

INSPECTION REPORT

SAINT MICHAEL'S CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

Watford

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117589

Headteacher: Mr J Murphy

Lead inspector: Mr G Clements

Dates of inspection: 24th - 27th January 2005

Inspection number: 268901

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of students:	11 - 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1,008
School address:	High Elms Lane Garston Watford Herts
Postcode:	WD25 0SS
Telephone number:	(01923) 673 760
Fax number:	(01923) 680 511
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Pamela Lewis
Date of previous inspection:	15 th March 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Saint Michael's Catholic High School is an 11-18 co-educational comprehensive school of about average size. It has recently been recognised by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) as one of the most improved schools in England.

The roll has increased since the last inspection and is currently 1,008 students aged 11 to 18, of whom 141 are in the sixth form. The school is considerably over-subscribed.

Most students join the school at the start of Year 7 and stay at the school for at least five years. Few join the school at other times. In most year groups the numbers of boys and girls are fairly evenly balanced, but in Years 8 and 10 there are significantly more boys than girls. In 2004, about half of Year 11 continued into the sixth form; a majority of the others continued their education in local selective academic schools and colleges. Through liaison with a school in Milan, four Year 12 Italian students are welcomed to study for a full year in the school.

The catchment area of the school is typical of London overspill. It serves mainly eight feeder primary schools, six of which are Catholic. Approximately 82 per cent of the current **role roll** is Catholic. Most students come from white heritage backgrounds. The proportion of students from other ethnic groups, at six per cent, is well below the national average. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language, at seven per cent, is below the national average and the number at an early stage of learning English is very low. Spanish and Portuguese are the main languages spoken. Five students are supported through the traveller achievement grant.

There are 154 students (15 per cent) with special educational needs, which is close to the national average. Of these, 20 have a statement of special educational need, which is just below the national average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals, at seven per cent, is well below the national average. When students start at the school their attainment is broadly average although, because of the proximity of several selective schools, the number of very high attaining students joining the school is relatively low.

The school's mission statement is 'Bringing Christ to All and All to Christ'. It aims, as a Christian community, to educate young people in the Catholic tradition.

The school's six main aims as detailed in its prospectus are:

- To strive to realise the full potential growth of each person, regardless of colour, race, gender and ability, and in doing so achieve academic excellence.
- To promote a sense of personal value, mutual respect and self-responsibility.
- To foster that love of God which finds expression in divine worship and service of our neighbour.
- To seek to establish a strong partnership with the families and parishes of those entrusted to our care.
- To cultivate the need always to give of one's best and so reflect the goodness of God's plan and creation.
- To pursue truth in all things.

In response to a questionnaire seeking their views about the school, a large representative sample of parents very strongly endorsed the view that the school is successful in meeting its aims. This view was further confirmed at a meeting with parents. The school sets itself very challenging targets. For example, in 2005 it expects at least 75 per cent of Year 11 students to gain five or more A*-C grades, which is well above the national average.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
5317	G Clements	Lead inspector	Chemistry (post-16)
19557	E Halls	Lay inspector	
2740	B Barratt	Team inspector	History Psychology (post-16)
33504	G Bradley- Peat	Team inspector	Mathematics
15163	E Deeson	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Business studies (post-16)
34089	R Gaff	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
22609	P Grey	Team inspector	Geography Geography (post-16) Citizenship
18261	A Hill	Team inspector	Art and design Special educational needs
18967	B Loydell	Team inspector	Mathematics (post-16)
12121	J Mallinson	Team inspector	English
2447	F Mikdadi	Team inspector	English (post-16)
31549	H Moulton	Team inspector	Music Performing arts English as an additional language
4474	I Punter	Team inspector	Design and technology
27825	J Versey	Team inspector	Science
18755	R Whittaker	Team inspector	Physical education

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

St Michael's Catholic High School is a very good school with many excellent features. It is very successful at creating an environment in which all students are well motivated to learn and work hard because they recognise and respect the dedication of all teachers to their success. By the age of 16, most students realise their full potential at GCSE and their personal development is excellent. Achievement in the sixth form is very good as nearly all students meet, and many exceed, their individual targets in examinations. Leadership and management are excellent. The school provides very good value for money. Students leave the school as responsible and mature young adults with a strong concern for the welfare of others.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The headteacher provides excellent leadership.
- The school has an excellent ethos which celebrates the very good achievements of all students and encourages them all to strive for their personal best.
- All those who work at the school share a very strong commitment to the achievement and care of students.
- GCSE results are well above national averages and outstanding in English and very good in French. In other subjects relatively few students gain the very highest grades.
- The school fosters very positive attitudes to learning and provides for excellent promotion of personal development.
- Excellent links with parents and the community inspire confidence, trust and respect.
- Overall teaching is very good. It is unsatisfactory in a small percentage of lessons.
- Although standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are good, for greater effectiveness provision needs to be co-ordinated across the whole school.

The school has made very good progress since the previous inspection and GCSE results have improved substantially.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Students' achievement is very good. In 2003 the school was recognised by the DfES as one of the most improved schools in England and its sustained improvement in 2004 was also recognised. Since the previous inspection in 1999, GCSE results have improved substantially, particularly in French, and at a rate faster than the national trend in Years 7 to 9. Significant improvements have also been made in the sixth form.

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2002	2003	2004	2004
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations (students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades)	B	A	A	A*
Year 13	A/AS-level and VCE examinations	C	D	D	

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

Results in the national tests for students aged 14 were above national averages in 2004, and continue the trend of rising standards in Years 7 to 9 since the previous inspection in 1999. GCSE results improved substantially in 2003 and further in 2004 when almost three-

quarters of the year group gained five or more A*-C passes. Results were outstanding in English and very high in French. Although there were quite large differences in the results of boys and girls these were often less than the national difference. There are no evident significant differences between students with different ethnic backgrounds. Although A-level results are below national averages, students taking these courses generally have lower prior attainment at GCSE than is the norm. Most students meet, and many exceed, expectations in their final results.

The school is generally successful in reaching its aim that all students should achieve their best. On joining the school at age 11 attainment is average, although comparatively few students have very high attainment. Relative to their potential, achievement is good by the end of Year 9 and very good by the end of Year 11 and Year 13. Achievement is high because all staff are dedicated to helping students reach their full potential.

Student's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. The attitudes, behaviour and values of students are very good. The school's promotion of students' personal development is excellent. Most students are very positive about school and keen to learn. Relationships are very good and there is racial harmony. Attendance is satisfactory and punctuality is good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10, 11 and the sixth form. Teachers' high expectations ensure that learning is good or very good in the majority of lessons, occasionally excellent and only unsatisfactory in a small percentage. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, are enthusiastic and, at times, passionate for their subject. Lessons often have a high level of challenge, though this is better in Years 10 to 13 than in Years 7 to 9.

The school provides a broad curriculum that matches the interests and aspirations of all students through provision of vocational and traditionally academic subjects for students aged 14-19. The co-ordination of ICT needs to be improved and provision of technology needs to be consolidated. The school's partnership with parents and with other schools and colleges is very good and its links with the community are outstanding. The care, guidance and support that students receive is very good.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school are excellent. Leadership by the headteacher is inspirational and is extremely well supported by the senior leadership team, staff and governors who share a common inclusive philosophy and dedication to their work for the benefit of students and to meet the mission statement of the school. Management arrangements are very good, particularly in monitoring and evaluating the school's improvement. Governance is very good and ensures compliance with all statutory requirements.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are very pleased with the school and the education it provides. Students are almost unanimous in their view that St Michael's is a good school to be at. They expect to have to work hard and appreciate the good quality of the teaching and the respect they receive from teachers. These very positive views were endorsed by the inspection team.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the school should do are to:

- Raise the numbers of students attaining the higher grades in national tests and public examinations.
- Ensure teachers implement in full their lesson plans to challenge all students.
- Focus lesson observations more specifically on evaluation of the quality of learning.
- Improve the co-ordination of ICT throughout the school.

THE SIXTH FORM AT ST MICHAEL'S CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL	
	The roll of the sixth form has steadily increased since the last inspection to 156, with 80 students in Year 12 and 76 students in Year 13. Students study a broad range of A2, AS and VCE courses. The minimum entry requirement is low. The sixth form recruits mostly from the main school, though a small number of students from other schools also join, including four students from Italy who study at the school for a year.

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is very good. For most students, achievement is very good in relation to their previous GCSE examination results. Attainment in A2 and AS examinations at the highest grades is lower than average because of the lower level entry criteria, but very good teaching ensures students make very good progress. The number of students who finish vocational courses is higher than the average. The overall quality of teaching in the sixth form is very good. The high percentage of students continuing into higher education shows the success the school is having in raising students' aspirations. The curriculum provides good continuity from Years 10 and 11. A wide range of subjects is available and this encourages students to stay on at school. The cost-effectiveness of the sixth form is good.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Teaching is very good and often excellent with challenging lesson content.
- Sixth form students make very good progress and they exceed expectations based on their prior attainment at age 16.
- Students have very good relationships with teachers, resulting in very positive attitudes and good application to learning.
- There is prompt detection of underachievement and very good support is given to identified students.
- There are very good enrichment opportunities which allow students to take increased responsibility and to contribute to the life of the school and to the local community.
- Higher attainers at GCSE do not all stay into the sixth form to ensure the full spectrum of A/AS-level grades are attained.

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
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English, languages and communication	Provision for English is very good . Teachers are well prepared. Lessons are effectively structured to ensure maximum learning. There is a variety of activities. Year 12 students tend to be slightly reluctant to respond, compared with Year 13 students.
Mathematics	Provision for mathematics is very good . The quality of teaching is very good and has many excellent features. Students work hard, show interest and enthusiasm, and achieve well, although numbers taking A-level mathematics are small.
Science	Provision for chemistry is good . Teaching is good as lessons are planned well and practical work is managed safely. Achievement is good in Year 12 and satisfactory in Year 13. When questioning students at the end of lessons, teachers should not only recall the objectives for that lesson but look to link with wider concepts.
Information and communication technology	Satisfactory provision is made for all students to improve their ICT skills.
Humanities	Provision for geography is good . Teaching is good and most students achieve well. The curriculum is stimulating and well balanced, including very good opportunities for fieldwork. Both teachers and students use ICT effectively to support learning. Provision for psychology is very good . Students achieve very well in comparison with their below average attainment at GCSE. Teaching and learning are very good and often excellent. The curriculum is well planned to inspire and sustain students' interest.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	The teaching of graphics and media courses is good .
Visual and performing arts and media	The teaching of art and design and of performing arts is very good . Achievement in both these subjects is very high.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Provision for physical education is very good . There is an excellent enrichment programme.
Business	Provision for business studies is good . The range of courses provided is wide and innovative. Teaching is good as the pace of lessons is brisk and activities are varied and interactive. Achievement is good and some students are able to apply ideas to new and unfamiliar situations.
Personal development and general programmes	The teaching of personal, social and health education is good .

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Very good. There are very good relationships between staff and students. There is a strong sense of community, with students being encouraged to take initiative and responsibility and to participate fully in the life of the school. Students receive good guidance about courses available to them and the careers advice they receive is effective. Students are very well supported by regular reviews and assessment of their progress, ensuring early identification and redress of underachievement.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Very good. A development plan is in place which has appropriate targets and which reflects the common vision of improvement, expansion and students' welfare. A strong

mentoring scheme is in place, and the involvement of the school's senior managers has had good impact in raising students' aspirations.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students enjoy the sixth form and they would recommend it to others. They feel they are taught well, challenged to achieve their personal best and encouraged to become independent learners. They experience a very good range of enrichment activities. They suggested that advice about which courses to take, careers and post-school prospects could be improved. The inspection team agrees with the positive comments made by sixth-form students. It disagrees with their view regarding advice about courses and careers, which was found to be very good.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

In 2003 the school was recognised by the DfES as one of the most improved schools in England and its sustained improvement in 2004 was also recognised. Since the previous inspection standards have improved substantially at Key Stage 4 and at a rate faster than the national trend at Key Stage 3. Significant improvements have also been made in the sixth form.

The school is generally successful in reaching its aim that all students should achieve their best. On joining the school at age 11, attainment is average, although comparatively few students have very high attainment. Relative to their potential, achievement is good by the end of Year 9 and very good by the end of Year 11. Achievement by the age of 18 of those staying on at the school is very good.

There has been a rising trend in standards at Key Stage 3 since the previous inspection in 1999, although there was an unaccountable drop in English test results in 2003. Results in the national tests were above national averages in 2004. There was a substantial improvement in GCSE results in 2003 and this increased further in 2004 when almost three-quarters of the year group gained five or more A*-C passes. These results placed the school in the top five per cent of all schools nationally. Although there are quite large differences in the results of boys and girls at GCSE these are often less than the national difference. The weaker achievement of a few boys is due to their lower aspirations. There are no evident significant differences between students with different ethnic backgrounds.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is high because all staff are dedicated to helping students to reach their full potential and teaching is very good.
- GCSE results are well above national averages. They are outstanding in English and very high in French.
- The number of students gaining the higher grades at GCSE is relatively low.
- Students with special educational needs achieve very well against their individual targets.

