

INSPECTION REPORT

ST KATHERINE'S SCHOOL

Bristol

LEA area: North Somerset

Unique reference number: 109317

Headteacher: Mrs A J Arlidge

Lead inspector: Mr R C Drew

Dates of inspection: 7 – 11 February 2005

Inspection number: 268927

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:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1015
School address:	Pill Road Ham Green Bristol
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs A O'Leary
Date of previous inspection:	15 March 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

This is an 11 to 18 comprehensive school just south of Bristol. About 60 per cent of its pupils come from the city and 40 per cent from the adjacent rural areas. There are 1015 pupils on roll including 116 sixth-form students. Just over 90 per cent of pupils are white (British) with about 2 per cent of mixed race and very small numbers coming from fifteen ethnic minority communities. Eleven per cent of pupils are entitled to free school meals (below average) but a higher proportion than nationally are on the special educational needs register and more than usual have statements of special educational needs. This partly reflects the presence at the school of an eighteen-place unit for pupils with physical disabilities. Socio-economic backgrounds vary far more than usual, as does the prior attainment of pupils. On balance, each year group enters Year 7 with a degree of social and economic disadvantage and below-average standards of attainment. The school was awarded specialist science college status in 2003.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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9710	Rosie Burgess	Lay inspector	
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31218	Thomas Allen	Team inspector	Geography English as an additional language
28199	Peter Lawley	Team inspector	English English (sixth form) Theatre Studies (sixth form)
30427	Felicity Shuffle-Botham	Team inspector	History History (sixth form) Religious education
4605	Michael Lormor	Team inspector	Music
31100	Geoffrey Hunter	Team inspector	Mathematics Mathematics (sixth form)
33940	Angela Cook	Team inspector	Science Biology (sixth form)
31963	Malcolm Padmore	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Information and communication technology (sixth form) Special educational needs
19404	Les Schubeler	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages Work related learning
12972	Anthony Weaden	Team inspector	Citizenship Physical education
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a good and rapidly improving school. Standards are above average and represent good achievement by pupils. This reflects the good quality of teaching and learning that prevail and the outstanding leadership provided by the headteacher. Overall, leadership and management are very good and value for money is good.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Pupils make good long-term progress and achieve well.
- Standards at the end of Year 11 are above average, with GCSE results rising much more rapidly than nationally.
- Excellent leadership is given by the headteacher. With her very effective team of senior staff, she demonstrates the ability to sustain school improvement.
- Good teaching and learning are the norm and the quality in some subjects is very good.
- There is very good leadership and management from several subject and year-group leaders.
- The management of provision for pupils with physical disabilities is excellent.
- Governance is very effective.
- A very small minority of pupils bring poor attitudes and unsatisfactory behaviour into school.
- There is a lack of consistency in the way low-level misbehaviour is managed in some lessons and registration periods.
- There are unsatisfactory features of provision for music, PHSE and citizenship.
- Several areas of the school have unsatisfactory accommodation.

There has been very good improvement during the last five years. Under the current headteacher, the school has tackled the key issues in the last report very effectively. Standards, teaching, behaviour, support systems for pupils and many of the school's facilities have improved markedly. It has acquired specialist science college status and a new sixth-form centre is approaching completion.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Overall achievement is good in Years 7-11 and in the sixth form. Year 9 test results in English, mathematics and science were average in 2004, but are generally above average. In the work seen by inspectors, all three had above-average standards. Pupils' work is also above average in art and design, modern languages and physical education, but below average in music and citizenship. Standards of work seen by inspectors in Year 11 are collectively above average. This is the case for most subjects, while in modern languages standards are well above average. Achievement by pupils in Years 10 and 11 is good overall, while in English and modern languages it is very good. However, too little achievement is made in music and citizenship. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress. Gifted and talented pupils make good progress. Boys' standards are lower than girls' and by a wider margin than nationally. At the end of Year 13 the overall standards are average and achievement good. Students reach well above average standards and record very good added value in some subjects, for instance, in theatre studies, while standards are below average and achievement broadly satisfactory in mathematics and ICT. **Pupils' personal qualities are developed well, particularly their social, moral and cultural awareness.** Attendance is good. The great majority of pupils are well behaved and positive, and in

many lessons and around school a very pleasant atmosphere prevails. The attitudes and behaviour

of a very small minority of pupils are poor, though staff modify this considerably. Overall, behaviour and attitudes are satisfactory.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The overall quality of education provided by the school is good, comprising good teaching and learning and a curriculum that is sound overall and good in Years 10 and 11.

Teaching and learning are good. A significant minority of lessons demonstrate very good teaching and learning and there are areas of excellence. Staff demonstrate a wide range of good skills and work very hard at establishing effective relationships with their pupils. In many lessons, teachers have their own or their department's distinctive strategies for managing pupils' behaviour, but there is a lack of consistency and some ineffective response to pupils in a significant minority. Both teaching and learning are very good overall in English and modern languages. The **curriculum** is broadly satisfactory, but is good in Years 10 and 11. There are weaknesses in 6th Form religious education and in collective worship generally. There is good care and support for pupils and very good links with parents. Links with the community are good.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall, leadership and management are very good. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and receives very good support from senior colleagues. This has enabled the school to make very good improvement during her time in post. A very strong sense of common purpose prevails amongst teaching and support staff. This is enhanced by the very effective strategic advice and day-to-day support of a well-informed Governing Body. Leadership of subjects and year groups is good overall and is excellent in the physical disabilities unit and very good in the sixth form. Management systems are less effective but broadly satisfactory in citizenship, music and religious education.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Overall, pupils and parents have good, positive views of the school. Many opt for it in preference to others when it is not their local or obvious choice. A great many pupils are extremely positive about the quality of teaching and tutoring they receive and the friendships they develop in school. Many pupils and parents resent the poor behaviour of a minority of pupils because it hinders learning in some lessons and absorbs teachers' time and energy. Both parents and pupils value the inclusive approach of the school, especially the impact of the unit for pupils with physical disabilities.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Stop low-level disruption by ensuring all staff consistently implement the same agreed set of procedures for behaviour management.
- Reduce further the occasional incidents of serious misbehaviour by a very small minority of pupils.
- Ensure the current improvements in music provision continue by providing better accommodation and resources and additional specialist support for Year 10 and 11 pupils.
- Implement the school's planned changes to the organisation and leadership of PHSE and citizenship provision.
- Provided good-quality dining accommodation, social areas for Years 7 to 11, outdoor physical education facilities and changing areas in the PD unit.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Provide adequate provision for religious education in the sixth form and a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good and cost-effectiveness is also good. This stems from good teaching and learning which enable students to achieve well. The sixth form is very effectively led and management is good. The overall improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory, but the rate of current improvement is very rapid.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- While standards are broadly average, students make good progress in lessons and long-term achievement is generally good.
- Achievement is very good in some subjects.
- Leadership of the sixth form is very good.
- Teaching and learning are good with much that is very effective.
- Students have very positive attitudes.
- Accommodation is currently poor, but new high-quality facilities are nearing completion.
- The curriculum, while broadly satisfactory, offers students limited enrichment opportunities.
- Several subjects record too little added-value at AS and A2.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Provision in English literature is good . Teaching and learning are good and the subject is well led. While recent results at A2 were well below average, current standards match national ones and students are achieving well.
Mathematics	Provision in mathematics is satisfactory . Standards are below average, but students are achieving satisfactorily. This reflects sound teaching and learning and satisfactory leadership of the subject.
Science	Provision in biology is good . Teaching and learning are good and standards seen by inspectors are in line with national ones. This represents good achievement given students' prior attainment.
Information and communication technology	Provision in ICT is good . Standards seen by inspectors are below average, though achievement or added-value is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are good.
Humanities	Provision in history is good . Students achieve well. Standards amongst current Year 13 are below average, though results in 2004 matched national ones. Teaching and learning are good and the subject is very well led.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Provision in design and technology is good . 2004 results at A2 were above average. Current standards are average and students achieve well. Leadership, teaching and learning are all good.
Visual and performing arts and media	Provision in art and design is good . Results and current standards match national levels and students achieve well due to good teaching and learning and good leadership of the subject. Provision in theatre studies is very good . The quality of teaching is very good and occasionally outstanding. As a result, students make very good progress and reach above average standards.

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

Sixth form tutors and subject staff are very good at monitoring and supporting students' personal and academic progress. Students are much more aware of their targets than is often the case and staff review these with students on a very regular basis. While careers guidance from outside school has been mixed, students receive consistently good advice from tutors and subject teachers.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership is very good. The newly appointed head of sixth form sets clear and demanding expectations of students and colleagues and also leads well by example. He has already established an excellent vision for the sixth form's future and contributed to improvement plans which are beginning to implement beneficial changes. **Management is good** and improving. The sixth form is now organised effectively and systems are efficient, but some decisions about the curriculum and monitoring of standards in subjects have only just been implemented and their benefits are yet to be felt. A key feature in ensuring good provision despite poor facilities is the high morale amongst students, the outcome of their own positive attitudes and the encouraging and purposeful style of sixth-form leadership.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students show very positive attitudes to sixth-form life. While their responses to the inspection questionnaire were varied, their conduct and discussions indicate a high level of satisfaction with nearly all aspects of provision. Accommodation is rightly considered poor, but students are commendably positive about the temporary facilities they use while the new sixth-form centre nears completion.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Pupils and students achieve well, reaching above-average standards at the end of Year 11 and average standards in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' achievement overall is good.
- Achievement is very good in some subjects.
- Results at GCSE are above average and rising much faster than nationally.
- Value-added in A-level courses is good most years.
- There are instances of subjects with below-average standards and too little achievement.
- Boys under-perform in comparison with girls in Year 9 tests, GCSE and post-16 examinations.
- Literacy skills are satisfactory, but standards are lower than in the school's wider provision.

Commentary

1. Pupils enter the school with a wider than usual range of prior attainment and attitudes to learning, but the school teaches and supports them well and their overall standards match national averages by the end of Year 9. These processes continue and intensify their impact over the next two years so that standards are above average and long-term achievement good by the end Year 11.
2. Results in national tests in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9 show a strong improving trend over the last few years, having been much lower than average at the time of the last inspection. They rose significantly in consecutive years since 1999 and were above average in 2003. Despite lower scores in 2004, the causes of which have been analysed and acted upon, current Year 9 pupils' work in all three subjects has re-established standards which are above average. This is also the case for the great majority of other subjects, though, in several, standards are broadly average. Provision in citizenship and music, however, lacks adequate coherence and depth in planning, leading to below-average standards and unsatisfactory achievement. In both cases, the school's monitoring has revealed the staffing and organisational issues at fault. Good recent appointments have been made in music and new arrangements are being implemented for citizenship.
3. The school's most notable success in recent years is the improvement in GCSE/GNVQ results. These are above average, having increased dramatically since 2001 with, for instance, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A* to C passes rising from 31 per cent to 58 per cent between 2001 and 2004. Provision for all categories of pupils has improved at the same time. One set of statistics for lower-attaining pupils suggests a lack of improvement, but this masks another success in which a significant minority of pupils have been placed on courses more appropriate than GCSE. The innovative approach to the curriculum, which uses vocational courses with strong work-related components, has prompted attendance, commitment and standards of attainment to rise noticeably in the current Year 11. Underlying the overall rise in standards are the decisive steps taken by the headteacher to establish an orderly school with high expectations in the minds of both pupils and staff. Good appointments and effective, regular monitoring have contributed to improvement and, although there is work still to be done, staff now indicate that they can concentrate on teaching with a high level of confidence that senior managers will support them as they deal with the challenging behaviour of some pupils.
4. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is good, as was evident from classroom observations and also from the good records kept by the special needs staff.

These records include the results of the effective initial testing that identifies special needs, and the ongoing records of progress kept by teachers and learning support assistants. Gifted and talented pupils also achieve well. There is a policy in place, which is reinforced by regular half-termly meetings of representatives from each teaching faculty. Better than average A* and A grade GCSE results feature in 2003 results in art, business studies, science and modern foreign languages in 2004. Two pupils have been identified as having English as an additional language. One has been assessed as stage 3 and the other as stage 4 of English acquisition for both oral and written communication. The standard of work seen is average for pupils of similar age. Both are confident in lessons and are making good progress. They show good achievement since joining the school at the beginning of the academic year.

