that these pupils need extra help in this subject, whatever their special needs, because this will develop literacy best.
76. Leadership is good. The new head of department shows strong vision and commitment and is already moulding a relatively inexperienced group of teachers into an effective team, helping them to improve their classroom skills. Management is satisfactory. New systems for the monitoring of marking and teaching, rewritten schemes of work for Years 7 to 9 and a departmental development plan designed to redress recent underachievement and raise standards have been introduced, but have not been in place long enough to have had a measurable impact. Additionally, the department has sought guidance and support from the Local Education Authority and is benefiting considerably from the in-service training and good team teaching opportunities which its literacy adviser provides.
77. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. With the exception of the 2004 results, standards in Year 9 national tests have improved, but they have declined in GCSE English and literature. Teaching remains satisfactory, with several good features, and lesson planning has improved. However, many pupils, especially in Year 10, still have a passive attitude to learning and show insufficient perseverance and independence, despite the good and often inspiring teaching.

## Language and literacy across the curriculum

78. Standards of literacy are well below average on entry. By the end of Year 11 they are below average. Poor listening skills affect achievement in several subjects, but speaking skills are being better developed and are approaching average. Standards of reading and writing are below average. Many pupils have problems with spelling and sentence construction and cannot express themselves clearly in writing because of their limited vocabulary and use of Standard English. A few have difficulty with reading and understanding examination questions and written instructions generally. The school acknowledges this and pays good attention in most subjects to revision and examination technique, but this is not consistent. Achievement is best in subjects in which teachers identify the skills to be practised and developed in their lesson planning and ensure that they address all pupils' literacy needs. Better practice is seen in some subjects than others. Geography, for example, is better than science, and there is good practice in modern foreign languages.
79. The teaching of literacy across the curriculum is satisfactory overall. Inspectors saw the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy, in which learning objectives are clearly stated and planning reflects a three- or four-part lesson structure in many lessons. However, opportunities for pupils to reflect on and consolidate their learning, both during and, particularly, at the end of lessons, are not always taken, or too little time is given to them. The understanding and use of specialist vocabulary in each subject are usually well taught and most teachers teach basic note-taking and essay-planning; in some subjects, such as geography, teachers provide high quality writing prompt and guidance sheets to help pupils to extend their responses and to structure their writing. Inconsistencies of practice between departments prevent all teaching from being good. The school must address this.
80. Literacy is managed well in those subjects that ensure that the development of its skills is an integral part of their schemes of work and departmental discussions. This is not the case in all areas, however. Such regular practice is noticeably absent in science. The library and librarian are not used effectively to support and promote literacy in all subjects, nor is there a cross-curricular working group which can drive literacy forward, share and develop best practice, and maintain the impetus of staff training. Although the school acknowledges that literacy across the curriculum needs to be improved, there are no clear, measurable performance or success indicators in its planning. Pupils' individual literacy targets and action plans are not regularly and systematically set, communicated and revised, or considered in all lessons. A lack of close monitoring is evident in the wide quality of practices seen in the Tuesday literacy period for Years 7 and 8. Because systems are not thorough and robust, standards are not improving quickly enough.

## Modern Foreign Languages

Provision in French and Spanish is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are below average but are improving; most pupils achieve well.
- Effective leadership has led to a marked improvement in the quality of teaching.

- Pupils' work is assessed thoroughly so that they understand what progress they are making.
- Achievement in Spanish in Years 10 and 11, particularly for high ability pupils, is not as good as in French.
- Pupils are developing good writing skills but do not have enough opportunities to practise oral work.
- Good resources and a generous allocation of curriculum time are contributing to improving standards.

### **Commentary**

81. GCSE results in French in 2004 were well below average. There was no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls. Performance in French was significantly below that of other subjects. However, the proportion of pupils entered for the examination was high compared to schools nationally. Some pupils were poorly motivated and did not complete the course. There has been no improvement in GCSE results in Spanish since the last inspection. Nevertheless, work seen during the inspection shows that standards are higher than examination results suggest. This is because the new head of department is providing positive leadership which is bringing about an improvement in the quality of teaching and raising expectations.
82. Standards in Year 9 are below average but achievement is good when compared to these pupils' general level of attainment on entry into the school. The department makes an above average contribution to whole-school literacy. Pupils are developing good writing skills; those of higher ability in Years 8 and 9 are making very good progress. They use the main tenses with a good level of accuracy and have a good grasp of key vocabulary. Progress is not as consistent for pupils of average ability, who are often given too much support by teachers, which limits their ability to write independently. However, those with special educational needs are well supported and make good progress. All pupils have opportunities to write at length giving personal details. They develop good literacy skills because of the strong insistence on understanding the structure of language and on the teaching of grammar. The recent establishment of a multi-media centre for the use of the department is having a positive effect on the development of oral skills, but pupils still lack oral confidence because they do not have enough opportunity to speak in lessons outside the multi-media centre. Standards in French in Years 10 and 11 are average and this represents good achievement compared with their level of attainment at the end of Year 9. Many pupils in Year 10 make very good progress; some are already producing work at a level that is above their predicted grade for GCSE. Pupils in Year 11 are generally secure in their use of the main tenses and are developing an appropriate grasp of vocabulary and structure. The better pupils speak with confidence and engage in question-and-answer sessions with little written support. However, there is little evidence of attainment at the highest level, and pupils find it difficult to react to unexpected situations in oral work.
83. Standards in Spanish are below average and achievement is satisfactory. Pupils develop an appropriate grasp of tenses and vocabulary. Those of average and below average ability often make good progress because they are well motivated, but high ability pupils are not being challenged enough. Nevertheless, standards are improving, and pupils are being entered for the full GCSE examination this year.