Commentary

1. For students joining the school in Year 7, their results in Key Stage 2 national tests were similar to national averages. It is evident from other standardised tests that there are few very high attainers. It is also evident that their standards in a few subjects, such as ICT and design and technology are below average on entry.
2. Results in the end of Year 9 tests were above the national averages. In English, mathematics and science the proportion of students gaining the higher levels matched the figures for all maintained schools.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	34.2 (32.0)	n/a (33.4)

mathematics	36.1 (36.0)	n/a (35.4)
science	33.9 (33.9)	n/a (33.6)

There were 174 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. Students make good progress in English and science and very good progress in mathematics. In English, girls perform better than boys but the difference is no greater than that found nationally. In science, students' knowledge and understanding improve more quickly than their investigative skills. In both these subjects there is scope for higher attaining students to be challenged more. Students achieve very well in all aspects of mathematics, but their skills in shape and space are particularly strong. There are no evident, significant differences in attainment of students with different ethnic backgrounds in any of these subjects.
4. Students who have English as an additional language are supported well and make good progress. Students with special educational needs receive very good support and consequently they achieve very well against their planned targets and make the same progress as others in their lessons. There has been good improvement in their standards since the last inspection.
5. By the age of 14, standards achieved by students in ICT are good and they are competent at the design and making of web pages. Standards are above average in French and geography. Their overall standards in design and technology are satisfactory but their making skills are better than their ability to design. Although they make good progress in physical education (PE), by the age of 14 their standards are just below expectations. Their progress in Spanish, which they only start in Year 9, is good. In history, standards are below average in Year 9 as much of the students' writing lacks detail and explanation. Standards in history are higher in Years 7 and 8 as students are making impressive progress. In art and design and music their standards are close to those expected nationally of 14-year-olds.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	74 (72)	52 (51)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	94 (94)	89 (87)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	96 (97)	96 (95)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	38.8 (38.1)	34.9 (34.7)

There were 165 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

6. In 2004, GCSE results were well above the average for all maintained schools and exceeded the school's targets. For example, 74 per cent of Year 11 gained five or more A*-C grades compared to the national average of 52 per cent. When compared with schools where students' attainment at the age of 14 was similar, these results place the school impressively in the top five per cent of such schools. When compared to schools with a similar intake in terms of attainment at the age of 11, the school's results are well above average and indicate very good value added. These highly commendable results reflect the dedication of all staff to helping students achieve their full potential. The percentage of students gaining five or more A*-G grades was also significantly above the national average but the number gaining the highest grades, A* and A, was relatively low reflecting to some extent the prior attainment of students when they joined the school. Girls gained four times as many A/A* grades than boys.

With the exception of PE where boys did better than girls, and mathematics where their results were similar, girls gained significantly higher results than boys in all other subjects. Often this difference was no greater than that found nationally, but in English literature, art and design, design and technology, geography and history it was larger.

- GCSE results were outstanding in English and very high in French in 2004. In both these subjects the percentage of students gaining A*-C grades exceeded the national average by more than 25 per cent and the proportion of highest grades was also above the national average. Results were above national averages in all other subjects except German, history and single-award science. Standards observed during lessons matched these examination results in a majority of subjects and were better in German and history.

Sixth form

- The achievement of sixth-form students is very good. Students begin A-level, AS and VCE courses with a much lower prior attainment at GCSE than in most sixth forms. Almost all students meet, and many exceed, the grades expected of them at the end of their course. This success is due to the hard work of the students and the strong commitment of their teachers to helping them realise their potential.

Standards in GCE A/AS-level and VCE examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2004

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	85.5 (86.3)	92.4 (92.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	16.8 (20.1)	36.2 (35.6)
Average point score per student	218.5 (195.5)	265.2 (258.2)

There were 68 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

- Since the previous inspection, the number of Year 13 students entered for two or more A-levels has increased and results, although remaining below national averages, have steadily improved. In 2004, all Year 13 students gained either an A-level grade A-E or satisfactorily completed sufficient modules to be awarded an AS grade in the subjects they studied. In VCE business, 17 of the 19 candidates were successful. At A2 particularly good results were gained in English, geography, psychology and religious studies. In each of these subjects the number entered was high and results were equal to or just below national averages, which given their low prior attainment represented very good achievement.
- Results are similar at AS-level, where from relatively low prior attainment students reach or exceed their expected targets. For the subjects inspected in depth, standards in English and psychology reflect very good achievement and match expectations. Standards in business studies are higher than last year. All are on target to pass their courses, with rather more likely to reach the top grades. Current Year 13 chemistry students did not complete the AS course last year because of staffing difficulties which have now been resolved. Their standards match expectations. In both mathematics and geography, standards seen in lessons and the evidence of recent work are in line with national expectations in both Year 12 and 13.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

The attitudes, behaviour and values of most students are **very good**. Students' attendance is **satisfactory** and punctuality is **good**. The school's promotion of students' personal development is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent.
- Students are very positive about school and keen to learn.
- Relationships are very good between students and with staff, and there is racial harmony.
- The school sets very high expectations for conduct and is effective in promoting very good behaviour, resulting in few exclusions.
- The ethos of the school is excellent and the school successfully promotes students' personal development and motivates them very effectively.

Comments

11. Students are very positive about the school and appreciate the support and encouragement they receive. Lunchtime and out-of-school activities are popular and students show great interest in their work, willingness to think, collaborate and concentrate, and take pleasure in their own achievements. They respond enthusiastically to good teaching and enjoy working hard. They show respect and concern for others. Most students show good levels of commitment to their own and others' achievement and high standards of work.
12. The school operates as a very orderly community in which students feel safe. Movement around the site is efficient and calm, and behaviour in the dining areas is very civilised. Students generally get on very well together and are polite, friendly, helpful and happy to take on responsibilities. The school has high expectations of behaviour and clear strategies, which are known to everyone, that successfully achieve very good standards. There are very few incidents of bullying or harassment and students say that staff are effective in dealing with any issues that are reported. The number of exclusions is low for this size of school.
13. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent and contributes significantly to the very good relationships firmly established in the school. Spiritual development is promoted very well through regular and sincere prayer and reflection in collective worship. The school meets the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all students. Students are encouraged to take a major role in assemblies and the accomplishments of individuals are celebrated well in these sessions. Students' spiritual awareness is raised in history, performing arts, and art and design. Their understanding of other cultures and countries is well developed, for examples through links with a medical clinic in Rwanda, and this contributes to the school's success in promoting very good relationships. Students and staff from a wide range of backgrounds relate well to each other. The good number and wide range of extra-curricular activities, including involvement in sporting and musical events, residential visits, retreats, major fundraising for both local, national and international charities, visits and visitors make an impressive contribution to personal, social and cultural development.
14. Students learn to respect the views of others and develop strong social skills. They learn to act according to their own principles and to challenge things that they consider unfair. They have many opportunities to exercise their initiative and take responsibility. For example, they carry out a wide range of duties in and around the school. Members

of the school council take their duties seriously. They consult with their peers and ensure that the views and ideas of students are considered and discussed with senior staff. Sixth-formers act as buddies to younger students and ensure a smooth transition to secondary education for new entrants to the school.

15. Students are effectively encouraged in their moral development and issues are explored in most subjects and in particular in the programme for personal, social, health education and citizenship. For example Year 11 students discussed current issues both of national and international interest and discussed people's right to protest. When discussing the need to clear Third World debt they were able to present their opinions intelligently.

Ethnic background of students

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	Number of students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	817	67	0
White – any other White background	46	4	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	39	9	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	11	3	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	13	2	0

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

Attendance

16. Most students' annual levels of attendance are good although the overall attendance is satisfactory and broadly in line with the national average. Most absence is due to sickness and students being taken on term-time holidays. Good systems and staff following up absences promote the low level of unauthorised absence.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	7.4	School data	0.7
National data	6.9	National data	1.1

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

Sixth form

17. The attitudes and behaviour of sixth-form students are very good. Year 12 students are very positive about the school, particularly the way in which they are trusted and respected as young adults. Students listen attentively in lessons and are keen to become actively engaged in their learning. They show confidence in their abilities and have suitably mature attitudes to their work and think deeply about what they are doing. All students appreciate the accessibility of teachers and their helpful comments when marking work.

18. Levels of attendance are satisfactory and most students arrive punctually to lessons.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is **very good**.

Teaching and learning

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in Key Stage 3 is good, and in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form it is very good. Very knowledgeable specialist teachers with high expectations that students will work hard, ensure that teaching and learning is good or very good in the majority of lessons, occasionally excellent and only unsatisfactory in a small percentage (six per cent) of lessons. The impact of adopting the whole-school policy based on 'the five pillars of learning' is evident in lessons. This has helped the school to develop a common approach to lesson planning by all departments and has been of particular importance in raising standards in the departments that were underperforming at the time of the last inspection. The overall quality of assessment is very good, although there is some inconsistency.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is an atmosphere of dedication and commitment to all students to help them achieve their personal best.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge which they impart to students with enthusiasm and, at times, passion for their subject.
- Teachers establish very good relationships with students, resulting in positive attitudes and application to learning.
- Materials and resources are well chosen and used effectively to reinforce learning.
- Lessons often have a high level of challenge, though this is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9.
- There is much very good practice in the constructiveness of assessment to inform students of what they need to do to improve, but this is not consistent across departments.
- Teachers respond well to the training they have received.
- Teaching is occasionally unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and this is generally due to an inappropriate or low level of challenge, combined with weak classroom management.
- In some lessons, plans to challenge the most able students are not always implemented effectively.
- Homework is used well to extend and reinforce learning.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 165 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
12 (7%)	43 (26%)	56 (34%)	44 (27%)	9 (5%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; figures in brackets show percentages.

19. In a high proportion of lessons teaching is good or better. Some excellent lessons were observed in English, history, mathematics and PE. In Key Stage 3, a high proportion of good and very good teaching was seen in mathematics and geography and in Key Stage 4 in English, mathematics, geography, PE, drama and personal, social and health education (PSHE). Teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. In Years 7 to 9 there were instances of unsatisfactory teaching in music,

PE, drama and PSHE. In both key stages, some unsatisfactory teaching was observed in design and technology.

20. Teachers' command of their subject is very good and they teach with enthusiasm, indeed with passion for their subject in some science, mathematics and English lessons. In the best lessons, work is well differentiated with the higher attainers being challenged whilst the lower attaining students are well supported. The school's decision to adopt 'the five pillars of learning' has made a significant impact as it provides a secure foundation for planning. Lively lesson introductions engage students' interest, evaluative plenaries reinforce the learning that has taken place during the lesson and formative assessment is used to ensure high achievement.
21. Most teachers recognise the individual needs of students and their planning reflects this. In an excellent PE lesson, for example, the teacher used excellent subject knowledge to plan a lesson that allowed all students to learn at their own level. The teacher related activities to GCSE grades, which helped students to know at what level they were performing and what they could do to improve.
22. In the most effective lessons, teachers make the content relevant to students. In an excellent PSHE lesson around the subject of church community and tradition, students considered the significance of song lyrics. Their understanding was extended through the probing questioning of the teacher, which was very effective at getting students to think for themselves and gain confidence in answering.
23. Although literacy across the curriculum is not planned in a co-ordinated way, many examples of good practice were seen, such as in their drama lessons where students developed confidence in talking and were learning to use appropriate language with sensitivity and understanding. In an art and design lesson, literacy was very well supported in the introductory session as students wrote stories about aboriginal art. In mathematics and science, fluent speaking and attentive listening skills were witnessed, and in geography, excellent probing questioning from the teacher extracted higher-level responses from students.
24. Teachers' expectations are generally higher in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3. In most lessons, the different needs of students are well met. There is good planning for differentiation, but implementation across subject areas is mixed. Good support was seen for students with special needs, but at times more-able students were not sufficiently challenged. In a poor music lesson, for example, students were asked to sing a very simple song, they became bored with the lack of challenge and it was difficult to remotivate them. In design and technology, there was a lack of planned differentiation to match expectations to the range of capability in the class. Small pockets of underachievement were also observed in mathematics, art and design and PE lessons, due to the low expectations of the teacher and where inappropriately low-level tasks were being given.
25. Most teachers employ a range of strategies effectively to reinforce the school's teaching and learning guidance. Teachers have clearly benefited from Key Stage 3 National Strategy Training as they implement many recommended teaching methods. The impact of whole-school policies in short-term lesson planning is particularly evident in lessons where 'the five pillars of learning' are generally adhered. In the best lessons, teachers hold high expectations that students will work hard and learn well. Learning objectives are shared and there are lively, clear presentations of the topic. Thinking skills are encouraged through probing questioning and challenging tasks set

by the teacher. Very good behaviour management was seen, where teachers intervened appropriately with individual students. In less successful lessons students were given too many elements to consider, resulting in a lack of focus and depth in their work. Opportunities to share and reinforce learning through plenary discussion at the ends of these lessons were missed.

26. The use of ICT by the teacher to enhance learning is planned well in some lessons. Interactive whiteboards are used in several subject areas to raise interest. In mathematics, for example, where students were studying similarity and congruency, the teacher displayed an interactive website on the whiteboard which brought the concept to life in an imaginative way. Consequently class discussion was of very high quality and led to considerable progress. The teacher's questioning skills were superb, enabling students to hypothesise and clearly justify geometrical proofs. Innovative use was made of PowerPoint to present topical information in science. In music, an interactive whiteboard was used to reinforce literacy skills as students marked in phrases, read syncopated rhythms and analysed structure.
27. Teachers use time and resources effectively. Lessons start promptly and maintain a brisk pace. Students' application and productivity are very good and they know teachers expect them to work hard. Teaching assistants are effective in their roles, and they are aware of the needs of students. Excellent support was seen for a student with Down's syndrome, who was able to access the subject fully at GCSE level because of the additional support given by the teacher and learning assistant working together. Support for students with English as an additional language is effective.
28. Students with special educational needs are taught very well and their progress in literacy, numeracy and ICT skills is thereby accelerated. A number of teachers have been deployed to give some curriculum time in support of special educational need (SEN) students. These effectively support the SEN teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) who work in the learning support department. As yet the TAs are not assigned to subject departments, although the mathematics department demonstrates good practice in the joint planning between teachers and TAs. Staff use individual education plans (IEPs) to inform their work with SEN students, although departments do not yet offer a subject-specific target to include on the IEP. IEP targets are reviewed termly and agreed by students and their parents.
29. The use of assessment data to inform teaching and learning is very good. Most departments implement school policy rigorously. The continuous tracking and the reporting of every student's progress three times a year in each subject area helps departments with early identification of underachievement and helps students to target areas for improvement. Within subjects students usually know the level at which they are performing and understand what they need to do to reach higher standards. In their marking of homework, most teachers write comments to help improvement but it is not always evident that this advice is taken.
30. The monitoring and evaluation of lessons is having a positive effect on improving teaching. The challenge the school now faces is to use this monitoring to identify weaknesses in learning and so eradicate the inconsistency found in unsatisfactory lessons.

