

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **THE BILLERICAY SCHOOL**

Billericay, Essex

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115384

Headteacher: Mrs S Hammond

Lead inspector: Mr Terry Parish

Dates of inspection: 20 – 24 September 2004

Inspection number: 268949

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11-18 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1673
School address:	School Road Billericay Essex
Postcode:	CM12 9LH
Telephone number:	01277 655191
Fax number:	01277 314414
Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Robert Orr

Date of previous inspection: 19/4/1999

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The school is much larger than average, has very recently been designated a mathematics and computing college and serves an increasingly broad and diverse catchment area. Overall, pupils are above average socio-economically, but attainment on entry is broadly average. Almost all pupils are white; a few come from a range of ethnic minority groups that change from year to year. Very few are likely not to use English as the first language at home. Although the proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below average, over recent years an increasing minority have entered the school with diverse needs, and the school successfully fosters inclusion of youngsters with social difficulties. Almost all pupils stay at this school for at least five years and an increasing number stay on into the sixth form. In recent years the school, like others in the locality, has had very considerable difficulty in recruiting and retaining teachers, including heads of department. Although staffing is currently satisfactory, recruitment continues to require a lot of time and energy to address the problem. The school has recent Artsmark and Sportsmark designations and has Investor In People status.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
15465	T Parish	Lead inspector	
19369	C Wild	Lay inspector	
19214	G Price	Team inspector	English
32914	J Hall	Team inspector	Mathematics
18076	H Dodd	Team inspector	Science, physics.
21806	P Swinnerton	Team inspector	Design and technology
18854	M McGregor	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
17404	J Tolley	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
31191	D Sylph	Team inspector	History
23324	S Greenland	Team inspector	Geography, sociology
32329	A Stafford	Team inspector	Art and design
31850	D Nevens	Team inspector	Citizenship, music
7926	J Bowden	Team inspector	Physical education
23588	C Ajitsingh	Team inspector	Religious education
7958	G Lewis	Team inspector	Special educational needs
27407	B Stoneham	Team inspector	Vocational subjects, business studies
22685	N Moss	Team inspector	Media studies

The inspection contractor was:

Serco QAA  
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DT2 9PU

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**This is a good school** filled with predominantly well-behaved pupils who enjoy work, play and a wealth of activities available to them. They are well taught and learn and achieve well. Good leadership and management overall, very good financial management and very good governance help the school make full use of resources and to give good value for money. The headteacher leads well and ensures that all pupils are valued.

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

- The number of pupils gaining higher grades in GCSE and GCE examinations has risen significantly in 2004 compared with results in 2003.
- The school contributes very well to initial teacher training, but the recruitment and retention of staff continues to pose a significant barrier to improvement.
- Standards in the workshop areas of design and technology are below average in Years 7 to 11 and pupils achieve unsatisfactorily due to unsatisfactory teaching, learning and leadership.
- Behaviour is good and pupils and students are happy, polite and interested in their lessons and the very good range of extra-curricular activities offered.
- Links with industries, agencies and colleges create innovative experiences for pupils and students, support learning and raise achievement in social and work-related skills.
- Pupils with special educational needs are very well taught in their base. Provision for them in subject lessons is satisfactory overall.
- The school provides good care overall, and pupils with significant learning or social needs are very well cared for.
- Assessment routines, although satisfactory overall, are not as rigorous in Years 7 to 9 as in other years.

The school has striven hard to counter difficulties in staff recruitment, which have adversely affected standards in recent years, and made improvements in the curriculum, assessment, special educational needs provision, accommodation and resources. Improvement is good overall.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

*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.*

**Pupils achieve well overall;** satisfactorily in Years 7 to 9, well by the end of Year 11. Students in the sixth form achieve well in work seen and overall in most of the subjects inspected, but achievement in A-level examinations recently has been satisfactory. Standards of work are

broadly average between Years 7 and 9, above average in Years 10 and 11 and broadly average in the sixth form, where only some subjects were inspected. Examination standards have risen in 2004 and achievement appears better; statutory targets were met and were appropriate. Achievement in most subjects is good overall and in English it is good across all years; achievement is unsatisfactory in some aspects of design and technology in Years 7 to 11. Other relatively weaker subjects, such as music, are improving as teachers are now in place. A significant minority of pupils have learning difficulties and/or social problems. Very good specialist support enables these pupils to achieve well.

The attitudes and behaviour of pupils are good overall. **The spiritual, social, moral, cultural and personal development of pupils is good.** Attendance and punctuality are both good. Sixth form students' attitudes and behaviour are very good. Their attendance is good.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching and learning are both good overall.** They are good in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, but satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 due to a small amount of unsatisfactory teaching (mostly in design and technology) and less rigorous assessment. Independent learning is common across the school, is good in the sixth form and is supported by pupils' and students' good skills in ICT. The curriculum, and care, guidance and support are all good; the partnership with parents is good whilst links with other schools and the wider community are very good and raise pupils' achievement in social and work-related skills.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are good overall both in the main school and in the sixth form.** Leadership by the headteacher and other key staff is good. Management is good. Very good work by the governing body ensures that money is very well spent, good work by all recognised and deficiencies chased up. They are well aware that the school does not meet the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship because of lack of enough large spaces to hold assemblies, but ensure that efforts are made. The Christian faith is supported through other activities, and provision of religious education does meet requirements in all years.