5. In English and modern languages, achievement across Years 7 to 11 is very good, exceeding even the school's generally impressive levels of added-value. In both cases, relatively new heads of subject have been very perceptive in assessing the best way to deliver the courses they offered, the teaching approaches of their departments and how target-setting could be used most effectively. Some other departments are also very consistent and successful in the way they manage behaviour, so that lessons involve low-level disruption relatively rarely. In these instances, teaching and learning are very good and this quality is sustained across the department because of good monitoring and effective sharing of effective strategies.
6. Achievement is unsatisfactory in music and citizenship. Recently appointed teachers in the music department are working effectively to improve provision, but discontinuity in staffing has left pupils with an incomplete and insecure grasp of areas of the subject. Progress in lessons is currently good, but longer-term gains are currently inadequate. In citizenship, the school has recognised the weaknesses in organisation of the course and are in the process of restructuring and making new appointments. However, at present learning is unsatisfactory and pupils are making too little progress.
7. While broadly satisfactory, literacy provision is less effective than the school's general quality. Coordination is unsatisfactory, though most teachers promote literacy skills adequately. Given the deficiencies in some pupils' initial skills, the scope to improve standards by raising literacy competence is clear. This is recognised in the school's current improvement plans.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	32.8 (35.3)	NA (33.4)
mathematics	36.9 (37.1)	NA (35.4)
science	34 (34.3)	NA (33.6)

There were 176 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	57.6 (53.5)	52 (52)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	90.4 (94.2)	89 (88)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	97.1 (95.5)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	47.8 (45.0)	34.9 (34.7)

There were 172 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

Sixth form

8. Standards are broadly average at the end of Year 13, indicating good achievement, given the wide range of prior attainment with which students enter Year 12. There has been marked improvement during the last four years: A-level results in 2001 were well below average, but each year since then, results have been in line with national levels and value-added has generally been positive. Students make good progress in lessons and they benefit from a well-designed and very effectively operated system for tracking their academic progress: they are able to see how high they should aim and are clear about how to improve their work.
9. There is considerable variation in the performance of subjects. Amongst those given a focus during the inspection, achievement by the end of Year 13 is very good in theatre studies and good in most other subjects, but broadly satisfactory in mathematics and ICT. In addition, A-level results for 2004 indicate clearly positive added-value in business studies, theatre studies, design and technology, history, ICT, psychology and French. However, the added-value in results was negative in physics, chemistry, physical education and further mathematics. Much of this variation reflects the differences in the quality of teaching and leadership: in subjects with strengths in both, standards and achievement are very good. All these features are very effective in theatre studies, for instance, where standards are above average, while in mathematics, where standards are below average, both are broadly satisfactory. The crucial strengths, common to all lessons with very good achievement, are teaching characterised by lively pace and extensive involvement of students, coupled with very effective use of assessment to set and pursue challenging targets for individuals and whole classes.
10. Female outperform male students significantly by the end of Year 13. The school is aware of this feature, common to most sixth forms, and is evaluating strategies to boost boys' performance.

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	100 (78)	92.3 (92.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	18 (26)	36.2 (35.6)
Average point score per pupil	238.4 (237.7)	265.2 (258.2)

There were 71 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attendance and punctuality to school and lessons are good. Pupils' attitudes to school and their behaviour, including the incidence of exclusions, are satisfactory. In the sixth form, behaviour is very good. Pupils' personal development is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There have been very significant improvements in behaviour in the last few years.
- A very small minority of pupils bring poor attitudes and unsatisfactory behaviour into school.
- Very good improvements have been made in monitoring attendance and in the rates achieved.
- The management of low-level disruptive behaviour is inconsistent in some lessons and registrations.
- Personal development, whilst good overall, is not coherently planned.

Commentary

11. The majority of pupils have positive attitudes to school and behave well. They are keen to learn and to be involved in activities and events outside of lessons. Generally, relationships throughout the school are good. However, in too many lessons a number of pupils engage in low-level disruption, which is not dealt with in a consistent manner by all staff, so that in over a

tenth of lessons learning is inhibited for all by unsatisfactory or, occasionally, poor behaviour. Whilst behaviour has improved dramatically since the last inspection, there are still groups of pupils who become involved in serious incidents of misbehaviour, and exclusions for a short, fixed term are high. Reported incidents of bullying and of a racist nature are dealt with well, and parents and specialist agencies are appropriately involved.

12. The school values and works hard to support all pupils; inclusion in the school is very good for pupils with a very wide range of special educational needs. Because of this, special educational needs pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to teaching and learning.
13. Attendance rates have also improved significantly and are now good. The majority of pupils are punctual, but lateness at the start of the day, mainly attributed to the buses, is a cause for concern, and many registration /tutorial periods are conducted to a flow of latecomers. Whilst lateness is properly monitored, the school's system does not record lateness after close of registration as an unauthorised absence, so that these are under-reported.
14. Personal development is good, and many lessons and activities put emphasis on moral, social and cultural values. However, personal development is not coherently planned to link what is learnt from many subjects with assemblies and tutorials. Personal, social and health education and citizenship lessons have too little impact, pupils' attitudes to these lessons are often unsatisfactory and pupils express little interest in the topics covered. Spiritual development is satisfactory. In history, religious education and English, especially, some good opportunities are given to discuss human frailty, and Year 11's discussion on *Silas Marner* demonstrated that they had a clear understanding of his struggle with religious belief, against the expectations of 19th century society. Pupils were involved in drawing up and agreeing the school's moral and social values, which are clearly displayed in classrooms and referred to when pupils step out of line; however, the amount of unsatisfactory behaviour indicates that the values are not accepted by all pupils. Assemblies have too little sense of occasion and little opportunity to reflect in silence on the message conveyed; the statutory requirement for acts of collective worship is not met. Cultural development is good and reinforced by the science college's emphasis on environmental issues, as well as through field trips, theatre, museum and gallery visits and interaction with schools and colleges overseas.

Sixth form

15. Attitudes in the sixth form are very good. Students are very positive about their experience in Years 12 and 13 and recognise many improvements in school life and facilities. Students are keen to succeed and work to achieve or better their target grades. They are willing to work independently, and are polite and considerate towards each other, younger pupils, staff and visitors. Attendance is very good. Students behave very well and provide good role models for pupils in the main school. They are involved with younger pupils in a range of activities, helping with lessons and other activities.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	5.3	School data	0.1
National data	7.8	National data	1.2

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

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	928	134	1
White – Irish	3	6	0
White – any other White background	5	2	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	5	1	0
Mixed – White and Black African	3	2	0
Mixed – White and Asian	1	2	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	20	1	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	1	1	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	2	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	4	2	0
Black or Black British – African	3	2	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	2	0	0
Chinese	4	0	0
Any other ethnic group	2	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	29	0	0

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided is good, with good teaching and learning across the school and a sound curriculum overall, with good provision in Years 10 and 11. Assessment is good overall and very good in the sixth form.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good across the school and in all year groups. In Years 7 to 9, the proportion of satisfactory teaching, as opposed to good or better, is greater than in Years 10 to 13.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching and learning has improved significantly since the last inspection and is good overall, with areas of excellent practice.
- In English and modern foreign languages, the overall quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- The learning of students in the sixth form benefits from very effective use of assessment.
- The quality of teaching and learning, while still satisfactory, is diminished in some lessons by limited strategies to manage pupils.

Commentary

16. Overall, 98 per cent of lessons have at least satisfactory teaching and learning and the quality of both is at least good in about 76 per cent. In all phases, there are examples of excellent quality. This indicates that teaching and learning have improved substantially since the last inspection, which has contributed substantially to a marked rise in standards over the last five years.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 156 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
7 (4.5%)	31 (19.9%)	81 (51.9%)	33 (21.2%)	4 (2.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

17. Teachers are consistently good at the great majority of their essential skills, planning with care and making good use of assessment data to meet the varied needs of the wide range of pupils in their classes. The general level of expectations is high and there is effective support for pupils with special educational needs in the great majority of lessons. Teachers show secure expertise in their subject and go out of their way to structure lessons so that pupils can be actively involved and see the progress they are making. Good relationships and an encouraging approach are the norm.
18. The teaching and learning of pupils with special educational needs are generally good. Teachers successfully adapt their work to the attainment levels of their pupils. Where there is a subject based learning support assistant, as in mathematics, the matching of work to ability is often very good. Where pupils are withdrawn for reading or spelling support, these groups are sensitively handled, and as a consequence pupils enjoy the sessions. However, the timing of some sessions during morning registration, for example, has resulted in a pattern of absences that adversely affects the learning and progress of some pupils. The school's use of target groups and setting has a positive impact on teaching and learning. The very good relationships between teaching assistants and pupils with special educational needs in many subjects motivate pupils to learn well. Practical activities such as computer aided learning for numeracy and literacy stimulate pupils' interest. The teaching of gifted and talented pupils is good. Teachers are aware of which pupils are identified by their departments as gifted and talented, and ensure that they are provided with sufficiently challenging work.
19. In English and modern foreign languages, teaching and learning are predominantly very good. This reflects the fine individual quality of particular staff but also indicates how leadership and management of large subject areas have established high, consistent expectations of teachers and pupils. In these instances, teaching that is merely satisfactory is becoming quite rare and it is always at least good.
20. In the very well taught lessons in any subject, relationships are particularly positive, deriving from a very close knowledge of pupils' previous work, targets, objectives, capabilities and limitations. Teachers use this information to gauge precisely how much independent learning or directive teaching to put into a lesson so as to hold pupils' attention and give them considerable responsibility for their own progress. The same teachers employ consistent techniques for managing behaviour, using very extensive praise and equally clear-cut sanctions applied at the first sign of unacceptable responses from pupils so that minor incidents do not escalate. As a result, the lesson sustains its positive atmosphere and pupils learn very effectively.
21. Elsewhere, in a significant minority of lessons, teachers are too slow to stop low-level disturbance, especially in the lower school. As a result, they have to divert considerable time and energy throughout the lesson to maintaining acceptable standards of behaviour and attention. While they generally succeed, they teach satisfactorily rather than well or very well,

and the progress of some pupils is hindered. Very occasionally, inadequate strategies for controlling behaviour contribute significantly to the few lessons with unsatisfactory teaching and learning. Similar factors lead to some registration periods providing an unsatisfactory start to the day.

Sixth form

22. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good with a minority that is very good and occasionally excellent. All teaching benefits from high-level specialist expertise and students see and respond to an obvious love of their subject in the great majority of their teachers. Increasingly, students learn very effectively from giving presentations and working together on these and other such tasks. The best teaching seen by inspectors included extensive use of question-and-answer sessions, almost always with follow-up questions to take students beyond their initial response into more challenging thinking or recall. Pace is very strong in these lessons, and students make rapid and secure progress because their initial level of knowledge is known and acted upon by the teacher. In the very best lessons, teachers and students give time to analysing examination board requirements for high-quality answers: students are helped to see precisely what is required to reach such standards in their current work.
23. Teaching and learning, while good overall, are very good in theatre studies: the features of strong teaching outlined above are consistently present in this subject. The teaching of gifted and talented students in the sixth form is good. Departments identify gifted and talented students, and teachers know who they are. In art, the provision of a working studio in addition to the teaching classrooms enables students to produce large-scale sculptural work in wire and plaster. Teaching and learning in mathematics are satisfactory: some staff contribute to the very best practice in the school, but there is considerable variation in quality, reflecting limited monitoring and support.

The curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory overall. The school is strongly committed to reviewing and improving the curriculum it offers. A good balance of academic and vocational courses is offered in Years 10 and 11. The school has successfully achieved specialist status as a science college. However, provision in citizenship and in personal, social and health education is unsatisfactory, and the school does not meet its statutory obligation to provide religious education in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school's commitment to evaluating and improving the curriculum is very good.
- Pupils experience a broad academic curriculum, with a good range of option choices, both academic and vocational, being offered in Years 10 and 11.
- The achievement of specialist status as a science college has encouraged exciting plans for further development of the curriculum.
- Provision for enrichment and extra-curricular activities in the main school is good.
- Provision in citizenship and in personal, social and health education is unsatisfactory.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good.
- Some timetabling difficulties mean that lessons in some subjects are not always spaced evenly enough.
- The school does not fulfil its statutory obligation to provide religious education in the sixth form.

Commentary

24. The school shows a strong commitment to improving the curriculum, and it evaluates its provision very thoroughly. Areas for improvement are sharply identified, and careful and thorough planning ensures that changes and improvements are made successfully. The school has already identified the areas needing development, and its plans for improvement are very forward looking.

25. In Years 10 and 11, a good range of courses is offered to meet the needs and interests of pupils. In addition to a good range of GCSE courses, vocational courses in leisure and tourism and in health and social care are provided. There are also link courses with a local college, a Youth Award course, and some workplace-based learning. This wide range of provision is well matched to the interests of the pupils in Years 10 and 11, and attendance, attitudes and punctuality have greatly improved as a result. In Years 7 to 9, the curriculum meets the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum, covers all subjects required, and includes religious education for all pupils.
26. The school's commitment to inclusion is evident in the good curriculum for pupils with special educational needs. Older pupils are prepared well for the next stages of their lives through courses such as the ASDAN Youth Award scheme referred to above or through the key skills courses. These courses include study and communication skills and help pupils to learn to work with others. They also promote independence well. A good range of visits reinforces the curriculum. Activities include sailing and outdoor education trips, and a good number of special educational needs pupils regularly attend a forest school that promotes care for the environment. All Year 10 special educational needs pupils go on good quality work experience. Arrangements such as setting by ability and the target groups, where special educational needs pupils are taught in small groups by specialist teachers, are good, although not all departments are successful in promoting good achievement among special educational needs pupils. The school has effectively limited withdrawal to only when necessary. Experienced and effective learning support assistants work well with individuals, giving targeted input on numeracy, literacy, spelling and study skills. Pupils attached to the unit for physical disabilities attend mainstream classes and are fully integrated into the life of the school. In addition, some excellent initiatives are provided for them, including swimming, sailing and a residential trip. These adventurous activities provide excellent opportunities for pupils to develop self-confidence. They enable them to succeed at a wide range of sports and to develop their social skills very well. Good extra-curricular arrangements for gifted and talented pupils include entry for national challenge competitions in mathematics. The book club organised via the school library encourages reading and discussion of a varied selection of literature. Links with sports clubs such as Bristol Rovers Football Club are strong.
27. The school's achievement of specialist science college status has encouraged some exciting developments, which are beginning to raise interest across the school. For example, well-attended science master classes are held on a Saturday morning, and pupils are investigating the exploration of space. In addition, solar panels have been installed to help demonstrate responsible energy husbandry, and innovative plans are in place to generate power from alternative sources, and to conserve and use rainwater.
28. Provision in citizenship is unsatisfactory. The coherence of the programme in Years 7 to 9 is weak; coverage is better organised in Years 10 and 11 though still too limited. No clear judgements about strengths and weaknesses appear in the assessment and reporting system. Provision in personal, social and health education is also unsatisfactory, and there are no effective links between the school's programme and the work of subjects, or the use of form tutor time. In addition, there is not enough use of ICT in music, and not enough study of Christianity in the religious education programme. Some difficulties in timetabling mean that, in a small number of subjects, lessons are not spaced evenly over the two-week timetable. Subjects affected include modern languages, history and religious education. This uneven spread makes it more difficult for learning to be smooth and progressive for some classes in these subjects.
29. Guidance on careers is satisfactory in the main school and enhanced by a good programme of work experience at the end of Year 10. There are good relationships with the Connexions service, which provides good careers information as well as valuable support to pupils with CV writing, making applications and interview skills.
30. Provision for the spiritual development of pupils is satisfactory, and for their cultural, moral and social development it is good. In spite of many positive initiatives to promote personal

development and learn about others' values, beliefs and cultures, the opportunities provided are not linked into a structured tutorial programme or personal, social and health education and citizenship lessons to form a coherent whole.