84. Teaching and learning are good overall; some very good teaching was seen. Pupils are developing good knowledge of vocabulary and good writing and literacy skills because planning is effective. High-quality schemes of work ensure that pupils make good progress over time. Lessons have clear objectives, with good starter activities relating work in the lesson to previous learning. Teachers plan the use of technology to support learning very well. They are developing increasing confidence in the use of new multi-media centre and are already exploiting its potential as a means of improving pupils' oral skills. However, this work is not being supported effectively in other lessons. Teachers do not, for example, use the target language consistently in lessons and do not encourage pupils to use the language for basic communication. As a result, oral skills, particularly in Years 7 to 9, are not as well developed as writing, which is why learning is not so good over time.
85. Pupils are well motivated because relationships in lessons are good. The enthusiasm for the subject shown by teachers transfers itself to pupils who work hard in most lessons and support each other well. The department organises a wide range of extra-curricular activities which enhances pupils' positive attitudes to the subject. A further reason why pupils apply themselves well in many lessons is that teachers have high expectations. They use their good knowledge of National Curriculum levels and GCSE criteria to set challenging targets in lessons. However, in some lessons, pupils are given too much support so that they do not learn to use language independently. They have a clear understanding of their learning because their work is regularly and thoroughly assessed. Teachers monitor progress carefully, and assessment is a strength. They set targets for pupils and monitor progress effectively so that they are able to challenge all pupils and identify underachievement. Pupils are clear about what they need to do to improve because teachers regularly explain National Curriculum levels and GCSE criteria to them. They require pupils to comment on their own progress, and set targets for improvement when marking pupils' work.
86. Leadership and management are good overall. The new head of department has a very clear vision of the way forward and is very well informed about current developments. Evaluation of the work of the department is thorough and leads to effective action-planning. This is already making a positive impact on the quality of teaching and is leading to steadily improving standards. Support from the governing body is very good. Governors' joint planning with the head of department has been responsible for the installation of a multi-media centre with guaranteed regular access for the modern languages department; this is already beginning to improve standards of oral work. Modern foreign languages have a high profile in the school. One third of pupils now have the opportunity to study Spanish from Year 7 onwards. The time allocation is generous and is already leading to improved standards in this language. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Although examination results remain well below average, there has been a marked improvement in the standard of writing.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is good and often very good, promoting effective learning.
- The head of department is enthusiastic and committed and the staff work well together as a team.



- Relationships in lessons are very good and the pupils behave well and work hard.
- Test results at the end of Year 9 have improved recently, particularly at the higher levels.
- GCSE results need to improve.
- Links between Rising Brook and the primary schools are not developed enough to enable smooth transition in this subject.

## Commentary

87. Pupils' results in GCSE examinations in 2004 are well below the national average at grades A\*-C and just below for grades A\*-G. Boys' results were better at A\*-C and girls' results were better for grades A\*-G. Pupils' results in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 in 2004 show the proportion of pupils reaching the required level is below the national average for that for similar schools. Girls performed better than boys. The proportion of pupils reaching the required level and the higher levels has risen significantly over the last few years.
88. Attainment on entry is well below the national average. Achievement over time by the majority of pupils at the end of Years 9 is good and at the end of Year 11 is satisfactory. Achievement in lessons is usually good and sometimes very good. In all years pupils with special educational needs make sound progress. Standards of work seen in lessons and in the pupils' books throughout the school were at the expected level for many pupils and better than the test and examination results would indicate in Years 10 and 11. Poor retention of knowledge prevents the pupils' performance in tests and examinations from being as good as it might be. Most pupils have a good grasp of basic number work and their algebraic skills are developing well. Data handling is generally well understood and used in other subjects across the curriculum. Many pupils find space and shape work difficult.
89. Teaching is good overall. All lessons seen were at least satisfactory and several were very good. Lessons are well planned with clear learning objectives which are communicated to pupils. In the best lessons, teachers have high expectations of the pupils, the pace is good and a variety of tasks has been prepared to challenge the pupils. In a Year 7 lesson, an investigative approach to the representation and analysis of data enabled the pupils to make very good progress in their understanding of the importance of data handling. Where teaching is less good the work is not as well matched to the pupils' needs. Some very good starter exercises were seen. In a Year 10 lesson, for example, the interactive whiteboard was used imaginatively and enthusiastically by the pupils to develop their ability to draw two-dimensional drawings of three-dimensional shapes. The use of the interactive whiteboard is developing well and enhancing the pupils' learning. The plenary sessions are more variable in quality and do not always consolidate learning appropriately. Teachers make effective use of questioning, encouraging pupils to explain their answers and solutions to the rest of the class.
90. Learning is good as a result of effective teaching. Most pupils acquire knowledge of basic skills and concepts, which enable them to work on their own to improve their understanding. Literacy is improved by the good displays of key words, the insistence of teachers on the correct use of mathematical language and the good oral work in lessons. In one starter exercise, pupils spent a few minutes writing mathematical words beginning with the letter S. Pupils have a positive attitude to mathematics; they

behave well in lessons and relationships between pupils and with their teachers are very good.

91. Leadership of the department is very good and management is good. The head of department is enthusiastic and has a clear vision of what needs to be done to raise standards further. She is well supported by the other teachers and the teaching assistant who are all hardworking and enthusiastic. The department is responding very positively to the National Numeracy Strategy and this is raising standards. The schemes of work are very detailed and well written. The department development plan is closely linked to the school improvement plan and clearly identifies the priorities for improvement. Assessment procedures are good and pupils are tested regularly. They are aware of National Curriculum levels and have targets set. Day-to-day marking is mainly both encouraging and informative, though there are inconsistencies.
92. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. The department carries out a detailed analysis of test answers to help the preparation for further tests and examinations. Teaching has improved and the use of ICT has further enhanced learning.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

93. Pupils' numeracy skills are satisfactory. The key features of the National Numeracy Strategy are now being shared with all staff in the school. Aspects of mathematics have been identified in most subject schemes of work. Pupils are using their mathematical knowledge and skills in other subjects across the curriculum. Statistical analysis, graphwork, basic measuring and calculations are used competently in geography, science, art and design and technology.

### **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

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

- Standards in external tests and examinations are well below national averages.
- Weaknesses in literacy reduce the progress of a significant number of pupils.
- Teachers plan their lessons well and provide a range of activities to engage pupils' interest.
- Most pupils concentrate in lessons, but a significant number, particularly in Years 7 to 9, do not work well enough on their own and are easily distracted.
- Many pupils find it difficult to remember the work they did previously.
- Teachers provide good support and encouragement.
- Work in the subject is not monitored and evaluated effectively.

#### **Commentary**

94. Results in the Year 9 tests in 2003 were below the national average. They were similar to the previous year. Girls' results were comparable with those of boys'. In 2004, results were lower, and likely to be well below average. Far fewer pupils reached the higher levels, particularly girls. Results in the GCSE examinations in double award science in 2004 were significantly below the national average, and lower

than those of the previous year. Boys performed better than girls. The percentage of boys gaining A\*/A grades was above average, while girls were below.