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

Relatively few parents attended the meeting or returned a questionnaire. Feelings from both sources are generally positive with most significant concerns related to inadequate staffing and related teaching and behavioural problems. At the time of the inspection almost all staffing problems have been resolved, although some new teachers still have to gain experience. Some parents also said homework was often not set or marked; at this early stage in the school year inspectors found too little evidence with which to support or refute this view. Pupils were very positive about their lot, criticisms by older pupils again mainly related to past poor experiences with supply teachers and the frequency with which such teachers sometimes changed.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- Ensure that teaching, learning, achievement, standards and leadership improve in the 'workshop areas' of design and technology.
- Ensure that all teachers use appropriate strategies to support pupils with special educational needs in their classes.
- Tighten up assessment procedures used in Years 7 to 9, paying particular regard to moderating assessments against national criteria and ensuring that marking of work is consistently good.
- Continue its great efforts and support related to teacher recruitment and induction.
- In the sixth form, pursue even higher examination standards that better reflect good achievement in lessons.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Provide a daily act of collective worship.



## THE SIXTH FORM AT THE BILLERICAY SCHOOL

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**The sixth form is good and is cost effective.** Good teaching and learning result in current good achievement. Standards in all subjects are at least average and standards are average overall. Overall, standards in examinations have typically been above average and results are higher in 2004 than in 2003. Such standards represent satisfactory achievement for those students. Leadership and management are good and well support the changing nature of the sixth form, which has a broader range of academic ability entering it now than in recent years. Governors' investment in accommodation and resources to help students learn for themselves has been successful. Staffing difficulties in the main school have had some knock-on effects in the sixth form, but good school leadership and management have successfully tackled this.

#### The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Although above average and improving, overall examination results have not yet fully reflected the good quality of education students receive.
- Students' independent learning, supported by very good accommodation, is good.
- Links with the community, agencies, colleges and industry are very good.
- Teaching and learning in art and design and in sociology are very good and lead to very good student achievement.
- Relationships between students and between students and staff are very good.

Little was said about the sixth form in the previous report. The requirement for religious education to be provided appropriately to all students is now met. Accommodation is now better. Provision for some subjects is better. Standards achieved in examinations are similar. Improvement is good overall.

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

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Provision in English literature is good. Teaching and learning are good. Students achieve well.
Mathematics	Provision in mathematics is good. Teaching and learning are good. Students achieve well.
Science	Provision in physics is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Students achieve satisfactorily.
Information and communication technology	Provision in ICT is good. Teaching and learning are good. Students achieve well.
Humanities	Provision in history is good. Teaching and learning are good. Students achieve satisfactorily. Provision in sociology is very good. Teaching and learning are very good. Students achieve very well.
Visual and performing arts and media	Provision in art and design is very good. Teaching and learning are very good. Students achieve very well.

Provision in media studies is good. Teaching and learning are good. Students achieve well.

Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Provision in physical education is good. Teaching and learning are good. Students achieve well.
Business	Provision in business education is good. Teaching and learning are good. Students achieve well.

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

## **ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

**Students receive good guidance** about their work and how to take up opportunities available when they leave school. There is good support for independent study including staffed study areas. Form tutors work well with students to help them reach their academic targets.

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

**Leadership and management are good.** Monitoring of students' progress and intervention to provide support is good. Analysis of how students perform in examinations could be more consistently applied across subjects to determine why results are not quite as good as the good quality of education provided indicates they should be.

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

Students are very positive about the quality of advice and support they are getting and their general experiences in the sixth form. The school's regular surveys, conducted by an independent third party, support students' views expressed to inspectors.

## **Glossary**

The term 'Key Stage 3' is sometimes used and means 'Years 7 to 9'. It is often used in connection with national strategies to improve teaching and learning and hence raise pupils' achievement in these years.

The term 'Key Stage 4' is sometimes used as an alternative to 'Years 10 and 11'.

Throughout this report 'pupil' is used in Years 7 to 11, 'student' is used in the sixth form.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

#### Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Pupils achieve well overall; satisfactorily in Years 7 to 9, well by the end of Year 11. Current students in the sixth form are achieving well in work seen and overall in most of the subjects inspected, but their achievement in examinations has been average. Standards of work are broadly average in Years 7 and 9, above average in Years 10 and 11 and broadly average in the sixth form, where only some subjects were inspected.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Overall standards in GCSE and GCE examinations appear to have risen in 2004 compared with 2003; national data has not yet been validated.
- Very good specialist support is provided for pupils with special educational needs and they, consequently, achieve well.
- Pupils and students achieve well in English across all years.
- Standards in the 'workshop area' of design and technology are below average in Years 7 to 11 and pupils achieve unsatisfactorily due to unsatisfactory teaching, learning and leadership.
- Standards are below average in French and in German in Years 10 and 11, and pupils have achieved unsatisfactorily due to staffing difficulties. Their progress is now satisfactory.
- Standards in music in Years 7 to 9 are below average and pupils have achieved unsatisfactorily due to staffing difficulties. Their progress is now satisfactory.
- Students achieve very well in art and design, and in sociology in the sixth form.

#### Commentary

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	36.0 (32.9)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	36.5 (35.6)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	35.6 (34.2)	33.6 (33.3)

*There were 291 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*

1. Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were above average compared with results in all schools, but below average overall compared with those in similar schools. Results were better than in 2002 largely due to much better English results. Compared with results in similar schools, English results were above average, mathematics results were well below average, weaker than in 2002, due to staffing difficulties, and science results remained below average and again suffered from staffing issues. Overall, results of tests in 2004 are better and targets were broadly met. The relative performances of boys and girls vary, girls tending to outperform boys. However,

the relative achievement of boys and girls overall has more to do with the proportions of boys and girls in each year and the prior attainment of each gender group. Proportions change significantly from year to year and when the numbers of girls fall it is typically girls of higher prior attainment who are missing. In addition, the overall academic standard on entry to the school has slowly fallen since the last inspection due mostly to an increase in the proportion of pupils with learning and/or behavioural difficulties, approximately 30 pupils. The number of more able pupils is about the same, but the proportion is less. At least partially in consequence of this, the trend in end of Year 9 test results was down until picking up in 2003, following good leadership and management strategies to tackle underachievement and improve staffing.

