

INSPECTION REPORT

St. PHILOMENA'S SCHOOL

Carshalton, Surrey

LEA area: Sutton

Unique reference number: 103013

Headteacher: Mrs J Johnson

Lead inspector: Mr R Hancock

Dates of inspection: 21 – 24 February 2005

Inspection number: 268929

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:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Female
Number on roll:	1182
School address:	Pound Street Carshalton Surrey
Postcode:	SM5 3PS
Telephone number:	020 86422025
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Sister Mary Damian FC
Date of previous inspection:	February 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

A technology college since September 1997, St Philomena's is a voluntary aided Catholic comprehensive school for girls in the 11 to 18 age range. There are 1182 students on roll, making it larger than most secondary schools. There are 265 students in the sixth form. The school draws its students from many parts of south-west London. Most students are classified as white British but there are also a number of students from different ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students whose first language is believed not to be English is higher than in most schools but none is at an early stage of language acquisition and most are very proficient users of English. Students are from a wide variety of social backgrounds but the proportion of families eligible for free school meals, 4.7 per cent, is below the national average. There are four Traveller students on the roll. The percentage of students identified as having special educational needs, including statements, is 5.6 per cent which is well below the national average. Most of these students have difficulties with literacy and communication. The school's intake represents a wide spread of ability but the overall standard of students when they start the school is above average. As part of its technology college initiative, the school works closely with four junior schools. It is an e-Learning Foundation school. The 'Investors in People' status was redesignated in 2003 when the school also received an award from the DfES for its high position in the 'value added' Key Stage 3-4 league tables. It has consistently received a School Achievement Award.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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14871	B Buteux	Team inspector	English (post 16) Drama Theatre studies (post 16)
17015	L Denholm	Team inspector	Psychology (post 16)
1249	J Edge	Team inspector	Work-related learning Biology (post 16)
4426	T Fitchett	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
24127	J Kidd	Team inspector	History
21899	G Lawson	Team inspector	Special educational needs
31821	B McCann	Team inspector	Physical education
32422	J Moxon	Team inspector	English
33160	N Power	Team inspector	Geography
18846	P Priest	Team inspector	Music Citizenship
4474	I Punter	Team inspector	Design and technology
20533	D Rogers	Team inspector	Art and design
18886	F Ruggiero	Team inspector	Mathematics
6432	M Sewter	Team inspector	Science
10053	J Simms	Team inspector	Art and design (post 16) English as an additional language
17522	N Stiles	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
2183	P Thompson	Team inspector	Information and Communications technology (ICT)

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7-10
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS	11-14
Standards achieved in subjects and courses	
Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	14-20
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	21-24
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES	25-51
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4	
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	52

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The school provides a very good education for its students which in many respects is excellent. The school has some areas of outstanding practice. Standards on entry to the school are above average and the school successfully builds on this advantage so that the overall achievement of students is good by the end of Year 9 and is very good by the end of Year 11. The quality of teaching and learning is good throughout the school and in many lessons it is very good and sometimes excellent. The behaviour of students is excellent and their attitudes to learning and to school generally are very positive. The headteacher provides excellent and inspiring leadership. The school is very well managed and leadership is very good throughout. The school enjoys very strong support from its governing body. It gives very good value for money. Sixth form provision is good and is cost-effective.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Standards are well above average in the main school and students' achievement is very good.
- High quality leadership promotes a very strong positive ethos.
- Students have very positive attitudes and their behaviour is excellent.
- Students' personal development is of high quality.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good but some lessons lack challenge.
- All students, including those with special educational needs, receive excellent care and support.
- A broad and rich curriculum serves the needs of all students but ICT is not used enough in some subjects.
- Links with parents are excellent.
- The school's best practice in assessment is not sufficiently widespread.
- Students' progress in citizenship is not systematically assessed and reported to parents.

The school has made very good progress since it was last inspected in February 1999. All the key issues identified at that time have been fully addressed. Some of the areas which were considered to be weaknesses then are now strengths of the school, such as provision for special educational needs. Sixth form provision has also been improved. The quality of teaching and learning is now better and is resulting in higher standards and greater achievement. The headteacher provides excellent leadership and the school has a clear plan for raising attainment even higher and for further improving the very good quality of education it already provides.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2000	2002	2003	2003
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	A	A	A	A*
Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	-	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.

A indicates that students' results are very high in comparison with similar schools and are within the top five per cent of such schools across the country.*

Standards in Year 9 are well above national expectations for the age group and given that standards on entry to the school are above average, students' achievement is good. Standards in Year 11 exceed expectations for the age group and are well above average. **Achievement by the end of Year 11 is very good.** The trend of improvement in results in national tests at the end of Year 9 is above the national trend as is the trend of improvement in GCSE examination results. Standards in National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science are well above

average. Overall GCSE examination results are also well above average. The achievement of students with special educational needs is very good. Higher attainers often do very well but would benefit from more challenge in some lessons.

The school provides very well for the development of students' personal qualities. **Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent.** Attendance rates are very good throughout the school and students' attitudes to learning and to all aspects of school life are very positive. Behaviour is excellent.

The overall quality of education provided by the school is very good. The quality of teaching and learning is good, and often very good, throughout the school. Teachers' subject knowledge is advanced, their lesson planning is of a high order and most have a deep understanding of how students best learn. In a minority of lessons tasks lack challenge and do not tax the students enough. Assessment practice is mostly good but is underdeveloped in some departments. The curriculum is very good in the main school because it caters so well for the different needs of students and is enriched by a very wide range of extra-curricular activities. Care, guidance and support are excellent. There are also excellent links with parents and very good links with the wider community and other schools and colleges.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of leadership and management in the school is very good. The headteacher provides excellent leadership by challenging herself and all who make up the school community to have the highest expectations and to reach the best possible standards in all that they do. Consequently, other senior leaders, teachers and all other members of staff also set high standards and provide effective role models for students. Management is very good because the school is very well organised, development planning for further improvement is effective, most key policies are in place and evaluation is well developed. Monitoring is mostly very effective but is not strong enough throughout the school to help ensure that best practice in assessment has been consolidated in the classroom and that all lessons have sufficient levels of challenge. The governing body has a good knowledge of the school's strengths and is aware that the school needs to continue to strive for the highest standards in all areas of its work. It provides very good support by bringing its experience and expertise to bear in helping the school to be safe, financially stable and very effective.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Links with parents are excellent. Parents strongly support the school and all that it stands for. They like the fact that their children enjoy attending school and the high expectations the school has of them. They also appreciate the quality of teaching and the commitment of staff. They have no major concerns. The vast majority of students enjoy school. They are particularly appreciative of the quality of teaching and of the fact that teachers care about them and show kindness towards them.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Ensure that the monitoring of teaching and learning encourages the spread of the best practice in the school.
- Ensure that the use of assessment is consistent and that it underpins a drive to raise standards even further.

and to meet statutory requirements:

- Ensure that students' work in citizenship is assessed and that standards are reported to parents.
- Ensure that students make effective use of ICT in art.

THE SIXTH FORM

OVERALL EVALUATION

The sixth form provides a good education for its students. Although examination results for 2004 have still to be validated, the indications are that students' performance at A/S, A-level and on vocational courses is above average and that their achievement is good. Most current work shows signs of further improvement. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good with much that is very good and sometimes excellent. Leadership is excellent and management is very good because the ethos of the sixth form is so strong; needs have been carefully analysed and a clear path for improvement has been very clearly identified. Overall attendance is very good, as is punctuality. Not subsidised by the main school, the sixth form is cost-effective. Overall improvement since the last inspection has been good.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The strong positive ethos which encourages students to strive for high standards.
- Target-setting and the close monitoring of students' progress.
- High levels of recruitment and good retention rates on courses
- Excellent provision in psychology.
- The large number of courses leading to an A-level qualification.
- Students have good opportunities to take part in extra-curricular activities.

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 is very good . Standards are above average and the achievement of students is very good. Teaching and learning are of high quality and the subject is led and managed excellently.
Mathematics	Provision in mathematics is very good . A-level standards are well above average and achievement is good. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Leadership is very good and management is effective.
Science	Provision in biology is good . Standards are above average and students achieve well. Teaching is good and students study hard and learn well. Leadership is satisfactory and the subject is well managed.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Provision in product design in design and technology is very good . The subject is very well taught. Achievement is very good and the subject is very well led and managed.
Information and communication technology (ICT)	Provision in ICT is very good . Standards are well above average. Teaching and learning are good overall and sometimes very good. Achievement is good and for some students very good. The examination results are amongst the highest in the school. Leadership and management are both very good.

Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Provision in physical education is good . Standards are average and the achievement of students is very good. The subject is very well taught and leadership and management are very good.
Visual and performing arts	Provision in art is good . Standards are above average and achievement is good. The quality of teaching and learning is good. The subject is well led and management is satisfactory. Provision in theatre studies is very good . Standards are well above average and the achievement of students is very good. The quality of teaching and learning is also very good. Leadership and management are excellent.
Humanities	Provision in history is good . Standards are close to the national average and the quality of teaching and learning is good. The subject is very well led and managed. Provision in psychology is excellent . The quality of teaching and learning is excellent, standards are well above average, achievement is very good and the subject is very well led and managed.

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

Teachers are very effective in providing information for students about their achievement in subjects and what they have to do to improve. There is also a very well developed awareness of how well students are achieving in the sixth form as a whole because their overall progress is very closely monitored. They are given very good advice when applying for entrance to university and when considering other further education possibilities, as well as good careers guidance. Effective courses in personal, social and health education [PSHE] provide further support for students' personal development. Students with special educational needs receive very good support.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership is excellent and management is very good. A very positive atmosphere pervades the sixth form. There are high expectations and a strong momentum for further improvement. Students are very well prepared for post -16 study because they receive good impartial advice on the range of settings available to them, the content of courses and university entrance and career requirements. The strong ethos that has been established enables students to thrive. Attendance, punctuality, homework, and overall progress are all carefully monitored. Appropriate support for students is always made available. The curriculum is regularly reviewed and comprises a very large number of well-managed courses leading to an A-level qualification as well as a number of well organised vocational courses. The sixth form area benefits from spacious teaching rooms, a common room and a useful resources centre but computers are not plentiful.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students' views on the sixth form are very positive. The overwhelming majority are very happy with what the sixth form offers, especially in terms of the quality of its teaching, the support they receive and the wide range of activities they can take part in.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Standards on entry are above average but by the end of Year 9 standards are well above average and the achievement of students is good. Most students go on to make very good progress in Years 10 and 11 and, overall, standards by the end of Year 11 are well above average, often high, and achievement is very good. Standards on A-level courses are mostly above average and, given their wide range of starting points in the sixth form, students' overall achievement is good. The school's overall performance continues to improve, both in National Curriculum tests and public examinations.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards by the end of Years 9 and 11 are well above average.
- The achievement of students is good by the end of Year 9 and very good by the end of Year 11.
- Standards are above average in the sixth form and achievement is good.
- Standards of reading, writing, and speaking and listening are high.
- Students with special educational needs make good progress and achieve very well.

Commentary

1. Results in National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science in 2003, the latest year for which validated results are available, were well above average in comparison with all schools. Results in English, mathematics and science were well above average. When the results are compared with those of similar schools it is clear that the progress made by students is very good as by the end of Year 9 overall performance in tests places the school in the top five per cent of schools for the extent of progress made by students between the end of Year 6 and Year 9. The trend of improvement is above the national trend. Test results for 2004 have still to be validated but the indications are that the school has maintained this performance. The standard of current work reflects the same picture. Standards in other subjects are above expectations for the age group.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2003		
Standards in:	School results	National results
English	39.1 (36.6)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	39.3 (37.6)	35.4 (34.7)
science	36.3 (34.8)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 184 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

2. The 2003 GCSE examination results show that the proportion of students achieving five or more grades at A*-C was well above average in relation to all schools, maintaining its position over time. However, in terms of the proportion of students achieving five or more grades at A*-G, the school's performance was even more successful as these were its best ever results and placed the school in the top five per cent of all schools nationally. The school was also successful in maintaining its high overall performance. On the basis of students' prior attainment, results were well above average for the proportion of students achieving five or more grades at A*-C, not quite as high as in the previous three years, but for the proportion achieving five or more grades at A* - G the school was placed in the top five per cent of schools. The school's overall examination results also placed it in the top five per cent of schools based on students' prior attainment.

Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2003		
	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	85 (84)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	99 (98)	91(91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (98)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	48.4 (45.9)	34.7 (34.8)

There were 178 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. No marked changes are indicated by the GCSE examination results for 2004, showing that standards have been largely maintained and that the overall performance of students based on their prior attainment continues to place the school in the top five per cent of schools. The trend of improvement remains above the national trend. Current standards are well above average in the majority of subjects and achievement is very good for most students by the end of Year 11.
4. Students with special educational needs achieve very well, many reaching standards by Year 11 that are similar to those of other students. They enter the school with levels of attainment that are below age-related expectations in literacy and numeracy. However, by Year 9 most of these students have made very good gains in acquiring reading, spelling, literacy and numeracy skills. By the time they leave school, they have also acquired a good range of GCSE qualifications and other accreditation and continue their education either in the sixth form or at college. Students at the later stages of English language acquisition make good progress, in line with others in the school. Students who are more able, together with those who are talented and gifted, mostly thrive on the high levels of challenge, especially in subjects such as English and mathematics, although they are not challenged enough in some lessons in some subjects. Detailed records show that children of Traveller families also achieve as well as other groups.
5. Standards of literacy and numeracy are high and provide a firm foundation for the development of students' achievement which is also helped, not only by good teaching, but by the school's very well developed systems for tracking and monitoring their progress. The school sets appropriate overall targets for students to achieve and has a good degree of success in meeting them.