95. Current standards in Year 9 are below the national average. Many pupils have substantial gaps in their scientific knowledge. The progress of a considerable number of pupils is significantly reduced by weaknesses in literacy. Pupils have difficulty recording what they are doing and confuse scientific terms. Their written notes are often inadequate, which prevents them revising their work properly. Because of this, attainment in external examinations is generally lower than in lessons, since pupils do not remember factual information well. However, by Year 9 most pupils gain appropriate practical skills and many have a much improved understanding of scientific concepts. As a result, achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory, although some boys make inadequate progress because they fail to concentrate enough in lessons.
96. Standards in Year 11 are below the national average, but most pupils have a better knowledge of scientific facts than in Year 9. Literacy levels are generally higher and do not affect pupils' progress as much. However, many pupils find it hard to link different aspects of the subject and their recall of earlier work is not sufficiently detailed. Pupils' assessed course work is satisfactory, with higher ability pupils demonstrating good investigative skills. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory and similar for boys and girls.
97. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress when given appropriate support, particularly when teaching assistants are working in the department. However, higher ability pupils do not always make as much progress as they might because teaching sometimes fails to develop their understanding and they are not given enough extension work. Pupils have satisfactory numeracy and ICT skills which teachers develop appropriately as required.
98. Pupils' attitudes are generally good. Most pupils concentrate in lessons and show interest. They respond particularly well when actively engaged in practical work. However, many have poor listening skills and are easily distracted. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 are over-dependent on teachers and lack confidence. As a result, teachers have difficulty encouraging them to think for themselves. A significant number of pupils, mainly boys, are uncooperative and behave inappropriately. This inevitably causes the work in some lessons to become disrupted, because teachers are interrupted by having to carry out the behaviour procedures.
99. Teaching is satisfactory overall. Teachers are well qualified and plan their lessons effectively. Individual pupils receive good support and encouragement. Learning is usually satisfactory and good when pupils are engaged well in the work and kept busy. However, learning is sometimes not as good as might be expected because pupils fail to respond, despite teachers' efforts. In some lessons, the work is insufficiently challenging and teachers do not ensure that pupils are fully involved. Although teachers organise a variety of activities to engage pupils' interest, the starts of lessons are often too slow and uninspiring. Improvements in pupils' literacy are hindered by too little reinforcement of scientific words, and over-use of worksheets reduces opportunities for extended writing. Assessment is satisfactory. Work is marked regularly and teachers are keen to help pupils improve. However, developmental comments are not specific enough or linked effectively to National Curriculum target. Teaching and learning are well supported by the work of the technicians, but accommodation is poor and hampers practical work, particularly with larger classes.

100. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Progress has been slow since the previous inspection, but there are signs of greater urgency following the appointment of a new head of department. A particular focus on improving learning, assisted by specialist help from outside the school, is starting to have some effect. Assessment data are used more effectively to track performance in the subject and schemes of work are being modified and brought up to date. More opportunities for investigational work are being introduced and the resources for ICT are better. However, weaknesses still exist in assessment and the management of behaviour and some higher ability pupils underachieve. Monitoring and evaluation of classroom practice are ineffective, resulting in inconsistencies in teaching not being addressed properly. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The range of courses for pupils in Years 10 and 11 is broad and appropriate for their needs, except for the small number learning music or Spanish who are not doing ICT GCSE.
- Time allocation for pupils in Years 7 to 9 and for the GCSE short course is not enough, so their achievement is unsatisfactory.
- The use of ICT in other subjects is satisfactory but it is not being well promoted, monitored or developed except in modern foreign languages.

### **Commentary**

101. Results in the 2004 GCSE examination in Information Systems were above the national average and above the results of the pupils in their other subjects. Those in other courses were below average. Pupils on the Applied GCSE course performed at the levels predicted for them, while results in the short course were below those predicted. Short course pupils have only one 50-minute lesson each week, which is below the time needed for good coverage of the course.

102. Current standards are below average, similar to those achieved in the examinations, with boys working at a higher level of competence. Pupils enter the school below expected levels. They remain so at the end of Year 9 and again in Year 11. Higher ability pupils do not work at the level of which they are capable. Pupils with special educational needs work well in relation to their ability when they are supported by teaching assistants, but the school cannot recruit enough so they are generally employed in English lessons rather than in ICT. Low attendance in many classes causes the already short time to be further decreased so pupils' achievement suffers, and when they do go to lessons, their unsatisfactory behaviour sometimes lowers their attainment.

103. Pupils throughout the school have satisfactory basic ICT skills. In Years 7 to 9 they carry out procedures to create and amend files, but do so without enough reference to their purpose. They think little about audience or user. With only one lesson each week it is difficult, though not impossible, for them to cover all of the demands of the National Curriculum or the Key Stage 3 Strategy. Their achievement is therefore unsatisfactory, taking all aspects of the subject into account. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 vary according to the course. Those in Information Systems think about the purpose of their work and show the development of thinking in their work. They therefore achieve well. The applied GCSE pupils carry out the procedures demanded by the course to a satisfactory level, and their achievement is satisfactory. Pupils following the Short GCSE course do not have enough time to reach the required level and so their work is superficial, with too little thought about its purpose. Their standards are therefore below expected levels and their achievement is unsatisfactory. Low level of literacy is a barrier to expression of ideas, for example pupils with special educational needs have unsatisfactory achievement because of the difficulties of expressing ideas in the short available time.
104. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in lessons, although the short time in some courses has a negative impact on learning overall. The best teaching is where teachers give clear guidance followed by good quality individual support; in such classes, pupils listen well. A blind visiting speaker held the attention of an Applied GCSE class, for example, while he described the impact of ICT on his life. The teacher added to the learning well when he intervened to show pupils where they could make helpful notes. When teaching is less good, the introduction to a lesson does not give enough help to allow pupils to start without individual support and the teacher cannot cope with the demand. Some disaffected pupils in several lessons seen made it difficult for teachers to keep the class on task, and so the learning of all pupils suffered. Often the school withdraws these pupils from class. Teachers mark work regularly but there is no consistency in comments, with some teachers giving useful help for improvement while others praise good effort.
105. The department is well led. The head of department is a good role model in his own teaching and has driven forward improvements in resources. Although he provides good quality assistance to colleagues who struggle with some pupils' poor behaviour, he does not have time to monitor teaching or marking in such a way as to move up standards. Management is satisfactory, but the workload the head of department has with the sixth form on another site necessitates the management of Years 7 to 9 to be in the hands of another teacher, with the result that there is too little co-ordination across all years to make sure that pupils' strengths are built on and weaknesses addressed. The school has yet to appoint an ICT co-ordinator.
106. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory in the widening of opportunities for the learning of ICT in Years 10 and 11, and the improvement of resources to meet the needs of the whole school.

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

107. Standards in ICT when it is used in other subjects are good enough for the purpose of the activities. Opportunities have improved since the previous inspection, with ICT used in almost all subjects, with the exception of citizenship. The lack of equipment in design and technology prevents pupils from achieving satisfactorily in the requirement to control movement in manufacturing, but they achieve well in French and Spanish. Information and communication technology makes a very good contribution to learning

in modern foreign languages, mathematics and history. The use of ICT is not monitored, so there is no assurance of equality of access within other subjects.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **Geography**

Provision in geography is **very good**.

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

- Leadership and management of the department are very good and are clearly focused on the raising of standards.
- Pupils respond enthusiastically to very good teaching and behave very well in class.
- Pupils achieve well and there has been an overall upward trend in standards over the past four years.
- Effective strategies are leading to an improvement in standards of literacy.
- Higher ability pupils are not always given sufficiently challenging tasks.