31. Extra-curricular provision is good. The programme offered by the school broadens pupils' experiences and provides good support for learning in the classroom. Residential trips to France for Years 7 and 8, theatre trips for all year groups, outings to museums, and a good range of physical activities, such as dance, aerobics and sports, all enrich the curriculum. The science faculty has developed very good extra-curricular activities, encompassing aspects of the science college mission statement. These include science clubs aimed at different year groups, an international link and Saturday morning master classes, which are very well supported by up to 45 pupils and adults. One after-school science club is currently designing and building a model moon station, which will demonstrate the concepts of self-sustainability. Extra-curricular activities for pupils with physical difficulties are a strength, and include swimming, horse riding and a residential outdoor pursuits course.
32. There is a good match of well-qualified teachers to the curriculum, and the quality of staffing has improved. Very well managed steps to recruit and induct high-quality teachers have enabled the school to check and deal with identified areas of weakness in provision, leading to improved examination results in several subjects. Non-teaching and support staff are also organised very well to aid efficient communication and reinforce the work of teachers in the classroom, through well-organised assistance and oversight. Accommodation is satisfactory, with particular strengths in the new science facilities, where new, very well designed and equipped specialist areas are enhancing teaching quality. At the same time, pupils in the physically impaired unit suffer from some cramped and unsuitable specialist accommodation, which lack expected areas to assure privacy and personal dignity. Unsatisfactory features of this specialist accommodation depress the development of social skills among this group. In physical education, while accommodation is satisfactory overall, achievement in hockey is depressed by absence of suitable facilities. A well-presented library provides a satisfactory range of fiction, and resources are at least satisfactory for most subjects and very good in science. At present there are insufficient computers to allow the expected level of use across all subjects.

Sixth form

33. The sixth-form curriculum on offer is broadly satisfactory overall, allowing the great majority of its students to enjoy sixth form education and make good progress across the Years 12 and 13. There is a good range of A and AS level courses, including some less "traditional" ones such as psychology and theatre studies, both of which promote high standards at A2. However, while there are some good vocational courses, this form of provision is limited and students seeking continuity with some of the good vocational provision they had in Years 10 and 11 are disappointed. In addition, the enrichment programme is not wide enough. The school has already recognised these shortcomings, and plans are in place to tackle all the weaknesses identified.
34. The school does not fulfil its statutory obligation to provide religious education in the sixth form. In addition, the school does not provide a daily act of collective worship. The school governors have debated the matter thoroughly, and decided that this would not be practical because of shortcomings in accommodation.
35. Extra-curricular provision is good. Students have available a range of extra-curricular activities, including outside speakers, Saturday morning master classes, visits to universities and conferences, and residential trips. Those studying a modern foreign language also have the opportunity to undertake their work experience abroad, whilst those studying biology go on a field course.
36. There is a good match of well-qualified teachers to subjects in the sixth form. While the current accommodation is adequate for most subjects, social and study facilities in the temporary sixth form base are very limited and poor in quality. However, the school has

campaigned well for new premises and an extremely impressive purpose-built centre is close to completion. Health and social care provision suffers from very poor accommodation, storage and display facilities, holding back achievement. Resources are satisfactory, but library provision is limited, and there are insufficient computers to enable students to use them to access information and for other assignments across the subjects.

Care, guidance and support

The procedures to ensure pupils' care, welfare, health and safety are good. The support, advice and guidance for pupils, based on the monitoring of their achievements and personal development, are good. The extent to which the school seeks to involve pupils in its work and development is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Induction arrangements are excellent for pupils in Year 7.
- Very good care is taken of pupils with physical disabilities.
- Academic assessment is effective in the main school and very good in the sixth form.
- Tutorial periods are not used as a coherent element in planned provision for personal development.
- Very good arrangements are made for vulnerable pupils at risk of exclusion.
- Pupils' opinions are sought on a variety of issues.

Commentary

37. Induction arrangements for pupils starting in Year 7 are excellent, and very good care is taken when pupils start at other times. Both pupils and parents express pleasure with transition arrangements.
38. Care provided by the unit for pupils with physical disabilities is very good, although their accommodation does not always make enough provision for self-dignity and privacy for pupils and parents. The services of external agencies are used well, both in the unit and in the main school.
39. Tutors and heads of year provide good support for individual pupils. However, the majority of tutor periods are not sufficiently structured to provide a good start to the day for all pupils, and are not linked with coherent programmes of personal, social and health education and citizenship. Pupils' academic progress is monitored well, and pupils are aware of the target levels and grades they are aiming for. Monitoring of personal development is less formalised. Some pupils maintain progress files of their achievements, and records of merits are collected in journals. Pupils involved in incidents of poor behaviour or bullying are monitored well, and public recognition is given to pupils who show good personal involvement in helping others or representing the school.
40. The local community development worker provides very well for groups of vulnerable pupils and those at risk of exclusion. A group of Year 10 pupils recently benefited from a peer mentors' course on drug awareness, under the auspices of the local police force and alongside pupils from other secondary schools, and are working with younger students to share the experience.
41. Procedures to ensure the safety, care and welfare of pupils are good, including those for child protection and health and safety. Very good interaction with the educational welfare officer has helped to effect very good improvement in attendance.
42. Pupils are given many good opportunities to participate in school developments. Their views are sought in a range of surveys, and all pupils were involved in agreeing the school's values. The school council has representatives from all year groups and is involved, for example, in a

student panel to interview prospective head teachers. Pupils were involved in some of the planning of the new sixth form building.

Sixth form

43. Students are happy with the advice offered about sixth form courses, as they receive good advice from their tutors and subject teachers. They know and understand their targets. Tutorial time is primarily a social event, although personal tutoring is conducted during this time and is useful to students.
44. Students have a good involvement in school decisions, through sixth form council and good day-to-day communication with tutors and the head of sixth form.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The effectiveness of the school's links with parents is very good. The quality of links with the community is good. Links with other schools and colleges are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent partnerships have been established with parents of pupils with physical disabilities.
- Parents are provided with very good information about the school and their child's progress.
- The award of science college status has led to the creation of some effective links with businesses.
- Very good links already established with primary schools have been further developed.
- The school is working very well with other schools and colleges to provide alternative learning arrangements for disaffected pupils.

Commentary

45. The school has developed a very effective partnership with parents, who provide good support for the school and are willing to come into school when problems or concerns arise. They are well provided with information about the school, and meetings are arranged to explain school procedures, such as option choices made in Year 9. Parents are informed about their children's achievements and involved whenever problems arise, and their response to requests from the school to visit is good. The partnership between parents of pupils with physical disabilities and the school are excellent.
46. The school works hard to involve the local community, and has built good business partnerships to achieve science college status, assisted by governors and others. These partnerships are continuing to strengthen as college status permeates activities in school.
47. Links with the many feeder primary schools are very good, and arrangements with local colleges to provide an alternative curriculum for pupils in Years 10 and 11 are very good. These links have a positive impact on pupils' attendance, and a significant number have improved attitudes to learning. The school is well represented on several local organisations.

Sixth form

48. Good links with colleges and universities help students in making well-informed decisions for their future studies and careers. Students are pleased with the opportunities that the sixth form has given them and look forward to moving into their new accommodation.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management overall are very good and have enabled the school to make very good improvement in the last five years. Governance is very good and the headteacher gives outstanding leadership.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher's leadership is excellent, especially her vision, commitment to improvement and ability to raise staff morale.
- Senior leadership and management are very good and serve the school very effectively.
- Several subjects and areas have very good leadership; it is excellent in the physical disabilities unit.
- Management is less effective in several subjects and in the promotion of further improvements in attitudes and behaviour.

Commentary

49. The headteacher has achieved a great deal in five years, principally because of outstanding leadership. She has committed herself to accepting only the best for pupils and staff and been willing to lead by example in pursuit of high standards. This extends from playground duty, to getting to know pupils by meeting and influencing the most enthusiastic and the most disaffected on a daily basis, to leading in high-quality strategic planning. It has involved backing colleagues in the face of unreasonable behaviour from pupils and, on the rare occasions where a member of staff has lacked professionalism, taking disciplinary action. This secure and purposeful context has engendered intense loyalty and confidence in staff. Both teaching and support staff display high morale and a strong desire to improve provision for pupils. Although there is more to do on raising standards of both attainment and behaviour, the decisive stand against accepting less than the best taken by the head on her arrival has already transformed both. It has also established high aspirations as the norm for staff, pupils and parents.
50. In addition, the headteacher has shown great skill in making appointments and creating teams so that, for instance, a very good senior management group can now extend effective leadership and management in many areas of the school simultaneously. Several subject departments have been revitalised by new leadership. The school's leaders show a successful balance between promoting independent action and working as teams. Deputy and assistant headteachers, for example, clearly work to agreed, collective principles and are good at sharing information and ideas: at the same time, individuals work very well independently, creating an effective staff development programme, for example, or coordinating day-to-day monitoring of a key stage. High-quality leadership extends to both teachers and support staff, where the latter are given far higher status than usual and respond with equally high-quality performance.
51. There are many well-led subjects, year groups and other areas of school life, but the quality is particularly good in physical education, English, modern foreign languages and in Year 9. The quality of leadership and management is outstanding in the physical disabilities unit. There is good leadership and management of special educational needs. The documentation required is of high quality, and the information given to teachers to inform their practice with special educational needs pupils is good. A very good team of learning support assistants has been created, making a valuable contribution to the learning of pupils with special educational needs. Leadership and management of the provision for gifted and talented pupils are also good. The designated co-ordinator is enthusiastic, and effectively promotes the importance of providing for gifted and talented students among staff, pupils and parents, through assemblies, regular written communication and meetings. However, the

accommodation for special educational needs is unsatisfactory overall. There is no area where pupils can have the privacy and dignity that are often required for pupils with the wide range of special educational needs attending the school.

52. Overall management in the school is good. There are extensive areas where it is very efficient indeed and systems and policies very effective. The very good improvement since the last inspection has been made possible by good planning and much good monitoring of initiatives and daily school activity. As a result, achievement, behaviour, attendance, accommodation, staff training, the Year 10 and 11 curriculum, as well as the quality of teaching, have all risen notably. In addition, nearly all areas still requiring change have been identified by the school and included in the current improvement plans. Management arrangements for PHSE and citizenship are less effective than the school's norms. While broadly satisfactory now, they have not allowed pupils to make satisfactory progress. In music, new staff are re-establishing the subject's place in the school, but too little improvement has taken place since the last inspection.
53. While evidence indicates that pupils' attitudes and behaviour are now very much better than at the time of the headteacher's arrival, they are satisfactory overall, when so much of the school's provision is good or very good. The leadership and management of this feature has great strengths, but lacks the consistency required to allow teaching and other aspects of school provision to move to the very highest levels. Serious incidents are dealt with very effectively and the high visibility and presence of senior staff around school has a very beneficial effect. However, more occasions of serious misbehaviour still occur than staff, pupils or parents would like. Additional, preventative strategies are therefore required, including the modifications to the curriculum planned by the school. In addition, in too many lessons and registration periods, the absence of a clear, universal policy for managing low-level behaviour problems leads to a major diversion of teacher's time and energy away from their principle task.
54. Governance is very good. Nearly all governors see the school in session at various times, some of them very regularly, which greatly enhances the information they receive from formal reports and meetings. They demonstrate a very detailed and balanced knowledge of the school that forms the basis for very good strategic support and guidance to senior staff. Meetings are regular, well organised and attended. Individual governors are strongly committed and the chair provides clear leadership. Virtually all statutory duties are well met and the decision to offer less than daily acts of collective worship is a considered one: however, there is currently too little opportunity for personal reflection in some assemblies for these to meet requirements. The governors oversee very efficient financial management and, given the standards reached by pupils and the quality of education provided, the school is offering good value for money. It operates 'best value' principles very well in comparing its performance with that of similar schools and opting for reliable and adaptable contractors for the sixth-form project, rather than the cheapest.

Unit for physical disabilities

55. Leadership and management of the unit for pupils who have physical disabilities are excellent. A very strong initiative is the handbook of guidance for all teachers, which provides excellent information and help for their planning. Annual reviews are exemplary and contacts with parents and outside agencies are excellent.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,242,810	Balance from previous year	-13,000
Total expenditure	3,237,228	Balance carried forward to the next	-7,418
Expenditure per pupil	3,185		

Sixth form

56. The sixth form benefits from new and very effective leadership. The head of sixth form works well with the headteacher and other senior colleagues. Together they have analysed the needs for post-16 provision very well. The school has been particularly successful in acquiring funding for an entirely new sixth-form complex to offer high-quality facilities from Easter 2005 onwards. The head of sixth and sixth-form tutors have been very successful in helping students sustain a positive approach while working in poor, temporary accommodation. They are also providing far better monitoring and support of students' progress than is common, with very regular and constructive discussions of targets and how to meet them. These strategies form the foundation of the head of sixth form's clear and demanding expectations of students. He leads well by example, enjoying good relationships with students, being accessible and constructive as well as challenging them to maximise their academic potential and personal development. Management is already good and the sixth form has effective policies and systems. However, some changes, particularly about broadening the curriculum and monitoring teaching quality in lessons are overdue. They are being implemented, but their benefits are yet to be felt and come too late for current Year 13 students.