**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	55 (53)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	96 (94)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (99)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	36.4 (37.1)	34.7 (34.8)

*There were 269 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

2. GCSE results have fluctuated too, falling from an overall peak in 2001 to a low in 2003, before rising significantly in 2004 when all targets were met. The Year 11 cohort in 2003 had significantly fewer girls; the cohort in 2004 about equal numbers of boys and girls. In addition, both the headteacher and governors agreed targets and strategies in 2002/2003 to more actively engage underachievers and provide more support for them in coursework and examination techniques. Results in 2004 indicate that such strategies are positively influencing standards and achievement.
  
3. In 2003, compared with pupils in all schools, the proportion of pupils who gained five or more A\*-G grades or one or more A\*-G grades was well above average. This reflects the very good support given to relatively less able candidates. The proportion of A\*-C grades was above average. When comparisons are made with results in similar schools, the proportion of A\*-C grades falls to average. However, national figures are based upon similar numbers of boys and girls taking examinations, which was not the case in this school in 2003. There were 24 per cent more boys than girls, and girls, nationally, attain significantly more A\*-C grades. Overall results, using a points system, were average compared with similar schools, deflated by the A\*-C proportion. The overall result does not take into account the significant minority of pupils following non-GCSE accredited courses. Ninety-six pupils, a high proportion, got eight or more A\*-C grades and 64 pupils, ten or more; this does not emerge clearly from school 'benchmarks', although it does indicate that gifted, more able, pupils have opportunities to excel. In consequence of all these factors related to this school, the inspection team consider that 'above average', compared with 'similar' schools is a fair reflection of the school's performance in 2003 GCSE examinations.
  
4. All pupils in Year 7 are tested for reading and spelling on entry to the school. These tests give specific information that is not always readily available from national tests at the end of primary education. Overall, standards on entry to the school are broadly average, but pupils taught within the learning support base have standards in English and mathematics that are below the national expectation. The school has set a 'functional age' of ten years

for reading and 9.06 years for spelling, and pupils who do not achieve these levels are given the opportunity to participate in a variety of activities focused on improving specific skills. In recent years the number of pupils below the 'functional' ages has increased. By the end of Year 9 many have improved standards significantly and 90 per cent of all pupils achieve the 'functional' reading and spelling targets set. Pupils in Years 10 and 11, who are in the 'Support Option' group or the 'XL' group often have standards that are below expectation. Very good support is provided for these pupils, and their results at GCSE have improved beyond expected grades. Their attendance at examinations has also improved. The 'XL' group of pupils participates in a course that includes time spent at college or in training. Motivation within this group has also improved. The progress made by pupils with special educational needs is good overall, and sometimes very good, in lessons. Their achievement over time is also good in most subject areas. The school provides a curriculum that meets the needs of such pupils very well, including an accredited ASDAN Cope course, which combines life skills and personal development. Some pupils have received the silver level ASDAN award with accreditation equivalent to a grade B at GCSE, although this is not incorporated into 'benchmarking'.

5. The very few pupils studying English as an additional language in recent examinations did as well as their peers and some have continued their studies into the sixth form. Several students achieved almost all A\*/A grades.
6. The only subject in which standards and pupils' achievement are not yet improving overall is design and technology. Teaching, learning, and leadership in the 'workshop areas' are unsatisfactory. Girls' standards of work and consequent achievement are much better than those of the boys. This is a result of a traditional option pattern; girls choose food and textiles technology where they perform satisfactorily or better, boys choose workshop-related technologies. The school has adopted locally and nationally supported changes to the design and technology curriculum, which are in place from Year 9. Inspection suggests such changes will not lead to improvement until underlying problems are resolved. Recent underachievement in music, French and German, and business studies (only sampled in Key Stage 4) is being overcome due to more consistent staffing and good whole-school leadership and management.

## Sixth form

### **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	82.5 (88.4)	89.4 (92.6)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	23.8 (23.4)	32.6 (35.3)
Average point score per pupil	281.4 (271.5)	258.2 (263.3)

*There were 108 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*

7. The school operates an 'inclusive' sixth form entrance policy, which means a proportion of pupils are relatively academically weak when they enter the sixth form, but this group is, to an extent, balanced by a significant minority whose attainment is well above average. Attainment on entry to the sixth form overall is typical of most schools of this type and broadly average. Overall results for 2003 are above average, average for males, well above average for females, and results for 2004 appear better than those in 2003. However, the proportion of students gaining the higher A and B grades, is noticeably below average in 2003 and reflects an 'easier' entrance policy to the sixth form in 2001. This broad analysis agrees with inspectors' judgements about the current students' work, which shows students to be achieving well in

most subjects inspected; achievement in physics and in history is satisfactory, in art and design it is very good. However, there is a discrepancy with analyses, based on 'value added', of how students performed in both 2003 and 2004 A-level examinations compared with their prior attainment at GCSE. These analyses show these students achieved satisfactorily overall, as might be expected. As teaching and learning in the sixth form are good and many students appear to take full advantage of opportunities for private study, the prognosis is that the current cohort of students will achieve well in examinations unless there is an underlying problem with how well they answer questions when examined. No such problem was brought to the attention of inspectors or was apparent in the scrutiny of work.