#### **Commentary**

108. The attainment of pupils on entry is well below that expected for their age. Accurate teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 show that both boys and girls, while remaining below the standards expected for their age, improve their performance and achieve well. This is confirmed by work seen in class. Pupils use technical terms well, describe and explain regional contrasts in less economically developed countries, and understand how to resolve land use conflicts in national parks.
109. In 2004, results in the GCSE examinations were well below the national average at grades A\*-C and below average at grades A\*-G. A higher percentage of girls attained grades A\*-C. Despite the downturn in results from 2003, results in geography have improved overall since 2001 and are now among the highest in the school. Standards of classwork seen in Years 10 and 11 are just below those expected at this stage in the course, but the coursework based on the local region is good. Pupils' achievement by the end of Year 11 is good. They have a good understanding of the reasons for population changes in the United Kingdom and of the primary and secondary effects of the Kobe earthquake in Japan.
110. Boys achieve as well as girls in class and both contribute willingly to discussions and collaborate well in paired and group work. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is good. The learning support assistants are used to good effect. Much work is well targeted individually and very good behaviour overall allows pupils to receive individual support. The achievement of higher ability pupils is good but they are not always given sufficiently challenging extension tasks beyond their coursework.
111. Teaching is very good overall; pupils learn well. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and high expectations. They plan well-structured lessons with varied activities and resources. Lessons start in an orderly way and the pace throughout is brisk, but not enough time is left at the end to reflect on objectives and to ensure that lessons finish promptly. Questioning techniques are particularly well directed to stimulate pupils' interest. The use of homework to extend learning is good and constructive verbal comments are frequently given to the whole class. Self- and peer-

assessment are becoming well developed. Written comments tell pupils what they have to do to improve and performance against targets is carefully tracked.

112. Pupils are improving their literacy through the reinforcement of key words and through teacher insistence on the accurate construction of sentences and the use of evidence to support arguments. There are many opportunities for discussion but extended writing is limited. Good teaching of numeracy results in the accurate use of a range of graphs and charts in all years. The programme of fieldwork is well integrated into the schemes of work and ICT skills are well developed through coursework. The selection of worldwide case studies contributes well to pupils' cultural development and they reflect sensitively on the magnitude of natural hazards and man-made disasters. There are few opportunities for studies of multi-cultural Britain but citizenship skills are explicitly taught.
113. Leadership and management of the department are very good. Teachers are excellent role models. Teamwork is very good and the commitment to the raising of standards is highly professional and enthusiastic. The department is managed very efficiently on a day-to-day basis, ensuring a consistent approach to teaching and learning. The use of self-evaluation is clearly linked to planning for improvement. Monitoring is becoming more widely used to track performance but is not yet sufficiently rigorous. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good, particularly in the opportunities for individual enquiry and fieldwork, and in the improvement in literacy.

## History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results are below national averages.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Pupils' literacy is weak.
- Pupils achieve well in lessons, but less well over time.
- Leadership and management of the subject are good.

### Commentary

114. The standards in history are average. They are better by the end of Year 11 than by the end of Year 9. Whilst GCSE results remain below national averages, they have been steadily improving. Results in 2004 were the best achieved so far, with no significant difference between those of boys and girls. The Year 9 teacher assessments also show some improvement, but are below the national average. The progress of many of the pupils is held up by their weak literacy, particularly in the lower ability sets. An example of this was shown in a Year 8 lesson where, despite good support from the teacher, many pupils found it difficult to imagine what people may have thought of the execution of Charles I. Weaknesses in the ability to retain information also hold up the overall progress of pupils, especially in Years 10 and 11. Pupils understand chronology satisfactorily, and most are improving their skill at handling source material and drawing conclusions from it.

115. Achievement is satisfactory overall. In lessons it was good, but pupils achieve less well over time because they have difficulty understanding or remembering the work. Most pupils enter the school below, or well below, the national average. The department has a satisfactory literacy policy to raise achievement, with key terms explained and some good individual support in the classroom. A few instances of reading aloud were seen, but some of the written work in books is very limited in content and vocabulary, especially that of boys. The position is better in Years 10 and 11, where emphasis is effectively placed on understanding examination techniques. A good example of this was seen in a Year 11 lesson, where pupils constructed well their own mark schemes to answer a question on propaganda sources in World War I.
116. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Lessons are well planned and structured, with pupils well engaged in their work. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Classes are mostly well managed and pupils respond with good attitudes towards the subject, although there is some low level disruption in lower ability sets in Years 8 and 9. Most pupils acquire skills well and some good examples of GCSE coursework were seen. Effective use of questions challenges the pupils to think about the issues involved. Strong moral challenge is a feature of most lessons, an example of which was shown in a Year 10 lesson where pupils discussed well the Nazi views of women and society, based on posters from the 1930s. Pupils with special educational needs have good support from the teachers and tasks matched to their attainment. No use of classroom assistance was seen for these pupils who make at least satisfactory progress. The scheme of assessment is good, recording and tracking pupils' achievement. This operates more effectively in the examination groups.
117. Leadership and management are good. There is a clear vision and direction for the subject and documentation is thorough. All schemes of work have been effectively revised. Consultation is regular, as is support for the two non-specialist teachers. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching is satisfactory. Enrichment of the curriculum is good, with a Year 10 visit to the World War I battlefields and many local activities. The use of ICT is satisfactory, with some problems of access.
118. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. The work of the department has been thoroughly analysed and made more relevant to the needs of the pupils. Tasks now match attainment much more closely. Work by pupils on sources and evidence has improved and skills are much better developed. None of this has yet been reflected in examination results.

## **Religious education**

Provision for religious education is **satisfactory**.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The long-term decline in the subject has been reversed since the recent appointment of a specialist teacher.
- Achievement is satisfactory, because teaching and learning are satisfactory.
- Standards are still too low.