Teaching and learning in the sixth form

31. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is very good. The enthusiasm that teachers have for their subjects is infectious and results in strong motivation and high levels of achievement. Very knowledgeable specialist teachers with high expectations that students will work hard, ensure that learning is very good in the majority of lessons and occasionally excellent. For example, excellent teaching in psychology was seen to help students to achieve very well. The teacher's very high expectations and constant challenge in a Year 13 lesson resulted in students working at exceptionally demanding levels in analysing, interpreting and evaluating psychological theories explaining criminal behaviours. Exceptionally clear explanations and demonstrations enabled them to understand complex concepts and to develop difficult skills such as those of measuring correlation. Learning thrived in an excellent learning atmosphere.
32. Similarly, in English, excellent structuring of lessons enabled students to understand the full complexity of the poetry of William Blake and Thomas Hardy. They responded very well to the teacher's challenge by using their own vocabulary in an imaginative and exciting manner. In mathematics, excellent use is made of a range of teaching and learning strategies with interesting starter activities to lessons that motivate students by challenging them to think and share ideas.
33. Through effective questioning, teachers encourage students to participate in discussion and express their own opinions and suggest their own explanations. Students gain confidence, and although some Year 12 students initially show reluctance to volunteer answers, by Year 13 they are much more forthcoming. In chemistry, teachers gain the confidence of students but don't always challenge them sufficiently to draw on their knowledge of wider concepts when answering questions. Teachers tend to focus too closely on a single topic rather than reinforcing principles through application in new contexts. In performing arts, probing questions by the teacher led to an interesting and challenging debate about Stanislavski's theory of acting. Consequently students made very good progress.
34. Teachers use a range of teaching and learning strategies to very good effect. New technology is used well. In mathematics, graphics software is used effectively to investigate the properties of curves, and in geography students and teachers use ICT for presentations to add pace and increase the level of engagement of their audiences. Teachers mark students' work regularly and rigorously but sometimes students do not respond to written comments on their work and this limits the impact of teachers' marking. Teachers use assessment information well to plan their lessons and to track students' progress and target them for additional support when necessary.

The curriculum

The school provides a broad curriculum that matches the interests and aspirations of all students through provision of vocational and traditionally academic subjects for students aged 14-19.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision for students' personal development is excellent.
- The introduction of alternative curriculum pathways for students aged 14 to 19 offers a wide choice of courses to meet the interests and aspirations of all.
- Extra-curricular provision, particularly in sport and performing arts are excellent.
- Provision of ICT has been substantially increased but lack of co-ordination across the curriculum leads to loss in efficiency in the use of time and resources.

- Time for design and technology in Years 7 to 9 is low, and arrangements to teach part of the curriculum in science need to be consolidated.
- Resources for learning are good.

Commentary

35. The school is successful in its aim to provide a challenging, broad, and balanced spiral curriculum which ensures continuity in students' experiences and leads to progression in their learning. The curriculum is expected to both challenge and support students to achieve excellence academically, spiritually, socially, culturally, physically and morally. Although the challenge in classroom activities could sometimes be higher, provision for students' personal development is excellent. From the very positive responses of students and parents to questionnaires it is evident that they find the curriculum to be interesting and students enjoy their learning.
36. At Key Stage 3 the time allocations for most subjects are adequate to cover the whole National Curriculum programme of study, but time is low for design and technology for which it is planned to teach some components in science lessons. This arrangement needs to be consolidated. ICT is allocated one teaching period a week in Years 7 to 9. Lack of co-ordination of the work covered in these lessons with the use of ICT across the curriculum results in some loss in efficiency in teaching time. Opportunities to reinforce learning through application are lost. The introduction of Spanish in Year 9 supplements the provision of French and usefully broadens students' knowledge of modern foreign languages and will enable them to study two languages for GCSE in the future. Although the teaching of some English and mathematics classes is split between two teachers, this does not have any evident detrimental effect.
37. At Key Stage 4 all students follow a core curriculum which includes GCSE PE and religious education (RE) as well as mathematics, English and science. In September 2001, vocational options, designed to meet the aspirations of students more effectively, were introduced as an alternative to the previously traditional academic subjects. Applied GCSEs in science, business and ICT which relate the topics covered more explicitly to the world of work are taken by half the Year 10 students. Eleven students follow work-related courses involving two days in school following the core curriculum and three days work placement in a job of their choice. These students expressed their satisfaction with their individualised courses in such diverse occupations as car mechanics, floristry, animal care, hairdressing and accountancy. Geography coursework has been designed to engage boys more actively in fieldwork. Uptake for design and technology is uneven. Graphic products, which half the year group take is the only technology course taught in Year 11. In Year 10 a larger number take graphic products and there is a small group studying GCSE textiles.

Sixth form

38. The sixth-form curriculum has been enlarged to provide progression routes for students following the diverse pathways at Key Stage 4. Since the previous inspection, vocational courses in travel and tourism, media, retail and marketing and sport and fitness have been introduced. Common timetabling with two local consortia enables sixth-formers to follow their chosen courses in any of the schools involved. At present little advantage is taken of this arrangement. The A-level physics students visit another school for their lessons and one chemistry student from another school comes to Saint Michael's for lessons.
39. Very good provision is made for students with SEN It ensures that they are very effectively included in the National Curriculum and the life of the school. Teaching assistants work alongside subject teachers and give sensitive, planned support to SEN students. Several initiatives have been introduced since the previous inspection. A link with the town football club enables a group of Year 8 students to attend literacy classes at the club one day a week after school on a ten-week certificated course.

Year 10 SEN students who are not studying a modern foreign language are able to attend a local college to receive advice and guidance on preparation for a career. This is also a certificated course. Year 12 trained 'buddies' are available to younger students for reading and discussion during afternoon registration time. SEN students have good access to computer suites with appropriate software to help their learning. Accommodation is a weakness of the provision. The very small office for the SEN co-ordinator is remotely located from the small classroom used to withdraw individual or small groups of students for literacy support.

40. Extra-curricular provision is excellent and gives students opportunities to take responsibility. Sports activities take place every lunchtime, before and after school on every day and at weekends. Many staff, including governors, are involved in supporting these activities and student participation is high. As well as practising for competitive school teams in football and rugby, during the week of the inspection many students were preparing for a gymnastic and dance presentation for which they were responsible for some of the choreography. There are numerous opportunities for students to participate in out-of-hours learning. Regular music and drama productions involve large numbers of students and the gospel choir makes a major spiritual contribution to assemblies and to the local community, through joining in with local church services and outreach work. Regular opportunities for foreign travel, for example to Barcelona, skiing in Austria and supporting differently abled students on a trip to Lourdes, all provide memorable and valuable experiences.
41. Careers education and guidance is good. All students have the opportunity of work experience in Year 10. They are prepared well for this through the PSHE programme and they usefully evaluate their experience in English lessons on their return.
42. The school is fully staffed with well-qualified teachers and support staff. Resources to support student learning are good. For example, in many subjects, students have their own textbooks to take home. Several computer suites support ICT across the curriculum. Some aspects of ICT, such as datalogging, cannot be taught effectively because resources for ICT in science are inadequate.
43. The accommodation is well maintained and clean, with many impressive displays, celebrating and supporting the curriculum. Some of the accommodation is very good, for example excellent new facilities have been built for English and drama, and the library and some ICT suites are spacious. Most accommodation is at least satisfactory. Teachers generally have their own classrooms in subject suites, most of which provide a pleasant and effective learning environment. Unsatisfactory aspects of accommodation include small rooms and shortage of storage space in art and design, design and technology, SEN and some computer suites. The storage of dining furniture in the main hall poses an obstacle and a health and safety risk during the PE lessons that are taught there. Some of the corridors are narrow, but student movement is well managed by adherence to a one-way system and the considerate behaviour of students where potential overcrowding might occur. Overall the accommodation is satisfactory, and where it is not, potential difficulties are minimised by good management.

Care, guidance and support

The overall quality of care, guidance and support for students is **very good**. Staff monitor and support students' personal academic progress **very well**. Students are **very effectively** involved in the school's work and development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Relationships between all staff and students are excellent.
- Very good communication between all those involved ensures that support for students is effectively targeted to their needs.
- A wide variety of skilled support staff strengthens the school's pastoral provision considerably.
- Staff put the school's very good assessment and monitoring procedures into effective practice to guide students' work.
- Pastoral care, including welfare, health and safety is very good.

Commentary

44. The school's senior managers work closely with a variety of agencies to provide support for all students. This is proving highly effective in helping them to cater for students' different needs and to make the most of their time at the school. Add to this the specific pastoral roles of the school's management team, the work of the chaplain and the learning support department, together with the possibilities offered by the alternative curriculum, and the enormous breadth of support is apparent. Those responsible communicate with each other sufficiently frequently and informatively so there is no duplication of effort. Also it is possible to see clear progress, or otherwise, on the part of individual students and adapt the support accordingly. For example, travellers' children have made good progress in reading through targeted individual support. The achievement of Afro-Caribbean students has been increased through effective use of the ethnic minority achievement grant (EMAG) to provide additional mentoring. Students and parents are particularly positive about the very good arrangements to help students settle happily into secondary school life.
45. The arrangements to ensure child protection are very good, with good training for all staff, good methods of communicating concerns and suitable emphasis on maintaining confidentiality. There are good procedures to support students' health needs and in the event of accidents. Health and safety procedures are very good in practice and the school effectively carries out risk assessments. Activities, such as the breakfast club and break-time refreshments, ensure that students feel welcome in school and ready to make the most of lessons.
46. Personal, social and health education lessons offer students useful guidance on a variety of topics, such as making decisions about what to study in Years 10 and 11 or what direction to follow after the end of compulsory schooling. Class teachers, form tutors and heads of year review students' academic progress on a regular basis and use the information to provide them with good advice and support. The school council effectively involves students in influencing school life.
47. The school offers a high level of individual care and guidance to students with special educational needs.

Sixth form

48. The support offered to sixth-form students is very good. Students feel well supported in their learning and that any concerns that they voice are taken on board. Students' academic work is regularly monitored and their progress tracked, and the wide range of available courses means that those of different aptitudes have access to suitable types of learning for their needs. Those aspiring to go to university receive good help with their applications and proactive help is given to those who are unsure of the next step to take.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's partnership with parents and with other schools and colleges is **very good**, its links with the community are **outstanding**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are very happy with what the school provides for their children.
- The school's partnership with parents makes a very positive contribution to students' learning.
- Links with the local and wider community enrich students' learning and provide excellent opportunities for personal and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Information for parents about their children's progress and the work of the school is very good.
- Members of the school association and governors work hard to support the work of the school.

Commentary

49. Staff and governors give a high priority to developing and maintaining positive relationships with parents. The pre-inspection questionnaire and meeting with parents showed a very positive view of the school and reflected an overall high level of satisfaction with all aspects of the school's provision. Inspectors support these very positive views.
50. The quality of information provided for parents is very good and helps them to support their children's learning at home. Inspectors judge that newsletters, general information and students' annual progress reports for parents are very good. Reports demonstrate teachers' good knowledge of students and effectively inform parents what their children need to do to progress to the next stage of learning.
51. A key factor in the school's very good links with parents is that staff are very approachable. Parents have access to the school at any time and staff are helpful and friendly. Staff normally manage to resolve any concerns of parents informally. However, in the event that a parent should wish to make a formal complaint, there is an effective complaints procedure. If staff have any concerns then parents are contacted. The school warmly welcomes parents into the school on a regular basis, contributing well to students' progress.
52. The SEN co-ordinator maintains very good links with parents and with appropriate outside agencies. They give very good support in the preparation and management of the annual review of statemented students. Good links are fostered with feeder primary schools and appropriate further education agencies.
53. The school association is run by a small but hardworking committee and successfully raises funds to provide additional resources and learning opportunities for students. Through a variety of events they raise funds to help purchase additional resources for the school. Their hard work is greatly appreciated by staff and benefits students well.
54. Students benefit greatly both academically and socially from the school's very close links with the community. A wide range of visits, visitors and parish, business and international links provide excellent enrichment of the curriculum and support students' personal and social development well, broadening their experiences and giving them opportunities to learn about the local and wider community. Links with other schools are very good and the school plays an active part in the local group of schools, both mainstream and special. Links with other Catholic schools are very strong. Arrangements support the transfer of students well by

providing opportunities for them to visit regularly and gain an understanding of the next stage of their education.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of the leadership and management of the school is **excellent**. Leadership by the headteacher is inspirational and **excellent**. He is extremely well supported by the senior leadership team, staff and governors. Management arrangements are **very good**. Governance of the school is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Governors, the leadership team and all other staff share a common philosophy and dedication to their work for the benefit of students and to meet the school's mission statement.
- The school is totally inclusive and encourages all students to strive for their personal best.
- Evaluation of teaching and provision of focused staff training have been effective in raising standards.
- Evaluation of learning has been less effective as students are not always challenged enough in lessons.
- The co-ordination of ICT across the curriculum and provision for design and technology could be improved.