WORK-RELATED LEARNING

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are good opportunities for some pupils to take part in off-site learning.
- Pupils' awareness of work-related learning is underdeveloped in the everyday curriculum.

Commentary

57. Some elements of work-related learning are well planned and delivered by the school. All pupils in Year 10 take part in a week of work experience, and a small number of pupils in Years 10 and 11 follow a programme of extended work experience, as part of the school's alternative curriculum. A good range of placements includes motor vehicle, painting and decorating, and hairdressing and beauty services. Seven pupils in Year 11 and 30 in Year 10 attend a variety of work-related courses that include catering, construction, child development and motor vehicle studies at City of Bristol College one day per week. The pupils express positive attitudes and speak enthusiastically about how they are learning to develop skills in organising, dealing with adults and working as members of teams. In addition to managing the extended work experience programme for these pupils, the school ensures that they all have lessons in the mainstream curriculum and study a range of GCSE subjects.
58. The careers programme is provided through personal, social and health education, and includes valuable opportunities for pupils to create a CV, make applications for work experience placements and have mock interviews.

59. The school recognises the need for more options and greater flexibility in this area of the curriculum. There is a co-ordinator to oversee the development of work-related learning. A link has been set up with a local enterprise school, and plans for including more vocational courses in the curriculum are good.
60. At the time of the inspection, an audit to assess the contribution made by a wide range of subjects to the development of work-related skills was underway. Because the results are not yet available, pupils' awareness of the relevance of those skills is at the moment still undeveloped.

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

- Above-average results are sustained by very good teaching.
- Very good leadership and management have ensured that there is consistent planning to underpin teaching standards.
- Pupils achieve very well, because lessons extend them constantly and give them confidence to take on new challenges.
- Spelling and punctuation of average- and lower-attaining pupils are weak, because teaching is not consistently focused on these skills.

Commentary

61. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 fell in 2004. Nevertheless, in 2003 they were above average, both overall and for the proportion gaining at or above the expected level (level 5). They held this level from the previous year, and have improved faster than the national trend. In comparison with similar schools, the results demonstrated very good achievement. Girls did better than boys, reflecting the national picture, with girls further ahead of the national profile for their gender than boys were for theirs. Performance matched that in mathematics, and was better than that found in science.
62. GCSE results rose in 2004. In 2003, pupil performance in GCSE English was above the national average, both overall and for the proportion gaining higher grades (A* to C). The proportion of girls gaining higher grades was well above the national picture, while the proportion of boys gaining higher grades was less than that found for boys nationally. GCSE English literature results reflected a similar pattern, in relation to national trends and for the relative performance of boys and girls, except that boys matched the national picture for their gender. Again, performance has improved since the last inspection.
63. By Year 9, in work seen, standards are above average. Pupils answer questions in class and explain themselves clearly in response to very well focused teacher questioning. They read aloud well, with expression and enjoyment, whether dealing with difficult passages from Shakespeare or analysing fiction. One group studying *Treasure Island* explained thoughtfully and fluently the ways in which characters were established through description, dialogue and their effect on the reader. Boys' standards are below those of girls, reflecting the position found in previous national tests. Higher-attaining pupils compose sentences with assurance and variety, organising their thoughts into well-balanced paragraphs and making good use of computers to convey their ideas to the reader. Average-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs convey meaning well in writing, but their work is marred by inconsistent punctuation and a tendency to write words as they sound, rather than spelling correctly. By Year 11, standards are above average. Higher-attaining pupils gain sophisticated understanding of themes and morality in fiction, illustrating it with detailed reference to events and character. Well-set homework helps them to absorb and enjoy nineteenth century fiction, before analysing it in depth in class through lively discussions, well directed note taking activity and regular teacher checks on their understanding. Average-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs know how to use examination criteria skilfully to reflect upon and improve their writing, following aptly designed classroom exercises. Again, their work is spoiled by irregularity in spelling and punctuation, because

teaching of these skills is not yet consistent and focused on helping them deal with the problem successfully.

64. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers expect a lot from pupils. They seize their imagination with vigorous questioning and a variety of activities to draw out and build on their knowledge of what they read, to extend the knowledge they acquire in well-set homework assignments. Teaching underpins very good achievement, because teachers exploit pupils' curiosity and insist that they apply themselves without fail. Pupils with special educational needs benefit from additional staff in the classroom, who prompt pupils and give additional explanations, enabling them to achieve in line with their peers. Pupils receive sensitive and supportive comments on their strengths, but advice on how to improve varies widely in quality, and is not consistently followed up, to check that pupils put it into practice. In some lessons, pupils' independence of learning could be further developed by a wider range of activity, whereas this is a strength elsewhere.
65. Leadership and management are very good. The specialist staff are led well to collaborate as a team, establish common approaches in the classroom and develop and adapt new and improved materials. Following a period of high staff turnover, urgent steps have been taken to improve lesson planning. Content has also been changed to engage boys' interests more fully, in order to raise their levels of performance. The reasons for a previous fall in examination results at a time of rapid staff turnover have been analysed, and vigorous action taken to ensure consistently good or better teaching. As a result, standards have risen both in work seen and since the last inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

66. Standards of literacy across the curriculum are average. Pupils discuss and explore new ideas sensibly in science, English, art, geography, religious education and design and technology. In physical education, teachers draw attention to specialist vocabulary and ensure that pupils use it well to deepen their understanding of their experience in lessons. A well managed and attractively laid out library does much to promote reading for pleasure, with a lively series of special events, visits from other librarians and book sales. In English and history, reading for information and pleasure is developed by well-planned sessions that arouse pupil interest in the library. Higher-attaining pupils demonstrate lucidity and very good organisation in their writing, along with very high levels of command of logical paragraph structure, punctuation and spelling. In science, for example, they explore concepts thoughtfully and autonomously, in well-set written assignments. At the same time, spelling and punctuation of average- and lower-attaining pupils across subjects are very unreliable, because teachers lack strategies to help them tackle their problems. Frequently, these groups' overall performance is depressed across all subjects, because their ability to express their understanding and grasp of ideas in writing lets them down.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are well above average and reflect very good teaching and learning.
- Pupils' positive attitudes help them to achieve very well.
- As a result of very good leadership and management, there has been very good improvement in the subject over the last two years.

Commentary

67. After an improvement in 2003, when GCSE results in French were above average, there was a further improvement in 2004, when results were well above average. The difference between the performances of boys and girls in 2003 was much smaller than that which was found nationally, and in 2004 the boys' results were slightly better than those of the girls. Fourteen pupils in 2003 and nine in 2004 were entered for the examination in German and they too gained results well above average.
68. Standards seen in Years 7 to 9 are above average and represent very good achievement. Speaking skills are good and pupils readily take part in spontaneous conversations with their teachers. Knowledge of grammar is good, as is understanding of both spoken and written language. Pupils with special educational needs achieve very well and benefit from being very well taught in small groups. In Year 9, all pupils study a second foreign language, either German or Spanish, and make good progress.
69. Pupils continue to achieve very well in Years 10 and 11. As a result of their teachers' high expectations and of their own application, they reach standards that are well above average in both understanding and using the foreign language. They develop a thorough knowledge of a wide range of vocabulary and grammatical structures that enable them to produce accurate writing.
70. Teaching and learning throughout the department are very good. Sometimes they are excellent. Teachers plan their lessons very well and enable pupils to develop their language skills, through a wide range of appropriate activities that are very well matched to pupils' needs and thus sustain interest. Pupils are regularly challenged and they respond very positively. Homework, particularly that set for pupils in Year 7, is imaginative and motivates pupils by giving them an element of choice. Assessment is very effective in helping pupils to be aware of their level of performance and how to improve. Teachers contribute very effectively to the development of pupils' literacy skills, by encouraging them to think about language patterns. Very good support is provided by the learning support assistants and also by the foreign language assistant. Because of lack of regular access to the school's facilities, the use of ICT to develop language learning is underdeveloped.
71. Very good leadership and management have made a major contribution to the very good improvement since the previous inspection. The head of faculty, leading by example, has created a cohesive team of teachers over the last two years, and the fruits of their efforts are now seen in greatly improved standards in the classroom, as well as in GCSE results. There is a shared vision for the development of the subject that puts an emphasis on further improvement of teaching and learning, but teachers do not have enough opportunities to develop their work by observing one another.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The pupils achieve well and attain good standards, because they are well taught.
- Successful recruitment of qualified temporary teachers has enabled standards to be maintained, in spite of staffing problems.
- Unsatisfactory behaviour from a minority of pupils affects learning in some lessons.
- There has been good improvement since the previous inspection, because of good departmental leadership and management.

Commentary

72. National test results at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were above the national average. The pupils' improvement was well above average, compared with their results in national tests three years previously. 2004 results, when compared with provisional national figures, are average, and in line with those in similar schools. Over time, results have been improving at a substantially faster rate than that seen nationally.
73. GCSE results in 2003 were in line both with those for all schools and with those for similar schools. The pupils showed well above average improvement from their individual performance in the national tests at the end of Year 9. In 2004, GCSE results improved, as a result of a well-planned and implemented change to modular assessment, as opposed to a single examination at the end of the course. Results for 2004 were well above the national average for all schools and for similar schools, reflecting very good progress by individual pupils from their national test scores in Year 9.
74. Pupils' work, observed in lessons and seen in exercise books, reflects this strong position. Achievement is good, both in day-to-day lessons and over the longer term. On entry to the school in Year 7, attainment in recent years has been average or, in some years, slightly below average. By the time they reach Year 11, the pupils' work is above average. Currently, more than four in five are in line to achieve level 5 or higher at the end of Year 9, and over three in five are set for a grade C or better at GCSE in Year 11. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 9 produce very good examples of handling data. In Year 11, stronger mathematicians demonstrate the ability to manipulate quite complicated algebraic formulae. At all levels, handling of calculators and basic number is reasonably secure, but those who find mathematics most difficult tend to forget over time how to solve examples they have been able to cope with initially in class and homework.
75. During the last two years, the department has been affected by long-term staff illness, by the secondment of the head of department to the local education authority for a twelve-month period, and by two periods of maternity leave. It has, however, proved possible to recruit qualified graduate mathematicians to cover each of these vacancies, so that standards have been maintained and, to an extent, improved in spite of these difficulties.
76. The quality of teaching and learning is good throughout the main school. Teachers know their subject well, so that lessons are well informed. Lessons are usually well planned, following the three-part structure recommended by the National Numeracy Strategy, and incorporating a range of activities, so that the pupils' interest is aroused and maintained. In an excellent Year 11 lesson on Pythagoras' theorem, for example, the teacher had planned very effectively for the range of attainment, so that each pupil was challenged to do his or her best throughout.
77. The quality of teachers' marking varies, but overall assessment is good. Very good use is made of questions from past GCSE papers by some teachers of older pupils, so that they understand examination requirements clearly. In Years 7 to 9, new departmental arrangements for analysing test results are helping the pupils understand their own strengths and weaknesses. Pupils take half-termly tests set and marked to national standards, and record their grades on charts showing the national curriculum level they have attained. They are expected to identify and write down targets for improvement, which helps them to achieve better.
78. The behaviour and attitude of pupils to their mathematical studies varies from lesson to lesson, and is only satisfactory overall. In the majority of lessons, pupils benefit from good teaching and work hard, so that everyone in the class learns well. In some, however, the behaviour and attitudes of a minority have an adverse effect. In these lessons, an undercurrent of low-level disruption and a lack of application and attention make it more difficult both for the teacher and for those pupils who want to learn. During the inspection, this was true not only for the one unsatisfactory lesson observed, but also for others where teaching was good. Carefully prepared and well-delivered lessons were rendered less

effective. Most commonly, but not exclusively, it is teachers new to the school who are targeted in this way.

79. Good improvement since the previous inspection reflects good leadership and management. The department is well resourced and well organised. Schemes of work are under constant review, up to date and subject to continuing improvement. There is a substantial commitment to continuing professional development. Initial teacher training students and teachers new to the school and to the profession are very well supported by the deputy head of the department. Learning support assistants are enabled to improve their knowledge and understanding of mathematics in after-school lessons from the teachers. The team as a whole is cohesive and shares ideas.

Mathematics across the curriculum

80. Pupils' mathematical and numerical skills are, for the most part, above average, and enable them to gain access to the mathematics required for understanding other subjects. In design and technology, measuring and weighing skills are good. In physical education, GCSE students present the statistics associated with heart rate and blood flow well.
81. The contribution made to developing pupils' numerical skills across the curriculum is variable. Several departments have numeracy policies although, unusually, science does not. The majority of subjects, having benefited from in-service training two or three years ago, identify opportunities for dealing with numerical topics in their schemes of work. Even where there are no policies, good teachers provide good help and guidance. Examples of this are to be seen in science, where graphical work is neat and well done, and design and technology, where all pupils, especially the lower attaining, are well supported.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- High expectations, coupled with a brisk pace in most lessons observed, result in well focused and engaged pupils.
- Good relationships between staff and pupils create a positive learning environment and motivate the pupils to work hard.
- Good ICT resources enhance learning.
- Worksheets are used too heavily and are not consistently challenging to pupils.
- A consistent use of rewards and sanctions within the faculty is effective in managing behaviour.
- Too often feedback comments on marked work lack guidance to pupils as to how they may improve.
- Technicians and teaching assistants provide strong support within the faculty, so that learning opportunities are maximised.