8. Most students 'stay the course' and do not drop out of the sixth form, which underlines the general contentment that students have with provision.

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

The attitudes, behaviour, and personal development of pupils are good overall. The spiritual, social, moral and cultural development of pupils is good. Attendance and punctuality are both good. Sixth form students' attitudes and behaviour are very good. Their attendance is good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils and students are happy, polite and interested in their lessons and activities.
- Most pupils behave well.
- Good relationships between pupils and between staff and pupils are fostered well. Relationships in the sixth form are very good.
- Attendance is above the national average.
- Some bullying occurs in the school, mainly of a verbal nature, but pupils feel the school deals with it appropriately.
- Overall, community responsibilities are well understood by pupils and students, although pupils dropping litter lets this positive picture down.
- Pupils' personal development is good and through the school council and newsletters pupils and students play a full part in school life.

### **Commentary**

9. Good attitudes to school have been maintained since the last inspection. It is noticeable that pupils are happy to be at school; they are good-natured, polite and the school is free from tensions. Most teachers work hard to ensure that all pupils arrive at their lessons with good attitudes and a desire to learn, and most pupils respond positively. In a few lessons, weak classroom management encourages a few pupils to become restless. Activities and support that the school provides outside lessons encourage pupils to succeed, keep them busy and involve them in a good range of interests.
10. Inspection questionnaires indicate most parents are satisfied with pupils' behaviour, but a small minority alleges misbehaviour happens too often when supply teachers teach their children. At the time of the inspection staffing problems have mostly been resolved and inspectors noted few instances of inappropriate behaviour. Good relationships between staff and pupils are a key factor in contributing to good behaviour in lessons and around the school. The school's commitment to inclusion and working with pupils who would otherwise become disaffected is successful, but occasionally a few of these pupils respond inappropriately and these account for most of the exclusion figures. Although



pupils feel that some bullying occurs in school, they do not feel that it is a problem and say that if bullying did occur they would be able to seek help from staff who would deal with it effectively.

11. A blot on pupils' otherwise good attitudes is litter dropping. The school has had to employ extra cleaning staff to combat the problem of the inconsiderate behaviour of some pupils in dropping litter on the ground either outside or in the school corridors. This happens at lunch-time when 1,300 pupils are served food from several outlets. There is a general acceptance by pupils of the amount of litter, which does not help in the struggle to keep the school clean.

**Ethnic background of pupils**

**Exclusions in the last school year**

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1600	143	3
White – Irish	1	0	0
White – any other White background	16	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	5	4	0
Mixed – White and Black African	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	2	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	7	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	7	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	8	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	5	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	4	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	3	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	2	0	0
Chinese	8	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	1	0
No ethnic group recorded	1	0	0

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

12. Attendance at the school is good; the rate of unauthorised absence at the school is below the national average. The school actively monitors and encourages regular attendance, but the school’s policy of requesting parents to give a reason for absence by the third day does not communicate to parents the importance the school places on good attendance or assure the school of the whereabouts of its pupils. Most pupils arrive at school on time, a few pupils are unpunctual, but arrive before the end of form tutorial. Pupils arrive punctually to lessons.

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

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	7.0	School data	0.4
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

13. Overall, the provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.
14. Pupils’ understanding of the responsibilities of living in a community is good and helped well by the effective school council and pupil newsletter. Some pupils have been trained as ‘researchers’ and are currently compiling a report that evaluates the school. In many lessons they work together responsibly in pairs and groups, supporting each other. The

citizenship programme develops their understanding of the needs of other members of the community, for example, through a survey last term of the facilities for disabled people in Billericay. During the inspection, some groups were planning the 'harvest' boxes they would give to older members of the community. Debates in several subjects show a good awareness of the needs of others.

15. Opportunities to understand their own and other cultures are good and lead especially to the appreciation of other cultures. These are studied through art and design, history, geography, languages, music, religious education, sociology and media studies. School trips have taken pupils to Japan, Ecuador and Pakistan, and the experiences from these trips have been cascaded back into the school through presentations by the pupils concerned. The trip to Pakistan was a particular success and involved pupils travelling as guests of the Pakistani Government, whose high officials they met. Pupils take part in theatre visits and productions, and talk with visiting authors, which allows them to develop their cultural awareness in these directions.
16. Spiritual provision is satisfactory. Good contributions to the development of spirituality are seen in art and design, geography and religious education, but are less evident in other subjects. Provision for pupils' moral development is good and pupils develop a good understanding of right and wrong. Adults set a good example for pupils and ensure good order in the school. Pupils are also taught to consider the effects of their actions on others and the actions of others on them. Pupils learn about developing trust and friendship. Representatives of the Christian faith are regular visitors and successful Christian 'clubs' are available at lunch-time. As yet, not many representatives of other faiths come into school. Most displays and notices in corridors and classrooms include a good multicultural dimension to them.

### **Sixth form**

17. Attitudes to learning in the sixth form are very good and sometimes outstanding such as in a Year 13 mathematics lesson where students had high aspirations and an excellent work ethic. In almost all lessons students are well motivated and interested in the subjects they have chosen. Students feel they co-operate well with each other and staff. They make very good use of ICT facilities, the library and study base. Their common room has a friendly and lively atmosphere. Very good relationships enhance learning and are evident in the way students assist each other either on computers or in conversations relating to their work. Attendance in the sixth form is good and encouraged by tutors' high expectations, including that of attendance during study periods.
18. Training provided for Year 12 students who volunteer to support pupils in Years 7 to 9 is detailed and thorough. The training pack provided and the support students are given when working with pupils are impressive. This gives students an opportunity to be responsible and to grow in confidence as well as providing an extra resource to support younger pupils. Relationships with younger pupils are harmonious and very professional.