Commentary

55. Since the previous inspection six years ago, the headteacher has provided the inspiration, desire and perseverance necessary to bring about the changes necessary without losing any of the strengths of the school. He is very ably supported by the leadership team and governors who are deeply involved with the school and themselves well directed by the chair of governors. The substantial improvement in standards has been founded on their belief that given the right environment, an appropriate curriculum and effective management, every student has the capacity to succeed. Their open approach pervades all levels of the management structure and staff and students are all able to contribute to decision making. Staff morale is high as they all feel supported and valued as part of the school family. Significant improvements have been recognised by parents who, through their questionnaire responses, rated leadership and management very highly.
56. The school improvement plan provides a sound framework with priorities and actions identified for each development area. The resources needed to implement the plan are costed and reflect very good financial management and control. Every action is justified through reference to the school's mission statement and informed by accurate

evaluation of current provision. Timescales for the completion of every action are fairly precise and the staff required to carry out the actions and those required as line managers to evaluate progress are identified. Although some of the success criteria are not quantifiable and monitoring roles for governors are not identified, the plan is obviously very effective in its impact on school improvement.

57. Each of the key issues for action identified in the previous report has been addressed systematically. Attainment in music has been improved by providing the department with well-focused support and training, occasionally involving the sharing of good practice with local schools, and rigorous evaluation. Teaching in music is now mostly satisfactory. The curriculum for the sixth form has been expanded considerably, with all Year 12 students having the opportunity to develop their ICT skills as well as being offered a much wider range of courses in school and through consortium arrangements. Carefully planned investment in ICT has increased provision for all students. The effectiveness of this provision and efficiency in the use of resources is an area for improvement that is being addressed through the recent appointment of a teacher with responsibility for co-ordination of ICT. Initiatives have been introduced and training has been provided to raise the achievement of boys and to ensure that appropriately challenging work is planned for higher attaining students, although further work needs to be done in this area.
58. The school provides well for continual professional development and support and induction for new teachers is very good. Procedures for evaluation and review of every curriculum and pastoral area of the school are well established and implemented effectively. Regular lesson observation, by heads of departments and their line managers, has established consistent application of the school's teaching and learning policy and identified aspects of teaching that require additional professional development. Eager involvement in training opportunities provided by the Key Stage 3 National Strategy Programme, dissemination of effective practice throughout the school and selective implementation of ideas has resulted in several improvements. The idea for the students' charter arose as a direct consequence of the training programme. Departments audit their own provision well, share and review learning objectives with students in every lesson and have reviewed their practice in marking students' work. Through the observation of lessons during the inspection it was evident that occasionally teachers did not fully implement their plans to challenge higher attainers or probe understanding deeply enough through their questioning. Heads of department and their line managers need to focus more sharply on the quality of learning in their observations.
59. Governance of the school is very good. Governors are very supportive and share the same vision. Through their individual expertise and experience in personnel, finance and education, they help determine the strategic direction of the school and provide a professional forum for evaluation and evolution of the school's development. They have provided valuable contributions to shaping the school's 14-19 curriculum as well as to forward planning for the school's jubilee in 2005. Governors are kept well informed through departmental reviews in which they are sometimes involved, and several governors have visited teachers in their classrooms and observed lessons. Governors have received good training in their areas of responsibility and are kept up to date with changes to legislation. They have ensured that the school is in compliance with workforce reform legislation. They take their responsibility for health and safety very seriously. They ensure risk assessments are completed for all school visits and, through regular inspection of the premises, they make sure that the site is safe for staff and students. Any identified hazards are promptly rectified. Through

very good financial management the excellent new accommodation was completed within budget. Governors regularly receive updated accounts that enable them to monitor expenditure closely and confirm that the sixth form is self-financing. Overall the school gives very good value for money because of the high achievement of students and the excellent quality of their personal development.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,799,737	Balance from previous year	15,942
Total expenditure	3,640,041	Balance carried forward to the next year	175,638
Expenditure per student	3,569		

60. The SEN co-ordinator gives very good leadership to the teaching assistants. She monitors their work closely, providing support and advice as necessary. With clerical support she manages the learning support department well, tracking the progress of SEN students from Year 7 entry data, planning and revising individual education plan (IEP) targets, co-ordinating the support in subject departments and conducting annual and transitional reviews for statemented students. The senior management team reviews and evaluates the work of the department annually and governors are kept apprised of its progress.

Sixth form

61. Leadership and management of the sixth form is very good. Expansion has been managed well and the sixth-form is cost-effective. Sixth-form students are treated with trust and respect. In return they are expected to work hard and they are given high levels of responsibility as role models for younger students. Promotion of the sixth form has been effective and the roll is increasing because of the rising reputation of the school within the locality. Recruitment policy is now more rigorously implemented. Individual targeting and mentoring of students in Year 11 has resulted in their courses being more closely matched to their attainment at GCSE. Response to national initiatives has been positive and innovative. The curriculum has been broadened to meet the aptitudes and aspirations of students more closely. The benefits of involvement of local consortia of schools have been explored and initiatives, such as students taking courses at different schools, are being trialled.

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

Work-related learning

Provision in work-related learning is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- All Year 10 students gain work experience that is well planned and self-evaluated.
- The students involved in work-place learning are well motivated and very well supported.
- Vocational components of the curriculum have been increased through provision of applied GCSEs in science and ICT.

Commentary

62. The school's provision for work-related learning is satisfactory as it meets, or exceeds, the suggested minimum requirements in each category. Prior to their period of work experience in Year 10, students follow a unit of study on careers and citizens' rights in employment within the PSHE programme. They also receive an individual interview with a careers adviser to determine a work placement that is most suited to their aspirations and interests. Their period of work experience is well planned and a large number of local businesses co-operate in providing placements. Students keep a diary of their experience which they use afterwards to evaluate their time at work.
63. Work-related learning is supported in the curriculum through an increased range of vocational courses. GCSE applied science which has a strong focus on industrial applications is studied by half the Year 10 group. Applied GCSE and GNVQ business courses are taken by two-thirds of students in Years 10 and 11. These students gain a good knowledge and understanding of the operation of different types of enterprises and the concept of the labour market. Units of study in other GCSE subjects, such as the unit on 'people, work and industry' in geography, further students' knowledge of different working conditions and their understanding of production methods and of economic constraints. Students also have opportunities to learn about employment from former students who visit the school and from guest speakers who contribute to the PSHE and English curriculum.
64. Eleven students from Years 10 and 11 follow an individualised work place learning programme during which they spend three days a week on a work placement in their chosen area and two days a week in school on core studies including English, science and mathematics. These students expressed a high level of satisfaction with their placements which ranged from car mechanics and animal care to hairdressing, floristry and accountancy. This provision has significantly improved the attitude of these students to school and learning.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers create very good relations with their students.

- Students achieve well, obtaining GCSE results well above the national average.
- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Extra-curricular activities arouse the enthusiasm of students for literature.
- Students should be encouraged to think more adventurously.

Commentary

65. The standards of students when they enter the school in Year 7 are at the national average. By the age of 14 they have made good progress and attain results in the National Curriculum tests that are above the national average. Girls perform better than boys in the tests in line with the national trend.
66. Through Years 10 and 11, students make very good progress, and their results in GCSE are well above the national average and the best in the school. Four-fifths of students gain grade C and above and almost a fifth of these gain A*/A grades. The results of girls exceed those of boys by the same difference as they do nationally. Results are well above those for similar schools.
67. Standards seen during inspection support these results. Students write with increasing accuracy and at great length, indicating that they are adept at working individually. They know the texts well, and show awareness of plot, structure and characterisation. Year 9 students can write persuasively and creatively. They word-process their finished work, but could use ICT more than they do for redrafting.
68. Standards of speaking are average. Speaking needs to be given more prominence from the earliest years in the school, with opportunities to explain and argue, to speak without notes and learn from the experience of small group discussion. Standards of reading are average. Regular library lessons and frequent silent reading sessions for Year 7 students encourage a familiarity with books and growing confidence in the use of words.
69. Achievement is good by the end of Year 9 and very good by the end of Year 11. Students in Years 7 and 8 show steady but modest progress, with rapid gains taking place in Year 9. Students then write with growing maturity and demonstrably make good use of the techniques they have acquired earlier. Students with SEN make good progress, which could be still better if given more co-ordinated support. Those identified as gifted or talented would benefit from greater use of extension work.
70. Teaching is very good overall and occasionally excellent. Its great merit is the conscientious commitment of teachers to giving students support, both in and out of lessons. Teachers expect students to work hard, and the best lessons allow students scope for their ability to plan, devise and present their own ideas. As a result of very good teaching, students learn how to respond to literature, with, for instance, excellent analysis of *Lord of the Flies* in Year 11. By that time students have also learnt how to write according to audience, and do so accurately, with a wide vocabulary, and often witty use of language. They could, however, be encouraged to think more adventurously for themselves, challenging the text and received opinion. Assessment is very good and teachers' marking is thorough.
71. Leadership and management are both excellent. The handbook is clear and comprehensive. Every aspect of teaching, learning, assessment, performance management and vision for the future is covered. High administrative competence is accompanied by friendly ability to lead a team. Since taking over in September, the

head of department has written schemes of work, devised common assessment tasks, organised extra-curricular activities for each year group and run catch-up classes after school, all of which have helped to raise standards. The organisation of a residential seminar in the Easter holidays aimed at lower achieving students is an innovative approach to raising attainment. Further development of the department should include more opportunities for teachers to observe each other in the classroom and share ideas and teaching methods.

72. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. All the merits identified in the last report have been retained, with substantial new initiatives already in place. Results are well above the national average. The number of students choosing to study English in the sixth form is very high. There are now many extra-curricular activities, such as opportunities to take part in productions and to visit the theatre, which arouse the enthusiasm of students and give them the feeling that their English teachers care sincerely about their success.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

73. Standards of writing, reading and speaking are average in most subjects and above average in others. The school's literacy policy is published in departmental handbooks. Many aspects, such as the display of important words on classroom walls have been adopted but there is no designated co-ordinator to encourage all teachers to understand the many ways in which literacy could be further developed. It is common for teachers in all departments to correct mistakes, and ensure that students can cope with specialist language. The time given to silent reading each day is very good, as is the paired reading supported by sixth-formers. The library has many merits, being attractively furnished and well maintained, with an excellent stock of material for students of all abilities, but it is not used as fully as it might be.
74. The extent and standard of speaking varies. Discussion is very common in science and religious education, but infrequent in geography and history. In drama and English, students give presentations which develop their speaking skills, but this was not observed in all subjects. Similarly there is inconsistency in providing appropriate written material to suit students of different capabilities. In some departments the literacy policy is applied effectively, but its implementation in others is less effective.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good lesson planning and classroom management result in students achieving well in most lessons.
- Teachers use assessment very well to help students improve.
- GCSE results in French have improved steadily and are now very high relative to national averages.
- Results at GCSE in German have seen a gradual decline and are now well below average.
- Leadership and management are very effective.
- Teachers make insufficient use of the modern foreign language during instruction in the classroom.

Commentary

75. In 2004 the performance of students in French at GCSE was very high compared to national expectations. Although boys performed less well than girls, their results were still markedly better than those achieved by boys nationally. In German, however, GCSE results were well below average. Standards, as measured by teacher assessments at the end of Year 9, have fluctuated in recent years, but in 2004 they were below the national average, as a result of students' weak performance in German.
76. Overall standards in French at the end of Year 9 are above average. In Spanish they are in line with national averages. At the end of Year 11, standards are above average in both French and German. Standards observed in German lessons were well above those indicated by recent GCSE results. Achievement observed in the great majority of lessons and in students' written work was good, and in some cases very good. For example, Year 10 students who started Spanish this year are making rapid progress: they are already beginning to use a range of tenses accurately, and can describe their home and family in detail. Higher attaining students in French in Year 11 can understand native speakers describing their town at normal speed, and speak confidently and accurately on the same topic.
77. Teaching and learning are good overall. No lessons observed were less than satisfactory. Teachers plan their lessons well to include a variety of activities that enable all students, including those in classes where most students have SEN, to practise and develop their skills. Teachers have a good rapport with their classes and very high expectations of behaviour. Most students are keen to contribute in class and their written work is generally accurate and well presented. Teachers give students detailed feedback on their work and set targets for improvement, which students confirm are very helpful. The best lessons are conducted at a challenging pace and students have good opportunities to take part in group and pair work. However, teachers do not use the modern foreign language enough for routine purposes and, in some lessons, too much time is taken up in translating.
78. Leadership and management are very good. There is a clear vision for the development of modern foreign languages and effective steps have been taken to remedy areas of weakness. Teachers work well together as a team and newly qualified teachers receive very good support. Schemes of work are sufficiently detailed to be helpful to any new teacher joining the department. All students now study French from Years 7 to 9, and take up Spanish in Year 9. German is being phased out. Most students in Years 10 and 11 take one language, and none currently study for two or more. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards have risen, particularly in French, although inconsistent use of the modern foreign language by teachers remains an issue.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students work hard, they want to learn and their achievement is very good.
- Leadership of the department is excellent.
- Students' progress is monitored closely through rigorous assessment procedures.