Commentary

82. Pupils enter the school with below average attainment levels. Results at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were broadly in line with both the national average and the average for similar schools. Performance was not as good as in English or mathematics. 2004 science results were lower than those in 2003, but better than the English ones for 2004. The GCSE results in 2003 indicate that standards are above the national average and this was sustained in 2004.

83. Standards seen in the inspection are average for Year 9. Good teaching across Years 7 to 9, in conjunction with the revised schemes of work, is raising standards, and more pupils are above or at the expected level. The achievement of pupils by the end of Year 9 is good. Standards of work seen in Year 11 are above average and achievement at the end of Year 11 is good. This is an improving faculty, and interim school data suggests that GCSE results are set to rise.
84. Teaching and learning are good. In some lessons, teaching is very good and, in one instance, excellent. Relationships are positive, and the consistent demand for good behaviour creates a calm, purposeful learning environment. The teachers' good subject knowledge, skilful questioning and energetic delivery result in enjoyable, stimulating lessons, where the majority of pupils are challenged. Lessons are well structured and provide for an adequate range of learning styles and abilities but there is scope for greater challenge in some lessons, especially in the level of tasks in work sheets. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported. Starter work, such as listing the key words from the last lesson, is used effectively to engage pupils on arrival in the laboratory. Attention to pace and changes in activity ensure that time is well used, despite the length of the double period, which is currently under review. In the excellent lesson, the pace was fast and challenging and all pupils were extended. In lessons where teaching is less effective, the activities were too low level (for example, cutting and sticking, or filling in gaps on a worksheet) and there is a lack of real challenge. Group work at the front of the laboratory is used effectively for in-depth discussions. Pupils are encouraged to learn independently, and this was observed in a Year 7 Cognitive Acceleration through Science Education lesson, where pupils were discovering the relationships between variables. Very good ICT resources support pupils' learning. In one lesson observed, pupils researched information about planets using laptops with Internet connections. In another lesson, an ICT presentation set the scene for a stimulating discussion on the search for extra-terrestrial life. Pupils generally participate well and their very positive attitude to learning means they achieve well. Feedback comments on marked work are consistently encouraging but too often lack specific guidance so that pupils are not always clear how they can improve.
85. Leadership and management within the faculty are good. There is a team spirit and a strong sense of purpose. Revision of schemes of work for Years 7 to 9 has been completed. Entry level and separate sciences are taught, which meet the needs of lower- and higher-attaining pupils. There is an ongoing review of other areas of the curriculum, with the intention of extending the choice of courses on offer. The faculty's recent self-review involved a systematic monitoring of teaching and learning, and provided the opportunity to share good practice. There is good monitoring of pupils' progress towards module targets set, and further data analysis is currently being developed. The two-week timetable creates an uneven distribution of lessons for some year groups, which results in a lack of continuity.
86. Extra-curricular provision is excellent, with trips, clubs, Saturday morning master classes and science week. Science college status has provided the opportunity to involve primary schools and the community, enriched the faculty's curriculum and stimulated excitement for science.
87. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are in line with national averages, and achievement over Years 7 to 11 is good.
- Teaching is good.
- Leadership and management are good.
- The pupil-computer ratio is below national averages.

- There has been good improvement since the last inspection.
- Though some subjects make a good contribution to standards in ICT, the scope and quality of cross-curricular ICT is below national expectations.

Commentary

88. Pupils enter the school with ICT skills that are below average. By the end of Year 9, the teacher assessments show overall attainment as in line with national averages. The department has developed very good assessment procedures, and these ensure that the grades they award are secure.
89. It was not possible during the inspection to observe any Year 9 ICT lessons. From evidence gained through discussion with pupils and from an analysis of pupils' work, it is clear that they make good progress, acquiring the knowledge, understanding and skills set out in the National Curriculum for ICT. Standards are average. The achievement of pupils by Year 9 is good.
90. Pupils used a range of commercial software applications to create databases, publicity materials and spreadsheets in a project about a film festival aimed at 11 to 15 year-olds. In design and technology lessons they acquire a satisfactory understanding of ways in which ICT can be used to control things such as traffic lights or milling machines. In science, they learn about ways in which sensors can detect variations in temperature and light.
91. Results in the 2004 GCSE ICT short course examinations were similar to the 2003 results, approximately in line with national averages. Achievement by Year 11 is good, and pupils' projects are of average standards overall. Pupils produce spreadsheets for projects that model information for hypothetical commercial users and apply satisfactory ICT skills in producing brochures and other publicity materials. They are becoming increasingly self-critical, and annotate some of their work, pointing to ways in which they can improve it. Their awareness of the needs and tastes of their end users are weaker aspects of their work.
92. Teaching is overall good. Teachers plan and prepare well for lessons. Schemes of work are good and ensure that pupils make good progress. Assessment is good. Teachers have worked hard to produce exemplar material to make the marking of work in Years 7 to 9 secure. What they have produced is an example of good practice.
93. The best teaching features short and punchy introductions followed by a good variety of interesting activities. These lessons finish with sessions that reinforce learning and give pupils a clear idea of what they have achieved. Teachers engage lively classes well by varying their delivery, for example by adding little quizzes. In the best teaching, pupils are left in no doubt about how they are expected to behave. In the few lessons where teaching is less secure, pupils are not clear about how they should behave and fail to apply themselves, chatting to each other and making little progress. Activities lack variety, are poorly explained and do not grab attention. Teachers and learning support assistants help pupils with special educational needs to make good progress by giving good quality support and guidance.
94. The leadership and management of the subject are good. The acting head of department has taken on the responsibilities well and has ably continued the work to improve standards in the subject. Resources for the teaching of ICT courses are satisfactory. There is a stable network that is maintained by a highly competent network manager. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. A major improvement has been to commit resources so that all pupils in Years 10 and 11 follow an accredited course in ICT.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

95. The provision of ICT across the curriculum is barely satisfactory. Although a few subject areas, such as mathematics, science and design and technology, make a substantial contribution to the development of ICT skills, the lack of easy access to computers and other equipment around the school defeats the efforts of others. This lack of access is particularly

acute in music, the humanities subjects and art. The school's pupil-to-computer ratio is below the national average.

HUMANITIES

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement in the assessment tasks is good.
- The Year 7 humanities carousel reduces opportunities for continuity and progression.
- Most students in Year 11 gain accreditation in religious education.
- The use of ICT is raising achievement.
- There is very little study of Christianity in the school.
- There is little consistency across the department.

Commentary

96. Standards in Year 9 are satisfactory, which represents good achievement, given the pupils' attainment at the start of the course. Achievement is highest when pupils undertake independent research projects for assessment. They present their findings using ICT, and clearly demonstrate enthusiasm and interest. Knowledge and understanding of Christianity is limited, as there is little opportunity for the pupils to study it during this year. Where they do consider concepts, such as the existence of God, they demonstrate understanding, although this is not developed higher up the school. The humanities carousel results in one term of concentrated study and two terms without any religious education, which affects the achievement of students in Year 7. Not all pupils in the target support groups throughout the school receive religious education. In the main school, however, students in Year 8 and 9 develop a sound knowledge of the key features of Sikhism and Islam, and have good opportunities to consider what it means to be a Muslim or Sikh in Britain.
97. The first cohort of pupils sat the short course GCSE examination in 2004. Results were well below the national average for 2003 in the higher grades, but broadly average for grades A-G. Results were adversely affected by teacher absences. Most pupils are entered for the short course, although a minority in the target groups do not have this opportunity. Pupils do not study religious education in the term prior to the examination, and this has a detrimental effect on standards.
98. Standards in Year 11, when pupils are studying religious education, are average, and achievement is satisfactory. Where pupils are motivated and actively involved in the lesson, they are aware of the effects of belief on the lives of believers. Knowledge of Christianity is below average, as pupils do not study a module of Christian teaching. In some lessons, pupils are un-co-operative and do not use the time effectively to develop their own values and beliefs. These pupils are currently on track to underachieve in the examinations.
99. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. There are good opportunities for pupils to consider the consequences of having a religious belief, and time for them to express their own views, which teachers treat with respect. Teaching is less effective when teachers fail to ensure that the quality of pupils' responses is high, or there is not enough challenge in the tasks set. Pupils achieve most when they are expected to apply reason and analysis to what they learn, and methods are used to ensure that they do. Pupils are clearly stimulated by the use of ICT in lessons, and this encourages their involvement and participation.
100. The department has dynamic leadership, which has resulted in new assessment tasks to monitor achievement and new schemes of work. The emphasis on ICT and the very good

accommodation and display has raised the level of interest in religious education, and produces a stimulating environment in which to learn. Management of the department is satisfactory; however, there is a lack of consistency in lessons and resources, and there is little opportunity for teachers to exchange and view good practice. Non-specialist teachers in particular lack specialist support for their work, which results in inconsistent delivery of the Agreed Syllabus.

101. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. The use of ICT is now significant and assessment tasks have been introduced. Most pupils now have the opportunity for accreditation in religious education.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils learn well because they are actively involved in their lessons. Achievement is good as a result.
- The humanities carousel in Year 7 reduces opportunities for continuity and progression.
- There are good opportunities for research and independent work.
- Lesson planning ensures that students are clear about the objective of lessons and review what they have learned.
- Leadership has a clear focus on achievement and is introducing innovative practice.

Commentary

102. Standards in Year 9 are average, and progress is good, given pupils' standards on entry to the school. The development of skills of analysis and interpretation are restricted in Year 7 by the humanities carousel, which results in two terms without any history teaching. However, good teaching in Years 8 and 9 enables pupils to develop these skills. They learn well, because they are actively involved and tasks require them to think about the impact of what they study. Pupils are developing their skills of observation and interpretation of sources, and they have good opportunities for research. Information found is attractively presented as projects for assessment. Their knowledge of the period is compartmentalised, however, rather than analysed to view the 'bigger picture'. For example, study of the Black Death does not include work on the effects on British working practices and society.

103. Results in the 2004 GCSE examination were below the national average for the higher grades. The percentage of pupils achieving grades A* to G grades was broadly average. These results were adversely affected by long-term staff absences. Standards in current Year 11 are above average and achievement is good. The achievement of some pupils is affected by poor attitudes that result in them completing tasks with little thought and development. Their understanding is therefore limited. More often, however, pupils are well motivated, as in a Year 11 class analysing the problems faced by Mormon settlers in America, they achieved very well and were able to achieve a high level of understanding that will aid recall. The study of the local settlement, Pill, is enabling pupils to experience first hand investigation of their own environment and, with the support of teachers, they are achieving well.

104. The quality of teaching is good, and teachers are enthusiastic about their subject. Excellent teaching was observed. Lessons are well planned to involve pupils actively, so they learn well. Teachers ensure that pupils recognise the key points of the lessons, and these are

reviewed at the end, so that they can recognise their achievement. The use of an interactive white board in lessons has a significant impact on the groups where it is used. Pupils find it stimulating, and the pace of the lessons is high as a result.

105. The quality of leadership is very good. There is a clear focus on achievement and examples of innovative practice and current rates of improvement are rapid. Management arrangements are less effective, but still satisfactory, because responsibilities are divided. There is inconsistency in practice across the groups. Results are reviewed annually. There is regular assessment of work, but there is little whole-department monitoring of the progress of different groups during the year.
106. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. National Curriculum level assessments have been put in place, and pupils are being involved in their assessment. Standards are rising and ICT is now a feature of the department.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of both teaching and learning is good.
- Fieldwork provision is very good.
- Very good improvement has been made since the last inspection.
- Very good assessment procedures are used well to improve standards.
- Lack of access to computers inhibits learning.
- Non-specialist teaching in Year 7 restricts the acquisition of geographical knowledge and understanding.

Commentary

107. Teacher assessment for pupils at the end of Year 9 indicates that standards are below the national average, which is confirmed by inspection findings. Pupils enter school with varying levels of prior attainment in geography, with standards well below national expectations overall. By the end of Year 9, standards have been raised and achievement is good. In the GCSE examinations in 2004, the percentage of pupils gaining A* to C grades was close to the national average. By the end of Year 11, pupils achieve well, by improving from below-average attainment in Year 9 to obtain grades in line with the national average overall. Lesson observations, analysis of pupils' work and discussions with pupils confirm that standards are in line with the national average. In a Year 11 lesson observed, the pupils showed remarkable insight into the decision-making process for industrial location. They used statistical information on three different less economically developed countries to present the case for the country of their choice.
108. The quality of both teaching and learning is good overall. Lessons are well planned, so that work proceeds smoothly and logically, enabling the pupils to make good progress. Teachers use a wide range of resources to match the different learning styles of the pupils and help them to apply skills learnt in a variety of contexts. In the better lessons, teachers provide opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning, by selecting relevant information from texts and justifying their own point of view. However, there are occasions when too much teaching reduces the amount of learning taking place. Generally in Year 7, where teaching is carried out by non-specialists in the subject, the lack of subject-specific knowledge limits the challenge and expectations, especially of the higher-attaining pupils. The good relationship between staff and pupils creates an atmosphere in which good learning takes place, and the good display of work in classrooms enhances the learning environment.

Pupils generally achieve high productivity in each lesson, but in some cases there is limited recording of what has been learnt. Although teachers use digital projectors and videos, the lack of satisfactory access to computers hinders the use of ICT in the learning process.

