

INSPECTION REPORT

SAINT JOAN OF ARC ROMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Rickmansworth

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117590

Headteacher: Mr. A. Sumner

Lead inspector: Bill Stoneham

Dates of inspection: 11th – 14th October 2004

Inspection number: 268899

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

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Terms used in this report

Key Stage 3 refers to students in Years 7, 8 and 9 who have transferred in most cases from their primary schools at the end of **Key Stage 2** after Year 6. **Key Stage 4** refers to students who are in Years 10 and 11. Those students who remain at school after the compulsory period of education are in the **sixth form**, in Years 12 and 13. Students in Years 7 to 11 follow courses and programmes of study set out in the **National Curriculum**. A course in religious education is a requirement for students of all ages at school.

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

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

Efforts have been made to minimise the use of shorthand notations, though some have been used. Throughout the report, the notation **ICT** refers to information and communication technology. The term **SENCO** refers to the special needs co-ordinator. An **LSA** is a learning support assistant and an **IEP** is an individual education plan. **PHSE** refers to the school's programme for personal, health and social education and **WRL** refers to Work-related learning. Comparisons to national averages are based on data for the academic year 2002/2003 for tests and examinations at the end of Years 9 and 11. For sixth form students, comparisons to national averages are based on the academic year 2002/2003, the last year

for which national comparative data is available. Any reference to examination results in 2004 is to identify trends only.

In the report the word 'pupils' relates to youngsters in Years 7 to 11 and the word 'students' to those in the sixth form; that is Years 12 and 13.

At the time of the inspection there were too few students with special educational needs in the sixth form to determine judgements about the quality of education they receive.

During the period of the inspection, no Year 11 pupils were in school; they were all undertaking work experience placements. Standards and levels of achievement in Year 11 were judged by extensive scrutiny of work.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1230
School address:	High Street Rickmansworth Hertfordshire
Postcode:	WD3 1HG
Telephone number:	01923773881
Fax number:	01923897545
Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr. S Howes

Date of previous November 1998 inspection:

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Saint Joan of Arc Roman Catholic School is a larger than average, mixed, voluntary-aided, comprehensive school located in the small Hertfordshire town of Rickmansworth. It has 1,230 students aged between 11 and 18, of whom 195 are in the sixth form, which is of average size. The school was recently designated as a specialist mathematics and computing college and, in 2002, was awarded a Schools Achievement Award as well as Investors in People status. The area served by the school is large, extending along the Metropolitan Underground line both into neighbouring London suburbs and Buckinghamshire, as well as serving towns such as Watford. Many youngsters travel a considerable distance to school. The socio-economic background of the intake is varied and the school does serve some areas that are deprived but, on balance, most come from homes with highly favourable socio-economic circumstances. There are some selective grammar schools in the extended catchment area. Nevertheless, standards on entry to Year 7 are above average overall. Standards on entry to the sixth form are also above average. Approximately 55 per cent of students in Year 11 continue into the sixth form. The proportion of students identified as having special educational needs and those with a Statement of Educational Need, is broadly average. The ethnic mix of the school reflects that of the surrounding area, being mainly of white race; the percentage of students whose first language is not English is low, with only 2 pupils being at an early stage of English acquisition. There are no pupils from refugee or asylum seeking families, or from the travelling community.

Approximately one per cent of pupils join or leave the school other than at the usual times of the year. This is a well below average figure.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
27407	Bill Stoneham	Lead inspector	
19653	Elizabeth Dickson	Lay inspector	
20629	John Bryson	Team inspector	English Post 16 English
20939	Roger Grant	Team inspector	Mathematics Post 16 Mathematics
18076	Howard Dodd	Team inspector	Science Post 16 Biology
2971	Kathy Hooper	Team inspector	Design and Technology
2048	Doug Masterton	Team inspector	Information and Communication Technology
17404	Judith Tolley	Team inspector	Modern Foreign Languages
15462	Cliff Blakemore	Team inspector	History Post 16 History Post 16 Business studies
18261	Anthony Hill	Team inspector	Art and Design Post 16 Art and Design
31701	Graeme Rudland	Team inspector	Music
18755	Roger Whittaker	Team inspector	Physical Education
10807	Paul Quest	Team inspector	Citizenship Work-related Learning
7926	James Bowden	Team inspector	Special Educational Needs
1819	Roger Crowther	Team inspector	Post 16 Psychology
33497	Stephanie Benbow	Team inspector	Geography Post 16 Geography

The inspection contractor was:

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the school is good, including a good sixth form. Standards rise from above average on entry to Year 7 to well above average by the end of Year 11. The students achieve well because of the good curriculum and strong support, combined with good and sometimes very good teaching. Standards in the sixth form are above average and, again, achievement is good. The value for money offered by the main school is good; it is satisfactory in the sixth form.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The leadership of the headteacher is very good.
- The school is an inclusive community. Pupils and students feel valued because of the very high quality of support and care they receive.
- Pupils and students achieve well overall because of good quality teaching, but there is an element of unsatisfactory teaching in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- The school is popular and over-subscribed. Much thought is given to helping new pupils to settle and the induction procedures are excellent.
- Provision in English, art and design, Italian and music is very good.
- The school's accommodation is poor. This makes for difficult teaching conditions in many subjects.
- The use of assessment data at whole-school level is improving, but its use as a device to raise standards via target setting at a departmental level is inconsistent.
- Provision in design and technology and physical education is unsatisfactory.
- Though achievement in the sixth form is good, it would improve if less lesson time was lost.

Good progress has been made since the last inspection. Most of the key issues identified then have been addressed well and standards are higher, in spite of difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff. The school has continued to improve its accommodation and learning resources, though its accommodation overall is poor. The school has been successful in accessing various funding streams, including gaining specialist college status.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

Key: A – top 5 percent; 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.*

Overall, achievement in the school is good. Standards at the end of Year 11 are well above average when compared to all schools nationally and are very high when compared to similar schools. In relation to above average standards on entry in Year 7, this represents good

achievement over time. Students with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language also achieve well. Standards fluctuate from year to year in the sixth form and in 2003 were average, but achievement was good. In Year 9, standards are well above average in English and above average in both mathematics and science. Achievement is satisfactory in most subjects; it is good in mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT) and citizenship and very good in English, art and design, Italian and music. In Years 10 and 11 standards are well above average in English and above average in mathematics and science. Achievement is unsatisfactory in physical education, but satisfactory in design and technology and French. It is good in most other subjects, but in English, art and design, Italian and music it is very good. The unvalidated examination data for 2004 indicates some improvement in results at both GCSE and A-level.

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The overall quality of education is good. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall; it is satisfactory in Years 7, 8 and 9, good in Years 10 and 11 and very good in the sixth form. Throughout the school, learning is enhanced by the good relationships established with students and the improving monitoring and evaluation of teaching undertaken by the school's managers. The continual efforts to improve accommodation and resources also benefit the quality of learning. The curriculum is good and reflects the school's very strong commitment to be inclusive. Students have good opportunities to enrich their learning from a wide range of visits and other educational experiences. Community links are good, with good support for learning outside the school day. Links with parents are very good, though a minority of reports do not contain everything they should. Students receive good support and their views are taken seriously. The arrangements for welcoming new pupils into Year 7, including those with special educational needs, are excellent.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school is **effectively led and managed.** The leadership of the headteacher is very good. His very strong personal beliefs and commitment to Christian ideals have done much to shape a community where supportive and harmonious relationships flourish and where there is a keen focus on raising expectations and continuous improvement. The leadership and management offered by other key staff are good and they work effectively to raise students' attainment. The governors are most supportive and proud of the school and its ethos. They undertake their duties responsibly and all statutory requirements are met. Governance is satisfactory.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The school is popular and over-subscribed and parents are very happy. Though they are not without concerns, they are confident that the school deals with issues raised well and they value highly the school's inclusive, Christian ethos. Students enjoy being at the school; they are well taught and cared for. Though they have concerns over the behaviour of some students, the inspection confirmed that in most cases this is addressed well by the school. They view the school as a happy one.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Further improve the monitoring of teaching and learning, especially in Years 7, 8 and 9, to eliminate the elements of unsatisfactory practice and ensure that very good practice is shared.
- Ensure that examination and other data is used consistently by all departments, including in the sixth form, to inform students and set them challenging learning targets.
- Continue efforts geared towards improving the quality of the school's accommodation.
- Raise standards of provision in design and technology and physical education.
- Reduce lost time in sixth form lessons by ensuring that all classes start promptly and that mid-lesson breaks are kept to a minimum.

THE SIXTH FORM AT SAINT JOAN OF ARC ROMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good. Standards vary from year to year, reflecting the nature of the intake, but during the inspection standards were above average, with students achieving well. Teaching and learning are very good, leadership and management are both good and though some teaching groups are small, the cost effectiveness of the sixth form is sound.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Teaching is very good, but achievement is only good owing to teaching time being lost because too many lessons fail to start promptly and mid-lesson breaks are not kept to a minimum.
- Provision in business studies is excellent and it is very good in English, art and design and psychology.
- The students are appreciative of the opportunities offered. They are supportive of the school and leave as considerate and articulate adults.
- The use of assessment data as a tool to raise standards needs to be improved.

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	Very good in English . The quality of teaching and learning is very good and students' achievement is very good.
Mathematics	Good in mathematics . Students achieve well because of the tuition offered by very knowledgeable teachers.
Science	Good in biology . Students achieve well because teaching is consistently good.
Humanities	Good in geography . Standards are above average. Teaching, learning and achievement are all good. Good in history . Students achieve well because of good teaching. Very good in psychology . Standards are above average and teaching and learning are very good.
Visual and performing arts and media	Very good in art and design . Very good teaching is having a clear impact on learning.
Business	Excellent . Students achieve very high standards as a result of excellent teaching and careful guidance.

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

Advice, guidance and support are good. Induction into the sixth form is good and is improving. Once their courses have started students are given good advice about planning their futures.

Assessment data is used to set targets and to monitor progress, but such procedures are not consistent and rigorous at departmental level. Students are offered good quality advice on their futures.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. A good learning environment has been established and students achieve well. The procedures for monitoring work are improving, relationships are supportive and there is a good range of curricular opportunities. Students greatly value the experiences that sixth form education offers.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students thoroughly enjoy the sixth form and regard the teaching they receive as being challenging and helpful. Some are critical of the advice they receive about courses in the sixth form and in higher education, though the inspection team does not concur with these views. The students believe that the sixth form is run well, it is a harmonious community and they are consulted and listened to.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

The overall achievement of pupils in the main school is good. Achievement in the sixth form is good and standards are well above average. In general, pupils enter the school with above average standards. By the end of Year 9 standards are above average and achievement is satisfactory. By the end of Year 11 standards are well above average and achievement of pupils in Years 10 and 11 is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- In Years 7 to 11 pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve well overall because of good teaching and the whole range of support services offered.
- Teaching is very good in the sixth form but because too much lesson time is lost, achievement is not as good as it could be.
- To improve achievement further, more consistent use should be made of assessment data by teaching departments.

Commentary

1. The school recruits pupils into Year 7 from a large number of geographically spread primary schools. Standards on entry are, overall, above average and the school works hard to unify standards in previous learning. Inspection evidence indicates that by Year 9 standards are still above average and that the pupils' achievement is satisfactory. By Year 11, standards are well above average. The pupils' achievement is good and they reap the benefits of the good, and often very good, teaching they receive. Pupils for whom English is an additional language and those with special educational needs achieve as well as their peers. Though some examination data indicates that girls' achievement was better than that of boys by more than the difference nationally, this outcome was not striking during the inspection, possibly reflecting the work that the school has undertaken to address this issue. One point to emerge in some lessons is that higher attaining students are not always sufficiently challenged. Though overall they achieve as well as their peers, their progress in these lessons is inhibited.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	37.6 (36.5)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	37.7 (37.3)	35.4 (34.7)
science	35.8 (36.5)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 207 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. The Year 9 national test results in 2003 in both English and mathematics were well above average, and in science they were above average. Overall, standards were well above

average when compared to all schools nationally. In comparison to similar schools based on prior attainment, standards were well above average in English and average in mathematics and science, but above average overall. This indicates satisfactory achievement. The unvalidated data for 2004 indicates an improvement in results.

- Standards in GCSE examinations in 2003 were well above average when compared to all schools nationally, based on the attainment of five or more grades at A* to C, average total GCSE points per pupil and average points scored on their best eight subjects. When compared to similar schools based on prior attainment, results were very high on most measures, frequently being in the top five per cent nationally. Teaching and learning are stronger in Years 10 and 11 and during these two years pupils successfully build on their prior learning and achieve well.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	72 (75)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	96 (98)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	98 (99)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	41 (43)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 186 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

- In the 2003 GCSE results the proportion of students gaining A* to C grades, or the equivalent, was well above average in most subjects. In mathematics and religious education standards were above average, but they were very high in history and physical education. Only in art and design were standards below average, though the unvalidated results for 2004 show that this department has made a strong recovery. In terms of average points scored in 2003, standards were very high in history, well above average in French and geography and above average in all other subjects apart from art and design where they were below average. The overall picture is one of success and the main contributory factors are the quality of teaching, the extensive support and encouragement offered by the school, complimented frequently by much parental support and encouragement, and the willingness of many pupils to improve their standards. The unvalidated data for 2004 suggests a small decline in results mainly associated with some staffing difficulties experienced by the school.
- Inspection evidence based on lesson observations and analysis of students' work indicates that standards in Years 7, 8 and 9 are very high in Italian, well above average in English and music and above average in all other subjects except art and design, citizenship, design and technology and physical education, where they are average. All pupils, including those with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language, are achieving at least satisfactorily. In mathematics, citizenship and ICT they are achieving well and in English, art and design, Italian and music achievement is very good. In Years 10 and 11 standards are above average in most subjects. However, in non-GCSE physical education standards are below average and they are average in design and technology. In English, geography, history and music standards are well above average. In most subjects students achieve well, but in English, art and design, Italian and music achievement is very good. In contrast, achievement is satisfactory in design and technology but is unsatisfactory in non-GCSE physical education classes because assessment procedures lack rigour. The overall levels of achievement are good because of a variety of factors including the effective curriculum, the commitment of staff

to the pupils and the school's good, and improving, use of assessment data to set targets and monitor performance against such targets. However, one remaining challenge is to ensure that at a departmental level assessment data is used with consistency to monitor pupils' progress and to set challenges.

6. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well in relation to their targets set in their individual education plans (IEPs) and Statements of Special Educational Need. Across all years and in most subjects they also achieve well. In English and music they achieve very well because of the quality of teaching offered.
7. All Year 11 pupils with special educational needs are entered for a range of GCSE examinations and this year some have been able to opt also to take a vocational subject. Provisional 2004 GCSE examination results show that the majority of pupils with special educational needs achieved as expected and that approximately 20 per cent achieved better than expected. Approximately 25 per cent of pupils attained 5 A* to C grade passes and a third of the pupils on the school's list of special educational needs have gone on to further education courses.
8. There are very few pupils who are at an early stage of English language acquisition. Those for whom English is an additional language speak fluently, read fluently and with understanding and are able to understand normal everyday speech with little difficulty. They respond appropriately and are able to explain what they have heard or read in their own words. Reading skills are less advanced than those of pupils of the same age, but this does not inhibit their learning. They do, however, have a more limited range of language than their peers and have some difficulties with technical and subject-specific language. Pupils' writing is not always accurate; they experience some difficulty distinguishing between similar sounds and similar sounding words in English, so that their writing is not always easily understood and does not always fairly represent their understanding. They make appropriate progress and achieve satisfactorily in Years 7, 8 and 9. Since the majority of pupils with English as an additional language in Years 10 and 11 are concentrated in Year 11 and were out on work experience during the inspection, it was not possible to judge the attainment or achievement of these pupils.

Sixth form

9. Standards reached in Alevel and equivalent examinations in 2003 were average and were below the standards reported in 2002. Girls fared better than boys in 2003; their results were average overall compared to the boys' results, which were below average. Unvalidated results for 2004 suggest a marked improvement in standards. These fluctuations in performance reflect the school's previous more open recruitment policy. More recently, following a change in leadership of the sixth form, a different approach has been taken and more time is now spent advising students which courses to take in light of their GCSE results. This has already led to improved course retention rates and an improvement in standards. In terms of prior attainment, students in 2003 gained results that were better than expected, so their levels of achievement were good.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	93.9 (97.6)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	34.5 (41.2)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per pupil	247.6 (278.3)	258.2 (263.3)

10. For those subjects where sufficient candidates were entered to allow national comparisons, standards in 2003 were very high in physical education, were well above average in business studies and psychology and were above average in drama, English literature, French, design and technology and ICT. Standards were average in geography, history, mathematics, physics and religious education; below average in biology and well below average in art and design.
11. Sixth form work seen during the inspection, based on the eight subjects that were inspected in depth, indicated that standards are above average, though in English and psychology they are well above average and in business studies they are very high. Students' attainment on entry is above average, but because of very good quality teaching students achieve well overall. In some cases, such as business studies and psychology, the students have no previous knowledge as these subjects were not available at GCSE. Nevertheless, they are gaining and consolidating knowledge and understanding at a rapid rate. Achievement is at least good in all subjects; but in English, art and design and psychology it is very good and in business studies it is very high. Though high quality teaching is offered, achievement is not as good as it could be because too much time is lost through lessons starting late and because some mid-lesson breaks are too generous. No significant differences in achievement between female and male students were discernible.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. Most arrive on time and their attendance is satisfactory. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Sixth form pupils have very good attitudes and personal qualities.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils enjoy coming to school and have good attitudes to their work.
- Most pupils behave well in and around the school.
- Relationships between pupils and staff are very good, underpinned by the school's very positive ethos and high level of care for the individual.
- Attendance has improved this term in response to recent measures the school has introduced.
- In a minority of lessons, pupils' misbehaviour disrupts learning.
- In some sixth form lessons learning suffers through the late arrival of both staff and students and because mid-lesson breaks are too long.

Commentary

12. Attendance at the school for the past academic year was similar to other schools nationally. Good attendance and punctuality are promoted well and their continuing improvement is an appropriate high priority for the school. In this regard, the 'Call Divert' system was introduced in September, which telephones parents on the first day of a pupil's absence; this is already having a positive impact on levels of attendance this term. There is no time built in for pupils to move from one lesson to another and often lessons are late in starting because pupils do not arrive on time.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	7.6
National data	7.2

Unauthorised absence	
School data	0.5
National data	1.1

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

13. Pupils are clearly proud of their school and its reputation. A strong characteristic across the school is the sense of pride and belonging, shown through the pupils' compliance with expectations regarding uniform, their developing confidence and their politeness and friendliness to visitors. Most pupils work hard in lessons and want to do well. Attitudes towards work in subjects such as English, art and design and citizenship are particularly positive; pupils show a mature approach to their studies and become actively involved in lessons, listening attentively and asking and answering questions enthusiastically. Pupils' attitudes tend to be better in lessons where teachers have high expectations and inspire high standards. Where the expectations are set out immediately, and it is made clear to pupils that appropriate sanctions will be carried through when necessary, pupils quickly settle to the work set, and retain interest and concentration throughout the lesson. On occasions, however, pupils' attitudes in lessons are unsatisfactory. They do not listen well enough to the teacher and become restless and inattentive when the activities do not interest or challenge them.
14. Behaviour by nearly all pupils is good throughout the day. In the pre-inspection survey, a substantial number of pupils indicated that there is some bullying or racial tension in school. The inspection team was particularly careful in investigating pupils' concerns. The questionnaire analysis did not match with the views pupils expressed in conversations with inspectors. In general, pupils felt that, although there were incidents in the school, they were dealt with well when reported. The pupils are reminded regularly, for example in assemblies, of their responsibilities to each other and the need to tackle any concerns quickly. Despite the school's best efforts, five pupils were excluded permanently in the year prior to the inspection for their unacceptable behaviour.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British – Indian
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean

No of pupils on roll
510
73
37
6
3
9
16
4
3
6

Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
10	5
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0
0	0

Black or Black British – African	8	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	558	0	0

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

15. Pupils' personal development is fostered well. They enjoy constructive and positive relationships, both with one another and with the staff they have got to know. Pupils know that members of staff are very willing to help through giving advice and support.
16. In normal lessons the attitudes and behaviour of pupils with special educational needs are generally no different to those of others. Where learning support assistants (LSAs) are present to support pupils with special educational needs this is accepted well by all, others often taking advantage of their presence and seeking extra help themselves. The attitudes and behaviour of those pupils who attend withdrawal lessons in the learning support department are very good and this results in a calm and purposeful learning atmosphere. Year 10 pupils with Statements of Special Educational Need are particularly appreciative of the help, support and guidance they received from the learning support department throughout their time in school.
17. Overall, pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development is good. Pupils develop very well spiritually. The school's strong commitment to the spiritual development of pupils stems from its mission statement. Very good opportunities exist for prayer and reflection in assemblies and masses and pupils respond very well. The school chapel is well used by pupils for quiet reflection. Pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 attend a retreat for one day per year and the residential opportunities available for pupils in Years 10 and 11 are well supported. Pupils value the strong community ethos which pervades the school. Staff have been given very good guidance by the school's chaplain for developing spiritual aspects of their subject, although the impact of this in practice is variable. Pupils' responses to spiritual opportunities in music and art and design are very good and in English, religious and non-religious spirituality is explored through the texts that are studied. The spiritual dimension is less strong in physical education, ICT and history.
18. Pupils' moral and social development is very good. Assemblies provide opportunities for pupils to consider moral and social issues and this has a positive impact on their attitudes. Pupils show a strong sense of loyalty to the school as a community. The school council operates effectively and is valued by pupils. Pupils regularly engage in charitable work throughout the year. Opportunities for collaborative work are available in most subjects. Excellent practice was seen in art and design where pupils and staff are contributing a section to a display, designed by the art technician. The art and design department also deals with issues of conflict and the environment in their work. Very good moral attitudes were seen in English, geography, art and design and music. Moral issues are effectively dealt with within the alternative curriculum programme.
19. Pupils' cultural development is satisfactory. The school places a strong emphasis on its identity and culture, but there are fewer whole-school opportunities for the development of an appreciation of cultural diversity. Pupils experience a range of cultures in the school's 'One World Week' where visitors come into school and share their cultural traditions. In English, pupils explore other cultures through literature from around the world, and in a geography lesson seen issues relating to life in Gambia were powerfully highlighted.

Sixth form

20. Sixth form students are keen to do well and are appreciative of all the school has to offer them. They have very good relationships with teachers and take a mature attitude to their studies. They are keen to take part in lessons and enjoy exchanging views and learning,

both from their teacher and from one another. While many students make appropriate and constructive use of the school's facilities for private study, a number spend much of their free time socialising in the common room. Students in the sixth form must register every day and must sign in and out if they have study leave. Their attendance in lessons is closely monitored. Though attendance levels and punctuality overall are satisfactory, some lessons start late either because the students, or the teacher, are not punctual. Learning is also impeded on those occasions when staff allow students very generous mid-lesson breaks.

21. Students take responsibility for their own personal development and are encouraged to choose from a wide variety of good opportunities to involve themselves in the life of the main school, the sixth form and in the community. For example, a group of Year 12 students help out in local nurseries and residential homes, while some others are involved in establishing a school magazine. Some students take an active part on the sixth form council, giving them opportunities to develop leadership and decision-making skills. They organise many successful charitable events, and contribute to the life of the school through their involvement in the school council, anti-bullying group and paired reading with younger pupils. They develop a good degree of independence and are becoming mature and responsible adults.
22. The students' spiritual, moral social and cultural development is good. Students benefit from opportunities to develop their spiritual and moral awareness through assemblies, tutor time and at residential retreats. Students feel strongly that the school prepares them effectively for adulthood. In English, there are carefully planned opportunities for developing students' awareness of spiritual and moral issues. Visits abroad help to widen students' understanding of different cultural issues; a visit to India is currently being planned, and a visit to Romania took place during the last academic year.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching and learning are good overall and very good in the sixth form. The curriculum is good and more than adequately meets the needs of all pupils and students; it is inclusive and offers good opportunities for enrichment. The quality of resources is good but the quality of significant parts of the school's accommodation is poor. Pupils and students receive good care, guidance and support. There are very good relationships with parents. Work with other schools is good, as is the school's partnerships with the wider community.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good overall. They are satisfactory in Years 7, 8 and 9, good in Years 10 and 11 and very good in Years 12 and 13. Assessment is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Almost all teaching is at least satisfactory, three quarters is good and three out of every ten lessons are very good or better; this benefits learning.
- Though effective monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning have led to an overall improvement, there is still an element of unsatisfactory teaching, particularly in Years 7, 8 and 9.

- At a whole-school level assessment data is used well as a device to raise standards through target setting, but at a departmental level this information is used inconsistently, thus reducing its effectiveness.
- Pupils with special educational needs benefit well from the quality of teaching they receive.
- In the main school, teaching and learning in English, art and design, Italian and music are very good. In the sixth form teaching and learning are excellent in business studies and very good in English, art and design and psychology.
- The wastage of time associated with some sixth form teaching impedes achievement.

Commentary

23. Most of the teaching and learning seen was either good or very good. The strongest teaching was observed in the sixth form where nearly all the teaching was good or better, but very good teaching was spread across all year groups and subjects. This is a considerable improvement since the previous inspection. The findings of the inspection mirror the views of pupils, students and parents. The quality also reflects the work the school has put into the monitoring and evaluation of classroom practice and matches its self-evaluation of its work in this respect. There were seven excellent lessons, three of which were in Italian. A small percentage of unsatisfactory lessons was observed, particularly in Years 7 to 9 and across a range of subjects. The challenge now for the school is to make more lessons excellent across a range of subjects and eliminate the element of unsatisfactory teaching.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 158 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
7 (4%)	42 (27%)	68 (43%)	33 (21%)	7 (4%)	1 (1%)	0

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

24. In the best-planned lessons learning objectives are shared with pupils and a starter activity is included to consolidate previously learned knowledge as well as to introduce the focus of the present lesson. A variety of main activities is well structured and allows students the time to plan and produce good quality work. This often involves pair and small group work; thus pupils are also developing their communication skills very well. In an excellent Year 9 Italian lesson, for example, the teacher had a very clear idea about what pupils should achieve. The lesson was very well structured, building on previous learning and using different stimulating activities and methods to enhance the quality of learning. In most lessons, very effective use of questioning by teachers not only challenges pupils to think, but also enhances their speaking and listening skills. ICT is effectively used in many lessons to support learning. Effective plenary sessions bring lessons successfully to an end and ensure pupils consolidate what they have learned.
25. Underpinning the quality of teaching is the good, and sometimes very good, quality of working relationships in the classroom and the positive attitudes and behaviour of the great majority of pupils. In many lessons the teachers' natural enthusiasm is shared with pupils and, as a result, they work hard and well in a very purposeful atmosphere. Pupils respond very well to the challenge offered in the best lessons and particularly so when they are given responsibility to work independently, or as pairs and small groups. In an

excellent Year 10 drama lesson, for example, the concept of 'melodrama' was introduced in an inspiring and effective way. As a result, all were engrossed in their work and made better progress than might have been expected.