Sixth form

6. The levels of attainment when students enter the sixth form are very mixed but are slightly above average. At the time of the last inspection standards were viewed as a weakness. Since that time they have been improving and results for 2004 indicate that standards are now above average. The standard of current work in most subjects is also at above average levels. A-level results in English and mathematics were above average in 2004. The standard of current work in English is above average and students' achievement is very good. It is well above average in mathematics and achievement is good. Results in science subjects have not shown the same consistency. They have been above average in physics, but below average in chemistry and have been average in biology. Achievement is more mixed in science subjects and this is still reflected in some variations in the quality of current work. Students' attainment is well above average in psychology where their achievement is high. They are recording similar results in sociology and sports studies. Results in history have been below the national average. The most successful results in vocational courses have been reached in health and social care and in ICT where standards have been well above average. Five students in the sixth form have been identified as having special educational needs. They are all making good progress and achieving well.

Standards in GCE A/AS level and VCE examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2003		
	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	96.6 (96.4)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	41.9 (47.3)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per pupil	256.7 (252.7)	258.2 (263.3)

There were 124 students in the year group.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Students' behaviour is excellent. Students' attitudes, attendance and punctuality are all very good. Their personal development is excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The excellent behaviour around the school and in the classroom is a major strength.
- Students show great interest in school life and the range of activities available.
- Attitudes around the school and in the classroom are very good.
- Relationships across the school are excellent.
- The contribution that the very good attendance and punctuality makes has a positive impact on students' achievement.
- Students are enterprising and willing to take responsibility.

Commentary

7. Students' behaviour is excellent and has a significant effect on their achievement in the classroom. Their behaviour around the school and outside it frequently receives very positive comments from parents as well as the general public. Students are polite and courteous and are very considerate to others, including visitors to the school. This is a part of the general ethos of the school and the very high standard of behaviour is maintained in the classroom, at registration and during assemblies. The respect shown by students to visitors and other adults around the school is outstanding, as demonstrated in an assembly for students in Year 7 when they listened quietly and courteously to the visiting speakers. Exclusions are few, and although incidents of bullying occur from time to time, the school handles them effectively. On occasions, the school has resorted to 'restorative justice' when dealing with instances of bullying. Any form of harassment is dealt with firmly.

Ethnic background of pupils

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

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
817	14	0
63	2	0
6	2	0
23	1	0
30	1	0
35	1	0
27	4	0

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

8. Students' attitudes are very good. Their positive attitudes in the classroom raise the quality of lessons and add value to their achievement and learning. Students arrive promptly for lessons and settle down quickly to the work in hand in a mature and responsible manner. The strong, positive ethos of the school underpins the attitudes of the students. Excellent relationships prevail across the school and the students' very good attitudes are a part of their response to them.
9. The range of activities provided by the school enriches students' education. They are confident, have very good self-esteem, and are not afraid to make their views known on a range of matters, such as school uniform and the state of the toilets. Their confidence is boosted by opportunities to show enterprise and take responsibility, such as the mentoring scheme for students in Year 11 that many students readily volunteer for. The school council is an active body and students are vocal at meetings and readily express their views. Students have shown great concern for the victims of major world disasters and have worked imaginatively and indefatigably to raise very large sums of money to aid relief work. The majority of students are confident, articulate, aware and caring young people. They are very reflective and have a very strong moral sense. They enjoy the arts. Their personal development is excellent.
10. Students' attendance is very good, being well above the national average, and unauthorised absences are rare. The school monitors attendance closely and the few students who have attendance problems are well supported with the help of the education welfare service. Students arrive promptly at school and lateness to school and to lessons is not an issue.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	5.7	School data	0.2
National data	6.9	National data	1.1

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

Sixth form

11. The behaviour of students is excellent. Students' attitudes, attendance and punctuality are very good.
12. In this respect students are very good role models for the rest of the school. Their attitudes are very good in the classroom and have a very positive impact on learning and achievement. Students' interest in school life and their involvement in its activities are excellent. Across the school many students take part in school activities with enthusiasm, including sports and school productions. Students' willingness to be enterprising and take responsibility is a strength. Attendance and punctuality are very good and the school promotes good attendance very well. Sixth form students are very balanced and mature, showing a proper sense of their own worth combined with a good awareness of others.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The overall quality of education provided by the school is very good. The curriculum is very good. The quality of teaching and learning is good, and often very good, throughout the school. The school's support for all its students is also of a very good quality.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall throughout the school. There is much that is very good and a significant degree which is excellent. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen although the pace of a minority of lessons was too slow. Assessment is well used to help students

know what they have to do to improve although there are some variations in quality from department to department.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching and learning is very good or excellent in about a half of all lessons.
- Almost all lessons have clearly stated aims and a strong sense of purpose.
- Teaching makes very good use of questioning to develop students' learning.
- Assessment is effectively used in most subjects to identify what students have achieved and what they still have to learn.
- There is insufficient challenge in a minority of lessons.

Commentary

13. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good and much is very good or excellent. Teaching shows a good awareness of students' starting points and what they need to go on to achieve. Lessons are very well planned. They have clear objectives which are usually made known to students so that they have a firm idea of the purpose of each lesson. Many lessons begin with what are known as 'starter' activities designed to arrest students' attention and to motivate them. Many of these are used very successfully, especially in Years 7 to 9 but some go on for too long and lose impact. Learning is well developed in the main part of lessons and is matched to the needs of all students, including those with a particular aptitude for the subject as well as those with special educational needs. Teachers' explanations are clear, guidance is always forthcoming, and students are skilfully questioned so that teachers can know what they have learned and what they have still to learn. Most lessons capture students' interest and teachers give very good presentations, often making use of ICT. In just over one in ten lessons the pace is too slow and students, especially those who are higher attainers, do not get enough challenge.
14. Teachers set appropriate homework on a regular basis. Tasks reinforce students' learning and sometimes extend their knowledge and deepen their understanding. The diligence of students in undertaking homework contributes significantly to their levels of achievement. Their impeccable behaviour and their very positive approach to learning are also major factors enabling teachers to help them reach their potential. Despite the absence of an overall school policy outlining how students' high levels of literacy skills can be fully exploited, most teachers make good use of them by setting challenging writing assignments and demanding reading tasks. Lessons also make very good use of the highly developed speaking and listening skills of students. ICT is used effectively by most teachers. In some subjects its use is uneven but taken as a whole the application of ICT is helping students to derive more from their learning. Teachers have a good rapport with their students, praise them regularly and are genuinely supportive of them. Parents and students speak very well of their expertise and commitment.
15. Students with special educational needs are taught very well. Subject teachers liaise effectively with teaching assistants, learning support assistants, special needs teachers and year leaders to plan and structure the work of students with a wide range of learning difficulties. Teachers have very high expectations of students' behaviour and attainment and their planning is thorough. Excellent relationships formed through very careful induction and mentoring procedures, encourage students to succeed and they work very hard to overcome difficulties. Consequently, students obtain good results in the national examinations sometimes exceeding their predicted grades.
16. Students have very positive attitudes to learning. They learn well when teachers make good use of interactive whiteboards to illustrate and clarify ideas effectively and also when they have opportunities to apply their own computing skills. They can study independently but also enjoy working together, often producing some effective solutions to problems as a result of their collaboration. They learn about presentation skills when they have opportunities to feed their ideas back to one another. Role play is a very well used device for helping students to

understand situations and points of view. The quality of teaching and learning is consistent and promotes very good achievement. The monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is now well established and is helping this process. The school is in a strong position to identify the very best teaching and to replicate good practice. Key words and concepts are highlighted and prove a useful aid to learning.

17. Assessment and recording are well developed to enable teachers to track the progress of individual students. Comments on marked work are almost always encouraging and are also effective in making it clear to students exactly what they need to do to improve their work. However, this aspect of assessment is inconsistent and the best practice is not yet firmly established in all subjects.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 186 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
17 (9%)	73 (39%)	70 (38%)	26 (14 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0%)	0 (0 %)

Sixth form

18. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good, often very good, and sometimes excellent. Lessons in which the quality of teaching and learning is good or very good, amounting to about three-quarters of all the observations in the sixth form, are very well planned, build effectively on students’ earlier learning, make use of teachers’ specialised knowledge of their subject to set high levels of challenge, and use assessment precisely to help students develop further learning. The quality of teaching and learning was of a high order in one in five lessons. In these lessons students were deeply involved in their learning as a direct result of powerful teaching which ensured that they were relentlessly challenged. In most lessons students learn very well because learning is very well organised, activities have good levels of interest and students respond very well and work hard. However, occasionally, in about one in five lessons, the pace of learning drops, often because teaching does not create enough opportunities for students to show initiative and to think for themselves.

The curriculum

The curriculum is very good in the main school. It is good in the sixth form. Opportunities for enrichment and the range of extra-curricular activities are excellent throughout the school. Accommodation is satisfactory. Resources are good. The provision for students with special educational needs is very good. Students leave Year 11 with very good accreditation and have clear ideas of future pathways, many continuing their education in the sixth form or at college.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A strong sense of moral and spiritual purpose permeates the curriculum.
- The school’s cultural, sporting and arts provision is outstanding.
- Developing vocational provision and work based programmes in Year 10 and 11 reinforces the school’s commitment to educational inclusion.
- Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is grounded in the strong implementation of the national Key Stage 3 strategy in core subjects and in ICT.
- Provision for students with special educational needs is very effective.
- The sixth form offers a good mix of vocational and academic programmes.

Commentary

19. Save for the provision of ICT in art and assessment practice in citizenship, the school meets all statutory requirements. Underpinned by a strong purposeful ethos, it provides a very good curriculum in Years 7 to 11 and a good curriculum in the sixth form, preparing students well for

the next stage of education. The curriculum supports the aims of the school and meets the requirements of its technology college status although the requirement that mechanical control should be studied in design and technology in Years 7 to 9 is not met.

20. The school has a clear vision for the development of the curriculum across the 14 to 19 age range. In Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form there is a breadth of general and specialist courses, coherently planned to promote a 14 to 19 curriculum which meets learners' needs and aspirations, while a very distinctive programme of curriculum enhancement in Years 7 to 9 offers topics ranging from astronomy to Welsh. The subsequent development of vocational GCSE courses in Years 10 and 11 has provided clear pathways in 14 -19 provision. These courses are taken by an increasing number of students of all abilities and are proving to be very popular. The timetable works effectively but the use of some single forty five minute lessons is limited because the time is too short for the complex learning that teachers require in some lessons.
21. Highly relevant vocational courses and enhancement activities build on the interests and aptitudes of students with special educational needs alongside the full range of GCSE examination courses. The flexibility of provision enables a wide range of learning activities that are coherently and precisely matched to students' priority needs and interests. A good example of this is the provision of the Award Scheme Development and Accredited Network (ASDAN) Transition Challenge, alongside other courses, to enable one student to be able to continue her studies in her future placement. Students with special educational needs have very good opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy through intensive group work, speech and language support and accelerated reading, spelling and literacy courses. They also have opportunities to follow specialist courses in ICT to enable them to improve their typing, reading, spelling and literacy skills. The school provides them with laptop computers to manage work at home and in the classroom. Staff have a very good understanding of their needs and meet them with sensitivity and skill. Setting arrangements in Years 7 to 9 help the school offer a curriculum tailored to ability and social competence, with small sets where necessary allowing close personal attention to those most in need. ICT is used to develop learning in most subjects.
22. Social and personal education takes place in a context which stresses the values such as moral integrity and loving personal relationships. The provision for personal, social and health education lessons across the school is good. Students are encouraged, both in those lessons and in other curriculum areas, to discuss a variety of ethical, moral and social issues. There is a strong contribution to the programme from external agencies and partners. The health authority contributes to guidance on health and personal issues, with contributions also from business and other partners on personal finance and careers, including useful talks to sixth form students from outside speakers on student loans and finance. The school has close links with the Connexions service, ensuring that students are well informed about opportunities in further education and local employment, helped, too, by the re-introduction of work experience into Year 10 as part of the third phase technology college status.
23. Provision for the social, moral, cultural and spiritual development of students is excellent in all respects. The school's provision for their spiritual development is outstanding. The opportunities for worship and for spiritual reflection are to be found not just in assemblies and religious services but also in registration periods, where students pray with their teachers. The chapel provides a welcoming space for quiet and respectful meditation. Many lessons, too, contribute to the sense of wonder and awe. The school also provides outstandingly well for students' moral and social development. Both inside lessons and in their wider experience of school life, students are helped to become responsible and moral members of society. The whole-hearted response to the recent tsunami disaster indicates the strength of students' understanding of what they can do to make the world a better place. Teachers in every subject are aware of the need to provide social and moral leadership.