109. Leadership and management are both very good. A clear vision and the development of a cohesive team enable the smooth running of the department. The provision of fieldwork opportunities for the pupils is a strength, and produces good case study reports for GCSE examinations. The Year 7 Street Project is a particularly good introduction to geographical skills. The subject leader's role in developing international links with Italy and Slovakia broadens the horizon of students and staff. In order to cater for the needs of higher-attaining and gifted and talented pupils, new extension textbooks have been acquired and are used well in lessons. The subject leader is a very good role model and encourages teachers to support each other in the quest to raise standards. Lessons and pupils' work are monitored on a regular basis, and small-group support classes for Years 8 and 9 have been introduced to help pupils with special educational needs.
110. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good; all issues have been addressed. In the last inspection, there were judged to be too many unsatisfactory lessons. The quality of teaching is now good overall, with no unsatisfactory lessons seen during the inspection. Schemes of work have been updated and new resources acquired. Very good systems for assessment and use of data to set targets have been introduced, and standards of attainment have improved significantly over the past three years. The introduction of a unit of study on the globalisation of fashion is an innovative attempt to raise the achievement of girls. The marking of pupils' work now includes levels attained, as well as constructive comments on how to improve. New staffing, with very good teaching for pupils taking GCSE, has contributed to rising standards and increased the number of candidates taking the subject in the sixth form, where recruitment has previously been low.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results have risen rapidly.
- Standards reached by current pupils are average in Years 7 to 9 and above average in Years 10 and 11.
- Teaching is good and leads to good achievement by pupils.
- A well-balanced curriculum is giving pupils in Years 7 to 9 a worthwhile technological experience.
- The subject is making a good contribution to pupils' social development.
- Leadership and management are good.
- The curriculum for pupils in Years 10 and 11 is narrow in scope.
- Opportunities for enriching the curriculum are limited.

Commentary

111. GCSE results in 2004 showed a significant increase on the average results gained in 2003. This improvement was reflected across all design and technology areas, and represents good achievement by pupils. The proportion of pupils gaining A* grades increased considerably. Teacher assessments for pupils in Year 9 fell to below average in 2004, a considerable drop from the 2003 figure, because revised assessment procedures yielded more accurate information about pupils' attainment and progress. The current assessment figures are in line with inspection findings for Year 9 pupils.
112. Pupils enter the school with below-average ability in design and technology and a wide variation in experience. Because of the structured way in which design skills are taught, standards among Year 9 pupils are average, and this represents good achievement. Improvements to the curriculum for Years 7 to 9 have broadened the range of topics and skills

that pupils experience. The inclusion of elements of control technology, electronics and computer-aided design and manufacturing now provide a worthwhile technological experience and are beginning to form the foundation for higher standards. The quality of work in Years 7 and 8, for example, is beginning to reflect the way teachers have co-ordinated their approach to teaching design skills and the way they use assessment procedures to guide pupils' learning. Pupils work well in a practical situation, and this contributes well to their personal development. In a very well taught Year 8 lesson, for example, pupils learnt to follow written instructions, work together in groups and consider the taste of unfamiliar ingredients as they worked under strict time limits. Many pupils, however, find difficulty in concentrating when writing evaluations of their work, limiting their capacity to work independently.

113. Pupils make good progress in Years 10 and 11, and most are working to above-average standards. Achievement continues to be good. Higher-attaining pupils are able to present their design ideas with good three-dimensional sketching, and can research and analyse a design task well. In resistant materials, although some practical skills lack refinement, most pupils turn their design ideas into successful practical outcomes. In food technology, there is clear evidence of progression in the quality of content and presentation of GCSE project folders. There is systematic coverage of all the examination assessment criteria, and this is of particular help to lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs. Pupils on the recently re-introduced textiles course are producing good experimentation with colour, texture, fabric and techniques. Lack of skill in working independently remains a hindrance for some pupils.
114. Teaching and learning are good overall, with some very good aspects. Good planning, very good use of interactive visual display technology and an imaginative technique for presenting information contributed to a very well taught Year 9 lesson that increased pupils' understanding of how and why we evaluate products. The lesson was conducted at a brisk pace, and pupils were fully involved in the activity. The best teaching was effective in managing potentially difficult behaviour through full involvement with the work. Where teaching was only satisfactory, it failed to overcome the low level disruption caused by the poor listening skills of some pupils.
115. Leadership and management are good. The head of faculty provides a clear direction for development, and has introduced many new procedures and policies to take the subject forward. A focus on managing pupils' behaviour and improving teaching have proved to be appropriate priorities for raising standards, and are now beginning to have an impact. Good management has steered the faculty through a difficult period. There is a very good understanding of the faculty's strengths and weaknesses, and clear plans to improve. The narrow curriculum for Years 10 and 11 will be broadened by the planned vocational courses. At present, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to enrich their understanding of technology in our everyday lives by participating in visits outside school.
116. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

117. **Drama** was inspected on a sample basis. Results in 2004 at GCSE rose sharply from the previous year, when they were average overall, and the proportion reaching higher grades (A* to C) was below average. Standards of work seen during the inspection were well above average by the end of Year 11. Pupils develop lively performances of contemporary plays, communicating their understanding through confident gesture and command of space, well inflected speech and well timed acting of climaxes in scenes. They benefit from very good

teaching, which enables them to improve by evaluating their own and each other's work in response to very well focused questioning. Levels of achievement are very high, because teaching is demanding, while drawing well on the enthusiasm pupils bring to their work.

Music

Provision in music is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Because of significant disruption to their learning, pupils' achievement over time has been unsatisfactory.
- Standards at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11 are below average.
- In the majority of lessons, teaching and learning are good and most pupils are now making good progress.
- Leadership is good and there is a clear vision for the development of music.
- The development plan lacks the detailed success criteria, costings and realistic timescales that would make it an effective management tool.
- There is insufficient use of ICT for pupils in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

118. Since the previous inspection, the school has experienced great difficulty in recruiting and retaining appropriately experienced teachers in the music department. There has been significant disruption to pupils' learning and a decline in the standards they have achieved. As a result, improvement since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory. The school has now established some stability in the staffing for music and standards, although still below average, are beginning to rise.
119. The school acknowledges that its assessment of the standards reached by pupils at the end of Year 9 in 2004 was too high. The standards seen in lessons indicate that, in recent years, pupils' progress in developing important musical skills such as internalisation of pulse and pattern, listening and understanding of the musical elements has been very limited. Standards in Year 9 are below average, and overall achievement over time is unsatisfactory. In Year 7, where teachers have had the opportunity to build effectively on pupils' skills when they enter the school, standards of composing and performing are at least as good as, and in some instances better, than those being reached by Year 9. In most lessons, pupils' attitudes are good. Occasional examples of off-task behaviour are dealt with effectively.
120. In 2003, the small number of pupils entering the GCSE examination in music all passed with A* to C grades. In 2004, this figure fell, with three out of five reaching A* to C grades. The number of pupils taking the exam has been too small to compare with national statistics. The numbers now following the GCSE course have risen, but there is a great variation in levels of ability within the groups, and overall attainment on entry to the course is below average. In Year 11, most pupils are reaching standards that are below average, and only a minority of higher-attaining pupils are beginning to reach standards in line with the course. Staffing difficulties in the previous academic year resulted in pupils starting coursework late, and many pupils still lack confidence in performing. Consequently, their achievement over time is unsatisfactory. The school is now working hard to address this situation. Generous staffing has enabled the Year 10 class to be taught in two ability groups for most of the week and, whenever possible, teachers offer additional support for pupils in Year 11.
121. Overall teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and high expectations of pupils. They use questions effectively, for example in consolidating pupils' knowledge of the musical elements, instruments of the orchestra and musical structures. They make good use of key vocabulary to support the development of pupils' literacy. Standards in literacy vary widely: higher-attaining pupils reach high levels of fluency in talking and writing about their work, but for the majority standards are below average. Teachers know their pupils well and provide good support for individuals in practical sessions. Because of the quality of teaching, most pupils in Years 7 to 11, including those with special educational needs and the gifted and talented, are making good progress in most lessons.

Only occasionally do pupils with special educational needs make less progress, when there are no adult helpers to support them in practical activities. Teachers assess their pupils' capabilities well and are beginning to encourage pupils to assess their own work. However, this is at an early stage of development and, with the exception of the highest attaining, pupils do not have a secure ability to know how well they are doing and how to improve.

122. Overall, leadership is good. The head of department has only recently taken up her appointment, but has set out a clear vision for the development of music in the school. She has rightly identified strengths and weaknesses and made accurate evaluations of the standards reached by pupils and their wide-ranging abilities, interests and aptitudes. There is a strong sense of teamwork in the department. Day-to-day management is satisfactory. Assessment procedures are at an early stage of development, and teachers have begun to plan revisions to the curriculum that will address weaknesses in learning and improve the quality of curricular provision across the school. However, there is still much work to do. The curriculum is not yet planned in sufficient detail and the development plan is not sufficiently detailed or focused on the key priorities for improvement. The teaching accommodation is adequate in size, but storage space for valuable instruments is limited, and overall the appearance of the accommodation and its organisation need some improvement for it to provide a truly attractive learning environment.
123. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are able to make some use of a small number of laptop computers to enhance their compositions, but the provision of ICT for pupils in Years 7 to 9 is unsatisfactory, and provision does not meet the requirements of the National Curriculum for music. The school has invested in new instrumental resources that make a positive contribution to pupils' progress in practical sessions but, throughout the school, pupils' progress in listening is depressed by the limited range and quality of resources and equipment. A team of seven peripatetic teachers from the local authority music service provide lessons on percussion, woodwind, brass, strings, voice and guitar to over ninety pupils. However, pupils' involvement in extra-curricular music making, once a strength of the school, had all but ceased in recent years. Levels of involvement are still low but additional activities such as choir and band are beginning to be re-established.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average.
- Leadership and management of the subject are good, and have secured good improvement since the previous inspection.
- Teaching and learning are good, and pupils achieve well as a result.
- Teachers do not always manage low-level misbehaviour consistently.
- There are not enough opportunities for pupils to experience the world of art at first hand in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

124. Standards of work at the end of Year 11 are above average. Pupils learn to work effectively in printmaking, sculpture and painting. Their composition work is strong, and they create beautiful paintings based on a broad variety of themes including birds and animals. Sculpture is often made on a large scale, and effectively explores shape and texture in three dimensions. Drawings from the life model are vigorous and lively. At the end of Year 9, standards are also above average. Pupils learn to draw with confidence, sketching rapidly to create interesting still-life drawings in chalk pastel. Their collages are often sensitively balanced, with harmonious colours and shapes carefully arranged. Three-dimensional work is

strong, and pupils work enthusiastically in clay and plaster. ICT is not used widely enough to fully extend all pupils' work.

125. Leadership and management are good, and have secured good improvement since the previous inspection. Standards in both Year 9 and Year 11 have risen, and results at GCSE have improved. In addition, the quality of teaching and learning is now good overall, sometimes very good and occasionally excellent.
126. Teaching and learning are good. In the best lessons, teaching methods are exciting and inspiring. For example, in one lesson, still-life groups were set out as if in a French café and lesson objectives were presented in the form of a printed menu. The teacher was dressed as a waiter, in waistcoat and bow tie. Pupils were excited and inspired, and excellent learning was the result. In addition, lessons often feature a wide range of materials on offer, and pupils can choose to paint or draw, or work in clay and wire. This leads to good levels of engagement with materials, and good learning is often the result. Because of the good teaching and learning, pupils make better gains than expected in skills, knowledge and understanding in the subject, considering their starting points when they join the school. Their achievement is good at the end of both Year 9 and Year 11.
127. Teachers do not always manage low-level misbehaviour consistently. A small number of pupils do not try as hard as they could in their lessons. They tend to work rather slowly, and do not always listen carefully enough to the teacher. Reminders to pay attention are not always effective enough, and take up too much of the teachers' time. As a result, the pace of the lesson slows, and learning overall is not as good as it could be. This is a reason why some lessons are satisfactory, rather than good.
128. There are not enough opportunities for pupils in Years 7 to 9 to experience the world of art at first hand; for example, by visiting galleries or taking part in workshops with professional artists. As a result, their research lacks a sense of real excitement.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement across Years 7 to 11 is good.
- Standards in GCSE have improved since the very poor results in 2003.
- Leadership is now very good.
- In games, pupils' understanding of principles of play in attack and defence is limited.

Commentary

129. Standards of work in Years 7 to 9 are generally good, when compared with age-related expectations, in a range of games and gymnastics. Pupils exhibit a variety of skills in football, badminton and hockey. While some lack controlled execution in competitive situations, others are at an advanced stage and perform confidently in a game context. A significant number of pupils know how to involve dynamic stretching as part of a warm up, and often lead their peers at the start of sessions. However, the understanding of principles of attack and defence across games does not always fully match the development of skills. In gymnastics, girls show a range of ideas, often quite ambitious, when creating group and paired balances as part of a sequence. In Year 8, the majority of girls are making good progress in

understanding how to choreograph a dance motif, but at this stage their clarity in use of gesture is limited. Achievement across Years 7 to 9 for pupils as a whole is good, and units of work allow pupils to pursue an activity to an appropriate depth.