26. Prior to the inspection, parents had raised issues about the quality, quantity and regularity of homework. Some negative comments were received suggesting that some staff set homework irregularly with little thought about how what was set would enhance learning. Other parents were more positive. Pupils interviewed during the inspection also voiced some critical comments. From their scrutiny of work samples and what was seen in lessons, the inspection team cannot confirm the negative views expressed. Though some variability in quality exists, the homework that was seen by the inspection team was usually of an appropriate quality. In mathematics homework is very well planned and designed to enhance learning; while in history the quality of marking of homework is of a very high standard. The conclusion of the inspection team is that in other subjects, the setting of homework is at least satisfactory, but in order to gain greater consistency the school might like to feature this aspect in its monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning.
27. Where teaching and learning were less than satisfactory, this was mainly because of a lack of planning to meet pupils' needs and take account of prior learning. At times lower attaining pupils struggled with work which they found difficult. Occasionally the teaching was dull in approach, was too teacher centred and failed to capture pupils' interest and as a result insufficient progress was made.
28. Pupils with special educational needs benefit well from the quality of teaching they receive. Teachers have copies of pupils' individual education plans (IEPs) as well as very useful summary information provided for each pupil on the school's list of those with special educational needs. Targets on IEPs are discrete and sharp thus helping teachers plan their work to meet the needs of these pupils. In a Year 8 Italian lesson, for example, key phrases and structured writing activities met pupils' learning needs and enabled them to complete the tasks successfully. In a Year 9 English lesson, structured writing activities rather than 'free' writing ensured pupils with special educational needs made very good progress.
29. Where observed, learning support assistants (LSAs) provided effective support. In a history lesson, for example, an LSA circulated well, providing very good support for pupils with special educational needs. In a religious education lesson the quality of support offered by the LSA kept pupils well on task and in Year 8 and 9 English lessons the LSAs strongly supported learning.
30. Pupils who speak English as an additional language in Years 7, 8 and 9 are withdrawn from lessons in small groups. In these lessons they are well supported and are able to develop speaking, listening, reading and writing skills appropriately because lessons are well planned to meet their needs. However, these lessons concentrate on what has gone before rather than anticipating what is to come in subject lessons. Opportunities are missed to identify key language used in subjects. Pupils therefore remain, to a certain extent, dependent on the teacher in lessons. The quality of this teaching and learning is satisfactory.
31. Assessment arrangements are good. The school has carefully selected data on students' attainment to record and uses a 'Targeter' program. The school uses Cognitive Ability Test (CAT) scores to form the baseline for the profile of each pupil on entry to the school. Analysis of this data establishes targets for each pupil and for each subject department. Achievement and targets are communicated to parents each term. Twice a year there is

an opportunity for parental involvement in agreeing targets. This is a strength of the school's assessment procedures.

32. The quality of marking and assessment in subjects is good overall but varies between departments. In English and art and design very good use is made of formative assessment leading to the setting of clear and specific targets. In these departments, level and grade descriptors are accessible to students and are a point of continuous reference. This practice now needs time to become embedded to reduce inconsistent practice and allow good practice to be shared. Pupils with special educational needs benefit from a very good use of assessment data that allows appropriate targets to be set and for progress to be tracked.
33. All departments have access to the school's database and are beginning to use this to set targets and monitor pupils' progress. Further development is required to ensure all middle managers and classroom teachers interpret data accurately and use it to set targets that are realistic and challenging. Assessment is not always an integrated part of learning and more guidance for staff in the use of levels and targets to inform planning and provide appropriate levels of challenge would benefit learning further. A very good range of assessment tests is used to identify pupils with special educational needs; this has the potential to enable the tracking of these pupils over time. However, the analysis of this data, particularly in Years 7, 8 and 9, is not sufficiently well developed to show, for example, if pupils with special educational needs are making adequate progress.

Sixth form

34. The overall standard of teaching and learning in the sixth form is very good. In nine out of every ten lessons, teaching and learning were at least good, and were very good or better in four out of ten lessons. The sixth form provides a very good environment where students have the opportunity to develop intellectually and to be well prepared for higher education courses. The quality of teaching enables the students to achieve very well in most lessons. Teaching is particularly strong in English, art and design, business education and psychology.
35. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge very effectively to set clear learning objectives in lessons; students are, therefore, well aware of what is expected of them. Very effective planning, including starter activities as well as a variety of structured activities, ensures the lessons are well paced and that the time available is used to ensure very effective learning takes place. In the best lessons, students are thoroughly engaged in challenging activities that help them develop intellectually as well as personally. As a result, they are able to sharpen their critical thinking skills and heighten their interest in the subject. In an excellent English lesson, for example, dynamic teaching delivered a set of learning activities and encouraged independent and collaborative study. As a result, all students made rapid progress in developing their analytical skills in relation to the novel 'Jayne Eyre'.
36. Very good classroom relationships underpin the best teaching in the sixth form. Where students are actively involved, they make very good gains in knowledge and understanding and their contributions, including presentations, enliven the quality of learning. One issue, however, should be addressed. Some lessons started late, either because the students were tardy, or because the member of staff was not on time. Moreover, most classes comprise double lessons lasting 100 minutes. Some staff give the students a mid-lesson break, but during the inspection some of these breaks

extended to ten minutes or more. Late starts and extended breaks lead to wastage of time that results in achievement being good, rather than very good.

37. Based on the student questionnaire and inspectors discussions with students, it is clear that students feel the standard of teaching in the sixth form is very high and they particularly appreciate the fact that teachers are available to provide additional help and advice when it is required. The inspection team endorse this view.
38. The head of sixth form co-ordinates a good pastoral system that includes improving arrangements for assessment through which students' academic progress is regularly assessed and monitored. The use of assessment to promote students' learning is now good. The guidance offered to students has recently improved and the school guides students in their choice of courses so that there is now a better match between courses and students' aspirations and potential. Students' progress is checked and monitored regularly. Teachers' assessments in many subject areas are effective, both in relation to marking of essays or assignments and to feedback given to students in lessons. In history and mathematics, for example, the quality of marking is very good and helps students to improve. Though the use of assessment data has improved at the general level in the sixth form, it is still not used with consistency across departments.

The curriculum

The curriculum is good overall; satisfactory in Years 7, 8 and 9 and good in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. Extra-curricular opportunities are good. The quality and sufficiency of accommodation and resources are unsatisfactory overall; staffing is satisfactory, accommodation is poor but resources are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision for those pupils best served by a different curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is good.
- The curriculum for design and technology in Years 7, 8 and 9 and for core physical education in Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory.
- Opportunities provided beyond lessons help pupils improve their work.
- Some difficulties in recruiting full time teachers adversely affect curriculum management.
- Extra-curricular provision for personal development is very good.
- The curriculum offered in the sixth form meets the needs of current students well, and some collaboration with other sixth forms is beginning to widen students' opportunities.

Commentary

39. The curriculum is good overall and there are appropriate arrangements for a daily act of collective worship. Since the last inspection, statutory requirements not met then have been met, and an alternative curriculum has been developed in Years 10 and 11 for those pupils challenged by ten or more GCSE courses. Improvement has been good overall. 'Master classes' in mathematics, provided to pupils in Year 6 in four primary feeder schools, and 'master classes' for gifted and talented pupils in Year 8 in this and another secondary school, meet some of the curriculum demands required to fulfil the mathematics and computing college status of the school.

40. The curriculum in Years 7, 8 and 9 is as found in most schools. It gives pupils mostly satisfactory or better experiences of most courses available to them when they are older; but the design and technology curriculum is unsatisfactory because it is inadequately planned. In Year 9, science includes opportunities for many pupils to take part in Creativity in Science and Technology (CREST) awards and their success in these, at bronze level, is a good feature of the Year 7, 8 and 9 curriculum. A glitch in the Year 9 timetable, in part because of staffing issues, means pupils have two lessons of French on the same day. This is not ideal and slows their progress. Staffing of modern languages does allow for smaller classes helping pupils, particularly of lower ability, to learn. In science in Years 7, 8 and 9 teaching time has been reduced and this is adversely affecting the quality of learning.
41. Guidance in Year 9 for options in Years 10 and 11 is good. This particularly applies to the significant minority of pupils whose national test results, and the professional judgement of teachers, indicate they would have difficulty completing the ten subjects available to most pupils. These pupils follow a limited range of GCSEs; most take six, some nine, subjects. A vocational course in health and social care may be one of their options and some follow an extended work experience that takes one day each week. The single science GCSE syllabus adopted by most of these pupils has been carefully chosen to provide a better range of practical experiences than the dual award science course followed by most other pupils. School data shows that pupils following the 'alternative' curriculum achieve very well; they do much better than their assessments at the end of Year 9 indicate. This reflects very good management of this area of the curriculum.
42. Because of the 'alternative' curriculum, the wide range of GCSEs available to others and the applied ICT course available to all, the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is good and feeds courses available in the sixth form well. The health and social care course is new and the intention is for it to be eventually offered at a higher level in the sixth form. A good feature of the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is the use of extra booster classes to raise the achievement of pupils of middle ability. The success of this is particularly well illustrated by much improved GCSE results in mathematics in 2004. Though there are very good developments in modern languages, including the provision of Italian (particularly useful as it is spoken within the school community) timetabling does not encourage able linguists to take two languages. The modern language department does try to counter this with extra opportunities outside classes, including a Russian club, which resulted from pupils' requests to be taught the language. Pupils studying GCSE physical education are well catered for, but the curriculum provision for those not on the examination course is unsatisfactory. Their course is not adequately planned and their lessons are simply recreational.
43. Overall, curricular provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. These pupils have full and equal access to the curriculum and are fully involved in the life of the school. Alongside the traditional range of GCSE courses on offer, the school has recently offered some vocational courses to meet the full ability range of pupils in Years 10 and 11. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 have access to special literacy support and pupils in Year 9 have access to a study skills course offered by the learning support department. The strong ethos of inclusion and support for pupils with special educational needs has a positive impact on their social development and learning. A formal extra-curricular homework club run by LSAs, mainly attended by older pupils with special educational needs, means they have the opportunity to ask for, and receive, extra subject and specific support and guidance during the week. A small games club held during three lunchtimes per week also broadens the learning experience of pupils with special educational needs.

44. Provision for pupils with special educational needs across subjects is good overall, and in English and music is very good. Departments are kept fully informed of special educational needs as a result of regular liaison with the subject link group and the learning support department. LSAs are very enthusiastic and committed to working with pupils with special educational needs and their effective deployment ensures the curricular needs of these pupils are met.
45. Since the last inspection curriculum monitoring has improved. The use of the school intranet by teachers is beginning to ensure all departments can easily make themselves aware of each other's developments and planning across the school. However, such information has yet to be used to foster cross-curricular links, for example, between geography and science, when field trips are planned. Staffing issues constrain timetable possibilities and curriculum innovation. Some 30 per cent of teachers are part time and a significant number can only work on certain days.
46. Extra-curricular activities are good overall. Work connected with the arts, music and sport is good and social and personal development experiences, through charity work such as CAFOD, and opportunities to take part in retreats, are very good. Support for learning outside the school day is mixed; booster classes close to examinations are effective, while clubs and lunchtime activities broaden learning. There is little that is innovative; for example, there are limited opportunities for learning on line through web-based classroom support material or revision guides. Some resources are being placed on the school website and the ICT department is trialling work that pupils can access at home.
47. Accommodation is poor. A new building for mathematics and ICT is in the early stages of construction. The deficiencies in provision in design and technology, drama and physical education noted at the last inspection still exist. Conditions in many areas of the school, for example those already listed, plus science, citizenship and modern foreign languages, create a challenging teaching environment. The library, while being a pleasant and well-furnished resource, is small for the size of the school and has a limited book stock with which to support independent learning. Dedicated accommodation for the learning support department is not accessible by parents or pupils with mobility needs but there are good and improving ICT resources in the learning support department to support the learning of pupils with special educational needs. The school is well aware of the issues and has prioritised the improvements it wishes to make. The recent appointment of a premises manager has ensured proper attention is being given to the maintenance and safety of existing premises although dust removal and extraction issues remain in design and technology.
48. There is a satisfactory staffing provision, enabling the school curriculum, including the National Curriculum, to be taught effectively. The school necessarily uses a high proportion of part-time teachers and, although these are valued by the school, there are timetabling difficulties arising from the situation. There is good provision of specialist support teachers in the special educational needs department, which meets the requirements set out in statutory Statements of Special Educational Needs.
49. Resourcing of subjects is in most cases good and often very good. Provision of text and reference materials is generally good. Other than in design and technology, resources support and enhance learning. In that subject there is a lack of provision for the exploration of new technologies and materials in the context of the study of product design. Use of resources outside the school to enhance learning is at best satisfactory although there are good examples in Year 9 in science, for some students in art and throughout the English

department. Access to ICT provision is variable, as is the use made of the facilities, though good practice was seen in art and design, business and science.

Sixth form

50. The sixth form curriculum is good. A school review is intended this academic year to determine how to make it better. Potential students complete surveys so the school can find out what courses they want to do and about 55 per cent of Year 11 regularly joins the sixth form. Retention over the last two years has been very good; 98 percent of students beginning courses in 2002 left school at the end of 2004. Limitations in school accommodation and restrictions caused by part-time staffing militate against the sixth form further expanding. The new mathematics and computing block should allow more scope.
51. The curriculum is traditional and provides a broad range of A-levels. Exceptions are AVCE ICT offered in both years and AVCE business education in Year 13. Staffing problems stopped AVCE business education in Year 12 but A-level business education has been very successfully maintained. The school plans to increase vocational provision as courses in Years 10 and 11 work through and accommodation and staffing allow. Limited collaboration with local sixth forms - for example, two students take courses at this school but follow photography at a nearby school - allows students more choice. The local area is well served by further education colleges which the school promotes to those students likely to be interested in following specialised vocational courses. Some potential A-level students choose to attend a local sixth form Catholic college either because it is closer to home, or because it offers other opportunities.

Care, guidance and support

The school takes very good care of its pupils. It provides good advice and guidance, based on the monitoring of pupils' achievements and their personal development. Pupils have good chances to be involved with the development of the school through the school council.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Strong pastoral care and support systems are in place and pupils are cared for very well.
- Excellent, and much appreciated, transfer and induction arrangements from the primary schools help pupils to settle quickly into the school.
- The school council is an effective forum for pupils to make their views known.
- Some health and safety issues still face the school.