24. The school provides excellent cultural provision in lessons such as science, where the achievements of women and of black scientists are celebrated; geography, where problems in less developed countries are sensitively explored; and food technology, which introduces students to practices in various cultures. A very good programme of trips and visits outside school also encourages students to understand cultures different from their own, and this focus on the outside world is also a feature of the library, which makes a point of displaying books from other cultures.
25. The range of activities in physical education is broad and balanced, and a swimming pool on site adds yet another dimension to physical education and sport. There is very wide participation and a high success rate in sports teams and clubs. Arts provision is very strong and students have many opportunities to take part in drama productions and musical activities.
26. Staff are well qualified and dedicated. Technical and administrative support is good, while administrative staff present a strong and caring face to parents and the community. The grounds and accommodation are distinctive because of their beauty and historical associations but in terms of fitness for purpose as a school they are – at best - satisfactory. There are steep stairs, narrow corridors, a warren of small rooms all of which present difficulties of access and movement for students with physical disabilities. The school is aware of health and safety requirements and has sought extra funding wherever possible to improve facilities. It recognises that the premises are not suitable for students with physical difficulties and has made efforts to enhance access and to ensure that students are fully included in all aspects of school life. The school has also renovated toilet and changing facilities and there is a rolling programme of further renovation. Resources are well used and the interactive whiteboards in particular are making a positive impact on students' learning. The school has recognised the need to develop the library and resources centre to further independent learning and has a detailed plan for its expansion.

Sixth form

27. The sixth form curriculum is good because it serves the needs and interests of students from a range of ability. There are currently twenty-five subjects available at A/S Level, and twenty-three at A-level, including AVCE single and double award programmes - in addition to the Early Years certificate and diploma courses. Provision includes further mathematics, technology, music, A/S photography, psychology, general studies and general RE - with opportunities enhanced through joint working with partner schools. The introduction of CACHE and other post 16 vocational courses is an effective and integral part of the drive to improve recruitment and retention in sixth form. At present, provision for recreational physical education is limited. The resources centre is well used but greater access to computers would enhance learning.

Care, guidance and support

The provision of support, advice and guidance based on monitoring is excellent. The provision of care, welfare, health and safety for students and the involvement of students through seeking, valuing and acting on their views are very good. Students receive their education in a very supportive and caring environment.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The excellent monitoring of academic and personal development is a major strength.
- Students have a good and trusting relationship with more than one adult in the school.
- Students have excellent access to well-informed support advice and guidance.
- The school takes particular care in ensuring that students work in a healthy and very safe environment.

- The induction arrangements for students, with the involvement of students from Year 11, from primary school are very good.
- The support the school offers to children from Traveller families is a strength.

Commentary

28. The school pays particular attention to students' care, welfare, health and safety and this is an excellent feature of its work. Much of the school is housed in old buildings which have potential difficulties for those working in them but the governing body has been punctilious in ensuring that very good attention is paid to all aspects of health and safety. Appropriate child protection procedures are also in place and the deputy headteacher ensures that all members of staff are reminded regularly of them.
29. The quality of the support, advice and guidance provided to students is a particular strength of the school. Monitoring systems are very well developed. There is close liaison between academic departments and form tutors, heads of year and the deputy headteacher. Each individual student is well known by form tutors and their progress is monitored closely and regularly with the active involvement of parents. Both students and parents are aware of targets and these are discussed at parent evenings at which the student is also present. The result is that staff have an excellent relationship with students and a comprehensive understanding of their achievement and development. The school nurse runs a 'drop in' centre for students on a weekly basis. The school gives particularly good support to students from Traveller families. The school works closely with the Traveller education service and has been successful in helping these students reach their full potential wherever possible.
30. The school involves the students very well in its work. It seeks, values and often acts on their views. Regular school council meetings discuss items involving school life and students' views are considered seriously. Following concerns raised by students, the toilets have been refurbished, the school is making changes to the uniform and is seeking students' views on a different school bag, the present one being a bone of contention with many students. Students are also asked to give their opinions on such matters as what makes for effective teaching and learning, as part of the school's wish to improve provision in all aspects of its work.
31. Induction arrangements for primary school students are very good. Not only are there the usual procedures with visits from the head of Year 7 and visits from students in Year 6 to St Philomena's, but also students from Year 11 act as mentors to new students during their first year. This is much appreciated by the new students, as they feel comfortable in approaching one of their peers if they have concerns. Furthermore, a group of gifted and talented students is planning to deliver lessons to students in Year 6 as a part of the school's technology college programme, a very innovative feature.

Sixth form

32. Sixth form students receive the same level of advice, support and guidance based on the same high quality of monitoring as those in the main school. The very good links between tutors, parents and students ensure that students are well informed on their progress they are making and made aware of their targets. This is true at a pastoral and at an academic level. Some sixth form students, not following the UCAS route, felt that they were not as well advised. However, the head of careers and the heads of sixth form go out of their way to ensure, with the help of the Connexions service, that they do not miss out on proper careers advice. Through a sixth form council the school seeks sixth form students' views. Evidence indicates that that the school acts on these, where appropriate.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has excellent links with the parents. The links with the community are very good as are the school's links with other schools and colleges.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The links with parents are a particular strength of the school.
- The provision of information about the school and about students' standards and progress is excellent.
- The excellent way that the school handles problems raised by parents.
- There are very good induction processes for new students.

Commentary

33. The school's links with parents are excellent because it goes out of its way to ensure that parents become involved with all aspects of school life. Parents respond very well to this approach. For example, a very high percentage of parents completed the inspection questionnaires in which they evaluated the school's provision. The St. Philomena's Association raises a large sum of money annually, usually around £23,000, which has a positive impact on the education of students. They have donated £100,000 towards the new school hall and they are now raising money to refurbish the library. Partly as a result of the Association's activities, the school has very close links with the community. This is because much of the money is raised through sales which are run several times a year. Parents said that if they raise concerns with the school they are dealt with efficiently, promptly and courteously.
34. The range of information that the school makes available to parents is excellent. Apart from the well-presented and detailed prospectus and governors' annual report, the school keeps parents well informed through its regular and extremely informative newsletters. Information about students' attainment and progress comes through the regular reporting procedure and very good students' annual reports. A small number of parents of students in Year 7 expressed concern that the first time that they could discuss their child's progress came in April. However, inspectors felt that this was acceptable as they have a consultation evening in the autumn term after students have been allocated to their teaching groups. Parents have the opportunity to make appointments with the form tutor, head of year or heads of department at any time during the year if they have concerns.
35. Parents make a very valuable contribution to students' education both at home and at school. Parents, teachers and students are all involved with students' targets and discussions with parents show that they are involved with students' homework and are encouraged by the school to involve themselves in their children's education.
36. The school has very good links with other schools through the induction process as well as through the school's technology college status. A number of proposals are about to come on stream, such as one to train gifted and talented students to deliver lessons. The school has very good links with other colleges which directly benefit those students not transferring to the school's sixth form.
37. Other links with the community and parents are developed as part of the school's technology college status. The school arranges for basic ICT courses to take place for parents, and organisations such as the Scouts and Mencap make use of the school's facilities to arrange their own courses. The school is seeking to develop community use and is currently exploring the possibility of joint ICT training in co-operation with the local NHS trust. Many of the arrangements are in the early stages of development, but they have the potential to become

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The headteacher provides excellent leadership. Other senior leaders, and staff as a whole, also provide very good leadership. Management is very effective overall. The governing body provides very good support for the school. Financial management is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher and key staff share high aspirations and common aims.
- There is much very effective monitoring in the school but some is not yet strong enough.
- Planning is very well developed and evaluation is advanced.
- Policies and procedures are clear, up to date and effectively implemented.
- The governing body provides very strong support.

Commentary

38. The quality of leadership and management was good at the time of the last inspection but it has improved since that time and is now very good. The headteacher shows excellent leadership by working to create a very strong ethos of achievement and expecting the very highest levels of performance by staff and students. To help realise this aspiration she ensures that staff and the governing body can interpret data and understand whole school performance and outcomes. Her understanding of the nature of the learning process is inspiring. Management has not yet ensured that students' work is systematically assessed in citizenship or that their learning is broadened in art through the use of ICT.
39. Ambitious targets are set for all major areas of the school's work and most areas of significance are well monitored. Especially good use is made of expertise both within the school and externally to verify achievement and to improve it further. Senior staff and all with major responsibilities provide very good leadership by working very well together to sustain a strong ethos in which students thrive. The headteacher and senior leaders undertake frequent and regular reviews of students' progress and respond by encouraging evident achievement and intervening appropriately to improve any perceived under-performance.
40. The school is very well managed. Effective monitoring of the school's performance is extensive but is not yet strong enough to ensure that the best practice in teaching and learning becomes firmly embedded in all lessons and that best practice in assessment is consistently found in all departments. An attractive prospectus does justice to the high ideals of the school, sets out clear aims and objectives, and provides helpful practical and statutory information for prospective parents. The staff handbook is a very significant document which characterises the high quality the school strives to achieve. Not only does it embody a very clear and well stated vision to guide staff but it is also underpinned with very clear and comprehensive planning guidelines as well as key practical details. It is of a piece as the vision and its expression are seen as one whole with the student at the centre. There is very clear internal plan and a detailed calendar of events. The school runs very well. There is strong evidence of great attention to detail; for instance the Traveller Education Service reports that there are excellent links between the school admissions secretary and the service and that all letters are copied to the team to ensure that messages and appointments are not missed due to lack of literacy skills or unreliable postal service.
41. The school improvement planning process is advanced. The process is consultative, careful account is taken of costings and departmental plans complement the whole school plan. However, some departmental plans are more carefully costed than others, and some plans are more detailed than others when identifying success criteria. The governors' school improvement plan identifies a clear focus which is appropriate for its aims and right for the school's stage of development. Challenging targets are set in the school improvement plan

which are met and often exceeded. The review process is also advanced, with all departments undertaking self-evaluation to a common format.

42. The special educational needs co-ordinator has a clear and exciting vision for the development of the area and with the support of the designated governor for special educational needs and the headteacher, ensures that this is shared by all staff. She manages the provision for students with special educational needs very well by strong and effective review and evaluation procedures. She monitors pupils' performance data carefully and supports her team in its effective use. Leadership of special educational needs is very good.
43. The governing body is very effective. At the time of the last inspection governors had a clear strategic view and a shared understanding of the school's needs and the priorities for development. These qualities have been maintained. The governing body has also ensured that all the key issues identified at the time of the last inspection have been addressed. It has extensive and varied expertise and a great deal of experience in governorship. It has helped the school to achieve and maintain specialist status. It has assisted the school greatly in developing its buildings and facilities and ensuring that it provides a safe environment for all who work there. It is directly involved in school improvement planning by helping to draw up action plans. The current annual governors' report to parents is very impressive, containing a wealth of well presented information, including detailed accounts of professional development and the progress of students with special educational needs, as well as meeting statutory requirements. The headteacher presents very full and detailed reports to the governing body and feels well challenged by governors. The governing body has been instrumental in helping the school to cost its priorities, adequately fund agreed initiatives, and maintain financial probity. It has ensured that the school meets most, although not all, of its statutory requirements in relation to the curriculum.
44. The school has established clear and effective plans for implementing initiatives in connection with its technology status and has been successful in extending its funding into a third phase. Documentation is clear, well organised, and very well presented. The school is extremely popular with parents and is over-subscribed. Performance management is well embedded. The school's self-review exercise, undertaken in conjunction with the LEA, was undertaken with care and rigour. Students believe the school is well run. Evaluations by assessors for 'Investors in People' identified the school's leadership as one of its strengths.
45. Clear detailed and carefully costed plans guide development in a very well organised environment. The governing body plays an active role in setting and monitoring the school budget. The school deploys its budget well. It has robust systems in place for tracking expenditure. Auditors' reports confirm the effectiveness of its practices, and any points of detail that reports identify for improvement are rigorously followed up. The school seeks to get value for money from its services. It routinely compares key aspects of expenditure with those in other schools. The unit costs are in the lower quartile students in schools of this nature and location. Given that the students' achievement is very good by the time they leave the school and that they make very good progress from Year 7 through to Year 11 and that their personal development is excellent, the school is giving very good value for money.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	446947	Balance from previous year	276398
Total expenditure	4188465	Balance carried forward to the next	534880
Expenditure per pupil	3555		

The balance includes earmarked funding of £434,880 for capital projects for works schedule to be carried out in the current financial year, and a contingency of £100,000 from delegated revenue.

46. A 'change management team' has been very effective in addressing work-load issues and its progress has been successfully reported on by external agencies. The team also has further potential to address other issues effectively. There is a very strong emphasis on self-evaluation all levels. Coaching is used by senior leaders to help colleagues improve their own performance. A very strong emphasis on team-working is evident. Strong support systems are in place. There is a strong momentum for further improvement.