- A very good range of enrichment activities is provided for more able students.
- The number of A* and A grades at GCSE is relatively low.
- The use of ICT as a tool for teaching has yet to be fully exploited.

Commentary

79. Results over the last three years in the Year 9 national tests show an upward trend and are well above the national average. In 2004, the percentage of students gaining A*-C grades at GCSE was above the national average and all students gained an A*-G grade. Although the number of students gaining the top GCSE grades of A* and A was below the national averages results reflected the level of attainment of students when joining the school in Year 7. Performance at both the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11 is in line with the results of similar schools.
80. The achievement of students of all ages across all areas of mathematics is very good, but their skills in shape and space stand out as particularly strong. Higher attaining students in Year 9 investigating similar and congruent shapes are able to articulate their mathematical ideas extremely well, enabling them to formulate hypotheses and formal proofs in geometry. Middle attaining students in Year 8 are able to draw straight-line graphs and, because of well-planned questioning by the teacher, make predictions about the gradient and intercept. Their written work indicates very good progress and shows that their knowledge and understanding are built upon well. In Years 7 to 9, girls achieve better than boys. In Years 10 and 11 boys and girls achieve equally well. There is no significant difference in the achievement of students from different ethnic groups.
81. Overall the quality of teaching is very good and in some lessons it is excellent.

Example of outstanding practice

An excellent Year 9 lesson on congruence and similarity.

The lesson started with an interactive activity from an Internet site which immediately captured the enthusiasm of the students. The teacher had carefully formulated key questions and successfully directed the discussion towards similar and congruent shapes. The students were all fully engaged because the teacher continually challenged them and accepted nothing less than their best. Viewing shadows generated by people and trees invited students to think about how ratio and similarity are linked. The teacher then encouraged students to think more deeply as she skilfully made connections between the different strands of mathematics. Speaking and listening skills in the group work were of a high standard, prompted by the teacher's invitation to students to hypothesise and work out a geometrical proof. Learning moved on very rapidly and students made excellent progress. Excellent planning had included a variety of activities, and the use of ICT throughout the lesson was superb. The high quality of interactions, involving all students, made this an excellent lesson.

82. Teachers establish excellent relationships with their classes and students' behaviour is exemplary. Teachers know their students' abilities well and are therefore able to plan to meet their needs successfully and challenge them to work hard. For example, the teacher's high expectations of a Year 10 class ensured that they were able to plot simple linear graphs, resulting in very good achievement by students at the lower end of the ability range. In the best lessons, learning objectives are shared with students and revisited during the lesson. A number of different activities geared to students' learning styles are planned and students are challenged to think. The best teaching makes very good use of discussion to support learning, for example by requiring students to discuss ideas in pairs and groups. Effective questioning that gives

students time to think before answering and allows them time to explain their reasoning is a strong feature of many lessons.

83. Teachers use resources, such as the interactive whiteboard, very well, but the great potential of ICT as a tool for teaching and learning has yet to be fully exploited. Teachers set and check homework routinely to consolidate students' learning. Their marking of work is regular and they give sufficient constructive comments to show students clearly what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve. Literacy is developed consistently in mathematics lessons with vocabulary, through key words and spellings, explored well.
84. The leadership of the department is excellent and sets very high expectations for the raising of standards. Considerable hard work has gone into the organisation of a fully comprehensive scheme of work and implementation of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy is excellent. Involvement of students through competitions such as 'maths challenges' and links with universities provides challenge for gifted students. The department handbook is informative, thorough and a useful resource which ensures consistency in practice. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching, as evidenced by the thoroughness of the recent department review, are very good and have led to the sharing of effective teaching styles. Lesson observation now needs to focus more sharply on the evaluation of the quality of learning and achievement of students.
85. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The department has systematically dealt with issues raised by the last inspection and is continuing its drive to increase the number of students attaining at the higher levels.

Mathematics across the curriculum

86. Work has been undertaken to promote mathematics across the curriculum, including whole-school training. Students apply their mathematical skills competently in science and departments have liaised well regarding expectations and consistency. For example, in a geography lesson students drew scatter graphs to relate the distance from home to the time they take to get to school and in another class students constructed bar charts to show types of litter in school. The costing of biscuits in food technology demonstrated students' competence when being asked to do calculations involving weight. Overall, students' use of mathematics across the curriculum is satisfactory.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Behaviour and attitudes to learning are very good.
- The relationship between teachers and students is good because teachers plan interesting and relevant lessons which motivate the students to learn.
- Leadership of the department is very good and effective.
- The high quality of marking, feedback and setting targets for students leads to good standards of writing and understanding.
- The learning objectives for science enquiry are generally set too low in Years 7 to 9.
- More-able students are not always stretched enough in lessons.
- Health and safety practices are excellent.

Commentary

87. Results in the 2004 National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 were above the national average and above the average for schools with a similar intake. An average proportion of students gained the higher levels in these tests. At the age of 14, students' achievement in science is good. In 2004, the proportion of students gaining GCSE A*-C grades in dual- and single-award science was above the national average. All the students entered for GCSE were successful in gaining an A*-G, but the number attaining the higher grades of A and A* was well below the national average. The attainment of girls was higher than that of boys in both key stages, but gender differences in attainment fluctuate from year to year and there is no significant trend. Overall achievement at age 16 is good.
88. Standards of work observed in lessons and in students' writing was generally at or above expectations. Good feedback from teachers, both during lessons and when marking, is helping students to understand better how to improve. Concepts and themes of science are usually understood well. Lower attaining students, in particular, are making very good progress. For example Year 9 students in a lower ability class could explain the technical processes of cloning using quite difficult scientific terminology. However, students' standards in the skills of science enquiry are not progressing fast enough in Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4, students of all abilities understood concepts at appropriate levels, but standards in science enquiry were still below expectations in the Year 10 classes observed.
89. Teachers have high expectations for effort and behaviour, and students work hard and do everything asked of them. The students are polite and confident, keen to learn and participate well in all activities. They speak, listen and write to the best of their ability. In particular, students with learning difficulties are well supported and their efforts and achievements are good. Where achievement is not as high as it could be, it is invariably due to the learning objectives not being set at a high enough level to challenge the most able students in each teaching group.
90. Teaching is good. Very good subject knowledge and enthusiasm supports a determination to make science interesting for the students. Teachers plan lessons well to provide good variety of practical, visual, and reflective experiences. For example, the use of PowerPoint to scroll thought-provoking pictures related to radioactivity was very creative. Students are taught to appreciate the relevance of science to everyday life. Teachers focus very well on literacy, ensuring that students understand and use the technical language well in speaking and writing, and difficult concepts, such as chemical equations, are taught effectively through use of analogy and models. Numeracy is also used appropriately in science and good liaison with the mathematics department ensures a consistent approach across the school. Students know that they can get help if they need it, and they respect the efforts of their teachers.
91. Assessment is very good. At its best, marking has become a dialogue, leading to more demanding targets and progress. The department has detailed records of student attainment and students know their levels and targets well. Homework tasks are differentiated to meet individual student needs. Good extra-curricular opportunities exist for students, including science clubs and revision classes to boost their attainment. Students use computers well for homework, coursework and reading research. However, the use of ICT to collect and handle data from experiments is not yet satisfactory due to lack of equipment and the small number of class-based computers.
92. Subject leadership and management are very good. Since the last inspection, progress has been satisfactory, although similar weaknesses in the teaching of science enquiry were identified. High turnover of teachers hindered early progress but recent progress has been good. The department now has a young, well-qualified and enthusiastic team of teachers, with a strong impetus for improvement. The introduction of an applied science GCSE course has raised students' awareness of the relevance of science in industry and society. The head of department monitors and evaluates the work of the department well. Health and safety

consideration and safe working by students during practical work are excellent. Two technicians provide valuable support for the department. Many aspects of good teaching as promoted by the Key Stage 3 National Strategy have been implemented and the department is deservedly recognised as a leading science department for Hertfordshire, supporting the training of other teachers.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- By the age of 14, the standards reached by students are above average.
- Results in Intermediate GNVQ (equivalent to 4 GCSE Grade Cs) are above average.
- The department is very well led and well managed but effective whole-school co-ordination of ICT provision has yet to be established.
- The school's resources are good, though the many computers were not fully employed in lesson times during the inspection.

Commentary

93. Students enter the school in Year 7 with a wide and varied grasp of ICT skills and overall their standards are below average. By the age of 14 their standards, as determined by teacher assessment, are above average. In 2004, about a third of the Year 11 students entered Intermediate level GNVQ and four-fifths of them passed (which is equivalent to four GCSEs at Grade C). This pass rate is above average and is an improvement on the results in previous years. There is no significant difference between the standards of boys and girls or between those from different ethnic groups.
94. In Years 7 to 9, achievement is good. Students enjoy the work and have a desire to learn. Progress is best in aspects like word-processing and, by the end of Year 9, most can work quite effectively in tasks such as the design and making of web pages, leaflets and presentations. They have good, realistic ideas and have learned to use appropriate fonts, styles and colours. A few are able, in their document design, to take account of their target audience and purpose. Standards are weaker in the design and use of spreadsheet and database files, and also in understanding how and why people work the way they do with computers in the 'real world'. The department has only recently started to plan for the students to have sufficient contact with sensors, control systems and email to meet National Curriculum requirements.
95. In Years 10 and 11, those students working on the GNVQ course gain the expected range of skills and knowledge at a satisfactory rate and to an adequate depth. They are, however, less stretched during these years than in Years 7 to 9. Their achievement is satisfactory. The progress made by other students in Years 10 and 11 is less satisfactory as it depends on the variable demands of their individual option choices.
96. Overall teaching is good although it varies at both key stages from very good to satisfactory. Teachers demand very high standards and their planning is very good. They expect students to work hard and they maintain a good pace by using a wide range of resources and a variety of activities that help students to concentrate and learn quickly. In some classes, particularly in Years 7 to 9, students have to share computers and their progress is slower. Furthermore teachers may not find enough time to assess the students' work properly and advise them on how they could do better. Students with SEN are given good specialist support which ensures that their progress is similar to the rest of their class.

97. The department is very well led and well managed. Consultation, communication, delegation and monitoring in the department are all good. The teachers work well together and share a clear vision of the way forward. There are firm plans to replace the GNVQ course from next September to ensure that all students in Years 10 and 11 follow an accredited ICT course. The school has good computing and communications resources, though during the inspection week use was relatively low. Two of the many computer rooms provide good accommodation but others are small and less well ventilated. Improvement since the time of the previous inspection is good.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

98. The use by teachers of computers to make their teaching more effective and their encouragement of students to use the technology to help them learn is good in a number of subject areas. For instance:

- The school has a number of interactive whiteboards, and these are well and appropriately used.
- Relevant materials are provided on CD-ROM to help students who miss lessons or who would value such support for revision.
- The technology computer room is a very useful resource for teaching and learning graphics.
- In modern languages all students word-process their GCSE coursework.
- As well as word processing, geography calls, on occasion, on the students to use spreadsheets and presentation software.
- PowerPoint is used creatively in science and geography to present information.

However, the use made of technology by students in the classroom is not co-ordinated with the work covered in discrete ICT lessons, so opportunities to reinforce and extend what they learn are lost. The contributions of work in different subjects to developing all students' skills, knowledge and understanding according to National Curriculum requirements are not planned coherently. As a result there is some loss in efficiency in use of lesson time and assessment of students' capabilities is not rigorous enough to help teachers to plan activities that are challenging for all.

HUMANITIES

History

The provision for history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are improving. Students achieve well.
- Recent changes in staff are leading to much improved teaching.
- Systematic assessment procedures are being developed, but the use of data to track students' progress is not fully established.
- Work is marked regularly but marking does not give enough guidance for improvement.
- Good leadership and management are resulting in rapid improvement in standards and provision as a whole.

Commentary

99. GCSE results were well below average over the last three years. Current standards in Year 11, while below average, show clear indications of improvement. Standards are below

average in Year 9 but are also improving. Students achieve well throughout the school in comparison with their earlier well below average attainment in history. Progress in Years 7 and 8 is especially impressive. All students, including those with SEN and the gifted and talented, achieve equally well.

100. Students have sound knowledge and understanding of the topics they study. They work well in lessons, with higher attaining students in Years 7 and 8 currently reaching above average levels. Students respond well to challenge. Year 7 students, for instance, worked with great enthusiasm in deciding which of the contenders to the throne in 1066 had the strongest claim. They develop a range of historical skills, but those in the critical analysis of historical sources are underdeveloped. Oral work is much stronger than written work. The levels attained in Years 9 and 11 are lowered by weaknesses in writing. Much writing in Year 9 lacks detail and explanation. GCSE essays are not sufficiently well structured. Students do not support their explanations with evidence. Their work is mostly descriptive rather than analytical and there is little evidence of sustained argument. Students' literacy and numeracy skills are satisfactory, but their written work is sometimes careless and unfinished. They use ICT well for the presentation of coursework.
101. Teaching and learning are good. Both have improved significantly recently, following a period of staffing difficulties. Some lessons are very good and occasionally excellent. Students respond very well to the teacher's challenge, enthusiasm and high expectations. Because of the good subject knowledge and clear explanations of the teacher, students are able to work with confidence in understanding complex factors. Year 11 students for instance, worked at demanding levels in linking the Wall Street Crash and the Treaty of Versailles with Hitler's rise to power. Presentations are enhanced by the effective use of ICT. Classroom relationships are excellent. All, including those with SEN, make good progress. Teachers' questioning is effective in engaging students and checking understanding, but less so in requiring them to explain and develop their answers. Procedures for assessment are improving through being linked to National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades. However, data is not used on an on going basis to monitor progress and set targets. Teachers mark work regularly but do not set high enough standards, or give enough advice to students on how to improve.
102. The recent rapid improvements result from the lively, enthusiastic and clearly focused leadership of the head of department. She has achieved a great deal in the short time she has been at the school, and has very clear priorities for future development. She inspires other teachers to share her vision, high expectations, and commitment to improvement. Her monitoring of teaching and learning leads to teachers becoming increasingly confident and effective. The remarkable progress made since her arrival at the school has resulted in achievement, teaching and learning being significantly better than at the time of the previous inspection.