Commentary

52. This is a most caring and thoughtful school. Pupils are supported very well through the school's strong and well-organised pastoral system. The high level of care provided is a strength of the school. Form tutors and heads of year build strong relationships with pupils and their families. These are supportive and promote good learning. Such very good knowledge of pupils and their backgrounds helps the school to provide support when needed. Individual problems are handled with sensitivity and consideration and there is a strong focus on supporting those who are underachieving or have any personal difficulty. Meetings involving academic and pastoral staff are held regularly, and quickly identify and target help for individuals who require it. Pupils are confident that, if they have a concern

over their work or personal relationships, there is an adult to whom they can turn for support. A number of pupils interviewed said without hesitation that they would go to a member of staff, for example, their tutor or the school chaplain, if they were in difficulty.

53. The arrangements for child protection are very good, and all the requirements are met. Teachers and support staff are aware of what to do if they suspect abuse has taken place. This forms part of the induction process for all new members of staff. When pupils are ill or injured they receive a high level of care and attention. All medical needs are catered for very well. Regular risk assessment audits and health and safety checks are carried out by designated members of staff. However, during the inspection it emerged that some health and safety issues exist. The school and its governors are well aware of these problems and are pushing the appropriate authorities to take appropriate action.
54. Very positive comments were made by both pupils and their parents about the arrangements to support pupils as they move from Year 6 in primary school to Year 7 at St Joan of Arc. The school has established excellent relationships with its large number of feeder primary schools and has developed excellent transition and induction procedures. Prospective pupils are visited in their primary schools and are then invited to attend a well-planned induction day, where they take part in lessons and they, and their parents, meet their tutor and other members of staff. On their first day at school they are personally introduced to the headteacher, who welcomes them individually to the school. There are also excellent arrangements for the induction of pupils with special educational needs. Small groups of incoming Year 6 pupils are transported to the school by the learning support department for a visit prior to their starting in Year 7. The very positive outcomes of the induction procedures were evident from the pupils in Year 7 talking enthusiastically about their new school.
55. The school has very effective relationships with outside specialist agencies that enhance further the quality of support and guidance for those pupils with special educational needs. Annual reviews are effective and support pupils with Statements of Special Educational Need as they move through the school. Parents' and pupils' views are taken into account because they are involved in the setting and reviewing of their targets at annual reviews and on special 'IEP review' days. The school meets fully the curricular requirements as outlined in pupils' Statements of Special Educational Need. The learning support department also has links with Watford FC that are of direct benefit to pupils with special educational needs. Pupils are invited to visit the ground. Some lessons are taught there and pupils are given an opportunity to mix learning with social activities.
56. The views of pupils are taken into account well through the school council, which effectively includes all pupils through the form and year councils. The school has acted on some suggestions and concerns, such as the recent improvements to the canteen.

Sixth form

57. Responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire indicated that many students did not feel they had received enough advice on careers and information on which courses to choose in the sixth form. However, those students spoken to during the inspection said that generally they had been well briefed on the courses they had selected, and valued the support they had been given from staff, including the Connexions personnel. Sixth formers also reported that they feel fully involved in the school and that they are appreciative of the opportunities offered to them.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has maintained the very good links with parents reported at the last inspection. Partnerships with the community and with other schools are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents can very easily contact the school and speak to someone who knows their child well.
- The school provides a very good range of high quality information for parents.
- Very good links with primary schools, particularly those from which most pupils transfer, ensure that pupils settle quickly into Year 7.

Commentary

58. A very high proportion of parents who responded to the questionnaire, or attended the pre-inspection meeting, expressed a high level of satisfaction. The school is highly regarded, with increasing numbers of parents choosing to send their children to it. Parents feel that teaching is good, and that their children are making good progress and encouraged to become mature and responsible. They value the level of care and concern for individual pupils. The arrangements for settling in are particularly appreciated by parents of those new to Year 7.
59. Parents are comfortable about approaching the school. Tutors and heads of year are readily available if parents have any queries or concerns. The headteacher holds a monthly open 'surgery' where parents can come and discuss any problems relating to their child. Parents are involved when there are particular concerns about behaviour, attendance, medical or other educational needs. Attendance is high at parental consultation and open evenings. The parents and friends association works conscientiously and tirelessly to raise funds for the school, though only a few parents are involved.
60. There is very good written communication between school and home which keeps parents informed about school activities and about the progress their children make. Regular newsletters are well presented and give a clear picture of day-to-day life at the school. All pupils have 'link books' which parents read and sign and which provide a means of regular communication between home and school. The interim and full reports on pupils' progress indicate the levels pupils are working at and many of the targets set are practical suggestions for improvement.
61. The school appreciates parents' views and regularly consults them through surveys. Such surveys show that, overall, parents are very satisfied with what the school provides. In response to some concerns about homework, the school set up a process where the headteacher regularly monitors and samples homework throughout the school.
62. The school has built a very close and effective working relationship with the primary schools from which it draws its pupils. Comprehensive exchanges of information, and a programme of regular visits, ensure that Year 6 pupils are well prepared for life at secondary school, and consequently they settle in quickly. Various activities in ICT and mathematics, promoted through the school's specialist college status, give primary pupils the opportunity to visit the school and become familiar with the surroundings.

63. The school's links with the community are good. Pupils entertain local elderly people at Christmas, and there are opportunities to take part in public speaking competitions run by the Rotary Club. The educational welfare officer, community police officer and representatives from the fire service and charities visit regularly and involve themselves in the life of the school. There are some good links with employers through the work experience programme and the school lets out its facilities to several local organisations. The school uses the local area for visits, for example geography field trips, and, beyond the immediate vicinity, the school organises a mission and an annual trip to Lourdes.
64. There are good links between the learning support department and the parents of pupils with special educational needs. Parents are invited to attend annual reviews and their views are recorded; hence they are fully involved and informed as to their child's progress towards the targets set as part of the review process. Parents and pupils are also involved in the setting and review of targets on IEPs. Parents are kept fully informed of procedures for support of pupils with special educational needs.

Sixth form

65. There are various links with the local community, including students' involvement in community work such as helping in primary schools and working in residential homes. The school is developing closer links with nearby secondary schools to share expertise and training and to strengthen the school's post-16 curriculum. Through its links with the University of Hertfordshire, the school arranges for students to attend careers conventions and open days.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school is well led and managed. The leadership by the headteacher is very good. Management overall is good; financial management is very good. Governance of the school is satisfactory. All statutory requirements are met.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership by the headteacher is very good.
- Good leadership in the sixth form is improving provision.
- Financial management is very good.
- Lack of emphasis on improved teaching and learning in monitoring leads to some inconsistent practice.
- The school gives good value for money.

Commentary

66. The leadership of the headteacher is very good. He holds an unshakeable belief in the values of the Christian faith and promotes them passionately within the school and beyond. Under his leadership, the school has grown in size considerably and the community, governors, staff, parents and pupils hold him in very high regard. The school has a very strong community ethos.
67. Leadership, overall, is good. Whole-school planning is focused well on improved achievement for pupils. Whole-school priorities are clearly reflected in departmental

development plans and in the work of the majority of the departments. There is a sense of teamwork that has been promoted through successful achievement of the Investors' in People award. Performance management is being used effectively to review teachers' practice. There is good leadership of the sixth form and an improving ethos.

68. Management is good. The school functions smoothly as an orderly and respectful community. There is a cohesive senior management team. There are systems in place to devolve management responsibilities to middle managers through performance management. Test and examination results are evaluated and used to shape priorities for improvement. However, the evidence on which monitoring is based, in whole-school planning and in the management of the performance of teachers, is limited. There is too little emphasis on measurable outcomes in terms of changes in teachers' practice and pupils' achievement. Although the majority of departments ensure continuous improvement, some have made insufficient progress since the last inspection. There are some gaps, therefore, in the systems for holding staff to account. The new head of sixth form is providing sound management. There are several promising plans for improving provision, including greater emphasis on developing students' independence and extending curricular opportunities.
69. The work of the governing body is satisfactory. Some governors have very good involvement in the day-to-day running of the school and have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. Governors are consulted about key aspects of the school's performance and are very supportive of the school's Christian ethos. The governing body successfully meet all statutory requirements.
70. The national problems related to recruitment and retention of staff are compounded in an area of high cost housing and the school relies heavily on part-time teachers. Although there is a high turnover of teachers, there is a good induction programme. Performance management is well established, but the objectives for teachers are not always measurable in terms of teaching and learning. The observation schedules emphasise teacher behaviour rather than judgements about the learning outcomes for different groups of pupils. The good practice that is emerging in many departments, with respect to the use of data and the monitoring of teaching and learning in order to improve provision, is reflected in the improvement in teaching and learning across the school. However, it is not reflected consistently in all departments.
71. Financial management is very good. The recent very good audit has led to prompt and efficient amendments to procedures. The present surplus on accounts, which amounts to just below five per cent of the school's income, represents a hedge for present building works that are in progress, but for which invoices have yet to be received. The governors play a key role in their oversight of the budget. They challenge and check financial aspects of the school very well. Although the school is beginning to embrace the principles of best practice effectively, there is scope for governors to use a wider range of data.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	4,488,159
Total expenditure	4,397,602
Expenditure per pupil	3,572

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	129,001
Balance carried forward to the next	219,558

72. Leadership and management of the learning support department are very good. This has resulted in a very good whole-school ethos for the inclusion of and support of pupils with special educational needs. There is a clear vision for future provision and development planning is well linked to whole-school areas for improvement. The school pays due regard to the Code of Practice for special educational needs and statutory requirements are met. The present draft policy for special educational needs has yet to be formally ratified by the governing body.
73. Shared management has ensured LSAs are deployed effectively to provide the required support for pupils with Statements of Special Educational Need and those at the school action stage of the Code of Practice for special needs. This provides the breadth and level of support required for these pupils. The monitoring and evaluation of the work of the support staff are well embedded as a result of the appraisal system. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.
74. Leadership and management of the EAL provision are very good. Assessment procedures are very good; the teachers responsible for providing support to these pupils have identified their specific language needs and provide good levels of support for pupils both in mainstream lessons and through regular small group work sessions. Appropriate resources are used and pupils can, therefore, develop their skills in English in a very supportive atmosphere; as a result pupils increase in confidence and competence in speaking and responding and in reading aloud. Advice has been sought from outside agencies and appropriate training for teachers has been provided. At present the programme of study reacts to pupils' difficulties rather than anticipating them. In order to be more effective and to enable pupils to be more independent in lessons, there needs to be a more structured approach to teaching, based on the future language needs in lessons.
75. The school is situated in an area that creates considerable difficulties for recruitment and retention of staff. The headteacher and governors do what they can to recruit good quality teaching staff, whether trained in this country or elsewhere. New and newly arrived staff are given a mentor and are both professionally and socially welcomed into the school community. All reasonable measures are taken to ensure that new staff settle quickly and make a positive contribution to the life and work of the school. The measures taken by the school to induct, support and develop all staff who work there are good, well considered and effective in varying ways across departments. The staff development team manages the process of continuous professional development well. All staff have ample opportunities to apply for courses that they feel will support their professional development, and records of all training undertaken are kept in good order. All teaching and support staff have a professional development portfolio in which they keep their training and development records.
76. The school has a strong pastoral approach and there is explicit emphasis on the development of the whole child, as well as improving achievement. The standards in the school continue to rise and the school is increasingly over-subscribed. The school's accommodation is poor, but facilities have been improved. The school has achieved specialist status and the School Achievement Award. Since the last report, there has, therefore, been good improvement. Issues relating to statutory requirements have been successfully addressed. However, there are still significant health and safety issues in several areas. The school gives good value for money.

Sixth form

77. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The head of sixth form is fairly new to post and is being well mentored by a deputy headteacher. Enrolment and induction systems have improved to ensure that students are placed on suitable courses, while still maintaining the school's unquestionable commitment to inclusion. The head of sixth form's work is having a positive impact on the motivation and attainment of students and standards are improving. There is also a satisfactory vision of how the sixth form should develop. The procedures for monitoring the progress of students are improving and the governors have a satisfactory understanding of the work undertaken. The sixth form is large and the students enjoy and value the experiences offered. They appreciate the personal support provided by their staff. Overall, the sixth form offers sound cost effectiveness.

WORK-RELATED LEARNING

The provision for work related education (WRL) is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Careers education and guidance is well taught in all years through the school PSHE programme.
- An efficiently run work experience programme provides Year 11 pupils with good opportunities to learn from the direct experience of work.
- A curriculum audit has not been completed and as a result not all departments have clearly identified the work-related elements in their subject.
- There are a limited number of vocational courses available to all pupils.

Commentary

78. The school's programme for careers education and guidance, including elements of WRL, has been carefully planned in accordance with national guidance and meets requirements. Through a well-taught PSHE programme in all years students undertake a number of relevant exercises that are designed to develop essential personal skills that are also valuable employment-related skills. There are also several units of work that directly address work-related issues. For example, a Year 10 group was looking at personal finance and examining how the stock market works. Pupils make a mature and informed contribution to group discussions. In these lessons the teaching was good with teachers using a range of teaching methods to interest and challenge pupils.
79. In Year 11, students benefit from a very well planned and delivered work experience programme. Pupils are well prepared for this and good monitoring takes place during the visits. Preparation for life after Year 11 is good. Students are suitably informed of post 16 education opportunities, both at school and in further education, as well as being given information about employment opportunities.
80. The school offers a limited range of vocational courses that are open to all pupils. A good example is a well-taught double award health and social care course. Pupils who take this course are achieving well, reaching standards that are above those predicted. There is a specially designed alternative curriculum for pupils who have difficulty coping with the full examination workload. Two choices are available, one of which provides an opportunity for disaffected pupils to obtain placements in work-related situations.
81. The school has yet to complete an audit of work-related learning across the curriculum. A number of subjects such as English and geography have identified sections of their curriculum

that contain work-related elements but this is not consistent across all subjects and opportunities are missed. Although the school has good relationships with a number of employers there are very few examples of partnerships with industry being effectively used in the curriculum.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

82. The focus was on English, French and Italian but German was sampled. Standards in German were above average but teaching was dull and failed to capture pupils' interest. Activities were pedestrian and did not adequately reflect the pupils' needs; as a result they underachieved.