Sixth form

47. Leadership is excellent and management is very good. Students are very well prepared for their sixth form education. They receive very good impartial advice on what the sixth form courses entail and which are the most appropriate routes for them to pursue. They also receive impartial advice so that they can make up their own minds as to which are the most appropriate places for them to pursue their post-16 education. Recruitment rates are very high and retention rates on courses are good.
48. Sixth form leaders ensure that strong systems are in place to support students. Their progress is very closely monitored, both by their subject teachers but also by their tutors and by the head of the sixth form. Target setting is well established. Because of the ethos of high expectations and very good attention to practical matters such as high attendance rates and good punctuality to lessons, the achievement of students is good. They also receive a well rounded education as they are involved in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, have good scope for taking initiative and exercising responsibility. Although improving, opportunities for recreational physical education are not extensive.
49. The systematic monitoring of teaching and learning in the sixth form has just started and has the potential to maximise the strengths of the teaching and to strengthen the weaker features of learning found in a minority of lessons. The sixth form area has a useful resources centre which is well used but is not well equipped with computers. The common room for students promotes social interaction and provides opportunities for relaxation. Because standards are rising and there are well thought through plans for further development, improvement since the last inspection has been good.

WORK-RELATED LEARNING

The quality of provision for work-related learning is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A large proportion of students achieve well in some elements on vocational courses.
- Current provision for students in Years 10 and 11 is not broad enough.
- The school has introduced initiatives from a secure foundation of well-established and successful careers education and vocational courses.
- Assessment is undeveloped.

Commentary

50. A large proportion of students in both Years 10 and 11 choose to study the good range of vocational courses. As a result they develop substantial skills, knowledge and understanding relevant to work. Students achieve satisfactorily from one week of work experience, taken by all students in Year 10, but the benefits are limited because the time allocated to work experience is brief. Also, last year, the preparation and debriefing phases of work experience did not challenge learners to think about working life in sufficient detail. A strength in students' achievements from this experience of work, reported by employers, is that the mature and sensible attitudes of students gave a good basis for learning. The school made sure that placements were precisely matched to individual needs. Lessons to create learning for work for students in Year 10 lead to mixed achievement, from satisfactory to very good.

51. Provision meets statutory requirements but lacks the time to secure sufficient progress for all elements. Provision for all students in Years 10 and 11 is built into the weekly pastoral programme. Students learn about work from the effective careers education programme, including effective elements provided by the Connexions service. The quality of learning about work is boosted because careers education is a well-established part of the programme for Years 7, 8 and 9. Provision in the pastoral programme lacks time on how best to promote learning for enterprise and employability. The staff are not assessing the achievements of students in their work-related aspects. Good features are the strong links with employers, the Young Enterprise course for some, and design and technology provision has good support for work-related learning in technology weeks for students in Year 9 and those on GCSE examination courses.

52. Provision has developed from a strong foundation of good quality careers education and popular, effective vocational provision. The teacher in charge is very expert and experienced about how to prepare students for the world of work. The pastoral programme is monitored and the expert team have already shown that they know how to make sure that students in Year 10 can achieve more from their work experience this year. A draft policy on work-related learning is ready. Current provision is well managed. The leadership of this area is only satisfactory because it is not clear what is to be done to resolve the current gaps in provision.

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

- Excellent leadership and management ensure consistent practice in teaching for all groups.
- Students reach standards in tests and examinations that are well above national averages.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- Students respond very well to stimulating teaching and high expectations and they make excellent progress.
- The course of study is very well planned but the structure of some lessons needs to be more precise, so that there is time for shared review of learning at the end.

Commentary

53. Students enter the school in Year 7 with standards in English that are above average. Results are well above average in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9. In the GCSE examinations in English and English literature, results are similarly well above the national averages for girls, with passes for all students, and over ninety per cent gaining the higher grades. These are very good standards and they are reflected in the work seen during the inspection. They indicate excellent achievement by all the students, including those with special educational needs, as they progress through the school.
54. The quality of teaching and learning is very good in all years. Strong positive relationships between students and teachers result in very good behaviour and attitudes to work. Teachers have a thorough understanding of their subject and a desire and intention to share it with their students. They present a course that is challenging and stimulating, with a strong emphasis on independent thinking and response. Excellent use is made of a range of resources and approaches, although there are sometimes problems in planning such variety into the forty-five minute lesson.
55. There are many opportunities for students to work collaboratively in groups and to present their work orally to the whole class. This builds confidence and is a significant element in developing the range of vocabulary and sentence structures that contributes to examination success. Practice in assessment of students' work is excellent, underpinned as it is by the concern of the department that every student, whatever her ability and her needs, should fulfil her potential. All written work is carefully marked, giving clear indication of strengths and weaknesses and there is additionally an important element of self-assessment by the students.
56. The leadership and management of the head of department are excellent. Her clarity of vision and her high aspirations are shared by her team, all of whom contribute to the course planning and the consistency of practice that is such a strong characteristic of their work. All possible opportunities are taken to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning and to analyse strengths and weaknesses. The department is innovative, particularly in Years 7, 8 and 9 where, for instance, there are highly imaginative approaches to independent reading, to the development of thinking skills and to the teaching of literacy. Resources are creatively, yet prudently, managed. The last inspection report found little by way of weakness in the English in the work in the main school. However, there has been significant improvement in test and examination results, which are now even more impressive. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

57. Standards of literacy are high. Provision for the development of literacy skills across the curriculum is good because most teachers are exploiting the very well developed skills of students. There is very good practice in a number of subjects. For example, in physical education, speaking and listening are being developed effectively, with particular emphasis on the correct use of technical vocabulary. In drama, students contribute very well to discussion and show very good use of language in clear, well-presented written work. Most classrooms have subject terminology on display and this supports accurate spelling and increases the range of appropriate vocabulary. The recently appointed literacy co-ordinator has provided some effective support to the science department and is beginning work in other subject areas. At present there is no literacy policy to help ensure that all teachers are consistent in addressing any perceived weaknesses in literacy development of individual students or in maximizing their abilities. Nonetheless, students understand the importance of language to success in all subjects and are able to express their ideas very clearly and confidently, orally and in their writing.

Modern foreign languages

Provision in modern foreign languages is **good** with some very good features.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Extensive use of the foreign language by teachers and students creates a genuinely communicative atmosphere and develops students' confidence.
- Excellent relationships promote positive attitudes to learning.
- Standards are well above average in French and are improving in German.
- Aspects of assessment are not sufficiently well developed.
- The profile of languages in the school is in need of further promotion.

Commentary

58. All students study French in Year 7 and most also study French and German in Years 8 and 9. By the end of Year 9 standards are above average in French and German with some elements that are well above average. Students develop high level oral skills with some evidence of outstanding confidence, particularly in French, which leads to good use of a range of spontaneous language. Listening skills are well developed because of the exposure to the foreign language. Students have a sound grasp of grammatical structures, although writing remains limited in scope. Achievement by Year 9 is good because students make good or very good progress in acquiring, understanding and applying a new language. Those for whom English is believed not to be the first language and those with special educational needs achieve as well as other students.
59. By the end of Year 11, standards on GCSE courses in French are well above average. Although recent GCSE examination results in German have been disappointing, this would appear to be a short term deterioration due to staffing difficulties and does not reflect the overall standard seen in lessons, though some students show weakness in their productive language. Written work in German is somewhat mundane and students' use of more creative writing is not encouraged enough. Overall standards in German are average. Students in German achieve at least satisfactorily but low attainers make good progress from a low baseline. In Years 10 and 11 students of French achieve very well.
60. The quality of teaching and learning in German is good overall and very good in French with some outstanding features. Teachers use the foreign language for all classroom activities and communication and have high expectations that students will do likewise. This approach leads to some outstanding examples of students showing great confidence and a very strong

commitment to learning. Lessons are well organized but do not place enough emphasis on what the students learn rather than what they do. Insufficient time is given to review and assessment in order to inform future planning. Teachers have strong relationships with students who show much enthusiasm, which leads to a high level of student participation.

61. Leadership and management are strong. The head of department is a good role model for other teachers and is developing a consistent methodology across the languages. There is now greater stability of staffing whose strengths can be tapped to raise standards even further and the department's profile should be extended within the school. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good because standards in French have improved very significantly by Year 11 and students' confidence and participation are now markedly high.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards and achievement, particularly in Years 7 to 9, have significantly improved.
- Very good leadership promotes very effective teamwork and target-setting.
- Excellent enrichment significantly deepens learning experiences.
- Gifted and talented students are often highly challenged.
- Most teaching and learning is good and engages students well, but best practice is not widespread.
- Some aspects of departmental management are insufficiently developed.

Commentary

62. In 2003, results in national tests taken by students in Year 9 were well above average when compared nationally with all schools and with similar schools. They have improved steadily over time at a rate above national trends and were better than results in science although not as good as those in English. The results in 2004, still to be validated, were similar, and overall this represents good achievement. The GCSE examination results for 2003 at the higher grades taken by Year 11 were also well above average when compared with all schools nationally and with similar schools. They were better than in most subjects, but not as good as in English and science, and have improved steadily above national trends. The results in 2004 were similar. This, too, represents good achievement.
63. When students enter the school their standards are above average. By the end of Year 9, the standard of their work is well above average and very strong in algebra. Most students also perform accurate calculations without using calculators and mentally solve problems. Overall, achievement is good. By the end of Year 11, the standard of work is also well above average with high standards of algebra being maintained and achievement is also good. Overall, throughout Year 7 to 11, achievement is good for all groups of students, including those with special educational needs. Students also enter challenges and competitions and the most able in Year 10 follow additional mathematics, which helps them achieve very well.
64. The quality of teaching and learning is good. In eight out of ten lessons the quality was good or better; in almost one in three lessons it was very good or excellent. Students with special educational needs are also taught and supported well because teachers effectively match tasks to their needs and provide further individual in-class support. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and often use it to question students skilfully and to engage and challenge them and so raise their achievement. Students have very positive attitudes and very good relationships which help them enthusiastically engage in thinking and explaining. They are set targets which they know very well. This, along with very regular on-going marking and periodic reviews, helps students know how well they are doing and how to improve. Most teachers also use ICT resources very effectively.

Example of outstanding practice

Excellent use of the interactive whiteboard fully engages Year 8 higher attaining students. The 'starter' activity illustrates vividly how finding the n th term of a number sequence can be understood by building on patterns of various shapes. Students are further challenged when related sequences are presented on the whiteboard as columns of a spreadsheet. They enthusiastically contribute to open questions, quickly realising there is a common structure to the algebraic formulae they discover. The teacher's rapid recapitulation of how to use formulae in spreadsheet cells maintains high levels of interest and challenge while very effectively promoting the learning of ICT. The use of the whiteboard and the very skilful methods of questioning fully stretch the students' capabilities and result in high levels of achievement, thus helping students to become more confident, self-reliant and independent learners.

65. Despite much that is good, there are some weaknesses in some aspects of teaching and learning and not all is of a high enough standard: the pace of parts of some lessons is insufficiently challenging and engaging, students are sometimes over-directed and insufficiently involved in generating starting points to solve challenging problems or to provide an appropriate overall strategy.
66. Leadership is very good and management is good. Significant leadership opportunities are delegated by the head of department and a very positive team spirit leads to innovation and very effective sharing of good practice. Schemes of work, however, do not incorporate guidance to ensure that best practice is systematically promoted. There is a strong commitment to self-review and evaluation which identifies extremely high targets for students' attainment. Departmental planning is significantly strengthened by specialist college status and identifies and drives major improvement which is also well supported by senior leadership. The highly effective enrichment helps promote students' understanding of the intrinsic nature of mathematics and raise standards. However, not all monitoring and evaluation is extensive or systematic to ensure that excellent work is sufficiently widespread.
67. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. Standards and achievement have improved in Years 7 to 9 and work has become more challenging. Other issues raised have also been fully addressed other than including financial costings in departmental planning. There have also been other significant improvements which are raising achievement. These include the increased emphasis on effective learning, improved provision for students with special educational needs, and those who are gifted and talented, greater use of ICT by students, and improved links with primary schools.

Mathematics across the curriculum

68. Numeracy standards are high. The overall use and support for numeracy in other subjects are good. In mathematics lessons students demonstrate well above average standards of numeracy. In other subjects there are examples where mathematics is used well. For example, across Years 7 to 11 students use a wide range of skills in science and in geography there is a good emphasis on graphs, while in Years 10 and 11 students following the GCSE course in ICT apply spreadsheets and databases well and in business they make good use of mathematics. Special apparatus is used very effectively to support a visually impaired student when exploring the size of angles. Some other subjects, however, miss opportunities to sufficiently strengthen or exploit numeracy. There is a recent initiative that is building on previous development but the insufficient guidance to promote best practice and the over-restriction on the mathematics department's involvement is limiting progress. As yet the school does not have a numeracy policy to help ensure that numeracy development is effectively addressed in all subjects.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 are very high.
- Leadership is very good and science has an increasingly positive and exciting image.
- Good teaching and learning engages students' interest and enjoyment.
- Extra-curricular activities are very well developed and enjoyed by students.
- The monitoring and evaluation of teaching, and the sharing of good practice, are not fully developed.