130. Attainment in core physical education in Years 10 and 11 is generally good, with boys and girls making further progress in a range of games, as well as developing skills in a wider range of activities including indoor bowls, table tennis and trampolining. Pupils working towards GCSE achieve well in hockey and basketball, with some particularly impressive levels of individual performance in the former. Last year's results were in line with the national average for the subject, and this represents a significant improvement from the previous year's results, which had dipped from the normal high standard. Indications are that results will show even more improvement this year. The majority of pupils are making good progress. Standards of work in theory lessons are generally average or above, and in line with pupils' academic potential. The majority of Year 10 pupils show an appropriate knowledge of the nature and function of bones in the skeleton, and Year 11 pupils demonstrate informed insights into the use of drugs in sport.
131. Achievement and endeavour across Years 7 to 11 is good. A significant number of boys and girls develop and refine their skills in the strong extra-curricular sports programme. There are rich opportunities for a large number of pupils to engage in internal or external school competition. Clubs also exist for those pupils who wish only to participate and improve. Pupils with special educational needs are fully integrated and make good progress in specific activities. A girl with cerebral palsy was fully involved in creating a dance routine with other girls, making good progress.
132. Teaching and learning are both good overall, with a significant minority very good. Across Years 7 to 9, teaching is good where there are challenging objectives and teachers provide stimulating practical demonstrations and planned progressions at brisk pace, with a variety of tasks. In Year 11, teaching was very good when it set high expectations for pupils to present a topic for GCSE revision, having researched widely. The teacher was able to use the presentation as a catalyst to draw on pupils' previous learning, to establish what they need to know and understand for the forthcoming examination. Distinctive features of the teaching are teachers' good command of subject knowledge and the development of opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own and others' performances. Teachers offer good role models and often offer inspiration by demonstration to enhance learning.
133. Leadership and management of the department are very good. There is a reflective culture, and the desire of the teaching team to improve provision is seen in the way the team shares ideas on planning and evaluating units of work and individual lessons. Following a period of secondment, an experienced head of department has effected further recent improvement by developing assessment strategies, monitoring teaching to develop newly qualified staff and strengthening the extra-curricular programme.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Overall provision in citizenship is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Specific citizenship teaching by some teachers is good and pupils respond positively.
- Achievement across Years 7 to 11 is unsatisfactory.
- Pupils' attitudes towards the subject are often immature.
- Assessment and recording are underdeveloped.

Commentary

134. Across Years 7 to 11, knowledge and understanding about being informed citizens and the development of participation and responsible action are underdeveloped. Skills of enquiry

and communication are developing, due to pupils' experiences in some curricular areas such as religious education, but not all pupils have the same experience and opportunity across the curriculum. In Years 8 and 9, a significant number of pupils display immature attitudes towards important issues.

135. Action has been taken recently to improve the status of the subject, but provision currently lacks structure, continuity and identity. In Years 7 to 9, citizenship teaching involves a team of twelve teachers, some whom teach the subject reluctantly and many of whom have received no training in subject delivery. Staff do not always acknowledge the relevance of citizenship as a National Curriculum programme of study, so specific outcomes are not highlighted in appropriate lessons, and there are missed opportunities to develop knowledge and understanding of key issues. Specific citizenship lessons feature in the planned curriculum only once a fortnight; the infrequent lessons and the large size of the teaching team make continuity and consistency of experience difficult. In Years 10 and 11, citizenship is taught through a modular programme for half the year with religious education, and the GCSE short course in religious education has provided a better curricular structure than that used in the lower school. However, it is still too limited and achievement across Years 7 to 11 is unsatisfactory, with too many pupils failing to attach appropriate importance to the subject.
136. Some good teaching was seen, where lessons were well-planned and content challenged pupils' opinions. Teachers encouraged pupils to consider broader issues, such as global poverty and media influences, and questioned assumptions through whole-class activity and small-group intervention. Activities were well thought out and delivered at a good pace, and pupils responded positively to a variety of oral and written tasks. Where teaching was unsatisfactory, the learning was seriously undermined by the immature approach of a significant number of pupils, who deny the relevance and importance of the subject. No teaching was seen in Years 10 and 11, as the citizenship modules do not start until next term.
137. The Governing Body and senior management team have recognised the inadequacy of current arrangements and drawn up plans to remedy the situation. At present, leadership of the subject is good. The current subject leader has only been in post for one term, but has already produced a report that puts together a coherent programme running from Years 7 to 11. The absence to date of whole-school staff training has served to undermine the importance of the subject and its full integration into the life of the school. Pupils do not always understand when they are involved in citizenship work. Potential areas of good practice in other subject teaching have not been identified and included within the overall programme. Aspects such as the importance of the school council have not been fully recognised. There are no full schemes of work to underpin the programme, and there is no valid assessment system. Citizenship is reported on at the end of Year 9, but the reports relate more to explaining components of the course rather than the individual achievement of pupils within the subject.

Personal, social and health education

Provision in personal, social and health education is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Arrangements for the co-ordination of personal, social and health education are unsatisfactory.
- Lack of co-ordination between personal, social and health education and other related areas reduces its impact on pupils' attitudes and behaviour.
- Samples of work indicate below-average standards.
- Discussions with pupils reveal uncertainty about the content and purpose of personal, social and health education and reluctance on the part of some pupils to take it seriously.
- The school has recognised the need for personal, social and health education to take a more central role in developing pupils' social skills.
- Not enough progress has been made since the last inspection.

Commentary

138. At present, there is no designated co-ordinator for this area of the curriculum, and responsibility for managing the programme of study lies with individual year heads. The lack of central co-ordination is having a number of adverse effects on the quality of pupils' learning. Links with other curricular areas that contribute to the personal and social development of pupils are not adequately exploited. Opportunities are missed to reinforce work in personal, social and health education lessons by forging links with tutorial time, religious education, assembly themes and the teaching of citizenship. This lack of cohesion reduces the impact of teaching and leads to uncertainty in pupils' minds about the relevance of the topics to their everyday lives. The quality and impact of the programme are not monitored effectively; consequently personal, social and health education is not being fully used to support the hard work the school has put into establishing its value systems.
139. Personal, social and health education is taught to Years 7 to 10 for one lesson per fortnight and, in Year 11, by a series of special half-day sessions on designated topics. Since the last inspection, the amount of time for personal, social and health education has been increased by teaching religious education and citizenship separately. However, the two-week timetable cycle leaves a long gap between lessons which, together with the five half-day sessions for Year 11, creates a disjointed experience for pupils. Because all personal, social and health education teaching occurs in week one of the timetable, no direct teaching was observed during the week of the inspection. A scrutiny of work samples showed that pupils were not storing their work in an organised way and there was no evidence of the work being marked by teachers. Year 8 folders, for example, did not appear to have been added to since Year 7. Year 9 folders provided evidence that topics such as drugs, bereavement, personal relationships, sex education and respect for other peoples' opinions had been covered in some depth. The quality of notes, worksheets and individual writing, however, did not reflect care for, and interest in, the subject. Because the work relies largely on worksheets, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to express their views through extended writing. Where appropriate, the school makes good use of specialist agencies and organisations to assist with the teaching of drugs awareness and sex education.
140. During discussions with pupils, inspectors found that opinions on the effectiveness of personal, social and health education varied considerably. Some were vague about the topics covered and others said that it lacked interest or relevance. Where pupils thought that lessons were interesting, it was because tutors were enthusiastic.
141. The school has identified that personal, social and health education needs to have a more central role in developing pupils' social skills, and has drawn up plans for re-structuring this area of the curriculum, including timetable changes that will allow teaching to be done by a specialist team. There has been insufficient improvement since the last inspection.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 8 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 sixth form.

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
English Literature	9	88.9	99.4	11.1	44.9	60.0	85.5
Theatre Studies	4	100.0	99.6	50.0	42.8	90.0	85.1
Biology	7	100.0	96.6	28.6	40.0	71.4	79.3
Mathematics	9	100.0	96.8	33.3	56.6	75.6	89.5
Design and technology (product design)	4	100.0	97.8	0.0	35.0	75.0	77.9
Art and design	4	100.0	98.3	50.0	50.2	85.0	87.0
ICT (AVCE)	12	100.0	88.3	26.1	26.9	75.7	67.8
History	9	100.0	99.0	33.3	45.6	82.2	85.1

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

Overall, provision in English Literature is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching, based on very good subject knowledge, has improved standards in work seen.
- Good achievement is founded on very good student attitudes and commitment to work, which teachers exploit well.
- Good leadership and management deploy staff well to take advantage of their academic specialisms in class.
- Independent student thinking and research are constrained by limited opportunities for discussion in some lessons, and by a lack of relevant library provision.

Commentary

142. In 2004, results were similar to those of the previous year. In 2003, results in English literature were well below average overall, and for those reaching higher grades (A and B). Gender comparisons were not valid, given the small numbers.
143. Standards in work seen are average and represent a considerable improvement on previous examination results. By Year 12, higher-attaining students understand how writers use atmosphere, initial character presentation and narrative technique in novels to manipulate their readers' interest. For example, higher-attaining students studying the opening chapters of Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* arrived at a clear delineation between characters, raising questions of their own about the way the novelist involves the reader through the sense of

uncertainty projected in the narrative technique. Lower-attaining students' grasp of detail is

underdeveloped and hesitant, and they rarely develop understanding beyond a basic outline of superficial events and character descriptions.

144. By Year 13, standards are average, but have risen from the previous year. Students acquire a sound knowledge of the structure and concerns of twentieth century dramatic texts, through detailed work and discussion of extracts. They use the Internet well to extract, compare and contrast competing critical viewpoints, and make detailed handwritten annotations to augment and confirm their understanding of the material they extract.
145. Teachers draw on very good subject knowledge to brief students, and move their understanding forward beneficially through well-judged suggestion, questioning and prompts. Teachers encourage students to test hypotheses or to compare each others' ideas in order to consolidate and refine their understanding. They exploit the dynamics of small-group discussion well in Year 13, where student numbers are very small, while adapting methods astutely to involve students fully in the larger group in Year 12. However, teachers often spend too much time encouraging students to read aloud in lessons, curtailing the time available for them to discuss and examine their own reactions and ideas independently. In addition, limitations in the range and relevance of library stock mean that opportunities for independent study are restricted. Achievement is good overall, because teachers make sure that students grasp new ideas quickly and build on the excellent degree of commitment and enthusiasm they bring to their work.
146. Leadership and management of the subject are good, benefiting from new leadership that establishes good role models for the quality of teaching and exploits the individual academic strengths of specialist staff well. It follows that standards of work seen have risen, after a period in which performance had been below average, although standards are lower than those found at the time of the previous inspection. Numbers of students opting for the subject have also increased sharply.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

147. Standards of literacy across the subjects are average overall. Standards of discussion and the ability to give an articulate answer to teacher questioning are good. Students research competently by reading and by extracting information from the Internet. Standards of writing are average. Higher-attaining students take accurate notes and produce first-rate written assignments. Nevertheless, many average- and higher-attaining students are held back by problems of inconsistent spelling and punctuation, which persist from their earlier years in school.

MATHEMATICS

The inspection focus was on the A-level mathematics course. In addition, sampling of further mathematics in Year 12 revealed good teaching and good progress by students.

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Currently, lessons are well taught and students enjoy them.
- Examination results are below the national average, and lower than at the time of the previous inspection.
- Few students drop out from the course once they have embarked upon it.
- Year 13 students are having to repeat work not fully covered in Year 12.
- There are some shortcomings in the use of assessment to help students improve.

Commentary

148. A-level results were below the national average in 2002 and 2004, and well below in 2003. Results are carefully analysed by the department to identify areas for improvement. This analysis shows that, with the exception of one or two students who found themselves in unusually difficult personal circumstances, all achieved results commensurate with expectations for them. Students were also adversely affected by reduced timetabled teaching time in 2002 and staffing problems in 2003 and 2004. Overall, therefore, achievement in these years was satisfactory.
149. Hardly any students sit AS level examinations without progressing to A2 level, and so there are no reliable comparisons for these results with national figures. Failure and drop-out rates are low. Where they occur, it is usually because students are not successful in making the step up from relatively low GCSE standards to the more rigorous requirements of A level. The faculty recognises this, and is considering the introduction of better-structured induction and transition arrangements, with a view to reducing this element of failure. Currently, very good individual support is provided to students who are finding work difficult, by an excellent departmental support assistant, in addition to informal help and advice provided by teachers in their free periods, during break and after school.
150. The standard of work seen during the inspection was below national norms, but demonstrates sound achievement. Year 13 students demonstrate much improved algebraic skill, with the higher-attaining students showing a secure grasp of how to use calculus to find volumes of revolution. Those who also study physics have a very good understanding of Newton's laws of motion. Weaker students find the application of trigonometric identities more difficult, and sometimes cannot produce an appropriate diagram to enable them to solve practical examples in mechanics. Year 12 students, similarly, range in attainment from those who are finding the going hard to those who are likely to achieve the highest grades. They are taking their first steps towards understanding the integral calculus in pure mathematics and measures of location and dispersion in statistics.
151. The quality of learning and teaching is satisfactory. All of the advanced mathematics teaching is in the hands of the head and deputy head of department, both of whom are good, very knowledgeable and well-organised classroom practitioners. They were, however, absent from school for the bulk of last year, one on secondment to the local education authority and the other on maternity leave. The interim arrangements were of variable quality. Year 13 students describe some very weak teaching earlier in the academic year, the results of which are reflected in the work in their folders and in their initial results in AS level examinations. Later in the year, the school managed to appoint staff who were more experienced and skilful at teaching advanced level work, but this has still left a residue of ground to be covered again for all but the highest-attaining students this year.
152. In the classroom, lessons are now well planned and delivered with effective use of the overhead projector and a good variety of activities. For example, in a Year 13 mechanics lesson, students learned about the turning effect of forces acting at different points on a uniform lamina by hooking spring balances to different points on cardboard cut outs. Assessment of the students' work, whilst adequate, is recognised as being in need of improvement. The students mark almost all of their own work, and teachers then cover any areas of doubt or misunderstanding in class. This approach is sound and enables students to see and correct most of their errors, but it is not always the best approach for the lower-attaining students, who sometimes do not see what it is they do not understand or who may need extra help in organising their work. Not enough attention is currently being paid to short timed tests to build the students' confidence and improve their speed under examination conditions. Targets for improvement in each of the aspects of the subject are not yet clear enough, nor shared with the students as well as they should be.
153. Leadership and management of the mathematics department are satisfactory. The teachers are enthusiastic, and work together at planning lessons, so that most students enjoy mathematics. Improvement since the previous inspection is, however, unsatisfactory. The department has not yet managed to reach the higher standards achieved at that time since

the introduction of the new curriculum arrangements in 2000, which eradicated the consideration of course work. The teachers are acutely aware of shortcomings and are working hard on schemes of work and lesson plans to improve. In particular, they are looking forward to the installation of interactive whiteboards in each classroom, to provide opportunities for improved presentations of ideas.