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The positive climate for learning, the popularity of the subject and constructive teacher-student relationships are major strengths.
- Students in all year groups achieve high standards.
- Very good teaching methods, particularly the use of ICT, improve students' learning.
- Assessment procedures are used systematically to monitor the progress of every student.
- Marking is not having a consistent impact on helping students to improve.
- Strategies for students to learn from one another need to be extended.

Commentary

103. Very good improvement has been made since the last inspection. Standards have risen in both key stages. In 2004, teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 indicated that standards were well above national expectations. Last summer the percentage of GCSE A*- C grades was above the national average, whereas at the time of the last inspection it was below. Geographers now achieve better results relative to their other subjects and boys perform particularly well in relation to the national picture. However, girls continue to outperform boys by a significant margin, particularly at the higher grades.
104. In work seen during the inspection, standards attained by students in a range of contexts in Year 9 are above national expectations. Similarly, Year 11 students attain above average standards in their GCSE assignments, class work and homework. The achievement of students in Years 7 to 11 is good. Teachers emphasise skills and concepts within interesting and well-planned units and consequently, from an average starting point in Year 7, students progress well. All students keep and update a dictionary of important geographical terms which supports their development of literacy in the subject. There is a strong environmental emphasis to much of the curriculum which mirrors the department's mantra that 'geography is the best subject on this Earth'. The local area around the school is used well for mapping skills and fieldwork in Year 7; 'green' issues are analysed by Year 8 students in assessing the impact of deforestation in the Amazon rainforest and in Year 9 within a unit on 'waste'. Responsibility for stewardship of the planet is the department's key contribution towards citizenship education. SEN students achieve well as a result of tasks and resources that are designed to meet their needs.
105. In Years 10 and 11, students achieve well in lessons. Inequalities, fieldwork and the environment are key themes. Students acquire a good understanding of global population issues and the causes and consequences of migration through a case study on the USA. There is an emphasis throughout on understanding processes and patterns. Students are taught to use geographical terms accurately. In Year 11, the unit on people, trade and development challenges students to think about inequalities between rich and poor. Recently, a new coursework assignment has been introduced which was designed to engage boys more actively in fieldwork: 'How does the local football stadium affect the quality of life in the surrounding area?' All students have found this relevant and engaging. All students, including SEN students, make good gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding because the curriculum builds upon their previous learning in Years 7 to 9. ICT is used effectively by all students in the drafting and production of their assignments.
106. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good in Years 7 to 11. All lessons are at least satisfactory, with nearly all being good or very good. ICT is used very effectively in some lessons to enhance learning. A PowerPoint presentation on the Amazon rainforest in a Year 8 lesson, for example, helped students learn at a very good pace through the attractive display of pictures, data and diagrams. Teachers convey humour and unquenchable passion for geography which are immediately infectious and generate very constructive student-teacher relationships. In very good lessons, the teacher makes learning fun with the result that students are all alert, engaged and make very good progress. For example, in a Year 9 lesson the teacher provided small groups of students with a bag full of rubbish to sort into categories such as 'recycle' or 'reuse'. Such practical activities result in animated discussion by all and decision-making that has to be justified. Very good learning takes place when the success criteria for activities are shared and used by students to assess their own and others' written work. This is particularly evident at GCSE where the coursework assignments are meticulously planned and the students receive very clear guidance on grades and expectations.
107. Very effective assessment and tracking of students' progress over time enables teachers to identify those who need different types of support with their learning. As a result of the teaching, students' attitudes towards learning and their behaviour are invariably very good in these lessons. Teaching has less impact where students are not given sufficient opportunity

to grasp the objectives of the lesson. Marking across the department is helpful overall but comments on some students' work are insufficiently precise to help students appreciate what they do well and show them how to improve. Students are not always given time to read the comments made by the teacher and to act on the targets that are identified. In some lessons teachers talked for too long; students' concentration waned and this limited the learning that took place. In these lessons there are too few opportunities for students to learn from and teach one another. At the end of some lessons the review does not give students sufficient time to reflect upon their learning in that lesson.

108. Leadership and management of the department are very good. The head of department has played a key role in raising standards and in ensuring that improvement has been very good since 1999. He is focused on raising standards still further and is putting in place appropriate strategies to do this. The development of the positive climate for learning and the regular support offered to students has raised the profile of geography and increased its popularity as a GCSE option.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are good working relationships in lessons and very good student behaviour.
- GCSE results have improved recently.
- There are inconsistencies in teaching and curriculum coverage in Years 7 to 9.
- Take-up for GCSE courses is uneven.
- Monitoring and self-evaluation has not led to a clear development plan to address inconsistencies of quality and practice.

Commentary

109. Students joining the school in Year 7 come with varied experiences of design and technology and their overall standards of attainment are below average. By the end of Year 9, standards of designing and making are overall in line with national averages but are very uneven across the different material areas, ranging from above average to below average. Standards in students' designing work are lower than in their making skills and are particularly low in textiles and resistant materials.
110. Results in GCSE in 2004 were above the national average, showing a significant improvement on 2003. The gap between boys' and girls' attainment increased, remaining much wider than that found nationally. However, for both boys and girls their attainment was generally in line with their results in other GCSE subjects. Several lower attaining boys achieved their best GCSE grades in design and technology. The number of students achieving the higher grades, A* and A, has been well below national figures for the past two years.

111. Across all year groups students show good levels of application. Students with learning difficulties are well supported in class by teachers and teaching assistants and achieve well. In Years 7 to 9 students develop their knowledge and understanding of materials and acquire a range of practical skills. In this area of the subject their achievement is satisfactory. Their progress in the development of designing skills is slower and, in textiles and resistant materials, this aspect of the subject is considerably underdeveloped by the age of 14. Projects in these areas often lack the context required to inform students' decision-making when generating ideas, developing effective design proposals and evaluating their final products. These deficiencies are particularly significant for middle and higher ability students who underachieve. The uneven take-up at GCSE reflects the curriculum imbalances in Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11 within the two technology courses that students have opted to follow, their achievement is satisfactory.
112. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall but there are significant inconsistencies in different teachers' approaches, which lead to a lack of coherence in the students' experience in Years 7 to 9. The quality of lessons in these years varies from good to unsatisfactory. Teacher expectations are sometimes too low, particularly for designing. This leads to inadequate challenge for more-able students and too few opportunities for students to work in more imaginative and creative ways. Teachers' subject knowledge in terms of making processes, including the working properties of materials or ingredients and the use of tools, utensils and equipment is a strength. The planning of lessons, however, often makes insufficient reference to assessment information and the learning needs of different groups of students. Almost all students across the age range of the school show positive attitudes in lessons, behave well and enjoy good working relationships with each other and their teachers.
113. The day-to-day running of the department is well organised but subject leadership is unsatisfactory. The head of department is enthusiastic and has high aspirations but these are yet to be supported by planning and management systems that ensure consistency of practice and expectations across the department. Although monitoring has taken place it has not addressed the variation in the quality of teaching and standards. In Years 7 to 9 the time allocated to technology is low and a lack of coherence across the schemes of work for different materials and the weakness of some activities means that teaching does not make the best of the limited time available. Current curriculum planning expects students to experience parts of the requirements, such as electronics, through science but this will not be within a design and technology context. The use of ICT has been strongly developed in the graphics area, where computer-aided design (CAD) is well established. An after-school design club makes a good contribution to students' interest and achievement in the subject and some useful curriculum and assessment links have been made with local secondary schools.
114. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Significant refurbishment to the accommodation has been carried out. Although standards of attainment have improved recently at GCSE, the quality of teaching is less strong than at the last inspection and imbalances in the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 remain.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership of the department is raising standards after a brief period of decline.
- Very good teaching is leading to high achievement.

- Very positive attitudes to learning and very good behaviour in Years 10 to 13 support an enjoyable and industrious learning environment.
- Although standards are high, there was a wide gap in performance between boys and girls in 2004 GCSE examinations, with girls attaining higher results.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory as there is too little storage space and a lack of display areas.
- Independent learning is promoted very effectively, with students' views valued and high expectations of students to take individual responsibility for their work.

Commentary

115. Standards are high. In recent years the results in GCSE examinations have been well above national averages and high in comparison with other subjects. The percentage of students attaining A*-C grades in the 2004 GCSE examination dropped significantly from the previous year, although it remained above the national average. The absence of the head of department on maternity leave was a significant factor in this drop in standards, because of the loss of continuity in the department at a critical time. Girls' GCSE results in 2004 were significantly higher than boys. On entry to the school, students' standards are average. By the age of 14 most have gained a good understanding of colour, line and tone and handle art tools and media competently. They are less secure in their understanding of the work of important artists.
116. Teaching is very good overall and it is better in Years 10 to 11 than in Years 7 to 9. The very positive attitudes and behaviour of most students, along with very good relationships in lessons, contribute to the industrious and enjoyable environment for learning. Year 7 students, for example, were fully engaged in their paintings, representative of aboriginal art, and the more able produced fine pattern and texture in their work. Most teachers have an excellent command of the subject and they teach confidently and enthusiastically, enabling students to learn effectively and achieve very well. A strength of teaching is the encouragement towards independent learning that is best seen in the evaluation of class work, when the views of students are clearly promoted and valued. Year 11 students comment critically on their own work and are prepared to take risks in order to explore new artistic ideas.
117. The department benefits from very good leadership and effective management; it has made a very good improvement since the previous inspection. The head of department has spent time on maternity leave and has returned on a part-time basis. Although standards slipped a little while she was away, she is now ably supported by the head of the art and design, design and technology faculty and by her teaching colleague, and standards are set to rise again. The accommodation suffers from poor storage facilities, which puts the department under considerable pressure at examination time and when large-scale work is undertaken.

Music

Provision in music is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The structure for planning and teaching lessons is effective.
- There are high-quality productions and numerous opportunities for all students to participate in music-making activities outside lessons.

- The curriculum has limited opportunities for students to participate in group and collaborative work which aid independent thinking skills.
- There is insufficient planning for, and use of, new music technology.

Commentary

118. Students' attainment in music on entry is broadly in line with national expectations. They have some understanding of basic musical concepts, such as rhythm and pitch, and they are beginning to use structure and timbre, as in their 'space' compositions. In Years 7 and 8 students develop skills in instrumental playing and in music literacy. They experience a broad range of musical styles but there is an imbalance between practical and non-practical activities. By Year 9, their musical literacy is good. Students recognise and use music notation. They develop their expressive skills in whole-class performance. Many still find difficulty in holding an individual rhythm without close direction from the teacher, as observed within their samba playing. At the age of 14 they are better at performing than composing and overall their standards are in line with national expectations. GCSE classes are very small and student numbers too few to make valid data comparison with other schools. In classes observed, standards were average. Students developed their performing and composing skills appropriately but many have limited instrumental skills that prevent them from achieving the highest grades at GCSE. Although keyboards are used, little evidence was seen of the use or planning for use of ICT within the curriculum. This is an area that needs further development, particularly in composition and where students' lack of instrumental skills can be overcome by the use of new technology.
119. Achievement in music is satisfactory in both key stages. There has been a good deal of progress in developing new schemes of work to ensure progressive skill acquisition, year on year. Work is appropriately differentiated so that more-able students are given more demanding tasks, both in the classroom and through homework assignments. Achievement for students with SEN is also satisfactory because of clearly differentiated tasks with additional input to support their learning. In a Year 8 class, for example, the class was practising a group performance where more-able students played harmonic triads and less-able students played note-named parts. Students' positive attitudes and enjoyment in music-making ensure that progress in lessons is mostly satisfactory.
120. Teaching is mostly satisfactory. Teachers adhere to the whole-school policy on lesson planning and this is an important factor in the success of lessons. They share clear learning objectives with students. Good aural demonstration helps students to understand what they have to do to improve and teachers use the interactive whiteboard effectively to reinforce learning. Target setting is specific. Where teaching is poor, low level and inappropriate tasks are set, questioning of students is not probing, students move off task and it becomes difficult to remotivate them. Some lessons allow students too little opportunity to work independently or collaboratively, preventing them from developing thinking skills.
121. There are numerous opportunities for students to participate in out-of-hours learning. The school's large gospel choir performs to an excellent standard, making a major spiritual contribution to assemblies. It also shows a real commitment to serving the local community through joining in with local church services and outreach work. A strength of the department is its reputation for very high quality productions and shows. Additional instrumental teaching is good but opportunities are missed to involve students who benefit from this in whole-school ensembles.

122. Since the last inspection, the department has made satisfactory progress. The head of department has worked hard to improve standards and achievement to a satisfactory level by the development of progressive schemes of work in both key stages. Satisfactory assessment procedures are in place, though musical ability is sometimes confused with musical appreciation and this is an area needing further development. The department has made good use of its involvement with local schools to share good practice. It now needs to ensure that classroom observation identifies any weaknesses in students' learning so that high quality lesson delivery is always guaranteed.