## **Commentary**



119. Standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 have been depressed by the three-year period of staffing turbulence that preceded the start of the academic year. Low levels of literacy have an adverse impact on standards and achievement in all years.
120. By Year 9, standards are well below the national average. This represents satisfactory achievement. By Year 11, standards at GCSE Short Course examination level are also well below the national average. This again represents satisfactory achievement. The GCSE Short Course was introduced simultaneously into Years 10 and 11 in September 2004. Consequently Year 11 pupils are trying to complete a two-year course in one year. This will limit how well they can achieve, despite good teaching and the good attitudes most bring to lessons.
121. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall and good in Years 10 and 11. Where learning is strongest, lessons have clear aims that are communicated to pupils. They are planned well to achieve their objectives, and challenge pupils with a variety of activities and tasks that are well matched to their individual needs. Care is taken to ensure that pupils of all backgrounds and capabilities play a full and active part in lessons so that learning is sound. Good relationships encourage them to take risks in their learning, because they know that their peers will listen to their contributions with respect.
122. Where pupils learn least well, teaching is over-directive in style, and does not give them enough responsibility for their own learning. Work is sometimes too difficult for those of lower ability because it is too abstract. Assessment is satisfactory overall but unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9. Marking, though conscientious and supportive, does not always do enough to help pupils understand how to improve the standard of their work, or to develop their literacy skills.
123. The sole teacher of religious education is newly qualified. Though he is not yet experienced enough to undertake the leadership and management responsibilities of a head of department, he is committed to moving the subject on. In a short space of time he has successfully overseen the introduction of the GCSE Short Course, and formed valuable subject links outside the school. He enjoys good support from senior management and the Local Education Authority.
124. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory overall. Achievement is higher, because of significant improvements to the quality of teaching and learning. Pupils' attitudes have improved, and provision has been enriched by the introduction of the GCSE Short Course. However, standards are low. Statutory requirements are not met, because a significant minority of Year 10 and 11 pupils are withdrawn from lessons to study other subjects, and because religious education is not taught in the sixth form.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **Design and technology**

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

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

- Good planning and preparation for lessons ensures pupils adopt good working practices.

- Assessment procedures are well used by teachers to improve pupils' standards.
- National Curriculum requirements are not fully met, because systems and control are not covered sufficiently because of insufficient access to computers.
- The absence of a subject specialist leader and some non-specialist teaching adversely affect the standards achieved by pupils in some aspects of design and technology.

## Commentary

125. Results in the 2004 GCSE examinations were at the national average for those gaining grades A\* to C. Textile technology results were well above average. Pupils performed better in design and technology than their average in other subjects. Results in design and technology have been consistently at national average over a number of years. Despite the difficulties in the department over the previous two terms, standards of work seen in Year 11 during the inspection in textiles and food were at the national average. Achievement is good. Pupils show good awareness of health and safety when using equipment and tools, know the importance of a healthy diet and identify different fabrics. There is limited evidence of ICT being used to support presentation, but none to aid design or manufacture such as sketching in graphic products (CAD/CAM).
126. Current standards of work in Year 9 are below average. This indicates good achievement, as pupils' attainment on entry to the school is well below the standards usually found nationally. Pupils' files are generally well kept and well organised. Literacy is satisfactory in design and technology as a result of good teacher guidance. Keywords and technical phrases are encouraged. Oral responses in Years 7 to 9 tend to be short. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as others of their age because they are given good support.
127. The quality of teaching and learning in design and technology is satisfactory. Some good, very good and several unsatisfactory lessons were observed. Specialist teachers have a good command of the subject. In the best lessons, all pupils are clear about what they will learn, planning is effective and time is well used. Pupils are engaged in a variety of activities. Questions are well targeted at pupils to test their knowledge and understanding. Assessment procedures are good but are not well used by teachers to improve pupils' standards. In Years 10 and 11, not all pupils are clear what they need to do to improve their grades. A few lessons lack variety of teaching methods and drive, resulting in poor motivation and challenging behaviour from lower ability boys, though poor behaviour does not prevent the majority of pupils from getting on with their work. In a number of lessons, plenary sessions are weak because they are too short to allow pupils to consolidate their learning.
128. Leadership and management are both satisfactory because teachers have worked hard to keep the department together during the absence of the head of department and other staff members. Although staffing has had an adverse impact on the potential progress of subjects, improvement has been satisfactory since the previous inspection.

## VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

### Art and design

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers prepare interesting lessons, which engage pupils' interest.
- Teachers set firm rules for behaviour and attitudes to learning are good.
- There is a good focus on improving pupils' literacy.

- Pupils develop good cultural understanding.
- Facilities in ICT are insufficient.
- Assessment is not sharp enough for pupils to know how to improve.
- The lack of vocational courses is a disadvantage to many pupils.

## **Commentary**

129. Teachers' assessments show standards in Year 9 at the end of 2004 were below average. Year 11 GCSE results were also below average. Current standards by the end of Year 9 are in line with national expectations. Pupils enter Year 7 with well below average skills and understanding, so their achievement over the three years is good. They effectively use a wide range of media but have little opportunity to generate imagery electronically because there are insufficient computers in the department. Pupils develop good levels of technical vocabulary, when discussing their own work and that of other artists. They are given good verbal advice in lessons but their ability to retain knowledge gained in class is poor. Targets set for whole year groups are not focused enough for individuals. Skills in drawing are taught step-by-step, which helps pupils gain confidence and capability, including those with special educational needs who make the same good progress as peers. Pupils develop good understanding of a range of artists from different times and cultures, including works by Aboriginal, African and Japanese artists.
130. Standards seen in folders, sketchbooks and displays of Year 10 and 11 pupils were average. A few show maturity and choose their own topical issues, such as racism, as a focus, which challenge perceptions, but many are content to rely on teachers' suggestions or ready-made source materials from books, magazines or photographs instead of exploring their own creativity and inventiveness. This accounts for their lower examination grades. Pupils research the lives of artists using the Internet but they have to do this outside of lessons.
131. Teaching and learning are very good in Years 7 to 9, and this accounts for pupils' good achievement. Teachers plan interesting lessons and make attractive visual handout materials, which focus pupils' attention. They set firm ground rules for behaviour; consequently, attitudes to learning are good and pupils are industrious. Teachers use a good range of well-matched and supportive teaching strategies to cater for different learning needs. There are clubs on two lunchtimes and one after school each week, which extend opportunities for learning. There has been considerable lack of continuity with staffing. Present arrangements are still partly temporary. This in addition to the withdrawal of more appropriate vocational courses has been a disadvantage to many pupils. The subject is not a popular choice. Currently there are no pupils in Year 10. Only one lesson was seen in Year 11; teaching and learning were very good.
132. Leadership and management are good. The department is well organised. Displays are used well to celebrate pupils' work. Innovative word games and written exercises in lessons are making a good contribution to literacy and to the good improvement made since the previous inspection. A gallery visit to London for pupils in Year 9 has been arranged to help recruitment to the GCSE course. Relationships are good. There is a harmonious and welcoming ethos which helps all pupils to feel valued.

## **Music and expressive arts**

Music was inspected fully. Expressive arts were sampled in Years 10 and 11 where they provide a popular alternative to single arts courses; in 2004, results were above average. This represents good progress for both boys and girls. In the current Year 11, pupils are on target to achieve above the national average. Achievement is very good. The use of *mind mapping* for research and review is helping pupils remember ideas. The use of aide-memoires, visual images and work on artistic styles and patterns combines subjects in an effective way that includes music at a later date. Innovative developments in Year 8 are providing for a 'fast-track' approach to Expressive Arts that is expected to broaden the opportunities for courses in the arts.