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Teaching and learning are very good, enabling all pupils to achieve very well.
- The performance of boys in Years 9 and 11 is weaker than that of girls.
- There are too few opportunities for pupils to develop their ICT skills.

Commentary

83. In 2003, National Curriculum test results for pupils at the end of Year 9 were well above average. When compared to their standards on entry in Year 7, these results represent very good achievement. The unvalidated results for 2004 suggest that standards have declined slightly owing to some difficulties with staffing.
84. In 2003 seven out of ten pupils attained A*-C grades in GCSE English language and English literature examinations. English language and English literature results were well above average, representing very good achievement. The unvalidated results for 2004 suggest that GCSE A* to C results have remained high.
85. Pupils join the school in Year 7 with levels of literacy above the national average. By the end of Year 9 the standard of their work is well above national expectations. This represents very good achievement as they have built on their earlier successes and further developed their skills. By the end of Year 11, pupils' work continues to be well above national expectations and their achievement is again very good as they have developed as confident and articulate learners. By Year 9 pupils speak with fluency and make significant contributions to small group and whole-class discussions. They can communicate ideas, give opinions, respond to listeners, speak formally and are sensitive to others' views. Most read accurately and independently. They understand ideas, themes and characters in literature. They can select essential points from written material and identify key features. More able pupils can understand layers of meaning in texts, give personal responses and understand the ways language shapes meaning. The writing of average and more able pupils is organised, clear and correctly punctuated. Ideas are developed and sustained. The work of lower attaining pupils is less organised. By Year 10, pupils speak purposefully with increasing complexity. They can make personal and critical responses to what they read and understand how writers use techniques. The writing of more able pupils is lively and thoughtful. Lower attaining pupils achieve as well as their peers

because teachers provide carefully designed learning materials and tasks. The achievement of gifted and talented pupils is well matched to their abilities because their teachers provide intellectual challenge and support. The performance of girls has been consistently better than that of boys. However, the gap between boys and girls is closing because the department has introduced a range of strategies including: behaviour modification; setting clear specific targets; designing short, sharp tasks; and creating fresh schemes of work. At present pupils have few opportunities to develop ICT. This is because present access to computer rooms is limited.

86. Teaching and learning are very good. All teachers are subject specialists and they have high expectations of pupils and challenge them effectively. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and want to succeed; they work well on their own. They are supported in this by the way teachers encourage them to assess their own performance. Teaching and learning are monitored termly by the head of department so that teachers and pupils receive further guidance on how to improve. Planning, curriculum and assessment processes have been reviewed and improved. Marking and assessment consistently support improvement for all pupils. The department has a very good system of target setting. Homework is used very effectively to support learning.
87. Leadership and management of the English department are excellent. The head of department is dedicated to ensuring the highest possible standards. She is reflective, self-evaluative and innovative. For example, pupils have been trained to evaluate the contribution their work makes to their understanding of citizenship. Teamwork is very good. Her team emulates her enthusiasm and commitment. Strategic thinking and planning for improvement have helped her team to produce departmental policy documents that are clear and well focused on raising pupils' attainment. Evaluation is embedded in the department's practice and is open, frank and accurate. The subject has made very good progress since the previous inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

88. The literacy framework is in place in English classes. The school has an effective strategy for teaching the basic skills of literacy across the curriculum.
89. Standards of literacy are very high and enable pupils to achieve well. They communicate their knowledge of subjects very clearly in writing. They read fluently, with good comprehension, and make effective use of higher order reading skills such as skimming and scanning. They are fluent speakers and thoroughly enjoy discussions. In art and design and drama pupils use their speaking and listening skills to evaluate their own work and that of other pupils. Teachers consistently place a strong emphasis on the use of technical vocabulary and hence pupils are accurate in its use. There are planned opportunities for pupils to acquire and use technical language in geography and mathematics. In modern foreign languages teachers highlight the application of correct grammatical structures. Writing frames are provided in science and support pupils well in their written work.

French

Provision in French is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' command of French is very good.

- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good.
- Opportunities for pupils to use the language themselves are limited.
- The provision for pupils to take a second language is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

90. Standards are above average, which represents satisfactory achievement. In GCSE examinations in 2003 the proportion of candidates gaining A* to C grades was well above average, but the majority gained C grades. In 2004 standards have improved but the distribution of grades has remained the same. In work seen, though pupils write at length and standards of listening and reading are above average, they are less confident in speaking and responding spontaneously or writing independently of notes and models.
91. Pupils' attitudes towards their learning are good. They behave well and listen attentively. When they are given the opportunity to practise informally in pairs they concentrate on tasks set, work productively and their confidence increases in participating in whole class discussions as a result. However, when they are not directly involved in activities for lengthy periods or activities are not adapted sufficiently to enable them to succeed, they lose interest and concentration.
92. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, but one unsatisfactory lessons were seen. Teachers have a very good command of the languages they teach and use them effectively; pupils make the best progress in developing listening skills where expectations are high and teachers challenge the higher attainers to interpret more complex instructions for others. Presentations are usually clear, using the whiteboard, visuals or PowerPoint presentations so that pupils rapidly understand and use new language appropriately themselves. The most effective lessons are very well planned, with frequent opportunities for pupils to use the language themselves in pairs and small groups, so that they are confident in moving from one step to the next. In less effective lessons expectations are too low and lessons are dull with little opportunity for pupils to use the language themselves; teacher led activities are lengthy and often concentrate unduly on the theory rather than the practice of language skills; this inhibits rather than encourages pupils in their attempts to communicate their ideas. In the more effective lessons, the exploration of grammar is used as a means to develop practical skills so that pupils swiftly understand and apply patterns successfully themselves in practical situations. In some lessons the needs of lower attaining pupils and pupils with special educational needs are not adequately addressed in terms of the type of activities and resources available; as a result these pupils do not always have the means to succeed. In listening activities these pupils are not always given sufficient support through, for example, predicting what they are going to hear or support materials, to enable them to identify key words and phrases successfully.
93. Leadership and management of modern languages are satisfactory. Reading and writing skills have improved since the last report, the use of ICT is being developed and the department's procedures for assessment are good. However, the procedures for identifying and spreading the very good and excellent practice within the modern languages department are ineffective and result in inconsistency in the quality of teaching and learning across the department. The arrangements for pupils to start a second language are unsatisfactory, since pupils are not able to make an informed choice to start a second language in Year 10. Take up is very low and is dependent on pupils studying

independently before starting the course; this disadvantages able linguists in the next stage of education.

Italian

Provision in Italian is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' achievement is very good.
- Teachers' command of the language is very good.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good and enables pupils to achieve very well.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good.

Commentary

94. Standards of work in Italian they are high. This represents very good achievement. In GCSE examinations in 2003 the proportion of candidates gaining A* to C grades was well above average and more than one third gained A and A* grades. In 2004 standards have improved again. In work seen, pupils studying Italian are confident and display a high degree of independence in manipulating the language and higher attaining pupils identify and apply patterns themselves.
95. The quality of teaching and learning is very good, and pupils' attitudes are good. Teachers have a very good command of the language and use it effectively. In a Year 8 lesson, for instance, pupils made excellent progress in talking about the weather and leisure activities. A very clear PowerPoint presentation, followed by frequent opportunities to practise new language informally and closely monitored by the teacher, allowed pupils to build very effectively and confidently on what had gone before. Throughout the lesson pupils were keen to participate in whole class oral work because at each stage of the lesson they experienced success.
96. Leadership and management judgements are largely the same as for French, though assessment data is analysed more thoroughly in Italian and effective action is taken to improve standards and achievement.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good leadership and teamwork are helping to improve pupils' results at GCSE, which showed a sharp improvement in 2004.
- Homework is an important and integral part of teaching and contributes to good achievement by pupils in all years.
- Teaching offers too few opportunities for independent learning.
- The use of ICT is developing but there are still times when it could be used more effectively.

Commentary

97. The trend of the results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 has shown a small improvement over the past five years, especially at the higher levels. Results in 2003 were well above average with no marked difference in the performance of boys and girls. Compared to their standard on entry to the school, pupils' achievement is good. In the GCSE examinations taken in 2003, results were above average. The girls' results were better than those of the boys, though during the inspection no differences in standards based on gender were seen. In 2004 there was a sharp improvement in the GCSE results, possibly because of the new booster lessons put into place resulting from the new specialist school status. Compared with prior attainment, achievement in 2003 was satisfactory.
98. Current work seen in lessons and in pupils' exercise books shows that standards are above average in all years. Pupils' work shows much care and attention; their knowledge and understanding are built upon well, resulting in good overall achievement. This was exemplified in a Year 8 lesson on finding the angles of a polygon in which pupils excitedly calculated various interior and exterior angles of a number of different shapes. Year 11 project work seen showed similar care and attention with work requiring analysis of a problem in which they were required to find the shortest fence to enclose the maximum area of a field. More able pupils achieve well throughout the school. They are given work which is stimulating and extension work is provided where appropriate. For pupils with special needs, learning support assistants provide valuable help and this contributes to them achieving at a level beyond what would normally be expected.
99. Teaching and learning are good and sometimes very good. Relationships between pupils and staff are good, and there is a good working atmosphere in classrooms. The genuine respect and good relationships between staff and pupils is evident and this is a great help to the learning process. Pupils like the fact that their teachers are always available to help them if they have any difficulties. Lessons are well planned with suitable activities. Teachers employ their expertise and good subject knowledge effectively in structuring lessons appropriately, though more opportunities for independent work should be offered. They employ very good questioning skills to probe pupils' understanding. Teachers use a wide range of resources well to engage pupils in their learning, including good use of ICT when the equipment is available. Homework is set regularly as a helpful and logical extension to the class learning experience. Books are well marked and contain comments which are appropriate and constructively helpful for pupils to guide their own learning.
100. The leadership and management of the department are good. The schemes of work are comprehensive and there are opportunities for varied learning activities. The change to specialist college status has been very well managed, as have the procedures to improve examination results. The management of staff is good and new staff have been well incorporated into the department with their obvious strengths used to the full. The staff act as a coherent team, and there is genuine loyalty and respect for the head of department. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Mathematics across the curriculum

101. Pupils' application of mathematical skills in other curriculum areas is good. A whole-school policy has been in place for a number of years and this is now embedded in

teaching throughout the school. Pupils in mathematics are encouraged to practise their numeracy skills regularly in mental exercises alongside the use of calculators. In food science, pupils are required to measure and cost ingredients for recipes, whilst in science pupils regularly plot current/voltage graphs, calculate average speeds and use data loggers.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in all years are above average and pupils achieve well overall.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Teachers work as together as an effective team and are respected by the pupils.
- The laboratory accommodation is poor and has an adverse effect on learning.
- The time allocation for science in Years 7, 8 and 9 is insufficient and adversely affects standards.

Commentary

102. In 2003, the national test results at the end of Year 9 were above average. Over the last three years standards have stayed consistently above average and are in line with the standard in similar schools. These above average results agree with the standard of work seen in lessons and in pupils' exercise books. Results in 2004 were also good with 85 percent of pupils reaching at least Level 5, but there was a drop in the number reaching Levels 6 or 7. This is because of the reduction in curriculum time allocated to science since September 2003. The drop from four to three lessons per week means that science has less curriculum time, which is significantly below the national average of 12 per cent. GCSE results in 2003 were well above average. This represents a significant improvement on the standards at time of the last inspection when they were below the national average. In 2004 there was a drop in the percentage of students gaining grades A* to C. Severe staffing difficulties over the last two years are largely to blame, together with insufficient attention being paid to the quality of pupils' coursework by some staff and inadequate revision for the important terminal examinations.
103. The attainment of pupils who enter the school in Year 7 is above average. At the end of Year 9 attainment is above average and in line with the standard achieved in similar schools as defined by prior attainment. This represents satisfactory achievement. In 2003, the GCSE results were well above average. This represents good achievement. This judgement is supported by the progress being made by pupils in the lessons observed and from the scrutiny of work. Their overall achievement as they move through the school is, therefore, good as they consolidate their knowledge and understanding and develop good scientific techniques.
104. The quality of teaching and learning is good; no unsatisfactory teaching was observed and one lesson was judged to be excellent. Teachers are caring and insist on a high standard of pupil behaviour in lessons. The department is implementing ideas from the national Key Stage 3 strategy such as the three-part lesson. A good variety of starter activities is used, often involving some form of quiz with pupils responding using whiteboards. Such activities quickly engage the interest of the pupils and lesson start briskly. The best lessons observed contained a range of different pupil tasks, with teachers responding to the needs of the pupils and presenting the scientific concepts in a variety of ways. A Year 7 lesson on cell division started with a short video clip showing animal cell duplication followed by a sequential computer simulation of the same phenomenon. Suitably differentiated written tasks were set to reinforce further the concept and the lesson ended by pupils looking at real flowers with large anthers to introduce the concepts of pollination and fertilisation. The pupils were fully engaged throughout

the lesson and consequently highly efficient learning took place. Lessons deemed only to be satisfactory often lacked variety, resulting in pupils losing interest and becoming bored for parts of the lesson. Teachers mark books conscientiously and set specific targets for improvement, closely following the whole-school policy.

105. Leadership and management are both good. There is a comprehensive department handbook and good systems are in place to monitor the progress of the pupils, particularly in Years 10 and 11. The quality of the teaching and learning in science lessons is closely monitored with each teacher being formally observed by the head of department at least once a year. An analysis of the performance of the department takes place annually, with action plans being drawn up to improve standards. The head of department is fair in the way she organises the curriculum and allocates teachers to classes. Her hard work and commitment to the development of the department set an exemplary standard. As a consequence, she leads a dedicated and unified team who are supportive of each other. Sharing of good practice is strongly encouraged and whenever possible peer observations occur. New improvements that raise standards are always being considered. The recent investment in modern data-logging equipment and LCD projectors is having a significant impact on learning. There are, however, some barriers to learning. The number of laboratories is barely adequate for the number of science lessons being taught and some lessons take place in a classroom. Most laboratories are too small for the classes they hold and have poor facilities. Many are converted classrooms with too few sinks and electric sockets, which are positioned only on the sidewalls. This makes whole-class practical work with large classes very difficult. They are also dull and gloomy and do not create the best learning environment. Overall, improvement since the last inspection has been good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision for ICT is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The rich programme of study in Years 7, 8 and 9 is taking full advantage of the national strategy, using its methods and materials.
- Pupils in all years achieve well because of the quality of teaching they receive.
- The number of non-specialist staff teaching ICT hinders development.