Mathematics across the curriculum

154. In general, the students' skills in mathematics are satisfactory, and sufficient to support their study of other subject areas. In physics, the vast majority of students study mathematics at advanced level, and cope readily as, for example, when considering uniform accelerated motion. In design and technology, students make good use of a computer software package to produce accurate dimensioned drawing. The mathematics department makes no direct contribution to key skills development at sixth form level, beyond the AS, A2 and GCSE level courses referred to above.

SCIENCE

Biology was inspected in detail. Chemistry, physics and psychology were sampled, with one lesson observed in each subject. Teaching was good or better in the sampled subjects. In psychology, students were developing their research methodology, and the excellent teaching ensured that students achieved very well.

BIOLOGY

Provision in biology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good relationships between staff and students result in relaxed but focused lessons, where individual needs are met.
- Teachers' very good subject knowledge ensures that students are confident in their learning and understanding.
- Very good ICT resources are used effectively to support learning.
- Independent learning skills are extended by very good fieldwork.
- Marked work does not always provide clear feedback that informs the student how they can improve.

Commentary

155. A level biology results were well above the national average in 2003. In 2004, results were in line with the national average. The small cohort size makes comparisons unreliable. In 2003 and 2004, girls performed better than boys. No national comparison with the school's AS results is made, because of cohort size. AS results in 2004 were lower than those in 2003, but this reflects the fact that two students withdrew. In work seen during the inspection, standards are average and achievement is good.
156. Teaching and learning are good. Students have very positive attitudes to their work, and take advantage of opportunities offered. The tutorial style adopted is well suited to the small group size. Teachers' expert questioning challenges students' understanding and helps to consolidate learning. In one lesson, where the teaching was very good, ICT was used to show a variety of slides illustrating structures of the alimentary canal. Students gained confidence in identifying the different structures and predicting the region of origin. Copies of the slides were provided for the students to view on their home computers. In another lesson, independent learning skills were demonstrated when students gave presentations to the class on topics relating to the human skeleton, and responded to searching questioning. Feedback

on assessed work seen provides encouragement, but sometimes lacks sufficient detail to explain to the student how the standard could be raised.

157. Leadership and management are good. There is a clear focus on students' needs, with the current choice of module having been made by the students themselves. Schemes of work are being developed. Training is in place to ensure marking of coursework is consistent. The annual field course, organised and taught by the faculty, is tailored to the individual needs and abilities of the students, and provides very good learning opportunities. The faculty has not yet met the target set within the science college bid to raise the number of students studying biology, nor put in place the taster sessions planned.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There has been very good improvement since the last inspection, as there is now a good range of ICT courses in the sixth form.
- Teaching is good.
- Achievement is satisfactory.
- Standards by Year 13 are below average.

Commentary

158. The department offers a good range of courses for the sixth form. Some Year 12 students are taking an AS in ICT, and some students are resitting their ICT GCSE examinations. In both Years 12 and 13, students are following an AVCE ICT course.
159. In recent years, attainment has been higher than national averages. Standards in the present Year 13 AVCE course are below average, but an analysis of assessment data supplied by the school shows that the achievement of these students is satisfactory.
160. Students achieve satisfactorily in their coursework. They are acquiring satisfactory desktop publishing skills, learning a range of software functions that they go on to use in their work. They acquire knowledge and understanding of issues around the preparation and delivery of ICT training.
161. The Year 12 students who are resitting GCSE are making good progress, for example in developing presentations. They have sound technical skills for this work, but do not all apply these well to create slides that will attract the interest of their intended audience.
162. Year 12 AS students are achieving well, for example using advanced mail merge functions that they will need for their projects.
163. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers prepare for lessons well and planning is good. Question and answer techniques are used well to draw out responses and to give ownership to learning. Questioning can sometimes be a difficult process, as a number of students lack confidence in their ability to offer lucid and well-considered responses. Teachers therefore often use material that is close to students' experience, in order to build learning on what they already know. Teachers also use encouragement well to build confidence. They offer good levels of support and guidance as they work around the room, to promote individual learning. There is good variety to lessons, including one instance of role play that gave a dramatic and memorable start to a lesson. There was scope for this to have been extended to create dialogue between students and their notional end users. Teachers offer good levels of challenge and use homework appropriately to reinforce learning.

164. The leadership and management of ICT in the sixth form are good. The acting head of department leads her team well. She is an effective teacher and manager who leads by example. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection, when no ICT courses were offered in the sixth form. The recent drop in standards reflects changes in the prior attainment of students starting the course.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

165. The provision of ICT across the curriculum in the sixth form is satisfactory. A number of subjects make good use of ICT to aid learning, including design and technology, mathematics and science. Students studying independently currently have to find a computer where they can throughout the school, sometimes taking up a spare place in a classroom while a lesson is going on. Plans for the new sixth form block include a study area that is well equipped with networked computers.

HUMANITIES

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement at A level is good.
- The numbers of students following the course are rising.
- Tutorial support for students' coursework is very good.
- The students' reading programme is too narrow and is not monitored.
- Students' skills in organisation and note taking are underdeveloped.

Commentary

166. Results in the 2004 A level examination are in line with the national average and represent good achievement. Most pupils achieved a grade higher than their prior attainment at GCSE would suggest. Standards in class in Year 13 are below average; however, the individual guidance students receive for their coursework is very good and the school's expectation that these students will also achieve a higher level by the end of the course is well founded. Standards in Year 12 are average and the numbers of students following the course are rising. Higher-attaining students write fluently, and identify a variety of viewpoints in response to essay questions. They review information and are prepared to make their own judgements with supporting evidence. Lower-attaining students include much relevant detail, but do not always relate this to the title, or reach clear conclusions. Students are gaining confidence, and the supportive questioning of teachers is enabling them to achieve a secure understanding of the period they are studying.
167. The quality of teaching and learning is good, and teachers use a variety of methods to involve students in analysing the issues discussed. Students work well together and relationships are good. The individual tutorials support students and enable teachers to monitor individuals accurately. Teachers have high expectations and their subject expertise enables them to provide clear explanations. Students have insufficient textbooks for private study, which reduces the opportunities for them to prepare for their lessons and means they become dependent upon teachers for their information. The monitoring of students' wider reading or

notes to ensure that these support their studies is evident in some lessons but not in others. They use a variety of methods for writing notes and, although some are well organised and thorough, the work of other students will not assist recall and review.

168. The department is very well led, and good support has enabled students to achieve well in exams, despite changes in staffing last year. Results are reviewed, and students are encouraged to assess their own learning in order to gain greater understanding of the requirements of the exam board. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Standards are rising and students are achieving well.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology; product design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in AS and A2 examinations have been good.
- Overall, standards for current students are above average.
- Good teaching, underpinned by good subject knowledge, leads to good achievement by students.
- Information technology is used very effectively.
- Students have very positive views about the course.
- Students' progress is monitored well.
- Opportunities for students to enrich their learning outside the classroom are limited.

Commentary

169. All four students completing the A2 course in 2004 exceeded their target grades, and comparative figures show that their achievement was higher than in many other subjects. AS level results for 2004 were equally positive, and indicate that all students achieved well in comparison with their prior attainment.
170. Standards for current Year 12 and 13 students, taken overall, are above average. Year 12 students are working at above average-standards. They can represent design ideas quickly and clearly with good three-dimensional sketching, as was clearly demonstrated during an activity that required them to generate and develop problem-solving ideas whilst working to time limits. Students displayed imagination and creativity in their proposed solutions. They are able to combine these hand methods with computer-generated graphics to compile good-quality folios of work. Most students have stored the bulk of their design work in electronic form, and their understanding and use of graphics software is producing some impressive results.
171. Standards of Year 13 work seen during the inspection vary. Not all design folders are sufficiently well organised for this stage of the course, and some students have not recorded developmental work in enough detail. Practical projects have been carefully chosen and represent suitable challenges for students' interests and abilities, and have provided good opportunities for research and task analysis.
172. Teaching is good, and sometimes very good. Lessons are planned thoroughly within a carefully organised course outline; consequently, students learn well, and in a structured way. Their understanding of technical terminology, materials and processes develops alongside practical skills and experience. Year 13 students, for example, developed a better understanding of manufacturing techniques, such as die-casting, sintering, injection moulding and fabricating, during a well-conducted discussion that linked the topic with their own practical work. Teachers make very effective use of ICT in lessons. Skilful use of interactive whiteboard technology enlivened the teaching of measuring with vernier callipers, and the clarity of display enabled students to grasp the importance of accurate measurement rapidly and move on to dimension working drawings using computers. Students' work is assessed

thoroughly and weekly targets set, so all students make good progress, although some Year 13 students are unsure of their target grades. Students are very positive about the benefits of the course and the information on their progress they receive.

173. The course is led and managed well and, despite accommodation difficulties that require some groups to share workshop space, available resources are well deployed. There are few opportunities for students to develop their understanding of how design and technology influences society at large by participating in activities outside the formal curriculum. Progress since the last inspection has been good.
174. **VGCSE engineering** is a recently introduced vocationally oriented subject offered as a one-year course in Year 12. No previous results are available to provide comparisons, but, for this first group of students, teaching is good and standards are above average. The course is proving valuable for a group of students for whom a full AS or A2 course would not be appropriate.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Theatre studies

Overall, provision in theatre studies is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Through very good teaching, students build a thorough grasp of dramatic literature and approaches to performance.
- Standards of work seen are better than those in the most recent examination results.
- Very good student achievement builds on excellent attitudes to work and intensive intellectual and physical involvement in high quality acting exercises.
- Opportunities for students to experience professional theatre are limited.

Commentary

175. Results in theatre studies in 2003 were well above average, both overall and for the proportion reaching higher grades (A and B). They rose significantly from the previous year, and are better than those reported at the time of the previous inspection. The latest results came at a time of staff turnover.
176. Standards are well above average in work seen. In Year 12, students acquire both a detailed literary knowledge and an awareness of the performance demands of the plays they study. One group grasped fully the importance of character, symbol and the dramatic use of monologue in Lorca's *Blood Wedding*, following crisp, dynamic teacher questioning based on very good subject knowledge. In Year 13, students defined and explained a wide range of different staging techniques, having been very well led by teacher briefings and shrewdly designed activities to focus and build further their shared comprehension. For example, one group working on Jim Cartwright's play *Road* applied these perceptively in workshop improvisation sessions. Their understanding was reinforced by very thorough initial teacher preparation, as well as a full evaluation of what they had learned, structured into a very well balanced lesson plan.
177. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers deploy very high levels of academic authority and first-rate knowledge of theatrical presentation techniques to extend and consolidate students' knowledge of dramatic texts and related approaches to performance. They engage them in a stimulating range of applied acting activities, lively discussions and methods to challenge and help them share ideas. Teachers identify strengths thoughtfully and comment constructively as students act, based on a very rapid assessment of their needs. This combination leads to very good achievement, because

students are constantly engaged in the sort of enjoyable activity that arouses their curiosity but stimulates their intellect. While students participate in intensive and well-organised experiences in class, other opportunities are restricted. They have little experience of professional theatre and little input from visiting professionals or companies to extend the range of performances seen. However, this has been identified in future plans as an area for improvement. Achievement is very good, because students bring excellent attitudes to their work, and benefit from very high teacher expectations of their intellectual commitment and demands for their physical involvement in high quality acting exercises.

178. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. Lesson planning has recently been formalised and upgraded. Deployment of staff academic specialisms has been sharpened, while systems to check how well students are doing have been enhanced. The combination of these new measures is sustaining very good achievement in work seen.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good, and students achieve well as a result.
- Leadership and management are good, and have secured good improvement since the previous inspection.
- Three-dimensional work is sensitive and thoughtful.
- There are not enough opportunities for students to experience the world of art at first hand.

Commentary

179. Teaching and learning are good. Strengths of the teaching include thorough planning, and the provision of a good range of materials and processes. Teachers are also enthusiastic and have good subject knowledge. These factors produce good interest levels in students, who respond well and try hard in lessons, especially in their practical work. At times, however, discussions are led a little too much by the teacher, and students are not always active enough themselves. This is a reason why some lessons are good, rather than very good. As a result of this good teaching and learning, students in Years 12 and 13 achieve well, and most do better than expected considering their results in their GCSE examinations.
180. Leadership and management are good. Since the previous inspection, the quality of teaching and learning and students' achievement have improved, and both are now good. In addition, results have improved, and were well above average in 2003 at A level, although numbers taking the examination in 2004 were too small to reliably compare results with those gained nationally. Improvement since the previous inspection is therefore good.
181. Three-dimensional work is a strength of the course. Students show sensitivity and thoughtfulness in their use of materials in their sculpture. For example, they use the warm textures of sand to contrast with the cool smooth surface of plaster, and highlight the difference between light and shade. Standards of work in Years 12 and 13 are average. In Year 12, ICT is used imaginatively to strip away the colour from photographs of local scenes, greatly increasing their visual impact. Students' colour work is strong, and the use of low relief in their paintings accentuates the bright colours. In Year 13, small card models are very lively, and explore ideas for sculptures very effectively, with deftly twisting forms and planes creating interesting shapes. Colour work continues to be strong, and multiple portraits use a warm or cool palette to create different moods. However, students' notes in their sketchbooks are not always extensive or detailed enough, and their research lacks real depth as a result.
182. There are not enough opportunities for students to study the world of art at first hand as a group; for example on arranged visits to art galleries or studios. Because they cannot discuss

shared experiences among themselves, they are sometimes rather hesitant in expressing their opinions in class.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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