Drama

123. Drama provision was sampled through observation of three lessons and scrutiny of a small sample of students' work.
124. Provision for students to participate in drama is limited to Year 9 and above. It is not taught as a discrete subject in Years 7 and 8, instead being provided through the English curriculum. Students enter Year 9 with a low level of subject knowledge due to lack of previous experience. This prevents students having an in-depth understanding of drama skills and conventions. Some students struggle, for example, to take on a character, to stay in role, to use gesture or to participate appropriately in circle activities.
125. Drama is available as a GCSE option. In 2004, GCSE drama results were just above the national average. Achievement by the age of 16 is good. Students follow an exciting and intellectually demanding curriculum. Students know and can use explorative strategies such as thought tracking and hot-seating. They understand dramatic techniques, showing audience awareness in their speaking parts and when creating still images.
126. Teaching is good at Key Stage 4 and satisfactory at Key Stage 3. Lessons are well planned to include challenging tasks and activities. The teacher has high expectations and demands that students work hard. Students work well in groups and there is a very good balance between teacher input and collaborative group work. Through high-level questioning, students are challenged to create their own ideas and to analyse and criticise their own performance and that of others. Continuous assessment of progress is a strong beneficial feature of lessons. Lessons are completely inclusive. Due to very good support from the teacher, the learning assistant and the other students in the class, students with SEN are fully involved in lessons and make good progress.
127. The department is very well managed. Students follow a broad and motivating curriculum. Schemes of work provide high levels of challenge and provide for good social integration. The teacher in charge is an experienced examiner and ensures that students know the requirements of their coursework, the level of their work and what they have to do to achieve higher standards.
128. Although curriculum time is limited, students have a number of additional opportunities to take part in drama activity. Recent productions have included *Guys and Dolls*, *Joseph*, *West Side Story*, *The King and I* and *The Wizard of Oz*. Students also have regular opportunities to view drama through seeing visiting theatre groups and the work of GCSE and A/AS performers in school and in special services, as well as through school trips to the theatre. These additional opportunities make a significant contribution towards students' experiences of drama in both key stages.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education (PE) is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in GCSE are above national averages which represents very good achievement.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Leadership, management and teamwork of the department are very good.
- Assessment is not used consistently to inform planning.
- The extra-curricular programme of sports activities is excellent.

Commentary

129. All students take the PE GCSE examination at the end of Year 11. Results in the 2004 GCSE examinations were above national averages. Although more boys than girls gained A*-C grades, more girls achieved the highest grades. When students enter the school their standards are below national expectations. They make good progress and by the age of 14 their standards are just below national expectations. In a basketball lesson, Year 9 students had good knowledge of the basic technique of a set shot. However, their performance of the technique was restricted by weak hand/eye co-ordination. By the end of Year 11 standards are above national averages, which represents very good achievement. In GCSE, most students are able to take responsibility for their own learning. They work very well in small groups, where they can use their knowledge of the circulatory system to explain the effects of exercise on the body. Their good understanding and use of PE terminology supports their learning. Through Years 7 to 11, students with SEN progress at the same rate as other students.

130. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Students particularly benefit from very knowledgeable teachers in Years 10 and 11. Teachers' expectations are very high and the targets they set are challenging. Their variation of teaching methods motivates students and keeps them on task. Teachers usually match the work well to the standards students have reached, with students often working with different equipment and on different tasks, but in a few cases some students were moved on to more advanced tasks before they were ready to do so. Students know what level they reach at the end of each unit of work. However, teachers do not consistently use assessment so that students know what level they are working at during lessons. Assessment procedures do not include systems to ensure standardisation of judgements or to raise teachers' awareness of the achievement of different groups of students.

131. Leadership and management are very good. The teachers work very well as a team. They share good practice and are developing strategies to improve students' achievement. An excellent extra-curricular programme supplements the very good PE curriculum. The department has made good progress since the last inspection.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good with an emphasis on enquiry, communication, participation and responsible action.
- The subject has a high profile throughout the school.
- Provision is planned effectively within PSHE and across the curriculum.
- Assessment of standards and progress is not fully developed.

Commentary

132. Judging by students' work seen during the inspection, standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 are in broadly in line with expectations. All students, including those with SEN, achieve well in lessons. Most students try hard and have a positive attitude towards the subject and individual topics within the citizenship curriculum.
133. By the age of 14, students have a secure understanding of rights and responsibilities in a democratic society which they demonstrate through the well-structured discussions that take place in small groups in the classroom. Their written work on euthanasia, asylum seekers and child prostitution shows that most of them can justify their opinions about these issues and can use their skills effectively to carry out research. Alongside the discussions, citizenship contributes to the development of literacy because students are encouraged to record new political terms in their books. The deliberate emphasis on the skills of enquiry, communication, participation and responsible action helps to bring the subject to life in the classroom. Citizenship is not just taught within PSHE but in other parts of the curriculum, particularly English and RE. This has raised the profile of the subject considerably.
134. By the age of 16, students engage in more sophisticated thinking about aspects of key themes such as: 'Should advertising be censored so what it conveys is only the truth?', 'Has the 'rebranding' of the Metropolitan Police been successful?', 'To what extent in a democracy should protest be allowed?' In many of these topics citizenship helps to support students' understanding of right and wrong.
135. Teaching and learning are good overall at both key stages, although one unsatisfactory lesson was observed. When the teacher had secure subject knowledge, good teaching invariably led to good learning because this resulted in better, more challenging questions. Good planning for structured, open discussions resulted in high levels of engagement, interest and involvement by boys and girls. In some lessons, good learning is evident, as students have the opportunity to pose, as well as answer, questions and see issues from different perspectives. Good humour and a sense of fun inject pace into learning so that students' concentration is less likely to lapse. Less effective teaching occurs where the teacher has insecure knowledge of the topic, when there is a lack of challenge to students' thinking and when the timing of activities is awry. Assessment of standards and progress does take place but needs to become more systematic so that the end of key stage expectations in citizenship are more widely understood.
136. Leadership is good. The co-ordinator is developing a bank of useful resources and contacts with outside organisations, and the number of outside speakers are increasing. Her leadership and contributions by many others ensure the high profile of the subject.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

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

Level 3 GCE AS-level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	3	100	78	0	22	27	29
Biology	8	75	64	0	10	20	20
Business studies	10	60	75	10	15	18	26
Chemistry	6	67	70	17	13	23	23
Communication studies	4	100	87	0	25	38	33
Design and technology	15	47	73	0	14	13	24
Economics	3	67	72	0	19	23	26
English	11	91	86	18	17	26	30
Geography	16	44	76	13	20	15	27
History	2	50	82	0	21	10	29
Mathematics	13	31	60	0	14	10	21
Physical education	9	67	72	11	12	19	23
Physics	3	67	66	33	15	33	22
Psychology	4	100	68	50	15	38	23
Religious studies	44	66	82	0	26	19	31

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	5	100	98	40	50	80	87
Biology	7	57	97	0	40	43	79
Business studies (A-level)	12	100	99	33	39	72	82
Business studies (AVCE)	19	89	92	5	24	60	68
Chemistry	3	100	98	0	50	60	86
Design and technology	1	100	98	0	35	60	78
Economics	5	100	99	0	54	56	90
English	19	100	99	42	45	76	86
General studies	6	83	95	50	31	70	73
Geography	19	100	99	42	46	75	85
History	7	100	99	0	46	57	85
Mathematics	7	80	97	40	57	66	90
Performance studies	5	100	98	0	37	60	80
Physical education	5	100	98	0	31	60	75
Physics	4	100	97	25	45	60	83
Psychology	14	100	97	21	43	75	82
Religious studies	14	100	99	36	50	86	87

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus was on English literature. No students take modern foreign language courses in the sixth form.

English

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- AS results in 2004 were well above the national average.
- All students entered for A2 English literature in 2004 attained at least a pass grade, but the proportion gaining the higher grades was lower than the national average.
- Teaching is always either very good or excellent, leading to very good achievement.
- Teachers are enthusiastic about English literature and they successfully transfer this enthusiasm to their students.
- Year 12 students are occasionally reluctant to join fully in classroom discussions.

Commentary

137. Attainment on entry to the sixth form is average. The AS results in 2004 were well above the national average. The number of students attaining a pass grade in the A2 in 2004 was above the national average, although the proportion attaining the higher grades was lower. Girls initially outperform boys although the gap closes once students reach their A2 examinations. Results in the sixth form have been consistently good. Given the average attainment when students start the AS course, their progress during Year 12 is very good. This rate of progress continues in Year 13.
138. Evidence from lessons and written work shows that the achievement of students is very good and Year 12 and 13 students reach average standards. Year 12 students can write fluent essays with a high standard of language use. They are able to argue using critics' views, as well as quoting texts, to prove their point. Students are sufficiently confident to disagree with known critics' judgements and produce counter-arguments. In class, Year 12 students are occasionally reluctant to contribute to discussions. By Year 13, students' confidence has improved, to the extent that they are willing to argue with enthusiasm and occasionally great passion. Essays written by Year 13 students are of a high standard. They include clear references to the text to support arguments and present views. These essays are well structured and very readable.
139. The overall quality of teaching is very good with many excellent features. Lessons are well prepared with clear targets set and shared with the students. Teachers are enthusiastic about literature and this enthusiasm is infectious, with the result that several of the current Year 13 students intend to read English at university. Year 13 students speak enthusiastically about their experiences in English lessons. Teachers structure their lessons such that students use each activity to build on the knowledge and understanding gained in the previous activity. For example, excellent analysis by the teacher of the poems of Thomas Hardy enabled students to interpret successfully the content, language, meaning and message. As a result, Year 12 students gained a full understanding of the way Hardy expresses his emotions and they used their own vocabulary in their responses which were often imaginative and exciting. In another lesson, the teacher's excellent guidance helped Year 13 students to gain a clear understanding of the poetic complexity of William Blake. The support given by teachers to visiting Italian students is particularly effective.
140. Students are taught good reading habits, which include giving their views, supporting their arguments with the text and reading other critics. Teachers ensure that students research their assignments using ICT and that they always understand the historical and social contexts of the texts that they are reading. Assessment strategies are very effective in giving students a clear idea of how well they are doing and what they need to do next to improve their work.
141. Leadership of English literature in the sixth form is very good. Documentation is outstanding with clear schemes of work including clearly agreed strategies for effective teaching. The head of department and her colleagues work closely together to produce a consistently enjoyable experience of English literature for all students. Students interviewed spoke very highly of English provision. The department is effective at evaluating its own work. As a result, a current priority in the department is to enable more Year 13 students to gain the higher grades at A2. Sixth-form English provision has maintained itself as a strength of the school since the last inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

142. Literacy skills across subjects are well developed particularly in mathematics, psychology and business studies. Sixth-form students are fluent speakers and effective communicators. In mathematics, Year 13 students with English as an additional language have had key words provided to help them cope with examination questions. They are helped to understand what is required and how best to respond. Psychology students are fluent writers who have very good use of vocabulary. Students studying business and economics are fluent at discussing issues, especially in Year 13. In chemistry, where a large proportion of the students have English as an additional language, specialist vocabulary is used well.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The leadership of the department is excellent and management, particularly the assessment systems and tracking of students to monitor their individual progress, is very effective.
- The quality of teaching is very good and has many excellent features, including use of a range of successful teaching strategies.
- Students work hard, show interest and enthusiasm, and achieve well, although numbers taking A-level mathematics are small.

Commentary

143. A-level examination results in 2004 were below the national average. Although all students passed, only a third gained the higher grades A or B. These results represented good achievement, as attainment on entry to the course was below the national norm. Of the ten students who studied AS mathematics in Year 12, seven passed, five of them with A or B grades, which was in line with the national average. Retention into Year 13 was low with only two students continuing at A2 level. Four students in this group returned to Italy after completing their planned year in the sixth form.
144. Standards seen in lessons and the evidence of recent work are in line with national expectations in both Year 12 and 13. The two Year 13 students have made very good progress this year. They demonstrated high levels of reasoning in a pure mathematics module, investigating equations of ellipses by discussion and the use of graphics computer software, going beyond the set course syllabus. Both students have English as an additional language, but have progressed to more than a functional level verbally, although they still sometimes have difficulty interpreting the language in examination questions. The enthusiasm they display for pure mathematics is admirable, and mirrors their teacher's interest and passion for mathematics. They are also working hard, with interest, and achieving well in mechanics and statistics modules.
145. Of the ten students in Year 12, only four studied GCSE at this school. Their attainment level is in line with the national average of entry to the A-level course. They have settled well to the greater demands of AS mathematics. They show average standards and are enjoying the course working at a fast pace on algebraic manipulation and building on their previous work on factorising quadratics to find alternative methods of dividing expressions. All students are making good progress in their chosen options

of either statistics or mechanics, with well organised and comprehensive sets of notes, exercises and assessments.

146. Teaching is very good overall and has many excellent features. The head of department takes the large majority lessons and is a very good role model as a teacher. Teachers know their students very well and relationships are very good, with evident mutual respect, and even admiration. The schemes of work are detailed and lessons well planned and structured to suit the students and the topic. Teachers' subject knowledge and understanding is high, with thorough knowledge of the examination requirements. Teachers use a range of teaching and learning strategies to very good effect, with interesting starters to lessons, such as the Year 12 matching equivalent algebraic expressions. Car badge logos successfully stimulated the Year 13 students', to discover the equations which could form the lines and curves using computer graphics software. The interactive whiteboard is a valuable resource that is skilfully used. Discussion, investigation, research and presentation are used very effectively to develop students' interest and personal skills as well as their mathematical knowledge and understanding. Homework is regularly set and effectively monitored, and assessment procedures are very good, with a comprehensive system of tracking the progress of individuals.
147. Leadership of mathematics is excellent, with vision and a strong drive for improvement. This year has seen staffing problems, with recent changes necessary. The head of department is teaching almost all the sixth-form lessons, which is not an ideal situation. Management is very good, with adequate and well-organised textbook resources, although ICT resources are sparse. Changes in the AS course have been managed well and examination requirements are thoroughly met.
148. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good, with improved examination results. Standards are now in line with national averages, although class sizes are still small. Teaching has improved with the development of group work, discussion and good questioning techniques.