Commentary

106. On entry to the school, standards are broadly at the levels expected nationally. For pupils at the end of Year 9, school assessment in 2003 reported that 83 per cent had reached Level 5 or better and this figure has increased to 90 per cent in 2004. These figures indicate that standards are above average and that achievement is good. The close adherence to the national strategy together with good planning and assessment contribute significantly to the above average standards. In 2003, pupils in Year 11 entered the GNVQ Intermediate or Foundation examinations in ICT. Standards were broadly average, representing satisfactory achievement in terms of the pupils' prior learning.
107. Work seen during the inspection matches these results. In Year 9, standards are above average. The rich programme of study requires pupils to undertake a wide range of tasks using ICT that are carefully planned to extend attainment. Pupils' work shows that they are performing at the levels required. Achievement is good. Pupils make good progress through undertaking the demanding but very enjoyable programme of work that draws extensively on the national strategy materials. In Years 10 and 11 standards are above

average and have improved on previous years because of improvements in staffing. These pupils are achieving well in relation to their prior learning.

108. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Lessons are carefully planned with appropriate and demanding activities. In many cases the work is fun, particularly for pupils in younger classes, and this provides important motivation and learning. Appropriate homework, closely matched to the lessons, is set regularly. Teachers mark work very carefully to a high standard and offer much advice to pupils on how to improve. Target standards are set and each pupil's progress is carefully monitored. In consequence pupils work well in lessons. In all years the planning and delivery of lessons ensure that pupils with special needs are fully included and that gifted pupils are stretched. There are some issues, however, that make teaching difficult. ICT is taught in suite of rooms that have been converted from classrooms. Some have poor facilities for data projectors and screens, insufficient space for pupils to work away from the computers and poor layout for whole-class teaching.
109. Leadership and management of ICT are very good following recent changes in personnel. There is now an ambitious vision for what the subject can offer pupils and this has led to a big improvement in the curriculum for ICT throughout the school. Teachers work closely together to plan lessons in detail and this ensures a consistent quality of teaching. It also supports the relatively large numbers of non-specialist staff who contribute to the teaching of ICT. This large team is very well managed and the quality of teaching is closely monitored. However, it is not an ideal position to develop the highest standards and difficulty in securing stable staffing has had a negative impact on provision. It is the quality of leadership and management that is sustaining and developing standards in such circumstances.
110. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. There is better curriculum provision in Years 7 to 9 and the curriculum is now fully compliant with legal requirements in Years 10 and 11.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum (including sixth form)

111. Provision is satisfactory. The school has a suitable strategy to encourage and develop the use of ICT. Pupils make use of computers extensively for their work in many subjects and their general competency is good. Equipment has been introduced into most curriculum areas and this is leading to some good practice by teachers in making illustrated presentations and using specialised software applications. Good examples were noted in design and technology, music, geography and in science. Currently the school ratio of computers to pupils is 1 to 8 and thus it has not reached the Government's target of 1 to 5. Consequently there are some gaps in provision, such as in English. However, the required level of accessibility will be reached when the school's new teaching block is opened.
112. Some progress has been made in using network and Internet technologies. Facilities exist for teachers and pupils to access their files from home but there has been only limited development of putting learning resources on line so that they are available to promote 'any-time-anywhere-learning'. The school has not yet achieved a transformation of teaching and learning through ICT but is well placed to pursue such development as part of its vision as a specialist school for mathematics and computing.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE pupils achieve well because of good teaching.
- Relationships between pupils and staff are very good and lead to very good behaviour in lessons.
- Schemes of work do not identify clear cross-curricular links or provide detailed guidance to further raise standards of teaching.
- Pupils with special educational needs and the more able pupils require more support, including detailed feedback in teachers' marking.

Commentary

113. In 2003, National Curriculum teacher assessment for pupils at the end of Year 9 were above average. When compared to their standards on entry in Year 7, these results represent satisfactory achievement. In 2003, GCSE results were well above average, representing good achievement. Unvalidated results for 2004 suggest a drop in GCSE A* to C results but this can be attributed to a high level of staff turnover.
114. Pupils join the school in Year 7 with standards that are above average. By Year 9 the standard of their work is above national expectations. This represents satisfactory achievement. By Year 11, pupils' work is well above average and their achievement is good. By Year 9 pupils are able to describe and explain geographical concepts confidently and make good use of subject specific vocabulary. For example, pupils were able to suggest ways that different types of coastal defence would reduce the impact of waves on a beach. More able pupils need to be provided with more challenge in their work and support for less able and pupils with special educational needs should be included in teachers' planning. The performance of girls has been consistently better than that of boys in all years. However, the gap between boys and girls is closing because the department has introduced a wider range of strategies, including more active teaching and learning styles and good use of the interactive whiteboard.
115. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, but it is stronger in Years 10 and 11. All teachers are subject specialists and they have high expectations of pupils. Pupils have very good attitudes to learning and work cooperatively with the teachers and each other. The use of praise and reward is very good and motivates pupils very well. The very good relationships between staff and pupils and good teaching account for the increasing popularity of the subject.
116. Leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. Schemes of work are in place and are being systematically reviewed. These need to identify cross-curricular links to provide clearer opportunities for their focus in lessons. Marking and assessment need further development so that pupils understand more clearly how to improve. The subject has made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. The staffing of the department is now more stable and issues raised in the last inspection have been suitably addressed.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are very high because students are well prepared for the examination.
- Good teaching leads to pupils achieving well in Years 10 and 11.
- Not enough attention is given to meeting the needs of pupils of different attainment.
- The standard of marking is very high but the use of assessment data is not as good as it should be.

Commentary

117. Results in the 2003 GCSE examination were very high compared to the national average and pupils did better in history than they did in their other subjects. Girls achieved higher than boys and two-thirds of the girls achieved A* or A grade. Unvalidated results for 2004 show a decline from these very high levels, though results remain strong.
118. Pupils' standards at the start of the course are above average. By Year 9 they have chronological understanding and can place events sequentially in time lines. They are skilled in using sources of evidence such as sketches and cartoons to interpret the significance of events leading to the outbreak of war in 1914. Pupils are knowledgeable about topics. In Year 7 for example, they know about castle building in the medieval period, with higher attaining pupils able to research information on castles such as at Warwick. In other topics, however, many pupils do not achieve highly enough because they do not develop answers or analyse evidence sufficiently well. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well when given additional adult support. Overall, however, pupils' achievement in Years 7, 8 and 9 is satisfactory. By Year 11 pupils have made significant gains in depth of knowledge and skills in using sources of evidence and standards are well above average. They know a wide range of historical terms and use them in context to write detailed assignments. They understand about bias in evidence and can interpret information such as attitudes to the changing role of women in the early part of the 20th century. Achievement is good in relation to prior learning.
119. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, but it is stronger in Years 10 and 11. In Years 7, 8 and 9 teaching is satisfactory. The aims of lessons are clear and lessons are generally well planned, but the outcomes are not well reinforced by challenging pupils to explain what they have learned. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported but average and higher attaining pupils are not consistently set challenging tasks, so they do not achieve highly enough. Good use is made of learning resources, except for the use ICT. Some marking is very good and informs pupils very well, but the quality is inconsistent across the subject. In Years 10 and 11 teaching and learning are good and pupils benefit from being taught by subject specialists and it leads to them achieving well on the GCSE course. Lessons incorporate a variety of activities, which generates interest and leads to pupils applying themselves well to tasks. Class management is good so learning proceeds smoothly and much is achieved in lessons. Homework is well used to extend learning and provide opportunities for pupils to be self-reliant. The standard of marking is generally very high but there are inconsistencies in

quality across the subject. Procedures to assess pupils' standards and achievement are developing but are insufficiently developed to monitor individual progress.

120. The leadership of the subject is good and the day-to-day management is satisfactory. The planning of future developments is clear and appropriate, but how the outcomes will be measured is not clear. Monitoring is good, except for the need for more rigorous checks on how well pupils are achieving. Evaluation and regular review of performance is good. Schemes of work are current but underdeveloped, particularly for Years 10 and 11. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection. GCSE results have risen and standards in Years 10 and 11 are now well above average, but meeting the needs of pupils of different attainment has not been addressed fully.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well in most practical lessons.
- Younger pupils are particularly enthusiastic about their lessons.
- Homework supports pupils' learning well.
- Management of the department is unsatisfactory.
- The curriculum for Years 7, 8 and 9 is unsatisfactory.
- Accommodation and resources are unsatisfactory and there are significant health and safety issues.

Commentary

121. Standards across the school are average. Standards for the majority of pupils in Year 9 are average. By Year 11, they are comparable with those pupils of a similar age nationally. In GCSE examinations in 2002 and in 2003, results at A* to C were above average. However, unvalidated figures in 2004 show a sharp drop in attainment because of staffing difficulties throughout last year. The difference between the performance of boys and girls varies from year to year. Last year girls performed better than boys, but this year, their performance was worse. Overall, pupils did not perform as well in this subject as they did in other subjects in the school.
122. Pupils' achievement by Year 9 is satisfactory. They have a sound understanding of different materials and processes and they use specialist equipment competently and safely. Pupils' understanding of how to develop their designs is less well developed. The highest attaining pupils work accurately and produce items of a good quality. Pupils persevere very well in most lessons, especially if they are practical ones. Occasionally, girls are less confident than boys in resistant materials lessons. Pupils often make good use of ICT for homework. However, there are insufficient opportunities provided in lessons for using ICT. By Year 11, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. The work of the higher-attaining pupils shows how ideas have been generated and used to solve design problems. However, some pupils' designs do not develop. The behaviour of a few Year 10 pupils, particularly boys, is immature and affects their learning in some lessons. The work of girls tends to be better presented and contains a good level of detail. As a result, more

girls obtain higher grades in examinations. There is no difference in the achievement of other groups of pupils with special educational needs or English as an additional language.

123. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Though there is a significant amount of good teaching in the department, there is some unsatisfactory teaching owing to a lack of subject knowledge and lack of robust planning. As a result, pupils' learning is not well managed and outcomes are unsatisfactory in a few lessons. Most teachers manage learning competently. Lessons are structured and there is a good pace in the majority of them. However, the beginnings and ends of lessons are not always effective in engaging pupils and reinforcing understanding. In the best lessons, teachers make very effective use of questioning to challenge and extend pupils' thinking. They relate the work to industry and trends in society. There is a good emphasis on the development of numeracy. Key words are well taught in food technology. However, teachers have few strategies or materials for targeting and improving pupils' weak learning skills, except by one-to-one support. Opportunities are provided in food lessons to develop pupils' social skills. Despite some significant health and safety issues, pupils are very co-operative and responsible. Challenging extension activities are planned for higher attaining pupils in food lessons. Homework supports pupils' learning well. Technicians make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning, especially in food. Assessment is satisfactory. Pupils' work is marked regularly by most teachers and they receive useful verbal feedback. However, planning is not sufficiently specific to ensure that intended learning outcomes can be measured. Data on pupils' achievement is not, therefore, used to modify lesson plans.
124. Most of the staff have been appointed during the previous year and there are big differences in the approaches of some teachers. As a result, pupils are better taught and challenged in some lessons than in others. The schemes of work and the arrangement of the curriculum in Years 7, 8 and 9 limit pupils' understanding of how to solve design problems. The lack of resources, especially when theoretical aspects are taught, leads to insufficient challenge for pupils, and the buzz of enjoyment that is found where there is a more hands-on approach is missing.
125. The quality of leadership and management is unsatisfactory. There has been insufficient progress since the last inspection with respect to the quality of curriculum planning for Years 7, 8 and 9 and the poor accommodation. There is insufficient emphasis on modern methods and trends in engineering and product manufacturing and in the application of new technology. Several key members of staff left last year and there are insufficient systems for monitoring and supporting new and inexperienced staff to ensure a consistent experience for pupils and continuous improvement of the department.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

The focus was on art and design, music and physical education, but drama was also sampled.

126. In **drama**, one lesson observed was excellent. In Years 7, 8 and 9 drama is taught as a part of the English curriculum. Two groups are studying GCSE drama in both Years 10 and 11. In 2003, GCSE results were above average. In 2004 unvalidated results show that nine out of ten pupils gained GCSE grades A* to C. The quality of work is very good in Year 10. Standards are high, with much original and exciting work being undertaken. The quality of teaching is very good. It is imaginative and leads to a high level of interest from pupils. The needs of lower attaining pupils are well catered for. The leadership and

management of drama are very good. Disruption from other events continues to affect classes taught in the school hall.

Art and design

The provision for art and design is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good; pupils learn very effectively and achieve very well as a result.
- The very good leadership of a department benefits from a strong team of committed and experienced teachers, who work hard to maintain high standards.
- The use of ICT in art has not been fully developed and opportunities to explore the innovative field of digital art are currently being lost.
- Pupils' work is monitored very well and they know what is needed to raise the standard of their work.