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

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching and learning, the curriculum, and care, guidance and support are all good; the partnership with parents is good whilst links with other schools and with the wider community are very good.

### **Teaching and learning**

Teaching and learning are both good overall. They are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9; good in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. Assessment is good overall; it is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, good in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory overall in design and technology due to weaknesses in the 'workshop area'; they are often both good in food and in textiles technology.
- Pupils with special educational needs are very well taught in their base and their needs are satisfactorily, if inconsistently, met in subject areas.
- Teaching and learning in English, mathematics and science are good in Years 10 and 11. In Years 7 to 9 they are good in English and science, satisfactory in mathematics.
- Assessment routines, although satisfactory overall in Years 7 to 9, are not as rigorous as in other years.
- Independent learning by pupils is satisfactory overall, and by students in the sixth form it is good; the learning resource base (library) encourages learning.
- Gifted and talented pupils are well identified and their performance and development are effectively tracked.
- In the sixth form, teaching and learning in art and design and in sociology are both very good.

### Commentary

#### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 173 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2 (1%)	33 (19%)	74 (43%)	59 (34%)	5 (3%)	0	0

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

#### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in Years 7 to 11 in 133 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2 (2%)	23 (17%)	54 (41%)	49 (37%)	5 (4%)	0	0

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

19. Most parents who replied to the questionnaire indicated that they were satisfied with the quality of teaching. However, parents' comments at the meeting and some letters received gave reasons for dissatisfaction when regular teachers were either not available at all, or when long-term absence of regular teachers led to constant supply/temporary teachers, often changing frequently. Pupils gave similar comments; general satisfaction, with some subjects taught better than others and too often poor experiences when temporary teachers were used. Pupils admitted that some of their peers took advantage provided by changes of teacher and insecure management to misbehave rather more than they would do otherwise. The school is quite open about the difficulties it has had with recruitment and retention of teachers in recent years and the adverse effects this has had on maintaining standards and bringing about improvements. At the time of inspection the school is staffed satisfactorily and the quality of teaching and learning is good overall.

20. A handful of unsatisfactory lessons seen were all in Years 7 to 9, predominantly in the 'work shop area' of design and technology. Consequently, teaching and learning in design and technology are unsatisfactory overall and this is related to unsatisfactory leadership, itself a consequence of recruitment difficulties. However, both food technology and textiles technology, which operate somewhat independently, provide a good quality of education. The teaching of textiles is particularly innovative and challenging, and pupils' learning benefits immensely, in both food and textiles, from excellent technical support. Some parents expressed particular concern about music and one lesson seen was unsatisfactory. However, overall, teaching and learning are now just satisfactory following great difficulty in staffing, which led to pupils now in Years 8 to 10 having very thin experiences of music in recent years. Learning is now improving and pupils are achieving satisfactorily.
21. Although teaching and learning are judged good overall, no subject in Years 7 to 11 was judged to be providing very good teaching and learning. Teaching and learning in half of the subjects taught in Years 7 to 9, including mathematics, are deemed to be satisfactory. Reasons for this 'lack of sparkle' may be offered. The inspection was early in September and teachers were getting to know pupils, particularly Year 7. Due to bad weather the new building was not completed and some staff and pupils only moved into classrooms at the beginning of the inspection and many staff are new or relatively new, due to the difficulties mentioned above. Inspection also found that the quality of teaching is more inconsistent in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11, and this is due to a variety of reasons, from split classes and lack of specialist teachers in, for example, history, to general inexperience. There is also a tendency, common in many schools, for the 'better' or at least more experienced teachers to be taking examination classes. In science there is a broader spread of experienced staff across all years and teaching and learning were consistently good. Assessment practice also varies between Key Stages 3 and 4; GCSE requirements and 'target minimum grades' make assessment more tightly focused in Years 10 and 11 and both teachers and pupils are clearer about what has to be learnt and where improvements are needed. In Years 7 to 9, pupils are not always clear about how they should set about improving their work. There is inconsistency amongst teachers in such basic skills as marking and likely in the setting of homework to extend learning, and teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 are too frequently insufficiently moderated; standards of work are judged too high. This weakness can also be linked to staffing difficulties. Inexperienced staff have little 'feel' for standards whilst teachers recruited from overseas are often temporary and find it difficult to come to terms with the requirements of the English education system in general, and levels of attainment in the National Curriculum in particular. School management invests heavily in ongoing support and training for new staff, but the requirement is constant and drains financial resources.
22. Pupils' learning is very well supported by opportunities outside of normal lessons, which provide additional teaching, opportunities to do 'homework' and facilities for private study. The learning resource base is very well staffed and resourced and many pupils were seen working profitably in it at lunch-time and before and after school.
23. Teaching and learning within the special educational needs base are both very good. However, teaching in some subject areas does not always cater sufficiently for pupils with special educational needs. Appropriate support materials are not always prepared and teachers do not always obviously refer to targets set in pupils' independent education plans. In Years 7 to 9, pupils are withdrawn from lessons for successful literacy and

numeracy support. Early morning sessions held during registration, in the learning support base, are a very good example of the way in which pupils receive a variety of support:

- One-to-one support with a support tutor for reading, writing and spelling.
- Practise using computer software to improve basic skills in numeracy and literacy.
- Independent study with support available if needed.