SCIENCE

The focus of the inspection was chemistry. Students also take biology and physics, which were not sampled. For their physics lessons, the students travel to a neighbouring consortium school. Although still fairly small, the sizes of sixth-form science classes have increased since the previous inspection.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and a youthful enthusiasm that is infectious.
- Year 13 students did not complete the AS course last year but teachers are committed to helping them complete this, and the A2 course, to the best of their ability by the end of this year.
- Students have safe and competent practical skills.

Commentary

149. The numbers of students taking chemistry have, in the past, been small. Last year three students completed the GCE A-level course and all passed with D grades. These results were close to expectations based on their earlier performance at GCSE. Three students followed the AS course but because of staffing difficulties they were only able to complete two of the three units necessary for accreditation. Through the additional support provided by teachers, they are on schedule to complete the A-level course this year. Their achievement is satisfactory.
150. The current Year 12 class is larger, with eight students, three of whom are Italian and are studying at the school for a full year. Others also have English as an additional language. They all manage the specialist terminology well, and are able, for example, to categorise organic reactions into addition and substitution reactions. They demonstrated that they are able to apply systematic rules to naming derivatives of alkanes and alkenes, but they are not as certain about the three-dimensional shapes of molecules and bond angles. Their achievement is good.
151. The quality of teaching is good and the teachers have very good relationships with their students. The teachers are strongly committed to raising standards and have a youthful enthusiasm and passion for chemistry which they share with each other and their students. Teachers have focused well on teaching students to handle chemicals and apparatus safely and carefully. As a result, students perform volumetric analysis competently, at a good pace and achieve accurate results. They appreciate when they make a mistake in their technique and are keen to improve. During one observed practical session a student was, commendably, able to predict how his results would be affected by his small technical error.
152. Teachers' planning and organisation of resources is good. They employ effectively many of the teaching strategies promoted through the Key Stage 3 National Strategy. They share the learning objectives with students at the start and challenge them through a brief introductory questioning. Through their good humour and carefully worded, open-ended questions they encourage all students to respond. They do, however, often accept simple correct answers rather than seeking deeper understanding. For example, when questioning about oxidation and reduction they did not require answers in terms of changes to oxidation numbers but were satisfied with a simpler, and less generally applicable, electron transfer model. Teachers did not always take opportunities to reinforce understanding through use of the whiteboard. For example, by drawing molecules their three-dimensional shape could be emphasised and principles such as electron delocalisation requiring molecules to be planar could be exemplified.
153. Teachers' consolidate what students learn by returning to the learning objectives at the end of each lesson and asking them to interpret their experimental results. They manage this competently and comfortably. Opportunities are sometimes lost to challenge students for a deeper explanation, such as relating the thermodynamics of reactions to bond breaking and making and an energy profile diagram.
154. Sixth-form chemistry is very well led and managed. The two teachers are determined to compensate Year 13 students for the staffing difficulties experienced last year and have a comprehensive plan to provide additional lessons, as necessary. The clear, manageable timetable for coursework, that takes account of students' other commitments, ensures that all students know the deadlines and can plan their work accordingly. After a period of little improvement since the last inspection, there are now real prospects of the subject thriving in the sixth form.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

155. Since the previous inspection the school has introduced a compulsory ICT course of one period a week to support sixth-formers who are not on formal courses in the subject in the use of computers and communications. The course includes the teaching of ICT user skills and hardware handling. The students enjoy the work and some see a benefit for other courses in what they do. Their skills with software like word processors are generally satisfactory to support their learning in the other courses they follow. As yet, the course has not been matched to the national Key Skills specifications and students' work is not formally assessed for any external accreditation.

HUMANITIES

Geography and psychology were inspected in depth. The school also offers history, the teaching of which was not observed.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a positive climate for learning and constructive teacher-student relationships.
- Teaching and learning are good, particularly the use of ICT.
- The geographical experiences outside the classroom are of a high quality.
- Marking of written work should have a greater impact on improving standards.
- Students need to learn more effectively from one another.

Commentary

156. Since the time of the last inspection, geography has become a very popular choice of sixth-form students. Standards at A-level have been maintained. In 2004, the results of girls were above the national average but those of boys were below. Standards attained at AS level last summer were well below those expected nationally, with girls again outperforming boys. Observations of lessons and scrutiny of work indicate that standards are broadly in line with the average in the current Year 13 class, and slightly above average in the Year 12 class.
157. The department has planned a stimulating and well-balanced curriculum in the sixth form. The fieldwork undertaken in Ireland and Dorset has a significant impact on students' motivation and the development of their skills and understanding of issues such as tourism and coastal management. The subsequent coursework is of good quality. In lessons, students analyse carefully the index of rurality, learn about urban environments using Leeds as a case study, and apply numerous theoretical models to different geographical contexts so they can be evaluated. Aspects of physical geography are studied through topics such as hazards, disasters and weather extremes. Within these they make good gains in understanding patterns and processes. Year 13 students analyse data suggesting there is a north-south divide in Britain, and develop an increasingly secure grasp of examination criteria.
158. The teaching in Years 12 and 13 is always at least satisfactory, most often good and occasionally very good. Very constructive student-teacher relationships and the positive climate for learning are key strengths. Teachers' subject knowledge is so secure that they can guide students with assurance about what is expected by the examining board. For

example, in a Year 12 lesson focused on a water management project, the teacher spent time well explaining criteria against which all of their presentations are to be judged. Students responded well and produced better work as a result. When ICT is used for presentations it adds pace and increases the level of engagement. In one Year 12 lesson on tourism in the Peak District, students used ICT effectively to work independently in selecting relevant data from a range of websites. In good lessons, teachers use questions effectively to probe students' understanding and prompt them to extend their answers. This helps them to write to a higher standard.

159. Less effective teaching and learning takes place when learning objectives are not established clearly at the start, or reviewed effectively at the end of the lesson. Sometimes students do not respond to written comments on their work and this limits the impact of teachers' marking.
160. Overall, students achieve well in their course. Nearly all students are attentive and work effectively in response to the good quality of the teaching. Most students talk with enthusiasm about their learning. Most contribute regularly to oral work and co-operate well together in small groups. All students recognise the importance of using the appropriate geographical concepts but do so more often in discussions than in their written work. A small minority need to improve their personal organisation, particularly in respect of their folders of written work.
161. Leadership of the department is very good. Improvement is focused on raising standards further, particularly at AS level, and strategies to do this are being implemented.

Psychology

The provision for psychology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well in comparison with their below average attainment at GCSE.
- Teaching and learning are very good and often excellent. Students benefit from excellent subject expertise of the teacher.
- Assessment is thorough and systematic. Data is used very well to track progress and set targets.
- The curriculum is well planned to meet students' interests.
- Very good leadership and management is focused on achieving the very highest standards.

Commentary

162. GCE A-level results have been in line with the national average over the last three years. Current standards in Year 13 are similar, and reflect very good achievement when compared with students below and, in many instances, well below average overall attainment at GCSE. The number taking the subject is increasing, and retention rates from Year 12 to Year 13 are good.
163. Students have sound knowledge and understanding of a range of psychological concepts, theories and research. Year 13 students, for example, confidently compared a number of relevant theories and studies when explaining reasons for criminal behaviour. The standards being reached by Year 12 students are particularly impressive, given that they have begun their study of psychology fairly recently. In a lesson seen, they made rapid progress in understanding the function of the brain, and had a good grasp of the physiological perspective in psychology. Written work reflects similar strengths in knowledge and understanding of psychological theories, perspectives and methodology. Answers to questions are usually accurate and reasonably well detailed, but issues are not always discussed fully, and points made are not always sufficiently well supported by evidence drawn from the comparison and evaluation of research studies. Students' communication and numeracy skills are good. Statistics are analysed and used well to explain and support research findings.

164. Students respond very well to the teacher's high expectations and challenge. They enjoy their learning and are inspired by the teacher's excellent knowledge and enthusiasm, resulting in clear presentations and explanations, and lively exchanges. Highly skilled teaching results in students being able to understand complex aspects of the course, such as the theoretical basis for behaviour. Practical approaches, including research and experiments, ensure that students develop a good understanding of psychological methods. Learning thrives in a very good atmosphere. Classroom relationships are excellent. Skilled questioning extends thinking, and consistently high expectations and challenge result in students working at demanding levels. Topics are consistently linked to psychological theories and research, with a strong emphasis on comparison and evaluation. Independent research, including the use of appropriate websites, is strongly encouraged. The assessment of students' progress is rigorous, and data is used very well to track progress and set targets. Marking gives very good guidance for improvement.
165. The high standards in teaching and learning result from the very clear direction given by the head of department. She is deeply committed to ensuring that students enjoy and appreciate psychology, and achieve the highest standards possible. Her excellent subject expertise ensures that the curriculum is well planned to inspire and sustain students' interest, and that students are very well prepared for examinations. Provision is constantly reviewed, and planning is guided in the light of students' response. Psychology was not inspected at the last inspection.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

166. A lesson in post-16 design and technology was observed during the inspection week in which students from the AS graphics course and the BTEC media (digital) course were combined and team-taught. One teacher took the lead with the other playing a supporting role. The quality of teaching observed was good and the students' learning secure. Standards seen were in line with nationally expected levels.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Performing arts

167. Two performing arts lessons were sampled as part of the sixth-form inspection. Standards are average with students achieving between levels B and D, depending on prior experience. Lessons show teaching to be very good because of the teacher's excellent subject knowledge that is passed effectively to students. Features of good lessons include high expectations from the teachers. In a music lesson, for example, students (not all of whom had taken music at GCSE) were asked to sing complex four-part harmonies. In drama, where some students were new to the subject, a high level of challenge was observed where they debated Stanislavski's theory of acting. Students were seen making very good progress, assisted by the teacher's very good demonstration, probing questioning technique and constant reinforcement of skills and concepts. Achievement is very good overall because students are taught skills, as well as having the opportunity to work autonomously to develop their own styles, as seen in drama performance and improvisation work. Students' attitudes to learning are very good. They listen to each other's views with interest and respect, showing positive attitudes to learning. Students speak of how they enjoy their lessons, describing them as having given them 'invaluable' confidence and personal development.
168. Art and design in the sixth form was sampled. Achievement is very high and students' attitudes and behaviour are exemplary. Teaching is consistently very good. There is no separate studio for the small, but gradually increasing, number of A-level students. A display and work space has been set aside at one end of a classroom but,

inconveniently, work in progress has to be put away after lessons to provide room for other classes.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Provision in physical education is very good. The very good curriculum offered to students includes A-level and vocational examination courses and an excellent enrichment programme. One lesson was sampled in physical education. Standards were above average owing to the very good teaching offered. All students are achieving well.

BUSINESS

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- This well-managed and very well-led department offers an innovatively wide range of sixth-form courses.
- Business studies teaching is marked by high levels of care, motivation and energy, and the lessons are generally fast moving, interactive and varied.
- Though their classrooms are spread out through the site, the teachers are a very good team.

Commentary

169. In 2004, students taking A-level and VCE business courses gained good results. At A-level, results were close to the national average. All 12 candidates passed and four reached the top grades. Of the 19 students entered for the VCE course, 17 passed, which is above average, but only one gained a top grade. Standards of current sixth-form business students are higher. Students are on target to pass their courses, with rather more reaching the top grades than last year. In both Year 12 and 13 almost all students have a firm grasp of their current topics. In addition, many are able to discuss these fluently; some can apply concepts to situations with which they are not familiar and achievement is good.
170. The quality of teaching is good and occasionally very good. Planning is a particular strength, although learning objectives are not always specific enough to be fully helpful. Lessons usually proceed at a fast pace and activities are varied and interesting. The teachers' assessment of how well the students are doing is very good, being detailed, caring and accurate. Through their comments, teachers help students to understand what they need to do to improve. The students learn well and are often quick to gain a good grasp of the analytical and information-handling skills of the subject, as well as of basic knowledge. They have a determination to succeed. Most work very hard, often doing more than the teacher requests. When necessary they work very effectively together in small groups to share ideas and discuss issues.
171. Leadership is very good and has brought about successful expansion of the business studies curriculum since the previous inspection. The teachers in the department work well together despite being located in disparate parts of the school. The department is well managed and resourced.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The school does not offer any courses in health and social care.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

Formal provision for personal development occurs at the same time as for students in the rest of the school through a planned programme of PSHE and citizenship lessons. One lesson was sampled. The teaching was good and students contributed well to discussion.

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	2	2
How inclusive the school is		1
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	2	2
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	3	2
Overall standards achieved		3
Students' achievement	2	2
Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		2
Attendance	4	4
Attitudes	2	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2	2
Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		1
The quality of education provided by the school		2
The quality of teaching	2	3
How well students learn	2	2
The quality of assessment	2	2
How well the curriculum meets students' needs	2	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		1
Accommodation and resources	3	3
Students' care, welfare, health and safety		2
Support, advice and guidance for students	2	2
How well the school seeks and acts on students' views	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		2
The quality of the school's links with the community	1	1
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	2
The leadership and management of the school		1
The governance of the school	2	2
The leadership of the headteacher		1
The leadership of other key staff	2	2
The effectiveness of management	2	2

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