Commentary

127. This is a strong department that endured an uncharacteristically low standard of performance in the GCSE examinations 2003, where achievement was unsatisfactory. Performance in the 2004 GCSE examination has risen very significantly and the gap between the performance of boys and girl has narrowed to an insignificant margin. Following the disappointing 2003 results, the department analysed the outcome and was able to explain the sudden drop in performance, putting initiatives in place that have had a positive effect on performance. Standards seen during the inspection were broadly average in Years 7, 8 and 9, but rising to above average in GCSE classes. Given that pupils enter the school with standards in art and design that are below average, their achievement as they move through the school is very good. The increasing number of pupils opting for the GCSE course is a further positive sign of a strongly recovering department.
128. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers are very secure in their subject knowledge and teach well-managed lessons confidently. The planning and preparation for lessons are strengths; most lessons start briskly with very good, well-structured demonstrations, ensuring that lesson expectations are clear. The art technician offers very good support to the department. Pupils are very positive in their attitudes to work, are polite and very well behaved. They enjoy lessons and work hard to do their best, thereby achieving very well in lessons. They learn the basic art skills in a planned and systematic way, which leads them to explore a range of media in imaginative and skilful ways. Higher attaining pupils are able to use their drawing and painting skills to produce well-observed drawings that are developed through clay work to create work that is both technically sound and imaginative. Examination course work in sketchbooks shows a strong spiritual element, reflected through the very good notes on their personal research.
129. The leadership and management of the department are very good and have been responsible for the recovery from the low point it experienced last year. Owing to the unsatisfactory performance in 2003, the department cannot be seen as making a more than satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection, although there is clear evidence that it is currently an improving department. The head of department is a very good role model for staff and pupils, being committed, loyal and hard working. She leads

a strong teaching team that sets high standards for the department. The pupil assessment procedures are very good and enable pupils to know how well they are doing and what they can do to improve their performance.

130. Some difficulties remain. Opportunities to explore the innovative field of digital art are limited by the lack of appropriate art hardware and software. Teachers make good use of the laptop and projector they have and pupils are able to develop their research and word processing skills using school and home computers, but digital imaging and manipulation are at a very early stage of development in the department. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. There are problems of access to the department when heavy rains flood the school grounds; this is clearly an unsatisfactory situation for staff and pupils alike.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in Year 11 are well above average because pupils are given very good individual support.
- Teaching is very good and this results in very good achievement.
- Management of staff is very good and teachers are well deployed to the benefit of pupils.
- The commitment of staff leads to very good relationships and this has a positive impact on the popularity of the subject.
- Teaching conditions are difficult because of unsatisfactory accommodation.

Commentary

131. The 2003 GCSE results were above average and the unvalidated results for 2004 show a further improvement. Students in 2003 achieved at least well in relation to their prior learning.
132. Standards in Year 9 are well above average, and this represents very good achievement because when pupils enter the school, their standards in music are average. Pupils progress particularly well in Years 8 and 9. This is because they have two lessons per week and in Year 9 they are taught in smaller groups. By Year 9, they have good understanding of a range of styles and musical techniques. They can perform confidently and are able to improvise with musical understanding. A large number of pupils undertake the GCSE course because they have enjoyed music in Years 7, 8 and 9 and recognise the value of the subject. Their attainment on entry to the course is above average, and their achievement is very good because they are motivated to work hard and receive very good support from both class teachers and instrumental teachers. Work seen from Year 11 pupils was of a very high standard. Pupils develop good performing skills and play and sing well-suited repertoire. They create effective compositions and use ICT to help them.
133. Teaching and learning are very good. Lessons are very well organised and delivered with confidence. Well-judged practical activities enable pupils of all abilities to achieve very well. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and, in some lessons, excellent use is made of ICT as an aid to teaching. Teachers encourage pupils to reflect on their work and they do so articulately and confidently. Teachers and pupils share very good relationships and as a result, pupils respond well in lessons and apply themselves to tasks set with enthusiasm.

134. The leadership and management of music are very good. There is a strong commitment to pupils' needs, and staff are very well deployed within the department. Instrumental teachers are very well managed. They support pupils on examination courses and contribute to an extensive extra-curricular programme. The involvement of instrumental teachers in wider aspects of the work of the department is very good practice which has a positive impact on achievement at examination level. The number of pupils benefiting from instrumental tuition is double the national average. The department is making good progress in developing strategies for assessment and for tracking pupil progress. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. GCSE results, which were below average then, are now high and the quality of teaching and learning has improved.
135. The accommodation for the subject is unsatisfactory because there is insufficient space for practical music-making. One classroom is too small and when pupils work in groups they often have to do so outdoors, or in cramped corridors where the sound interrupts other lessons in the vicinity.

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in the GCSE course are above average and pupils achieve well.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning does not ensure consistency.
- Assessment is not used as part of learning or to inform lesson planning.
- The core physical education curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory.
- Indoor accommodation for the subject is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

136. Results in the 2003 GCSE examinations were above average. In core physical education it was not possible to make a judgement on standards. This was because pupils are not assessed during Years 10 and 11, and Year 11 pupils were on work experience placements during the inspection and none of their work was seen.
137. When pupils enter the school standards are in line with national expectations. Standards are in line with national averages by Year 9 and this represents satisfactory achievement. In a rugby lesson, Year 9 pupils were able to perform basic passing and catching. They knew how to set up and support a ruck situation. However, they were not able to consistently transfer this knowledge to a conditioned game situation because many had not developed the basic techniques of the ruck. By Year 11, standards in GCSE physical education are above average, which when compared to standards on entry to the course represents good achievement. Pupils achieved a very good understanding of defensive alignment in a Year 10 rugby lesson. They cooperated well when working in small groups when the use of communication skills was developed. In three Year 10 lessons seen achievement was unsatisfactory. Pupils were not working to the National Curriculum and so were not making progress in the acquisition and development of skills or evaluation and improvement of performance.
138. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teaching is good in GCSE physical education. In Years 7, 8 and 9 teachers target the work well to the standards pupils have

reached. Where teaching is not as good, pupils are not aware of what National Curriculum level they are working at and, therefore, are not set targets for improvement. In Years 10 and 11 GCSE pupils are focused on learning. They are motivated by the varied teaching and learning styles and cooperate well when working in pairs and small groups. However, in core physical education lessons pupils are not focused on learning because the lessons are recreational. Teachers do not plan for, or assess, pupils' attainment.

139. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. The new head of department has not yet developed a clear vision for raising standards. Monitoring of teaching and learning does not focus on raising standards and so there is much inconsistency in practice. The curriculum for Years 10 and 11 is not allocated lesson time and does not meet the recommendation of two hours physical education for all pupils aged 11 to 16. The breadth and balance of the curriculum do not meet the pupils' needs and the philosophy of recreation does not enable pupils to achieve at an appropriate level. Teachers are well supported by materials and systems and procedures through a good subject handbook. Many pupils take advantage of a good extra-curricular programme, but standards also suffer because the indoor accommodation for physical education is unsatisfactory.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

No subjects were inspected or sampled in this curriculum area.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship is reported in full below; PSHE was sampled. The PSHE course is well-structured and well managed, with a newly appointed team laying a strong foundation for the future. However, unsuitable accommodation arrangements limit the teaching strategies that can be used in PSHE because teachers have to teach in too many different rooms.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching is now enabling pupils to achieve well.
- Pupils' attitudes are very good. They are sensitive to other people's values and opinions.
- Subject leadership is good, and a good team has been established with a clear direction, but the monitoring of the citizenship curriculum is as yet unsatisfactory.
- Unsuitable accommodation arrangements limit the teaching strategies that can be used.
- Assessment is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

140. There are no national examination results in citizenship. As yet the school does not have an effective means of assessing standards in this subject. The previous fragmented nature of the teaching meant that pupils had no cohesive framework of knowledge that they identified as being citizenship. What they covered did include many of the skills in the curriculum; for example, the skills of communication in English and safety on the Internet in ICT.
141. Since September this has changed and pupils are now clearly aware of the subject. Current standards in Years 7, 8 and 9 are average. Pupils of all abilities are achieving well. They are able to discuss important issues in a confident and sensitive manner and to make informed choices. For example, a Year 8 group was considering the influence of the media. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are above average and achievement is good. Pupils play an active role in group discussions, confidently expressing themselves and demonstrating a sound understanding of the issues covered this term. This mature attitude is a reflection of the general ethos of the school and demonstrates that even though not identified in subjects, pupils have been addressing citizenship issues in lessons and assemblies. Citizenship makes a very good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
142. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject. Teachers use a range of teaching methods to motivate and challenge pupils but are hampered by the fact that they have constantly to move locations and, at times, teach in rooms that are unsatisfactory. Pupils are involved in the lessons and when given the opportunity make mature and sensitive contributions. Written work is good and is well marked. Although not all of the stimulus materials used are accessible to pupils with special educational needs, they are well supported and as a result achieve well.
143. The subject leadership is good. A newly appointed, well-organised head of department has a clear vision for the subject and is supported by committed teachers. Assessment procedures are not yet in place but are being developed. The delivery of other elements of citizenship across the curriculum is not carefully monitored and as a result much that happens does so by default rather than design. The subject was not reported on in the last inspection.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2003 (the latest year for which national comparisons are available).

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and Design	5	80	80.1	40.0	23.7	32.0	29.9
Biology	5	80	65.2	0.0	11.1	30.0	20.6
English Literature	10	100.0	85.9	40.0	19.1	39.0	32
General Studies	8	100.0	73.9	12.5	17.8	31.3	25.7
Mathematics	6	66.7	61.9	16.7	17.1	21.7	22.1

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and Design	13	100.0	98.6	23.1	50.2	69.2	87.5
Biology	10	90.0	96.4	20.0	39.2	68.0	78.6
Business Studies	31	100.0	98.7	51.6	36.8	89.7	80.1
Chemistry	8	75.0	97.6	25.0	49.0	55.0	84.9
Drama	15	100.0	99.5	53.3	40.1	92.0	83.6
English Literature	24	100.0	99.5	33.3	46.5	87.5	86.5
French	8	100.0	98.8	62.5	51.5	92.5	87.6
Design and Technology	7	100.0	97.8	42.9	35.0	85.7	77.9
Geography	9	100.0	98.7	33.3	44.5	80.0	84.0
History	22	100.0	99.0	31.8	44.6	79.1	84.6
Information Technology	7	100.0	95.6	28.6	24.6	71.4	69.5
Mathematics	14	100.0	96.7	21.4	55.6	81.4	88.8
Other Social Studies	33	100.0	97.4	54.5	42.7	90.3	81.8
Physics	5	100.0	96.7	40.0	44.6	76.0	81.7
Religious Studies	12	100.0	98.8	33.3	46.7	81.7	85.6
Sports/PE Studies	8	100.0	98.0	75.0	30.9	102.5	75.2

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Standards of work seen are well above average and students achieve very well.

Commentary

144. In 2003 the performance of students in AS-level English literature examinations was well above average. Unvalidated data for 2004 suggests that these results have improved. All students entered for the GCE A-level English literature examinations in 2003 gained grades A to E and results were above average. One out of five students entered gained the higher grades of A and B. The school's data for 2004 shows GCE A-level English literature results have declined. The school's analysis suggests that the 2003 group were stronger, based on prior attainment. Both AS and A-level results for 2003 represent very good achievement.
145. Standards in Year 13 are well above national expectations and achievement is very good. Students make significant contributions to oral work. They express their viewpoints and ideas clearly, explaining and illustrating them with evidence. They appreciate and criticise alternative interpretations put forward by other students. The writing of most students is evaluative and analytical. Students have a detailed knowledge of the themes and narrative structure of texts. They evaluate the contemporary values that influence authors and comment astutely on how interpretations of texts change over time. For example, in a Year 12 class on *Enduring Love* students explored the influences of Darwinism and evolutionary psychology on the concept of altruism in twenty-first century life. Students write accurately and persuasively. The written work of less highly attaining students shows some flaws in expression and accuracy and their analysis of the author's use of language lacks detail. In Year 12, students make very good progress in developing analytical skills in lessons and are beginning to transfer these skills to their written work.
146. Teaching and learning are very good. One Year 12 lesson was excellent. Teachers are very experienced and well read. They prepare and deliver challenging material. As a result, students make very good progress in improving their skills of analysis and their argumentative writing. Challenge and high expectations are features in all lessons. The use of talk is central to all lessons as teachers extend students' communication skills and encourage them to adopt a critical approach. Learning is highly interactive, with many opportunities for whole-class and small group discussion. Students are expected to work independently through research and delivering presentations, as well as through their note-taking and written assignments. The variety of learning activities encourages and motivates students. Students of all abilities carry out their essay work with enthusiasm and enjoyment. Marking is very good. Target setting is effective. The sharing of assessment objectives clarifies for students what they have to improve to achieve their goals. Teachers use written and spoken comments to clarify what each student needs to do to improve.

147. Leadership and management are excellent. The head of department is reflective, self-evaluative and innovative. For example, she has conducted self and peer evaluations of her performance. The department is well established and its members have a shared commitment to teach students a love of literature and language as serious critics aiming for a high standard. Planning for success is at the heart of the department's work and careful deliberation takes place before decisions are made. The department monitors students' achievement and provides appropriate advice about how to improve and succeed. Improvement has been very good since the previous inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

148. Students' communication skills in writing and speaking are above average in all sixth form subjects. Their general expression is very clear. They rarely lapse into inappropriate colloquialism. Research skills are very good. Teachers provide very good support for students' communication skills. Many subjects expect students to give presentations. High expectations are set for coherent delivery and explanations. Students write well to communicate information, ideas and opinions to intended audiences.

MATHEMATICS

The focus of the inspection was on AS and A-level courses. One lesson of further mathematics was observed in which the teaching and learning were good. Standard were above average and the students made good progress.

Mathematics

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well because of the good teaching they receive.
- Teachers' command of the subject is very good and this helps the quality of learning.
- Students enjoy mathematics, their numbers are rising and retention rates are good.
- There should be more planned opportunities to use ICT.

Commentary

149. Standards attained at AS level in 2003 were average. Compared with the standards on entry to the subject, this represented satisfactory achievement. The small numbers of students entered for the examination make comparison between boys' and girls' achievement unreliable. In 2003 A-level examinations, standards were average, with students mainly achieving in line with expectations. For present students, standards are above average and their achievement is good. This better outcome is, in part, because of more careful recruitment procedures. Students' relationships in lessons are very good. They support one another well and are becoming confident in taking responsibility for their own learning. They make their own notes in lessons and these notes are sufficiently well organised to serve as good revision tools.