Commentary

69. The results of national tests taken by students at the end of Year 9 show a pattern of steady improvement. In 2003, national data shows that they are well above the national average at level 5, and level 6 and above.
70. Results in 2004 are also well above the national average and students make good progress from Year 7 to Year 9. In comparison with similar schools, results are also well above average at all levels. Similarly, results in the GCSE double award examinations have improved steadily over the past five years. They were the best ever in 2003, where the proportion of students gaining higher grades was well above the national average.
71. Although still above the national average, results in 2004, which have still to be validated, have fallen slightly.
72. All students study double award science and three out of four students are predicted to gain passes in the range A* to C in external examinations in 2005.
73. Standards in lessons are very high and all groups of students generally achieve very well. Students in Year 8 quickly develop practical skills in food testing and those in Year 9 show good knowledge and understanding of photosynthesis. Students in Year 11 work very well together and are successful and confident in their work on ionic and co-valent compounds. Achievement and progress are very good from Year 7 to Year 11.
74. The quality of teaching and learning in science is good overall and there are examples of very good and excellent practice. The clear explanation of learning objectives and the successful use of 'starter' activities are well developed from the national strategy, although plenary activities are not as effective. Thorough and detailed planning of lessons, often with illustrated and engaging presentations and focused questioning, help students to learn well. Students are well motivated and enthusiastic and use equipment with care and enjoyment. They work hard both independently and in small groups, and are confident and competent learners. However, there are occasional lessons, as in Year 10, where challenge is insufficient and the most able are not fully stretched. Students' experience is greatly enriched through a varied range of extra-curricular and enhancement activities.
75. The head of faculty was appointed in September 2004, and leadership is very good. Key areas for development have already been identified and work has begun. Staff are handled with sensitivity and the team of teachers and other colleagues are very well supported. There is a keen sense of purpose to the work of the department and knowledge and understanding of science are high. The management of science is good. However, not all of the systems and organisation for the proper development and maintenance of science education are in place or fully effective. For example, the monitoring and evaluation of teaching are underdeveloped and sharing of good practice is not yet sufficiently well established. The team of three technicians provides excellent support to practical science. Occasionally, this has been under difficult circumstances as laboratories have gradually been re-equipped, altered and refurbished.

76. Since the last inspection there have been changes in staffing, responsibilities and resources which have had a major effect in some areas of science. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Many changes have brought about good improvement in the way the science curriculum is organised. All courses have been reviewed, updated and resourced, and recently improved laboratories and ICT facilities are now in use. Assessment is regular and rigorous and information is very accessible by all staff. However, its use to inform students of what is required to meet targets is not yet fully established. Assessment for learning and other developing strategies will eventually enable students to assume greater responsibility for their own learning. Students' work of good quality is on display throughout the department and supports an increasingly popular and positive image of women in science.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Provision in ICT is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Test and examination results are high compared to the national average.
- Teachers have a good command of the subject and can relate what they teach to the world of work well.
- Changes to the curriculum have the potential to improve learning.
- The most able students are not sufficiently challenged on the key skills course.

Commentary

77. Standards on entry to Year 7 are above the national average. In the past, a high proportion of students have reached the expected national standard at the end of Year 9. However, as a part of a programme of ambitious changes to the curriculum, the national Key Stage 3 strategy has recently been introduced in Years 7 to 9 simultaneously. The changes are working well in Year 7 but they are not yet fully effective in Years 8 and 9. As a result, progress from year to year is weak. Nevertheless, standards seen during the inspection in Year 9 remain above the national average. The progress made by students with special educational needs is good.
78. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 and 9 is satisfactory. All topics are clearly introduced and tasks demonstrated very well using computerised overhead projectors. The tasks to be done in lessons are defined well in the course materials. Students are keen to learn and their attitudes are positive. Lessons of 45 minutes' duration are often too short to enable practical work to be completed. In some lessons, the teaching method is weak and the pace slow.
79. All students currently take either the Applied GCSE or national key skills course at level 2 in Years 10 and 11. In 2003, before these new courses were examined, the combined examination result for the GCSE short course and GNVQ at intermediate level was very high compared to the national average; most students obtained the equivalent of A*-C grades. In 2004, the combined examination result was lower – due to the introduction of the new courses and staff changes. Standards in the lessons seen during the inspection were well above the national average. Overall achievement is good.
80. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 is good. All teachers have a good command of the subject and are able to relate what is taught to the world of work well. They give students good help and advice during practical activities. Lessons are planned and tasks defined well. Students are able to research topics independently and learn about the social consequences of ICT effectively. Students' learning is enhanced by many good applications of ICT in other subjects. Whilst most students perform well on the key skills course, the work does not challenge the most able sufficiently. A new and more appropriate course is planned for these students.

81. The leadership provided by the deputy headteacher and the recently appointed assistant head leader of ICT and e-learning is very good. The management of day-to-day activities is good. The department was without a head for twelve months and there have been many changes in the staff – factors which have delayed development. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. Examination results have significantly improved and specialised courses introduced. The quality of teaching and the rate of students' progress have both improved. Computing facilities are now broadly in line with the national average.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

82. The application of computing in other subjects is good overall. This aspect of the school's work has been the subject of much recent development. Teachers have been trained and given time to develop this aspect of their work. All teachers have laptop computers. An audit of the use of ICT in all subjects has been carried out. Computing is effectively embedded in the schemes of work in business education, design and technology, health and social care, English, mathematics and science. These subjects either regularly use the central computing facility or have their own dedicated facilities. Students commonly and effectively use word processing, publishing, digital imaging and the Internet. Students also learn to use computer-aided design and manufacture, 2-D design, computerised monitoring and control as a part of their work in technology and science. Electronic whiteboards are available in some areas. Good applications of ICT also occur in geography and physical education but further development is needed in art and history.

HUMANITIES

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership has established accurate and effective strategies for improvement.
- Standards are well above average and students achieve very well in their acquisition of historical skills.
- Teachers have a very secure knowledge of their subject and challenge students' thinking.
- Students behave very well and show a keen interest in history.
- ICT is underused as a teaching and learning tool.

Commentary

83. Standards at the end of Year 9 are well above average and most students have a very good background knowledge of the topics under consideration. The oral and written work of a significant number of students in Year 8, for example, would not go amiss in an examination class. Moreover, GCSE examination results in both 2003 and 2004 were well above average and standards seen in lessons mirror this performance. Students analyse and evaluate source material with accuracy and in Year 10, for example, they made perceptive comments on the effect of the First World War on Russia. In addition, students in Year 11 have a profound understanding of the causes and consequences of the Berlin blockade.
84. Achievement is very good in all years. As early as Year 7, students are handling a range of source material with confidence and in their work on hygiene in medieval London for instance, they are beginning to understand how historians come to their judgements. Furthermore, in Year 9, students of all abilities realise that the conflict in 1914 was the result of a wide range of short and long-term causes. In Years 10 and 11 students are now using historical terminology quite naturally and effectively to justify their opinions.

85. Creative teaching methods to meet individual learning needs and many opportunities for students to work in pairs and in groups are key features of lessons in all years. Students benefit, also, from the expert questioning of their teachers, who challenge their youngsters to think deeply and to support their views with evidence. Pace in the classroom is very brisk and teachers demonstrate a profound concern for their students' academic and personal development. Staff prepare their lessons thoroughly and offer their students detailed advice on how they may improve their work. In turn, students enjoy their studies and speak very highly of their teachers. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall and in nearly a fifth of lessons it was excellent.
86. The department is led and managed very well and the subject leader has identified and established key strategies to raise standards rapidly and effectively. Industry and teamwork are outstanding and lead to a high-quality departmental display, which celebrates the talents and industry of their students. Teachers recognise that more opportunities for students to use ICT are now essential if research skills are to be developed further. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. Standards are much higher, the quality of teaching and learning is better and students' achievement is more marked.

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching and learning lead to very good achievement.
- The head of department has a strong vision for the future development of the subject.
- Teachers help students to think for themselves.
- Teachers work as a team to share innovative and exciting ideas.
- Students with special educational needs are very well supported.

Commentary

87. In 2004, 79 per cent of students in Year 9 were judged by teachers to have reached or exceeded level 6 according to National Curriculum criteria. This showed an increase from 71 per cent in 2003, and an even more dramatic increase from 43 per cent in 2002. Standards of work by students from Years 7 to 9 seen in the inspection reflect the results and indicate very good achievement.
88. There was a rise in GCSE examination results from 2003 to 2004 although results for 2004 have still to be validated. In 2004 a higher proportion of students gained A* to C grades in geography than in English, mathematics or science and almost half of those taking geography gained grades A* or A. Standards of written work and oral responses by students in Years 10 and 11 seen in the inspection also demonstrate very good achievement.
89. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. The enthusiastic and innovative teachers promote active learning by setting imaginative tasks which challenge students and stimulate them to question and think for themselves. Students repay their teachers' enthusiasm by paying close attention and learning eagerly. Teachers mark students' work thoroughly and provide effective guidance on how they can improve. The strong focus on citizenship at the forefront of lessons and embedded in the schemes of work encourages students to acquire a sense of social responsibility. Teachers contribute effectively to the social, moral, cultural and spiritual aspects of the subject, while building sound geographical skills and knowledge. Students with special educational needs are very well supported by the department's teaching assistant. However, teachers sometimes expect too little of students in the lower sets and cover insufficient ground.

90. The leadership and management of the department are excellent. The head of department has a strong vision of the direction he wants the subject to go, and the energy and commitment to make essential and ambitious changes. He is expert at analysing examination results and takes immediate action to drive up standards in specific areas. By holding frequent meetings he has forged an effective team which works together to update teaching materials and to share new and exciting strategies.
91. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. A key feature then was the average performance of students on GCSE examination courses. Results have risen dramatically and are now well above the average for girls in the country as a whole. The leadership and management of the department were very good at the time of the last inspection and now are excellent.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership has ensured that the subject is fully up to date with recent initiatives.
- There is an improving trend in GCSE examination results, which are well above average.
- There are very good working relationships in lessons with very positive student attitudes.
- The curriculum for Years 7 to 9 needs adaptation to support students' GCSE course choices.

Commentary

92. Standards on entry to Year 7 are varied as students come with very different experiences of design and technology from their primary schools. By the end of Year 9 standards are above average overall, representing very good progress for most students. Standards seen in the scrutiny of work and in lessons in Years 7 to 9 are above average, but there are some inconsistencies across the department in teaching approaches and the context in which activities are set.
93. There is an improving trend of standards at the end of Year 11. In the GCSE examinations in 2003 students' attainment was very well above national averages for girls across the country but in the school context the results in design and technology were overall slightly lower than those achieved by students in their other subjects. The improvement achieved in the 2004 GCSE examinations results, although these have still to be validated, now shows many students with higher-attainment in this subject compared to others and are fully in line with students' targets and abilities. The standards seen during the inspection in Years 10 and 11 are well above average.
94. Achievement by the end of Year 9 is now very good. Students have developed effective approaches to designing and they produce thoughtful and creative ideas. Their making skills have developed well and show an understanding of a range of materials, tools, equipment and techniques. ICT is particularly well used in the product design area with computer-aided design and manufacture [CAD/CAM] equipment being used well by students to produce high quality products. The use of ICT to support designing and making is not consistent across all material areas. Students' achievement continues to be very good by the end of Year 11, supported by very effective use of ICT to present GCSE examination coursework in all areas. This coursework shows high levels of independence and very creative design solutions. CAD/CAM continues to be used very effectively in product design to support high quality making. Students with special educational needs are supported well by their teachers and there are no barriers to their achievement, nor to the achievement of any other groups of students.

95. There is some variation in the quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 but it is good overall, and very good in Years 10 and 11. Some lessons in Years 10 and 11 were excellent. The high quality teaching is supported by very secure subject knowledge, very good working relationships and very positive students' attitudes. Teachers' planning is detailed and matches high expectations and strategies to students' learning needs and interests. In the excellent lessons every possible opportunity for learning was taken by the teacher and the students. Elements of the forthcoming national strategy for design and technology are already well established. Not all teaching capitalises fully on the students' excellent behaviour and not all teachers' planning ensures the highest levels of challenge for the most able students. Weaker student management and organisation occasionally leads to missed opportunities. Assessment and student tracking systems are very good and the quality of marking is good overall with some inconsistency in practice. The Year 9 teacher assessments reported to parents in recent years are extremely high and are not fully supported by the standards of work seen.
96. The leadership of design and technology is very good. The head of department has a clear vision for the subject and has embraced recent developments such as product analysis, creativity and innovation, ICT systems and the use of 'Smart' materials. Subject management is good and the department has well organised working areas and very good displays to support teaching and learning. There are, however, inconsistencies within the department's practice to be addressed and inadequacies in the curriculum for a significant number of the students in Years 7 and 8 relating to electronic and mechanical control.
97. Technology College status and funding have supported the enhancement and refurbishment of the department's facilities, including the purchase of CAD/CAM equipment. An annual Technology Week in Year 9 makes a strong contribution to students' achievement, and the department's outreach work in local primary schools is highly effective. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. The quality of teaching is better and is supporting higher student achievement and improving examination results. The subject is fully up to date with recent initiatives and the use of ICT has been significantly developed.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- At the end of Year 11 standards are well above average.
- The quality of teaching overall is very good.
- Students' achievement is very good overall.
- Attitudes are very positive and behaviour is excellent.
- The department does not meet statutory requirements for the use of ICT.
- There is no planned provision to challenge gifted and talented students appropriately.