24. A Year 7 class was seen having a 'split' literacy lesson. Their attitudes and behaviour were very impressive; they worked conscientiously on their tasks with very little intervention from adults present. Half worked with the class teacher whilst the other half worked with support tutors, Year 12 volunteers or independently. The changeover after 30 minutes was achieved with little difficulty. Independent learners using computer software are carefully monitored and programs adapted to meet needs. In Years 10 and 11 pupils participate in a 'support option'. Pupils have the opportunity to use the time to complete work from subject areas with support from staff in the base. The present arrangement has resulted in higher level of grades at GCSE than would be expected and greater attendance at examination. Pupils work independently and behave responsibly in all lessons observed. Humanities, mathematics, physical education and design and technology teachers provide good information for 'support option' staff, but less consistently so in other subjects.
25. The documentation within the special educational needs department is very impressive in both the quantity and quality of information available to staff so that pupils' needs may be met. The records kept of pupils' achievement provides an excellent reference point for any subject teacher to be able to plan and prepare for pupils' needs. Assessment procedures give a clear picture of attainment and achievement, and how they may be raised.
26. Gifted and talented pupils are well identified as they start school and their progress, for example, through assessments, is well tracked as they get older. Teaching and learning styles to benefit them have been identified and data suggests they have been moderately successful, as such pupils have generally achieved at least as well as predicted. Work on preferred learning styles, for these and other pupils, is identified through coding on teachers' records, but inspectors found little evidence of use made of such information during the inspection other than reports about department meetings. Additional learning experiences for gifted and talented youngsters are recorded and appear popular.
27. There are few pupils who require English as an additional language (EAL) teaching in the school. Almost all have fluent use of English; only three still require extra support. The school has a policy for EAL, which is regularly reviewed. The school works closely with specialist teachers from the local education authority to ensure that pupils make good progress and are correctly assessed for language competency. Two members of support staff have also received training in teaching English as a foreign language. Pupils who have reached Stages 3 and 4 receive help in answering examination questions. The school handbook for EAL teaching provides clear guidance on testing, assessment and strategies for teaching and evaluating progress. Pupils with EAL are carefully monitored in line with all pupils supported by the learning support base staff.

## Sixth form

### **Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in Years 12 and 13 in 40 lessons**

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	10 (25%)	20 (50%)	10 (25%)	0	0	0

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

28. Teaching seen during the inspection was good and students seen were learning well, both in lessons and independently, making very good use of both the learning resource base and the monitored sixth form study area, which has ICT provision dedicated to them. Very good teaching and learning predominates in sociology and in art and design, relatively weaker teaching and learning, although satisfactory, in physics. Teachers' challenge, clarity and consistency predominate in the more successful subjects. Physics teaching is not always as clear as it might be, day-to-day marking is inconsistent, and pupils' learning is made harder by their general inadequacies in the level of mathematics required. Learning in business studies is hampered by unsatisfactory accommodation, ICT resources and insufficient business links.

### **The curriculum**

Curriculum provision is good from Years 7 to 13. Extra-curricular opportunities, like support for learning and sport, are very good. Accommodation, resources and staffing are satisfactory overall; resources are good and provision of support staff, such as learning assistants and technicians, is very good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- A well-constructed, broad and flexible curriculum meets the needs and aspirations of pupils and students well.
- The school provides very good opportunities for personal development.
- Opportunities for enrichment and extra-curricular activities are very good and well supported.

- The resource based learning centre (library) is a very good resource for all pupils and supplements the good provision for sixth form private study.
- Some accommodation, by being too small or not adaptable, limits the range of work possible.

## Commentary

29. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is broad and balanced and meets the needs and aspirations of pupils well. In addition to normal requirements pupils have the opportunity to study a second language from Year 8. However, timetabling of the second language has not supported learning well; the school has recognised this and provision for the current Year 7 has changed accordingly.
30. The school works hard to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs and aspirations of its pupils well and reviews its provision on a regular basis to ensure that it does. For example, boys' achievement has, in part, been raised by reducing option choices for some and increasing time available for examinations taken. In addition, curriculum time for likely underachievers has had, and continues to have, a focus on coursework. Higher attainers and the gifted and talented can follow additional courses and activities, and the gains they make are monitored.
31. Pupils' transition from Year 11 to post-16 study or work and from Year 9 to Year 10 is carefully planned. There is a comprehensive and very well planned programme of careers advice to enable pupils to make appropriate choices in Year 10 and beyond. Consequently, the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is flexible and enables pupils to choose from a wide range of subjects to pursue their interests and aspirations; many pupils take up to ten GCSE subjects. In addition to required courses, pupils have a wide range of additional choices such as drama, economics and media studies. There are also vocational courses such as travel and tourism, business studies and office studies offered in close collaboration with local colleges, which pupils may attend for parts of each week. A small number of pupils are provided with an alternative, work-related curriculum in collaboration with local colleges, which better suits their needs.
32. A good programme for personal development is planned and covers health and social education, citizenship and careers guidance. Pupils' awareness of citizenship is better where they have dedicated lessons in it, for example, in Years 7, 10 and 11, than where citizenship is taught through the humanities in Years 8 and 9. The school makes good provision for work-related learning; the programme starts in Year 7 in the personal development programme. There is a long established and well-planned work experience programme for Year 11.
33. Opportunities for enrichment and extra-curricular activities are very good. There is a wide range of sports and other activities after school. In addition, pupils have opportunities to take part in a variety of trips and visits that enhance the taught curriculum. Extra help is given to pupils outside the school day in the form of clubs, coursework and examination classes as well as residential and other activities during school holidays. There is a good level of participation in these activities and a large proportion of pupils take part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme each year. The school provides excellent opportunities for pupils and students to work collaboratively and develop problem solving and personal skills through whole-school activity days such as Industry Day and Citizenship Day where pupils from Years 7 to 13 work together to complete group projects.
34. The match of teachers to the curriculum is satisfactory. The school has had difficulties in recruiting high calibre staff in the past, but good management has ensured an improving situation. The staffing of the special educational needs department is very good, both of teachers and support staff. The match of other support staff to the curriculum is also very good, particularly the number of support tutors. Technical support staffing is very good, for example, in science and in design and technology, ensuring that teachers have more time