Provision in music is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching and learning are very good in Years 7 to 9.
- Standards are improving in Years 7 to 9 and results at GCSE are among the best in the school.
- The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.
- The use of ICT is not consistent.
- Assessment does not always match pupils' performance in Years 9 and 11.

### **Commentary**

133. Pupils enter the school with below average ability in music. They achieved well to achieve results above the national average in 2004. At the end of Year 11, all pupils achieved pass grades between A and G in 2004, but mostly of lower order because pupils generally lack broader practical experience to achieve the higher grades. Standards are among the highest in the school.
134. Standards improve quickly during Years 7 and 8. Good progress in performing and improvisation is made, but basic musical skills are not always consolidated using ICT or vocal work in Year 9. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good in Year 7 through work using recorders. Year 8 pupils memorise long melodies and rhythms. Good use of speaking and listening was seen as well as good reference to social and cultural education through pupil discussions and work on the *Blues*, for example. Most pupils taking GCSE also play an instrument or sing, and take part in the school's extra-curricular activities, such as the effective *Samba* band led by a teacher from the LEA Music Service.
135. Pupils learn well as a result of good teaching. Learning objectives are clear and pupils frequently review and appraise their work. Performing shows a high level of commitment. Pupils do not yet use a wide range of dedicated recording and sequencing tools to support composing. The marking and moderating of workbooks is complete but pupils do not always know what they need to do to improve. Compositions and performances, submitted early for the 2005 examination, show good musical outcomes particularly when using the voice and keyboard. Electronic keyboards are used but the use of ICT to review, modify and evaluate work as it progresses is less secure. The number of computers is insufficient for pupils to enhance composing, notation and contextual skills, especially in Years 7 to 9 and is a particular disadvantage for pupils in Years 10 and 11.

136. The department is well led and managed, and improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Standards by average and below average pupils have been consolidated, new pitched percussion for classroom use has enhanced the understanding of pitch and rhythm, and improvisation has become a central feature of the work at all levels. The dedication of the head of department and effective management of the subject are seen in detailed planning and regular review of improvement targets, but pupils are not expected to use their singing voices frequently enough. The lack of resources, including ICT, is hampering progress for some pupils. Assessment does not always match pupils' performance in Years 9 and 11 and is a management issue in the department action plan. There is a strong spirit of inclusiveness in music and Expressive Arts in the department, which is an inspiring place to be.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

### **Physical education**

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

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

- Leadership is excellent.
- Provision in Years 10 and 11 is excellent, with a high proportion of very good teaching.
- Very good arrangements for assessment and recording make a significant contribution to the quality of teaching and learning and the standards pupils achieve.
- Community links are excellent, but closer links are needed with local universities to provide opportunities to become involved in teacher training.
- The use of ICT is not developed enough to improve analysis of performance.

#### **Commentary**

137. Standards overall at the end of Year 11 are above average. Pupils play badminton confidently and enthusiastically. They choose shots and employ strategies to move their opponent around the court in order to win points. They keep score accurately. Pupils develop a good understanding of the role of the Olympic Games in modern society and accurately recall the significant events in every Games since 1936. Standards at the end of Year 9 are average. Pupils show accurate technique when performing fitness exercises and identify strengths and weaknesses in their own performance and that of others. They understand the effect of exercise on their bodies and why it is important to keep fit and healthy.
138. Achievement is very good. Standards in Year 7 when the pupils enter the school are below average and they find it hard to sustain activity over anything other than short periods. They identify that exercise causes changes in their bodies but cannot accurately say why. By the time they reach the end of Year 9, they are able to persevere during exercise, are self-motivated, and can identify the specific muscle groups used during fitness routines. Achievement accelerates in Year 10 and by the end of Year 11, pupils plan and perform aerobics routines enthusiastically and accurately show good rhythm, range of movement and syncopation. This represents very good progress.
139. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall. In the best lessons, teachers use their very good subject knowledge to plan lessons that engage and sustain the

interest, enthusiasm and commitment of the pupils. They ensure that skills are developed progressively; they tell pupils what they want them to do and how to achieve targets set for them. Pupils, therefore, build carefully on what they can do both in lessons and over time. In a Year 11 lesson, for example, pupils were given a variety of opportunities to explain to an increasingly wider audience what they had learned from their research into the politics of the Olympic Games. As a result, they confidently produced a balanced argument, giving opinions both for and against political intervention. In such lessons, the pace is brisk and time is managed very well. This ensures that there is always plenty of purposeful activity to which pupils respond very well. A particular feature is the quality and range of questions that teachers ask of the pupils. They probe and challenge pupils' developing knowledge and understanding so that progress made during lessons is accelerated. Assessment is good.

140. Leadership and management are excellent. The subject leader has been associated with the school over a considerable number of years and has used his experience of and links with the community to ensure that no opportunity is missed to improve provision for the pupils. The department continues to grow and to seek ways of improving provision and has recently submitted a comprehensive bid for Sports College status. A culture of high expectations based on mutual respect and a 'can-do' attitude permeates the department with the result that standards are consistently high. The department is also committed to the needs and aspirations of all pupils, with the result that those who have special educational needs as well as those who show particular talent are very well catered for. Staff freely give of their own time to promote sport and this has had an extremely positive impact on how the subject is viewed throughout the school. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good.

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

### **Citizenship**

141. Citizenship was sampled through its documentation, since no lessons were taught during the week of the inspection and pupils' work was not available for scrutiny.
142. Citizenship is one component of the personal, social and health education programme. The course units have been well planned by the present co-ordinator and leadership of the subject is good. Clear information has been provided for both pupils and parents about nature of citizenship and the topics to be covered. Sufficient time is allocated in Years 7 to 9 to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens and their skills of enquiry, communication, participation and responsible action. The time allowed in Years 10 and 11, and particularly in Year 11, is not adequate to cover the recommended topics.
143. The subject is taught by a team of non-specialist staff, for whom the co-ordinator provides a wide range of resources and activities, designed to reflect different learning styles. Both local and national sources are extensively used. Good external links have been developed with other schools and with local organisations such as the planning department, leading to some joint projects.
144. There are good internal links with certain departments, for example geography, which explicitly teach citizenship skills through topics such as planning decisions in national parks. A number of tutor groups have participated in active citizenship projects through re-cycling and fund-raising activities. Management is satisfactory overall. An

audit of cross-curricular opportunities has been completed but delivery is inconsistent and not yet carefully monitored. The current system for assessment does not provide a secure basis on which to track pupils' progress and monitor standards.