150. Teaching and learning are good. The strength of teaching lies in the very good subject knowledge of the teachers and their good planning of lessons, whilst students' learning is assisted by the mature attitude of the students themselves. Teachers' questions are designed to encourage students to think for themselves and become an active part of the learning process. Lessons are conducted with a mutual desire to succeed. Students receive help and encouragement and teachers provide good individual support, both in lessons and at other times according to need. Homework is set on a regular basis as a logical extension of classwork and is marked regularly with constructive comments designed to aid learning. One area for development, however, is that students should be offered more opportunities to use ICT as part of their studies.

151. Leadership and management are good, providing a good framework for students studying A-level mathematics. Schemes of work are in place, giving teaching staff guidance of what to teach and at what level. Numbers of students have been growing over the last few years and their retention rate is high. The improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Mathematics across the curriculum

152. Standards of numeracy are above average overall. The importance given to the subject in earlier years means that students have a good basic grounding of numeracy for use in other subjects. For example, students in business studies are able to calculate profit and loss accounts, while students in physics are able to work out the half-life of radioactive isotopes. Students in biology were observed calibrating a microscope.

SCIENCE

The department offers AS and A-level courses in biology, chemistry, and physics. Work in **chemistry** and **physics** was sampled only. Teaching was good in chemistry and satisfactory in physics. Standards in both subjects are average.

Biology

Provision in biology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and positive attitudes from students helps them to achieve well.
- Strong leadership and management have created a well-organised and efficiently run department.
- Much of the department's accommodation is poor and inhibits teaching and learning.
- The retention of students is below that in most other sixth-form subjects.

Commentary

153. In 2003, results at A level were below average. The unvalidated A-level results for 2004 show an improvement. For present students, the standard of work is above average. Standards are now higher because of better teaching and improved monitoring arrangements relating to who starts the course and for their work once the course has started. In relation to their prior attainment in science, the students are achieving well.

154. The recruitment of students varies from one year to the next but for the last two years it has been disappointing and below that of most other subjects in the school. Three years ago a large

group of 25 students started the AS course but because of timetabling complications it was impossible to split students into two groups. Fewer than half of the students in this abnormally large sixth-form group continued to Year 13 and in the following year recruitment fell significantly to just eight students. Retention over recent years from Year 12 to Year 13 has been disappointing. This was because monitoring arrangements lacked sharpness.

155. The quality of teaching is consistently good and students learn well. All the lessons observed were either good or very good. Teachers are enthusiastic and conduct lessons at a brisk pace. They plan lessons carefully to ensure that students are always kept interested. In a very good Year 12 lesson a 'loop-quiz' immediately engaged the students by making them think about recently covered work and acted as a useful lead into the new work to be covered: prokaryotic and eukaryotic cells. Very good use was made of Internet access which enabled the teacher to show clear animations of activities in cells, thereby giving students a very secure understanding of the processes involved. The teacher's excellent subject knowledge was evident throughout and she gave the students confidence in her interactions with them. A good range of different activities was used to maintain the interest of the students throughout the double period. This was an enjoyable experience for all, with very efficient learning taking place.
156. Leadership and management are both good. Detailed schemes of work have been written and the head of department provides good leadership to a team of knowledgeable and enthusiastic teachers who all share a strong commitment to improvement. She is always looking for new opportunities to increase the profile of the subject. For example, over recent years she has secured Nuffield bursaries for students to spend time working alongside research biologists leading to the award of the prestigious CREST (creativity in science and technology) gold award. Also in Year 13 students now undertake biotechnology projects working on genuine problems co-ordinated by the local education authority. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have improved and the greater use of ICT in lessons has significantly helped in students' conceptual understanding of biology. The wider range of practical activities and the introduction of the biotechnology projects give students a much greater awareness of the importance of biology to society. The one major remaining issue relates to the poor quality accommodation that staff and students have to endure.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

No subjects were inspected or sampled in this curriculum area.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Increasing numbers of students are choosing to study geography at A-level as a result of good quality teaching and very good relationships with staff.
- Developing use of international fieldwork is increasing student motivation and interest in the subject.
- Schemes of work are being developed, but do not indicate opportunities for further challenge and cross-curricular links.

- Assessment and marking processes do not provide students with a clear enough understanding of what they need to do to improve.

Commentary

157. In 2003 the performance of students in A-level geography was average. All students entered for the GCSE A-level geography gained grades A to E. Three of the nine students entered gained higher grades of A and B. All students entered for the GCE AS level geography examination gained grades A to E. One of four students entered gained the higher grades of A and B. The A-level results represent satisfactory achievement. The unvalidated results for 2004 are similar to those gained in 2003.
158. Standards seen in current Year 12 and 13 are above average and achievement is good. Recent improvements in staffing and additional fieldwork opportunities account for the recent rise in standards. Students can describe and explain factors affecting population migrations across the world, applying theory to, for example, using complex subject specific vocabulary. Students are able to work independently and co-operatively on research, discussion and presentation of information. Marking is regularly completed and identifies targets for improvement. The detail of teacher commentary needs to be developed to provide students with a clearer understanding of the level at which they are working and what they need to do to achieve higher level grades.
159. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons have very good features such as the use of the interactive whiteboard for students to create a presentation explaining the formation of shield volcanoes and relating the geographic processes involved in their formation to impact on the environment. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and prepare resources of a good quality. Opportunities for extending students' achievement need to be further developed to ensure that students are able to access higher grades. There are insufficient opportunities for individual research and, in some lessons, time is lost because of late starts and generous mid-lesson breaks. Relationships between staff and students are very good and result in very good behaviour and good levels of motivation in lessons.
160. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The department is looking at ways to improve its provision and the fieldwork in New York to complement demographic studies is having a very positive effect on the popularity of the subject. No judgement about improvement can be made as geography did not feature in the previous inspection.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well because of good teaching.
- Students have very good attitudes to learning that lead to them making good progress.
- There is insufficient planning of the curriculum and priorities for development.

Commentary

161. Results in the 2003 A-level examination were equal to the national average but the unvalidated results for 2004 show a decline, representing the lower levels of prior attainment of this year group. Results have fluctuated in recent years. Female students achieved significantly higher results than males did in 2003, particularly at the higher A and B grades. No judgements on differences in attainment based on gender could be made during the inspection as few boys presently study history.
162. For present students, standards are above average and achievement is good. By Year 13 students have acquired a sound foundation of knowledge of topics such as the problems faced by Henry VIII on his succession to the throne. They have a good chronological understanding, particularly the significance of events leading to the outbreak of war in 1914. They build on skills from Year 11 in using sources of evidence, but often do not develop assignments in enough detail because they do not support analysis of sources fully through the use of examples and historical quotations. Standards of written work are above average. Higher attaining students achieve well in developing their assignment writing skills with clear structure and detailed development. Discussion skills are underdeveloped.
163. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers are well qualified and have a range of experience and this leads to students' good achievement. Student-teacher relationships are positive and students have very good attitudes to learning. These help to ensure they make good progress on the A-level course. Lessons are well prepared and structured to provide challenge, so that students are critically aware of issues and offer interpretation of events. Homework is well used to support progress and assignments are carefully assessed so that students are very well informed about the quality of their work and how it can be improved. Occasionally the pace of learning is slow because some lessons fail to start on time, or too much time is spent on repetitive activity with insufficient focus on the analysis of research. In discussion students are not always challenged to develop points enough.
164. The subject is well led and satisfactorily managed. Subject performance is reviewed regularly, particularly results and action agreed for improvement. There is clear vision about longer-term development of the curriculum, but planning has not been formalised with priorities, responsibilities and costs clearly identified. There are opportunities for the training of teachers so that they can become familiar with curriculum change but the schemes of work give insufficient guidance to teachers about the content and resources for learning. The assessment of students' standards and achievement is good. Since the previous inspection the subject has made good progress. Standards continue to be above average and students continue to achieve well. Teaching is now better than previously reported.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are good and improving results at A-level because of the energetic and varied teaching provided.
- Co-operative and articulate students demonstrate above average standards.

- The available accommodation is not suitable for the numbers of students opting for the course.

Commentary

165. Standards in the 2003 A-level examinations were well above average and the unconfirmed results for 2004 at A-level show a continued upward trend. The achievement of the students is very good, especially as they have no previous experience of this subject at GCSE. For present students on the A-level course, standards are again well above average and their achievement is very good. Standards of written and oral work are very good and demonstrate a very good grasp of the subject. The frequent assignments and tests provide regular checks that ensure students' work is leading towards a high grade and assessment procedures help to ensure that they know what to do to improve.
166. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. The knowledgeable teacher shows great energy and gives frequent encouragement and support. Lessons are structured to provide a good variety of learning opportunities which reinforce and test learning as well as maximising interest. Year 12 responded enthusiastically to three diverse activities reinforcing learning of Bowlby's theory of deprivation; though the structure for feedback for some of these activities does not ensure the active participation of the entire group. A good pace was maintained and the teacher had high expectations. There is frequent emphasis on the skills required to secure high examination grades, for example where feedback on a topic has to be structured against assessment criteria. Rapport in lessons is very good; an adult learning environment exists in which students are active participants in learning.
167. Leadership and management are very good. There is only one teacher for what is the largest sixth form subject and provision has been steadily developed, though no judgement on improvement is possible as the subject did not feature in the previous report. The students confirm that psychology is a subject with strong teaching, clear and regular assessment and good career advice. There are clear handbook statements linking content with teaching methods and resources. The analysis of students' work is being used to review ways of improving performance. The otherwise satisfactory base room is currently too small for the increased numbers taking the AS course.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

No subjects were inspected or sampled in this curriculum area.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

One lesson was sampled in **music**. Standards were average and because of good teaching, students were achieving well.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good, well-informed teaching enables students to achieve very well.

- The quality of leadership and management is very good.
- Developments in digital art are restricted by the lack of good quality computer resources.
- Access to art rooms is hazardous in heavy rains. There is currently no separate sixth form studio that would enable the students to work in their non-contact time.

Commentary

168. The results in AS and A-level examinations in 2003 were well below national averages and below other school subjects. This unusual and very disappointing outcome has been analysed by the teaching team, with support from the senior management team. As a result, the staff have approached the subject with renewed vigour and determination and current results, although not yet validated against national figures, have shown a dramatic increase in student performance that has carried the department back to the strong position it has occupied in previous years. Current target grades, based on GCSE performance, give a clear indication of rising standards.
169. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers are very secure in their subject area and teach confidently and skilfully, giving well-informed support to students as they research and develop their examination themes. As a result, students' portfolios of work, and in particular their sketchbooks, are of a high standard. Work is very well annotated and presented to a high standard, showing evidence of very good progress through the post 16 phase. Drawing and painting skills are particularly well developed and students are encouraged to work on a very large scale to increase their confidence in using those skills. Some individual work is of an exceptional standard, reflecting their spiritual quest for self-awareness. Work in plaster, based on the theme of 'conflict', show personal insight that indicates a strong spiritual and moral provision in the learning process. Some work is impeded, however, because of restricted access to ICT equipment.
170. Leadership and management are both very good. The head of department leads a strong and committed team of well-qualified and experienced teachers. Together they have re-set standards following the disappointing results in the 2003 examinations and are committed to improvement. Very good records are kept of the department's work and the very good assessment system used enables staff to track the progress of students carefully, keeping them on target. Although the disappointing results of 2003 have led to a no more than satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection, there is clear evidence of improvements in the department that will sustain the high levels of achievement noted during the inspection. One serious issue remains, however. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. Access to the art rooms is made hazardous when rains flood the school grounds, a situation made worse by the current new build alongside the art rooms. Students have no separate studio area in which to develop their studies in non-contact time.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

No subjects were inspected in this curriculum area, but two lessons were sampled in **physical education**. Standards were well above average owing to the very good teaching and learning. All students achieved very well.

BUSINESS

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students attain very high standards at A-level because of excellent teaching.
- High quality assessment informs students very well about how to improve their work.
- The excellent leadership of the subject generates high morale among students.
- There are no curriculum partnerships with local businesses.

Commentary

171. Results in the 2003 GCE A-level examination were very high and results have been maintained at this level in recent years. Male students achieved higher than did females and students did better in business studies than in their other subjects. Achievement overall was excellent.
172. By Year 13 standards are very high and this represents excellent achievement given that the students have no prior experience of the subject at GCSE. They know how businesses are classified and can evaluate the merits of different forms of organisation. They understand about company finance and how to interpret profit and loss accounts and balance sheets. They make significant gains in knowledge of business terms and apply them well in assignments. The standards of writing are high. Assignments are well structured and incorporate knowledge of real businesses through the use of case studies. Organisational skills are very good with work set out systematically and improved through word processing. Occasionally a few students lack self-confidence in oral work so that answers are insufficiently developed. There is no significant difference in the standard reached by male and female students.
173. The key to the high quality teaching is the excellent command of the subject and clarity of explanation evident in lessons. There are high expectations of students in effort and commitment and consequently they prepare themselves well for regular tests and assignment planning. This results in students making rapid gains in knowledge and understanding of topics. Students enjoy business studies. They concentrate well in lessons, engage productively with others and respond to the challenges presented. This leads to them achieving highly in the topics studied. Assessment of students' progress is regular and thorough so that they know how well they are doing and how to improve. This is supported by students being trained in the regular assessment of their performance so they progressively improve their skills as independent learners. The only weakness is the failure to make use of local businesses to support learning through visits and participation in lessons.
174. The subject is excellently led by an energetic and efficient head of department. Monitoring of students' progress is thorough so that learning needs are constantly under review and action taken. Results are scrutinised against national standards and regular attendance at

examination board meetings ensures that teachers are up to date and know what is expected. There was no report at the previous inspection.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

No subjects were inspected or sampled in this curriculum area.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

No subjects were inspected or sampled in this curriculum area.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4);

unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).