to teach and often helping pupils and students learn more effectively than they would without such expertise.

35. Accommodation is satisfactory. The school has struggled hard to ensure that the quality and range of accommodation hasn't been detrimental to standards. This year, for example, it has had to invest in temporary classrooms for the English department, including, very temporarily, a marquee. A comprehensive asset plan is in place to enable further improvements to be made. In some subjects, the lack of rooms and space has meant that it is difficult to raise standards further; performing arts, for example. Good quality display in and around the school adds to the very good ethos in the school. Very good accommodation for physical education, including a swimming pool, enables a very good range of activities to be taught throughout the year. There is easy access to the very good ground floor accommodation provided for pupils with specific special educational needs.
36. Resources are good overall. All subjects of the curriculum have at least satisfactory resources of books and equipment, and most subjects are well resourced. There are some specific gaps within subjects: a shortage of data logging equipment in science and difficulties of access to ICT in history and geography, for example. Most subjects have a good stock of books for use in class, although sometimes these are shared in class or cannot be taken home by pupils. The school's resource based learning centre is a real strength; it is very well resourced, well funded and well staffed. Its stock is attractive and up to date and it provides very effective support across the subjects of the curriculum. ICT resources will become much better just after this inspection when systems already installed become operational.
37. The curriculum provision for pupils with special educational needs is good overall and referred to in both the sections on standards and on teaching and learning. The ICT resources within the special educational needs department are very good. They enable pupils to use various programs and games to improve literacy and numeracy in Key Stage 3 and work independently on coursework in Key Stage 4. Particularly impressive is the way in which all pupils use these resources sensibly and take real responsibility for their own learning.
38. The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship at any stage and so does not meet the statutory requirements to do so.

### **Sixth form**

39. The curriculum is broad and balanced. Students' needs and aspirations are met effectively through the provision of a wide variety of academic and vocational courses, for example, A-level courses in psychology, economics, music technology and media and theatre studies as well as GNVQ business. The school tries to ensure that all its students can pursue their interests and prepare for the next stage of their education and in order to achieve this it works in collaboration with local colleges and partner schools. It is also working with its partner schools to develop distance learning opportunities in order to further widen choices.
40. The development of students' key skills, including literacy, numeracy and ICT, provided through a rolling programme during Year 12, ensures that all students have access to sessions, although the school is reviewing its key skills provision to make it better. Religious education is encountered through the general studies course, taken by all students, and meets statutory requirements.

41. Students play a full part in the life of the school and the wider community, helping younger pupils in their work, through community service and taking a lead in school council activities. Post-16 students benefit from a work placement programme in which they are required to solve problems. Students are well prepared for the world of work, further training or higher education.
42. Sixth form teachers are well qualified and have a good range of experience and expertise. Accommodation overall is satisfactory. Students benefit from a newly built sixth form block of good quality that has both social and supervised study areas. However, where subjects are taught in different non-specialist rooms there is not always easy access to the use of ICT to support learning. In business studies, rooms do not offer a stimulating and business-like environment for vocational courses. Resources to support the sixth form curriculum are good overall. Book and equipment resources for ICT and for religious education are good, for other subjects they are satisfactory, although there is a shortage of books in history. Central resources to support independent study are very good. The study area and the resource based learning centre are very effective in supporting students' independent learning. Student study periods are timetabled and supervised in the centre. Students value resources and make good use of them.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **How well are pupils cared for, guided and supported**

The provision for pupils' care, welfare and health and safety is good. The support, advice and guidance, based on the monitoring pupils and students receive, is good. The involvement of pupils and students through seeking, valuing and acting on their views is very good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- School surveys and class and school councils enable pupils and students to have a strong voice in the school.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good in the support base.
- Pupils and students with significant learning or social needs are very well cared for.
- The well-established structure of year heads and form tutors provides a good and effective level of support for pupils and students.
- Monitoring and supporting of the personal development of pupils is good.
- Annual progress reports to parents are variable in their clarity and do not always convey well enough what pupils need to do to improve.
- There are good arrangements for the induction of new pupils and the transfer of students into the sixth form.
- There are some health and safety hazards associated with design and technology, and with litter.

## **Commentary**

43. The school actively involves pupils in obtaining their views. 'Backchat', the class representatives' forum, and the school council help pupils play a full role in school actions affecting them, for example, uniform and dining arrangements. Local and Essex students' councils encourage pupils and students to speak on behalf of their own and other schools to a wider audience. Both pupils and students feel that there are opportunities to put forward their views to form tutors or heads of year. The school conducts regular surveys of

pupils' views through an intermediary, and results show that the majority of pupils are positive about their school.