## 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 table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2004.

### *Level 3 GCE AS level courses*

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	4	0	63.5	0	10.4	0	19.8
Chemistry	2	0	70.3	0	13.2	0	23
English/English language	1	100	85.3	0	16.1	40	29
Design and technology	1	0	72.6	0	13.9	0	24.3
General studies	10	20	73.6	0	16.9	7	25.5
Geography	3	100	75.5	0	20.4	30	27
History	6	50	82.2	0	20.8	15	29.2
Information technology	2	100	66.6	0	8.8	25	20.6
Other sciences	4	75	67.4	0	14.8	20	22.8
Other social sciences	2	0	67.8	0	67.8	0	23.2
Physics	1	0	66.4	0	14.8	0	22.4
Religious studies	2	50	82.2	0	26.1	15	31.2
Sports/PE studies	3	66.7	72.2	0	11.8	26.7	22.8

### *Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses*

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	1	100	96.6	0	40	40	79.3
Chemistry	2	100	97.7	50	50	100	85.7
General Studies	3	100	94.9	0	30.5	60	72.9
Geography	1	100	98.8	100	46.4	100	85.2
Mathematics	2	100	96.8	50	56.6	100	89.5
Other social sciences	1	100	97.4	0	42.5	60	81.6
Physics	2	100	96.7	50	45.3	90	82.6
Health and social care	2	100	93.5	100	24.9	100	70

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

### English

Provision in English literature is **satisfactory**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The new course has been well implemented.
- Students are challenged by good teaching.
- Students do not take enough responsibility for their own learning.
- Poor attendance of some students is affecting their achievement.

#### Commentary

145. Historically, students have attained average standards in AS and A level English literature. In 2002, a combined English and literature course replaced this examination. In 2004, this was succeeded by the present literature course which is offered at AS level only.
146. Standards of work seen in the small group of four students are below average overall. Students speak confidently when required and contribute well to group work. Standards of writing are less secure because of students' limited vocabulary and their inability to synthesise commentary, quotations and analysis well. Writing is sometimes in an inappropriate narrative style and, although students respond strongly to plot and character, they often forget that these are literary constructs. Hence, because they do not closely analyse the writer's techniques and style, or effectively justify personal responses in their writing, they cannot attain the higher grades. Although they identify a suitable range of literary terms, they have difficulty commenting upon their effectiveness and impact on readers or audiences.
147. Achievement is satisfactory overall, in spite of good teaching. Achievement is aided by the very good relationships which exist both between students and with their teachers. However, students are too reliant on their teachers and are not developing as confident, independent learners because they are not inquisitive enough and do not carry out personal research unbidden. Additionally, some students are jeopardising their chances of success by their poor attendance.
148. Teaching and learning are good overall. Lessons are well planned and challenging. Teachers make very good use of the assessment objectives to guide students' responses and to ensure that they know what is expected of them. Teachers also try to make effective use of students' own knowledge and experience to help them to associate with the themes and texts being studied. However, because students are not widely read and do not have good general knowledge, they tend to see their teacher as providers and experts, and do not contribute enough themselves or take responsibility for their own learning. Marking is good and teachers' comments are clearly linked to the grade level descriptors to show students what they must do to improve.

149. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Teachers show both commitment and enthusiasm. The new course has been well implemented and teachers are now looking for ways of improving provision further and encouraging recruitment. The department is still developing a system for the sharing of best practice and examining how to promote students' self study and their independent learning more effectively. There is no improvement judgement because the AS syllabus was not taught at the time of the previous inspection.

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

150. Standards of reading and writing are still below average as students begin Year 12. English and literacy in the sixth form are below average overall, although they are average in some subjects. They are not low enough to make a significant impact on students' progress and understanding in their chosen courses, but they do limit the clarity of their written expression. Speaking and listening are better than reading and writing because students have opportunities in most lessons to use speech to explain, explore and evaluate, but a lack of wider reading and a limited vocabulary restrict their ability to debate and hypothesise and to justify and challenge concepts, theories and opinions. Teaching is good, with research, note-taking and careful planning for essay writing explicitly taught in most subjects, and assessment and learning objectives regularly communicated to students.

### **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

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

- Teaching and learning are good.
- Students are well motivated and work hard.
- Provision is well managed.
- The number of students studying A level mathematics is very low, but is beginning to rise.
- The use of ICT is not developed enough to support learning.

#### **Commentary**

151. The numbers of students following the A level course over the last few years is too low to be compared meaningfully to national averages. In the GCE A level examination in 2004 both the students achieved a grade in line with their prior attainment.
152. The standards of work seen in the sixth form are at the expected level and achievement is satisfactory. Students are making progress because of effective and challenging teaching. Students' competent algebraic skills enable them to cope with the differentiation and integration work. Good, clear diagrams in statistics helped them to answer questions with understanding.
153. Teaching is all good and students learn well as a result. Lessons are well planned. The pace at which the work is undertaken is well matched to the needs of all students. Questioning is skilful, and students answer confidently with a good level of understanding. Much of the written work demanded of students takes the form of questions, which test the students' understanding. Homework is set regularly together

with tests and examination questions. This work is marked in a detailed way to help students make progress in their understanding. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and they give clear explanations. Students find the work interesting and challenging. They are aware of their progress and predicted grades and recognise and appreciate the help and support given by the teachers. Relationships between students and teachers are very good.

154. Work is well managed in the sixth form. Staff co-operate in the planning and work well together under the very good leadership given by the head of department. Teachers know individual students' strengths and weaknesses well. The curriculum for sixth form mathematics is appropriate and meets the needs of the students. Individual students who work independently to enrich their learning are well catered for. Sixth form mathematics was not part of the previous inspection.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

155. The use of mathematics across the curriculum is satisfactory. In science some students find the mathematical aspects difficult but there is satisfactory opportunity for developing mathematical skills. A range of graphs and analysis of data is well used in geography coursework. The students' numerical ability enables them to cope with the necessary numeracy in design and technology.

## **SCIENCE**

During the inspection, work in chemistry was inspected in depth. Work in biology was sampled. No students currently study physics. In the one lesson of biology seen, Year 12 students were learning about the stages in cell division. Teaching was good. The work was well structured and enabled students to make good learning gains. Standards were in line with national expectations. Achievement was good because students were developing effective practical skills and were using these well to study the changes in chromosomes during plant growth.

### **Chemistry**

Provision in chemistry is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and provide good support and guidance.
- Students sometimes fail to develop enough understanding in lessons.
- The leadership and management arrangements are too informal.
- Students concentrate very well in lessons and are keen to learn, but many lack confidence.
- Accommodation is poor and resources unsatisfactory.

### **Commentary**

156. The numbers taking chemistry are very small so comparisons with national statistics are unreliable. In 2004, two boys took the A-level examinations; one gained grade A and the other grade C. Both students exceeded their expected grades. In the AS-level examinations, two of the five candidates gained at least grade E. One of these gained grade A. Students did less well than in their other subjects. All of the students

taking AS-level chemistry last year completed the course, but none of them opted to continue studying the subject to A-level. Consequently there are no students in Year 13.