Commentary

98. In the 2003 GCSE examination, results were well above the national average in the higher grades. This continued the upward trend of recent years, and results in 2004 indicate further improvement. Students start the school with standards in art that are broadly in line with expectations. By the end of year 9, standards are above the national average. This is the result of the strong emphasis teachers place on the development of drawing and painting skills and represents good achievement. A double period, amounting to 90 minutes each week, also helps to consolidate and accelerate learning.

99. Students learn to mix and blend colours imaginatively and successfully, inspired by the work of famous artists. They learn to improve their drawing skills using pencil, chalk and charcoal. They learn to manipulate other media, including printing and sculpture. Approaches to research and experimentation in sketchbooks also show good development.
100. By the end of year 11, standards are well above the national average and the achievement of students is very good. Students have learnt the importance of wide research, the development of ideas and how to work very effectively as individuals. Many learn to draw with confidence and sensitivity in a variety of media, and to use colour very effectively in a range of media although there are few planned opportunities for the development of three-dimensional work. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as other students as the result of effective planning and teaching strategies. Gifted and talented students have been identified, but there is no planned additional provision to challenge them appropriately.
101. The quality of teaching is never less than good and is frequently very good in Years 10 and 11. The best lessons have very good pace, learning is reinforced by regular questioning and there are very high expectations of students' active involvement and productivity. There were some occasions when pace, with very able students, was more comfortable than demanding. Aspects of literacy are being very well developed and there are good opportunities for spiritual development. Homework, linked to coursework, is set regularly and generally marked in a helpful way. Assessment is very thorough and particularly informative in Years 10 and 11. Students have very positive attitudes to work and their behaviour is exemplary. Provision for ICT does not meet statutory requirements and as a result the learning is narrower than it should be.
102. The department is well led by an enthusiastic and experienced specialist and the staffing situation is now consolidated after a year of unavoidable disruption. There is a good team spirit. Management and overall improvement since the last inspection have been satisfactory. This experience and enthusiasm are not yet sufficiently focused on a more detailed analysis of assessment information, as part of the department's determination to raise standards further for all groups of students. Good displays of work in art rooms and the public areas contribute to the school's impressive ethos.

Drama

Provision in drama is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in GCSE examinations are above average.
- Students of all abilities achieve very high standards of performance.
- The quality of leadership and management is excellent.
- Highly skilled teachers stimulate students to work confidently and independently.
- Students' learning is enriched by a range of extra-curricular activities.
- Students' personal development is enhanced by their drama experiences.

Commentary

103. Results in GCSE examinations are above average and have improved significantly since the last inspection. Due to this success the number of students choosing the subject has increased greatly. Standards are well above average by the end of Years 9 and 11. Achievement by students of all ages and abilities is very high because innovative teaching strategies encourage students to take an active part in their own learning. As a result, students work independently and collaboratively as they explore situations, issues and relationships and devise dramas for different purposes. Some outstanding work was observed in Years 7 and 9 because students use a range of drama techniques confidently and sustain their characterisations as they develop their storylines imaginatively.

104. Students in all year groups learn very well because the teaching is very good overall, and some teaching is excellent. A particular strength is the purposeful questioning techniques used to elicit reflection on the drama process, a critical awareness of the effect of the dramatic action and an evaluation of the impact on the audience. Students in Year 7, many with little previous experience, are engrossed in their characters and focus on the drama with complete involvement because the teaching is stimulating and keeps students alert and eager to learn.
105. Leadership and management of the subject are excellent. Schemes of work are planned for all year groups to ensure progressive learning through students' experiences of exploring shaping, performing and responding. Evaluation is built into every area of drama because students share their emotional response to all aspects and analyse their responses. Students' personal development is enhanced by their drama experiences and their learning is enriched by sharing in many extra-curricular activities.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in Year 9 are above average and in Year 11 are well above average.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good and enables students to achieve very well.
- Extra-curricular activity is very good overall and excellent in choral work.
- Leadership is very good but management lacks administrative support.

Commentary

106. Teacher assessment of students at the end of Year 9 in the last three years has placed a large majority at levels 5 and 6, with a few at the highest levels. This is above the average standard nationally. From current evidence this standard is being maintained. Strengths are the creative and fluent use of keyboards and the good quality of singing. GCSE examination results in the last three years show all candidates gaining grades A*-C. This is well above the national average, though numbers are relatively small. This standard, too, is being maintained. Among the 23 students now in Years 10 and 11 particular strengths are the use of technology for composition and good quality note taking in lessons. Instrumental learning and regular participation in performing groups lead to a high standard in performance in every year; the standard shown by the choirs is excellent.
107. Achievement overall is very good in every year. New entrants vary greatly in experience and ability in music. The presence of more able musicians in classes inspires and supports others so that all, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in practical work. Younger students commonly show their enjoyment of lessons and delight in their own success and that of others in the class. Most students in Years 10 and 11 have developed good study habits. They present written work with care and pride, doing their best with research tasks. Use of computers with sophisticated software and of good quality keyboards boosts achievement of students in every year and at all levels of attainment. The commitment and loyalty shown to performing groups by large numbers from across the school are a great boost to their personal development and to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the whole school community.
108. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers have high expectations of concentrated effort and plan enjoyable, varied learning activities. With secure subject knowledge and skill, teachers set a fast pace for lessons. They manage students very well, even where spaces are barely satisfactory. Older students are helped to become more responsible for their learning and are prepared very well for GCSE examinations. Assessment is secure, and very good in Years 10 and 11. In Years 7, 8 and 9 methods of assessment are

inconsistent. Students in these years are not yet benefiting from being made fully aware of National Curriculum criteria for different levels, which would inspire them to improve still further.

109. Leadership is very good. Hard working and well informed, it seeks constantly to improve provision so as to raise standards and achievement. An excellent role model, the leader fosters good teamwork. The problematic accommodation has been improved by his own voluntary work to very good effect for learning. His enthusiasm for church choral music inspires many students to attend thrice-weekly rehearsals and results in regular tours in Europe. Seventeen per cent of students learn instruments from visiting teachers, which supports curriculum work very well and enables instrumental groups and staged shows of very good quality. Without some administrative support the head of department, who also has responsibilities for whole-school issues, will not be able to raise the quality of management to match the quality of leadership. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Standards are higher, teaching and achievement are better – much better in Years 10 and 11. Plans for improved accommodation have yet to be timed and costed.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards, including examination results, are well above average.
- The high quality of teaching results in very good learning.
- Teachers provide an extensive range of extra curricular activities.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- There are no opportunities for students to take any additional accredited courses.

Commentary

110. Teacher assessment indicates that in 2003 the attainment of students by the end of Year 9 was very high in comparison to the national average. It was a similar picture in 2004, although these results have still to be validated. Standards in the present Year 9 are above average. Many students have the potential to reach the very high standards achieved in previous years. In the 2003 GCSE examination 94 per cent of students gained A*-C grades, figures that are well above the national average. Although the results in 2004 were not quite as impressive, the number of candidates entered was much higher. In both years, the proportion of students gaining A* grades was well above average. Standards among students in Year 11 who are not taking the GCSE examination are broadly average. At GCSE examination level standards are well above average in both the practical and theoretical elements of the course. Gifted and talented students of all ages reach high standards in gymnastics, cross-country, netball, football, swimming and athletics.
111. With students coming from so many different primary schools, standards on entry are extremely variable. Students make particularly good progress in Year 7 and this is maintained for the next two years, so that by the end of Year 9 students' achievement is very good. Students with special educational needs progress as well as others. Achievement is good for students in Year 11 who are not taking the GCSE examination and is very good for those who are following the examination course.
112. The quality of teaching and its impact on learning are consistently good. In most lessons teaching is very good and in some lessons it is excellent. Teachers create a purposeful and good-humoured atmosphere in lessons. This produces an excellent response from students. This combination, linked to exemplary behaviour, is a key factor in what is achieved. Thoughtful planning, the very good use of resources - including ICT where appropriate, and the reinforcement of key words, make a very positive contribution to students' learning. The

use of exercise books in Years 7 to 9 for self-assessment helps to consolidate the students' knowledge and understanding. The emphasis placed on evaluation of their own and other students' performances, as well as the teachers' good observational skills, contributes significantly to the quality of learning. Although curriculum time remains less than that recommended, the extensive range of extra-curricular activities provided by all members of the department, make a positive impact on the learning of many students in a variety of different sports.

113. As a result of very good leadership and management, teachers work extremely well together. Examples of good practice are shared formally and informally. Very good improvement since the last inspection has resulted in higher examination results and the increased use of ICT. The limited indoor accommodation has been enhanced by the recent addition of a fitness suite. Changing facilities have been improved. An enthusiastic teaching assistant supports some lessons and extra-curricular activities. The school sports co-ordinator is beginning to strengthen links with feeder primary schools. At present there are no opportunities for students to take any additional accredited courses, but the department has plans to introduce the junior sports leaders award for students in Year 10 and 11 once funds become available.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

114. Vocational courses were sampled. One in six students takes business studies in Years 10 and 11. In 2003, the GCSE examination results in business studies were well above the national average with over eight out of ten students obtaining A*-C grades and all A*-E grades. In 2004, the results were very similar. One lesson was observed. Students in Year 10 were seen learning effectively about the European Union and its impact on business. They enjoyed learning about the topic in groups. Achievement was good.
115. One in eight students takes health and social care in Years 10 and 11. Most of these students have special educational needs. In 2004, the Applied GCSE course was examined for the first time. The examination results were below the national average, with over a fifth of students obtaining A*-C grades and all A*-G grades. One lesson was observed. Students in Year 10 were learning very effectively about language development in young children. Achievement was very good.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Personal, social and health education

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

Main strength and weaknesses

- The course is well organised and covers major areas of students' personal development.
- Lessons are mostly well taught but some lack pace and purpose.
- Some of the significant components of citizenship are effectively delivered through the PSHE programme.
- The school makes very good use of external support to broaden the teaching programme.

Commentary

116. All students have two PSHE lessons each week. The programme is very well developed and embraces key areas of health and personal development, including the concept of citizenship. Good use is made of external agencies and of experts in different fields to enrich the course which is wide-ranging and systematic. It is popular with many students.
117. The behaviour of students is excellent and enables them to concentrate well in lessons. The quality of teaching and learning is mostly good, and is sometimes very good and even

excellent. Lessons are well planned and make good use of a wide variety of tasks, drawing on the well developed speaking and writing skills of students. The process of communication itself was the topic of two very well taught lessons observed in Year 8, part of the school's citizenship programme. Teaching made good use of skilful questioning to draw very good responses from students who were highly articulate. They expressed their ideas clearly, listened very well to one another and enjoyed the exchange of opinions. Teachers made clear to students that they were learning about citizenship to help them understand the concept. Lessons in Year 10 focused on learning about the world of work. Very good use was made of role play in some lessons to help students understand more about the interview process; other lessons on the unique selling points of merchandise were more laboured and did not generate the same degree of interest. The two lessons observed in Year 11 in which students worked on their records of achievement were satisfactory but not purposeful as the activity lacked a strong focus. One lesson observed in Year 12 was excellent as students worked animatedly and to very good purpose preparing an assembly presentation for students in Year 8.

118. The school's work on personal, social and health education is well led and managed. Teachers are committed to making lessons work and see the worth of them. The content of the programme is well thought out. Learning activities are varied and interesting. The programme has been broadened and up-dated since the last inspection and improvement has been good.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards reached through participation and responsible action are high.
- Much valuable learning comes from lessons across the curriculum.
- Assessment of achievement has yet to be developed to a satisfactory level.
- The subject's identity within the National Curriculum is not clearly recognised.

Commentary

119. Standards based on the levels reached by individual students in the different elements of citizenship cannot be judged with any degree of accuracy since no data is available although the quality of students' commitment to voluntary work, service to the school and to the wider community is clearly high. The ethos of the school strongly supports this. The level of discussion in lessons where citizenship was identified was well above average.
120. Achievement is good overall. A strength of the school is the fostering of participation and responsible action arising from subjects - for example, a recycling group – pastoral care -the prefect and mentoring systems- or the outstanding fund-raising for charities. A school council meeting involving students from Year 7 to Year 9, chaired and minuted by elected sixth form students, showed form representatives to be using this democratic system well. The work of the council for Years 10 and 11 does not yet match this. Monitoring of achievement in citizenship from classroom learning and voluntary service is insufficient at present.
121. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. In lessons where citizenship was clearly identified to students, they were very good. This was so in PSHE lessons in Year 8 in areas such as communicating and empathising with others, in drama on the theme of homelessness and in history in lessons focusing on the effects of war. In geography and business studies lessons good learning and teaching included citizenship programmes of study, but this was rarely made clear to students. Lesson plans in other subjects indicate that citizenship issues had been incorporated in planning. Good quality display in some subjects raises awareness for all who see it. The main weakness in teaching is in assessment - the monitoring of standards and achievement in citizenship for recording and reporting.

122. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory overall. Good leadership has been shown in ensuring that citizenship is an integral part of each student's personal development and that there is some strong work on citizenship featuring in PSHE lessons and in other subjects in the curriculum, but leadership has not been good in ensuring that the subject is properly assessed and that results are communicated to parents in line with statutory requirements. The subject is not managed satisfactorily because students are not made aware that they are studying citizenship, and are not informed as to what levels of skill they have reached in this subject. The development of students as 'responsible citizens' is part of the school's mission statement, yet citizenship is usually absent from lists of subjects. A GCSE course in citizenship studies has been considered but there is no plan to introduce this because senior leaders think there is too little curriculum time for it in any year.
123. An audit of all subjects has recently been carried out. Schemes of work in all subjects show citizenship programmes of study, or work which supports such learning, incorporated into particular units. There are textbooks for the subject for use in Year 10. Monitoring of learning from this fragmented delivery is at an early stage and has not been sufficiently systematic or evaluative. There has been too little training for teachers to be aware of the need to assess and record achievement of individual students in work counting for citizenship. Reports to parents of students in Year 9 have yet to include this information related to the level descriptors, as required. A new system combining student self-assessment and tutor monitoring is being developed for 2005. At present the school is not ensuring that statutory requirements are met in relation to the teaching of citizenship because it has not yet developed methods of assessment in this subject nor reported to parents the standards reached by individual students.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

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

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
English Literature	8	100.0	85.9	12.5	19.1	33.8	30.2
Mathematics	3	100.0	61.9	0.0	17.1	36.7	22.1
Biology	6	66.7	65.2	0.0	11.1	15.0	20.6
Chemistry	8	75.0	72.7	0.0	13.9	22.5	24.1
Art and Design	7	100.0	80.1	28.6	23.7	41.4	29.9
French	3	66.7	78.2	33.3	18.9	30.0	27.6
German	2	100.0	81.5	0.0	19.3	25.0	28.9
Physics	3	100.0	68.6	33.3	14.4	30.0	22.7
Design and technology	2	100.0	74.9	0.0	15.1	25.0	25.3
Sociology	3	100.0	71.8	66.7	18.4	50.0	25.4
Geography	4	100.0	74.3	75.0	19.8	52.5	26.5
History	5	100.0	80.7	40.0	19.5	44.0	28.6
Sports Studies	1	100.0	73.2	0.0	11.4	30.0	23.1
Other social studies	4	100.0	69.7	50.0	24.1	50.0	16.7
General Studies	3	66.7	73.9	0.0	15.1	16.7	26.7
Business Studies	7	71.4	76.4	14.3	16.3	15.0	20.6

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
English Literature	37	100.0	99.5	35.1	46.5	82.7	86.5
Mathematics	16	100.0	96.7	68.8	55.6	103.8	88.8
Biology	25	100.0	96.4	20.0	39.2	74.4	88.6
Chemistry	11	100.0	97.6	54.5	49.0	87.3	84.9
History	22	100	99.0	22.7	44.6	71.8	84.6
Design and technology	4	100.0	97.8	0.0	35.0	75.0	87.9

Information Technology VQ	7	100.0	77.9	85.7	23.4	102.9	67.3
Art and Design	22	100.0	98.9	50.0	54.1	89.1	90.0
Business VQ	12	66.7	65.0	33.3	14.6	56.7	84.6
Business Studies	12	100.0	97.6	50.0	36.8	86.7	80.1
German	4	100.0	98.4	0.0	47.9	75.0	84.8
Health and Social Care VCE	26	100.0	67.7	15.4	14.5	70.8	96.0
French	6	100.0	98.8	16.7	51.5	83.3	87.6
Drama	10	100.0	99.5	70.0	40.1	94.0	83.6
Other Social Studies	33	100.0	96.9	69.7	42.7	96.4	81.8
Physics	7	100.0	96.7	57.1	44.6	85.7	81.7
Other languages	1	100.0	96.9	100.0	64.5	120.0	93.8
Sociology	8	100.0	98.2	75.0	44.3	102.5	83.6
Sports Studies	13	100.0	98.0	76.9	30.9	106.2	75.2
General Studies	7	100.0	94.7	28.6	31.0	77.1	73.1

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

English literature is taught at A/S and at A-level. A combined English language and literature A/S course has been introduced in Year 12.

Provision in English is **very good** with some excellent features.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A-level results indicate significant improvement overall.
- Students' achievements are consistently high in response to the challenging tasks set for them.
- Teachers encourage students to develop their critical thinking skills and to learn independently.
- Excellent leadership by the head of department is reflected in the commitment of a highly skilled team of teachers.

Commentary

124. Results at A-level in 2004 showed a significant improvement on the standards reached by the same group of students in their A/S level examinations a year previously. This improved quality was reflected in the students' written work seen during the inspection in both Years 12 and 13. A-level results in 2003 were average but were above average in 2004. Achievement is very good because students work consistently near their capacity and many achieved far better than expected, making considerable gains in their learning. The head of department has led a plan of intensive action for improvement. A-level results and students' expectations are raised as they respond to the challenges of increasingly difficult tasks with a growing sense of personal responsibility which equips them with valuable study skills for the future.

125. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Lessons are very stimulating. Students become absorbed in their learning. They respond well to the texts they study. They support their arguments with relevant quotations as they explore a variety of techniques used by writers and explain the impact of these different styles on a range of audiences. Teachers share their considerable subject knowledge through skilful questioning techniques which

encourage students to reflect critically on the texts they are studying. Students take an active role and explain their interpretations fluently in speech and in writing. Assessment systems are used carefully to track students' progress and teachers mark written work sensitively indicating to students the ways to achieve their assessment objectives and meet their targets.

126. Leadership and management are excellent. The head of department inspires a team of committed teachers with innovative schemes to improve the quality of sixth-form teaching and establish high standards of achievement from students of all abilities. Retention on courses is excellent. The introduction of a combined English language and literature course in Year 12 has encouraged an increasing number of students to study English in the sixth form. Overall, this represents very good improvement since the last inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

127. On most A-level courses the standard of students' literacy is very high. Emphasis is placed on the development of subject-specific terminology, both in discussion and oral presentation, in subjects such as history and geography and, in all departments, in the close attention paid to improvement of written style. There is good support in class and in the very careful marking of work for students with special language needs.

MATHEMATICS

Mathematics is taught at A-Level. There is also a small further mathematics group studying at A-level, as well as a course for students attempting to improve their GCSE grades. The focus of the inspection was the A-level classes.

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have improved to well above average and students achieve well.
- The department monitors students' progress very well and offers excellent academic support.
- Not all teaching is of an equally high standard.
- Recruitment and retention levels of students are sometimes low.
- Schemes of work are insufficiently developed.
- There is a flexible range of courses offered and excellent enrichment opportunities.

Commentary

128. A-level results in 2003 and 2002 were well above the national average. Students did better than in many of their other subjects and made very good progress from GCSE. In 2004, although results have still to be validated, there was some decline due to some untypical circumstances but results were still above average. Results in further mathematics reflect the good A-level picture while the few A/S results are a little lower. Overall, these results represent good achievement.
129. For current students, standards at the end of Year 13 are well above average and their achievement is good. Standards in the very small further mathematics class are also well above average. Students in Year 13 have very good algebraic skills and a good understanding of proof. They are able to derive complex results involving several areas of mathematics. They can work well together in the process and are able to explain their reasoning in class discussions.
130. Teaching is good overall. Expectations are high and students respond well to the skilful way that teachers use their very good subject knowledge to involve them in solutions. The best teaching included some excellent features. All teaching engages, challenges and supports students well, which helps raise their confidence as independent learners and to achieve well.

Students state that the learning styles used in lessons are well suited to their needs, as is the independent study expected outside them. However, the high level of involvement and imaginative approaches used to raise achievement further are sometimes lacking and there is insufficient guidance in the schemes of work to promote these.

131. Leadership is very good and management is good. The department provides excellent academic support and guidance. Students highly value detailed feedback, open access to mathematics teachers, their involvement in reviewing their target grades and the flexible arrangements made by the department and school to enable them to follow courses of their choice. Students take part in competitions, lectures and activities which broaden and deepen their understanding of mathematics, and all will be following courses in higher education that involve at least a major mathematical element. However, strategies to improve and retain enrolment through to Year 13 have not always been successful and attitudes at the end of Year 12 towards mathematics are not always positive.
132. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. Standards and achievement have significantly risen, improved target-setting helps students to achieve more, there has been effective curriculum development and enrichment and Year 12 students exercise responsibility by providing in-class support for younger students who have difficulties in mathematics.

Mathematics across the curriculum

133. Standards of numeracy are high. Mathematics is supported and used well in other subjects overall. It is very well used in psychology when students analyse quantitative data using spreadsheets, in business when covering business finances, marketing and business planning, and in ICT when covering the considerable amount of numerically based work. There are also good standards of graphical and statistical work seen in biology and geography. Problem solving is well provided for within the A-level general studies course which all students follow, but otherwise, there is no overall whole-school monitoring of numeracy in the sixth form.

SCIENCE

Biology, chemistry and physics are taught at A-level. The focus for the inspection was biology.

Biology

The quality of provision in biology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have improved over recent years.
- Learners are effective because they work consistently hard and with independence.
- Teachers have high expectations and strong expertise.
- Some students are known to lapse in standards in specific areas; teachers are not yet doing enough to make sure students know how to improve their work.

Commentary

134. Standards have improved over recent years. Attainment at A/S-level for students currently in Year 13 was above the national average and results in the A-level examination in 2004 were well above average. The results for 2003 were in line with the national average. The achievement of students currently in Years 12 and 13 is good, even when measured against their strong background from Year 11. This is better than the progress indicated in recent years. The numbers of students choosing biology are impressive, as is retention during Year 13. At the end of Year 12, after the A/S examination, a satisfactory number choose to continue to study to achieve the full A-level qualification.

135. Teaching and learning are both of good quality. Students complete remarkable amounts of well-organised work. They make substantial progress in their understanding of complex ideas and undertake independent study and research effectively. Teachers are very expert and demand a lot from students, mostly successfully. Even so, interim test results show some slippage to average levels for some students. Assessment is frequent and accurate so students know the standard of their work but not enough is done to help them to know how to improve.
136. Leadership is satisfactory. The subject is well managed and has improved some aspects of provision. The work of teachers is closely monitored, assessment has been further developed and the good scheme of work has been maintained. Students are benefiting from the good level of investment in improvements to accommodation, provision of texts for study, the interactive whiteboards and the week long fieldwork for Year 13. Overall provision is much as reported at the last inspection and progress has been satisfactory because this situation is a marked recovery from an intervening period when students attained below their potential.
137. A lesson in **physics** was also observed as a sample of work in other science subjects. Standards in physics have improved recently, from above to well above national averages and in the Year 12 lesson observed students were well taught, learners were keen and confident, and achievement was good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

All students take the single (six unit) Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) in information and communication technology.

Provision in ICT is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are very good.
- Students achieve well and some very well.
- Teaching is good and students are given effective guidance on how to improve their work.

Commentary

138. A tenth of students take the subject in Years 12 and 13. Their GCSE and other equivalent grades on entry to the sixth form are well above the national average. In 2003, the AVCE examination results were high compared with the national average, with six out of the seven students obtaining A and B grades and all A – E grades. In 2004, the results obtained by a larger group of students were lower. Standards in lessons are very good. Achievement is good overall and for some students very good.
139. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and sometimes very good. Teachers' understanding of the subject is very good and they are able to apply computing to real work situations. In a Year 13 lesson, some students were seen designing a computer system to meet their individual client's needs and other students were building the system they had designed and evaluating it well. The teacher provided good practical help and advice on the construction of the computer systems. In a Year 12 lesson, students were seen designing spreadsheets to meet the needs of their chosen company – dating agency, maintenance electrical company, a retailer of swimwear – with very effective help and advice from the teacher. The coursework seen covered a wide range of computer applications – presenting information, spreadsheets, systems and installation, and managing and developing websites. The work was well marked and students given effective guidance on how to improve.
140. Leadership and management are very good. There has been a high turnover of staff. The recently appointed head of the curriculum area and new staff have done well to maintain

standards – the examination results are amongst the best in the school. The course has been introduced since the last inspection.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

141. Students are very competent users of ICT. The application of ICT in other subjects is very good but needs to be further developed in art. Teachers have been trained and given free time to develop aspects of their work. An audit of the use of ICT in all subjects has been carried out. ICT is extensively used very well in business education, design and technology, health and social care, history, mathematics, and in aspects of science, physical education, psychology and sociology. The school has planned wider use of ICT. The school is taking part in the E-Learning Foundation Pilot Project in order to raise money by means of grants from the National E-Learning Foundation and parental contributions to support ICT projects in the school.

HUMANITIES

Geography, history, psychology and sociology are all taught to A/S and A-level. History and psychology were the main focus of the inspection. Lessons were also sampled in **geography** and **sociology**. The quality of teaching and learning was very good in the two lessons observed in geography and students' achievement was also very good. Teaching and learning were good in the one sociology lesson observed and students' achievement was also good

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have high regard for their teachers and speak highly of their subject knowledge.
- A-level results have been below average for the past two years.
- Leadership and management are very good and teachers have introduced very effective strategies, which are already raising standards.

Commentary

142. Although all students reached pass level, percentages of students reaching the higher grades were below average in 2003 and 2004. However, standards seen during the inspection were average. Moreover, there are examples of students making oral contributions of A-grade potential in their work on the successes and failures of the Labour governments of 1924 and 1929, for example.

143. Students achieve well in both years. Because teachers place great emphasis on essay writing and examination technique, most students are beginning to understand what is needed for success. Furthermore, their written assignments are improving rapidly and they include accurate information on the views of a range of historians. A minority of students still find discussion difficult, but those with more competence in history support their views with relevant evidence.

144. Students in Year 12 are gradually coming to terms with the demands of sixth form study. They enjoy the company of their teachers and speak positively of their support, as they attempt to use more analysis and evaluation in both their oral and written work. In addition, they are grateful for the profound subject-knowledge of their teachers, in relation to the military campaigns of Napoleon, for example. Teachers' challenge is relentless and their questioning requires students to think deeply about the topics under consideration. Teaching and learning are good overall and are excellent in some lessons.

145. Leadership and management are very good and teachers have spent considerable time evaluating departmental performance, in order to introduce effective strategies to raise standards. These initiatives are based on developing students' understanding of what examiners require and they are already raising standards. Moreover, significant numbers of students are now planning to read history at university. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards are higher and leadership and management have improved. The department is now well placed for future development and further success.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **excellent**.

Main Strengths and weaknesses

- There are consistently high standards over time at both A/S and A-Level.
- Excellent teaching is based on strong professional knowledge and personal skills.
- Very good departmental management and planning sustains teaching and learning.
- Students have produced very good coursework and very well organised folders.
- Some shortage of resources limits teaching strategies.

Commentary

146. Numbers taking the subject have grown steadily. A consistent 100 per cent pass rate for the last three years has been maintained in the context of growing numbers and a wide ability span. At A-level, there have been yearly increases in the percentage of high scores from 75 per cent of the cohort in 2002 to 91 per cent in 2004, while in 2004 60 per cent of entries were at the very highest grades against 47 per cent nationally. There is a similar picture at A/S-Level in 2004, where results were very high.
147. This represents excellent achievement, while the high quality of the coursework and folders seen during the inspection, as well as marks from interim assessments, show this standard is being maintained - as does the sparkling enthusiasm of students for the subject, whose responses in discussion and written work reveal depth of understanding. All the coursework seen was thoroughly marked and up to date. Students are consistently engaged by their work, and the subject makes a strong contribution to their social and moral development. They are encouraged to write well, and numeracy is well served in the subject's strong quantitative base.
148. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently very good or excellent. Teaching is challenging and well structured; students respond to the obvious affection and respect with which they are treated. Good records of attainment are used both to track individual students' achievements, and as a diagnostic tool to help them understand how they can improve. Students receive outstandingly good individual support. Detailed planning is enlivened by an excellent rapport between staff and students.
149. Learning materials prepared by the staff are very good, taking account of the needs of students as well as the learning and assessment criteria of the examination Teachers are building an increasingly good resource base of additional materials, texts, journals and videos to support independent learning but the department does not have enough access to AVA and ICT resources to be fully effective. Planning is very good, with good communication among colleagues who share groups, giving the department a strong foundation on which to maintain its record of achievement. Leadership and management are very good. From this year, the department is managed as part of a small humanities group - with sociology - offering good professional support and a basis for coherent planning and allocation of resources. Commenting on psychology, the last inspection reported staffing problems and a decline in standards, with attainment below average. The improvement since that time has been excellent.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology is taught at AS and A-level with students opting to study product design and choosing to work with resistant materials or textiles. The numbers of students on these courses has been low but is increasing as the courses become better established. Currently the textiles option attracts the greater number of students.

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership has established the subject in the sixth form.
- Teachers know their subject very well and communicate strong interest and enthusiasm.
- Students work with high levels of maturity and independence.

Commentary

150. In the A/S and A-level examinations in 2003 the small number of students entered makes national comparisons inappropriate but all students were awarded pass grades, which in relation to their GCSE examination results represents satisfactory achievement. The results in 2004, still to be validated, show a marked improvement with almost double the number of students following the A-level textiles course, of whom nearly half achieved grades A or B. For many of these students these results are evidence of good or very good achievement.
151. The standards seen in the inspection in lessons and in the scrutiny of students' work are well above average in the textiles group and above average in the resistant materials group. All of the fourteen A-level students in Year 13 are on track to meet or exceed their target grades and almost all of these are grades A or B. Most students in the textiles group are expected to achieve grade A and have been awarded places on art and design foundation courses. Sixth form students' work evidences very high standards of presentation, making full and appropriate use of ICT software to generate and publish drawings, images and text. Students' research is very detailed and is well used to inform design ideas that are well developed to meet the needs of a specific situation or client. Their designs show a very good understanding of the working properties of materials and making processes. This is further evidenced in the quality of students' making work, often demonstrating very high levels of skill and accuracy.
152. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is always at least good and is often very good. Teachers' subject knowledge is very secure and this is shared with students with great enthusiasm. Students' positive attitudes are exemplary and there is strong evidence of very high levels of independence, but not at the expense of peer support and teamwork. The working relationships in lessons, between students and with their teachers, are excellent and a very effective balance is achieved between purpose and enjoyment. In discussions students can articulate their design thinking and can relate issues to the differing needs of users, designers and manufacturers, taking account of environmental factors when appropriate and the need for sustainable production methods.
153. Leadership is very good and has focused well on establishing the subject in the sixth form, as demonstrated by the increasing take-up and improving results. The courses are now completely different from those followed at the time of the last inspection and are much more relevant to current subject thinking and students' previous experience and interests. Improvement has been good. Further provision is planned and discussions with local schools and colleges are ongoing to determine the feasibility of offering other focus areas such as food technology.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and drama are taught both to A/S and A-level and both subjects were the focus of the inspection

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching leads to good learning and achievement.
- Students' own contributions to their learning greatly enhance achievements.
- Standards in two-dimensional work, especially painting and drawing are above average.
- Students do not use ICT well enough as a creative medium.

Commentary

154. Student numbers are relatively small and standards in A/2 level examinations have varied year on year. In 2003 these were average, but were well above average in 2004 with several students exceeding expectations. A/S-level results in 2003 were very good. A/S-level results for 2004 show students' attainment to be high.
155. Students' standards on entry to Year 12 are very mixed and about average for girls. This year the department has provided opportunities for a GCSE short course because some attainment did not match the standards for A/S level. Most students are taking A/S level and standards are above average. Students use the good 2D technical skills they learned in the main school effectively. Most students' work is in painting and drawing, where skills are strong. High levels of literacy enable students to annotate work journals with good analytical commentary. Very good attitudes and high levels of commitment contribute significantly to students' own achievements. In Year 12, for example, most pay for and attend classes in life drawing in a local college. These greatly enhance drawing and painting competence and results provide a useful addition to students' portfolios.
156. Standards in Year 13 are mixed but above average. Students of all abilities achieve well, including the minority with special educational needs such as dyslexia. Here, too, students respond very positively to the department's expectations, visiting galleries and exhibitions independently. These experiences improve achievement significantly. Only absences, or slow work pace currently result in any student's achievement not matching predictions. Some are working at standards higher than those predicted. Much rests on students' performance in their final examination, but with high motivation levels and good technical skills, students' results should match or exceed predictions by the end of their course.
157. Teaching is good. Students learn well from their teachers' main teaching method, which provides one to one tutorials within lessons for each individual. This results in a good level of independent learning. Some students would benefit from greater variety of teaching styles to improve the pace of their learning. Good relationships with teachers create a relaxed, enjoyable learning atmosphere of focused concentration. Communication between teachers about students' work is good, tracking what they have done and assessing progress properly. Students learn to develop large-scale work, often portraiture or landscape, with confidence. Many access arts-related higher education courses on the evidence of the quality of their portfolios. The department lacks appropriate ICT hardware and software, so students do not develop sufficient understanding about the creative use of computers in artwork.
158. The teaching team has now stabilised after lengthy absences and leadership is good and management is satisfactory. Temporary arrangements were successful in maintaining standards. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

Theatre studies

Provision in theatre studies is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in A/S-level and A-level examinations are well above average.
- Students' achievements are very good.
- Students' learning development is enriched by their drama experiences.
- The best use is made of the limited space available.

Commentary

159. Results on A-level courses were well above average in both 2003 and 2004. The most recent results in A/S-level examinations are outstanding. Current standards on both courses are well above average and have risen significantly over the past two years. This represents very good improvement since the last inspection. Students' achievements are very good overall which reflects the care taken by their sensitive teachers who tailor the learning for students at all levels of ability.

160. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers share their very good subject knowledge, and schemes of work are devised to provide students with practical experiences in the contrasting styles of Brecht and Stanislavsky. Students' independent learning is well promoted as they explore a good range of styles, genre and theatre conventions to create performances for different audiences. They organise their own work collaboratively and share ideas constructively to shape their presentations. Teachers assess students' work sensitively and indicate different ways of working for an effective performance. Good quality written work indicates that students are encouraged to explore and discover for themselves as they reflect upon the drama process and evaluate their own learning experiences. However, not enough structured support is provided during practical work to ensure that students focus their energy and concentration on creating a character and developing a situation with sufficient dramatic intensity.

161. Students take part enthusiastically in extra-curricular activities and school productions which enrich their learning and extend their drama skills. Sixth form students share their expertise and skills with younger students and join in lessons with lower year groups. The Shakespeare Club uses venues throughout the school advantageously to develop sixth formers' skills in performance and to support the learning of students in other years - for example, in a video presentation of 'Twelfth Night'. There have been significant improvements in drama teaching since the last inspection and as a result there is very high achievement overall. This is due to the clear vision and commitment of the excellent head of department who is well supported by a second specialist teacher.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education

Physical education is offered at A/S and A-level. Students are also given the opportunity to gain the Community Sports Leaders Award. Lessons at all three levels were seen during the inspection.

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good, resulting in good examination results.
- Extremely positive relationships between teachers and students encourage learning.

- Teachers make very good use of ICT.
- Students taking the Community Sports Leaders Award make a good contribution to the sporting life of the school.
- There is no timetabled provision for all sixth form students to take part in physical recreation.

Commentary

162. There are currently 7 students in Year 13 continuing with A-level and 10 students in Year 12 following the A/S course. In the 2003 examinations all students entered for A/S and A-level gained pass grades. The percentage of A-level students achieving the higher A-B grades was well above the national average. From a smaller entry there was a similar picture at A-level in 2004, with a slightly smaller proportion of students achieving the higher grades at A/S level.
163. Standards of attainment among students currently in Years 13 are average overall with two students attaining well above average standards. Students show a good understanding of physiology - for example, muscle contraction -and a good recall of earlier work. Within a wide ability range, students have made good progress and they are achieving very well. Students are conscientious in their approach, although one or two are content to remain passive during discussions unless addressed directly by the class teacher. Students in Year 12 are attaining good standards. They are lively, interested and committed. They were able to speak confidently about the relationship between skill and ability and were able to classify skills using a continuum. Students' folders are well organised and show clearly that the requirements of the syllabus are being met. Students in both year groups are reaching good standards in their chosen practical activities.
164. The quality of teaching in Years 12 and 13 is very good. This has a significant impact on students' learning. Planning is detailed and builds very effectively on students' existing level of knowledge. Topics are frequently taught in an imaginative and creative way. This was the case for example in the lesson on the acquisition of skill, where there was both practical involvement by students and very effective use of an interactive CD-ROM and Power Point slides. Mutual respect between teachers and students is evident in all lessons. This results in a very good working environment that encourages students to make progress. Expectations are high and students respond accordingly. They spoke very warmly about the level of help and support that they receive from their teachers, including individual tutorials.
165. Very good leadership and management are contributing to the consistency of approach and the good examination results. Whilst a small number of sixth form students are following the Community Sports Leaders Award, there is no timetabled provision for all sixth form students to take part in any recreational activities. The students taking the CSLA are working well and with considerable maturity. They are making an extremely positive contribution to the sporting life of the school. They help in many lessons and with extra curricular clubs, as well as organising events for primary school children.

BUSINESS

166. Work was sampled in **business education**. A fifth of students take either the GCE in business studies or AVCE in business. Two GCE lessons were observed. In Year 12, students were seen learning about cash flow in one lesson and stock control in the other well. One AVCE lesson was observed. Students in Year 12 were seen undertaking self-assessment and planning their work on management accounts. Overall achievement was satisfactory

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

167. Work was also sampled in **health and social care**. Just over a twelfth of students take the AVCE in health and social care. One lesson was observed. Students in Year 12 were seen learning about ethical dilemmas very effectively.

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

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