157. Four boys are taking the AS-level course in Year 12. Standards seen during the inspection were in line with national expectations. Students have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of chemical concepts and employ practical skills appropriately. They apply their knowledge of the key features of scientific investigations reasonably well when researching practical problems. On occasions, students demonstrate good insights into the subject and make effective links between different aspects. Compared with their attainment in the GCSE science examinations, their achievement is satisfactory.
158. Students' attitudes are very good. They concentrate very well in lessons and are keen to learn. However, they lack confidence and do not use their own initiative sufficiently to solve problems. As a group they feel they are coping reasonably well with the work in the subject. Their skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT are at least sufficient to meet the course requirements.
159. Teaching is satisfactory and sometimes good. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to explain chemical concepts effectively and provide individual students with good support and encouragement. One of the two teachers involved is newly qualified, but appropriate support and advice is given by a very experienced colleague who has a good understanding of the AS-level course requirements. Together they plan and organise lessons effectively. The Salters' chemistry course, used by the department, offers good opportunities for independent learning, but teachers do not always help students to think for themselves enough. Questioning sometimes fails to develop understanding sufficiently, because too little demand is placed on students to provide suitably detailed responses. The levels of challenge in lessons are occasionally insufficient to match students' capabilities. Students' learning is satisfactory because teachers assess their progress well and provide appropriate help. Marking is good and students are given clear advice on how to improve. Students have good access to ICT facilities, but their progress is adversely affected by inadequate resources and poor accommodation.
160. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Day-to-day arrangements operate effectively and the strengths identified in the previous inspection report have been sustained. However, because there is no designated teacher in charge of the subject, leadership and management arrangements are too informal and lack an appropriate organisational structure. In particular, accountability for standards and improvement targets is insufficient. The two chemistry teachers work together effectively and meet regularly to discuss progress. However, insufficient work is done on the monitoring and evaluation of standards in the subjects as a consequence of the leadership and management arrangements which are too informal.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

Information and communication technology was not inspected in the sixth form, but one lesson of A level computing was sampled. Teaching and learning were both very good in a very high achieving group.

## **HUMANITIES**

## Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management of the department are very good and are clearly focused on the raising of standards.
- Students achieve their target grades and respond positively to good teaching overall and to good preparation for coursework.
- Students do not always demonstrate sufficient initiative and independence in their learning at sixth form level.

### Commentary

161. The attainment of students on entry to Year 12 is broadly in line with the national average. There is one option group in each of Years 12 and 13, but the retention rate between these two years is low as a result of students' poor performance in their other subjects. The size of cohort in both 2003 and 2004 was too small for national comparisons to be made at either AS or A level, but almost all students achieved their predicted target grades.
162. Standards of work seen in students' files are just below those expected at this stage in the course but the contribution made by coursework is good. This allows them to demonstrate their skills in the collection and analysis of data and in their presentation through a range of statistical techniques. Skills in ICT at this level are well developed. Students, therefore, achieve well by the end of Year 13. In class, they demonstrate a good understanding of the globalisation process and of those of coastal erosion and management strategies. They write with conviction in response to practice examination questions and use evidence well to support their arguments.
163. Teaching is good overall and never less than satisfactory. Teachers have a clear enthusiasm for the subject, high expectations and very good subject knowledge. They challenge students well in their accurate use of advanced technical vocabulary and emphasise the need for evaluation as well as for description and explanation. Most lessons rely substantially on questioning techniques which are well focused. Although some students lack confidence in discussion, the quality of their presentations demonstrates an ability to extract and condense data effectively. However, student files indicate that there is also a heavy reliance on the distribution of written extracts which are not used well to develop their initiative and independent learning, a judgement also made at the time of the previous inspection.
164. Leadership and management are very good. Teachers are excellent role models, the different modules of the subject are well co-ordinated and teachers have a very clear commitment to the improvement of standards. The department is managed very efficiently on a day-to-day basis, and preparation for examinations is thorough.

## History

Provision in history is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results are below national averages.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Students achieve well in lessons.
- Progress is limited by weak literacy.

## Commentary

165. Standards in history are average. The numbers taking history are small and results are difficult to compare statistically. Performance has been below national averages, although there were improved results at AS-level in 2004. At present, there are 14 students on A-level courses. Based on limited evidence, students are mostly working at the expected level. They handle sources competently but their understanding of the work is limited by weaknesses in literacy. In a Year 12 lesson, the students were unsure of what was meant by 'revolution' in the context of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Students in Year 13 were more certain in their knowledge and understanding.
166. The achievement of the students in lessons is good, but they achieve less well over time. They have difficulties with retaining knowledge, as shown by marked tasks in their files. They are improving in their examination work based on sources, which they discuss well. Students in Year 12 effectively compared sources from 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain in preparation for an examination question.
167. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Lessons are well planned and students concentrate well. Levels of interest are good and students respond well to the work. They acquire good skills in handling sources of evidence and relating them to examination answers. A good example of this was seen in a Year 13 lesson, when students effectively compared sources on Stalin's Five Year Plans and constructed relevant judgements from them. The scheme of assessment is good, and students are aware of how well they are performing.
168. Leadership and management are good. The two specialists share good vision and direction for the subject; they consult regularly. Schemes of work have been thoroughly revised to make the subject more relevant, and numbers are increasing. Use of ICT is satisfactory. Since the previous inspection, the use of skills has been developed and there is some good independent work by the students. History in the sixth form is improving well.

## ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

### Design and technology

Provision in Product Design is **unsatisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have very good attitudes towards the subject.

- Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory. Lessons are inadequately planned and proceed at a slow pace.
- Systematic assessment is not carried out regularly and there are no formal records of students' progress.
- Students' use of ICT is inadequate for the level of courses.

### **Commentary**

169. In 2004, the AS-level product design results showed students achieving in line with expectation. All students were successful at achieving grades C to E. Current attainment is below average in Year 12 and Year 13. Students are not making sufficient gains in knowledge and understanding. There are some good standards of freehand sketching, good use of colour and satisfactory concept drawing in a very small sample of work seen. However, there was not enough work to see in students' folders. Discussion showed students are interested and motivated by their work and had thought carefully about problems to solve. They worked well on prototypes of their chosen product, albeit slowly. Very good original designing and good use of ICT was seen in one file. This level of work was not available to be seen elsewhere. Attainment is low for the courses. Nearly all the students are underachieving and the teaching is not having much impact on their learning.
170. Teaching and learning are both unsatisfactory. There is no evidence of appropriate subject knowledge being regularly imparted, nor much understanding of students' progress or planning, or course organisation. No reference was made to the requirements of the examination board. The pace of learning is inappropriate to the level of work.
171. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. Expectations are not high enough. No formal assessment of students' work or marking was available to be seen.



## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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