44. The school provides good support for its pupils' personal development. As a result, pupils feel staff are approachable and they are confident in their care. Heads of year and form tutors get to know pupils well. Information, through a computer based profile database, keeps staff informed on areas such as attendance, effort in lessons and possible examination grades. The individual mentoring of all pupils by heads of year encourages pupils to take responsibility for their own personal development. The school's approach to assessment is generally good, pupils know and understand their academic targets and are clear on how to improve their personal targets such as, 'working harder'. How to improve their work in specific areas of subjects is an area that requires further development. Annual progress reports to parents are variable in their clarity in identifying what needs to improve and how to go about it.
45. The school gives very good support to pupils who need help in overcoming problems related to learning or who are in danger of social exclusion. Children in care appear particularly successful right through to sixth form. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. Provision within the special educational needs department is very good, but it is less consistently so in subject areas. The needs of all pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Needs are met very well within the special educational needs base and by the majority of subject teachers. Individual education plans for all pupils on the register are very useful working documents and are used by the special educational needs department to track pupils' progress in all areas of the curriculum. The monitoring systems in place help to ensure that individual education plans are regularly updated and used to review pupils' targets. The school includes pupils, often with challenging behaviour, in classes. Pupils returning from a period in the pupil referral unit are carefully re-integrated and good use is made of the Key Stage 3 'inclusion' base in school. Targets for returning pupils are negotiated and parents are actively involved in the process. The school succeeds in integrating pupils with special educational needs through extra support or specific withdrawal, ensuring that they have access to the whole-school curriculum. They also have the opportunity to follow an accredited ASDAN course (a course that combines skill building and personal development).
46. Good systems are in place to ensure that teachers and classroom assistants are fully informed of child protection procedures. Other staff receive some information on child protection, but training is not significant. Through the personal, social and health education programme, the wider curriculum and form tutorials, pupils are taught to protect themselves. A Health Day and visiting speakers also contribute to the breadth of opportunities for pupils to learn how to take care of themselves. Health and safety procedures are mostly in place. The design and technology area is an exception and a list of potential hazards was notified to the school during the inspection. Litter at and after lunch-time is also a hazard; the very high number obtaining food from various school outlets means corridors and stairs have debris on them, which is a trip or slip hazard.
47. The establishment of links with partner primary schools has ensured that a good induction to this school is provided. A planned programme of careers education takes place through the personal development programme. The quality of advice to pupils on post-14 courses is good. The Connexions service is available in school and provides post-16 option advice; the service is widening their responsibilities to improve their involvement in the welfare of pupils.

## **Sixth form**

48. The generally good quality of care and support described above continues in the sixth form. Students receive good guidance on the use of their time in the sixth form, in the subjects to study and in the opportunities to talk to a wide variety of businesses. The quality of support by teachers, using assessment information, is good and students feel they receive well-structured advice and guidance on how to improve work and raise their levels of performance. Teachers provide useful support and guidance in administrative tasks such as preparing applications to university and in determining the additional requirements that will help to gain acceptance in further education establishments.

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

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Links with the community enrich provision for pupils' personal development and the curriculum very effectively.
- Curriculum links with other schools and educational institutions are very good and support learning well.
- Parents receive generally high quality information, but annual pupils' progress reports show room for improvement.
- Links with industries, agencies and colleges create innovative experiences for pupils and students.

## **Commentary**

49. Parents receive a wealth of information on the daily life of the school; newsletters are detailed and booklets to inform of the transfer to school and different stages of education are very useful. In the pre-inspection questionnaires, a few parents' responses indicate that they do not feel well informed on how their children are getting on. Progress reports give good information on the successes of pupils and clearly indicate if pupils are working at the academic levels expected of them and give details of their personal development. Reports are less successful at identifying specific areas that pupils should improve and how they should proceed or how parents might help them. Heads of year do work in school with interested parents to help them support their children at home. The school regularly conducts a survey of parents' views through an intermediary. The latest shows that virtually all who responded approve of the quality of reports and that most parents feel positive about all aspects of the school.
50. Links with the community are very well developed. The school is part of the local educational community in which teachers share their expertise with a view to increasing standards. Collaboration with other schools, colleges and further education establishments is effective and strengthened by the school's membership of the Consortium for School Improvement. This is a much wider group than the local one and enables much broader expertise to be tapped into. The school makes use of, and is useful to, a wide variety of businesses, through shared training and facilities. The ICT curriculum has been developed through such links. Girls in Year 11 are encouraged to

consider science careers by representatives from the research centres at British Petroleum and at GlaxoWellcome. Representatives from agencies such as the fire service, counselling services and Women's Refuge promote pupils' self-esteem and confidence and support their learning. Courses are held for parents in ICT and mathematics.

## **Sixth form**

51. Teachers make good use of links with the community through visiting speakers, and visits to theatres and museums to broaden students' experiences. Links with King's Way, an ICT charity, provides students with the opportunity to be involved with providing basic skills for disaffected young people and older people. Through the Business Enterprise activities, students are encouraged to widen their outlook by, for example, a two-day management course in conjunction with businesses and a university. Co-operative ventures with universities and colleges help students in their choice of careers and the involvement of Trident supports students in voluntary work in the community and work experience.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership and management are good overall both in the main school and in the sixth form. Leadership by the headteacher and of other key staff is good. Management is good. The quality of governance is very good across the school.

There is non-compliance with statutory requirements in the following area:

- Provision of a daily act of collective worship.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The headteacher provides good leadership and clarity of vision.
- The headteacher is well supported by an effective senior team who have complementary skills that are deployed to good effect.
- Governors are very committed to the school and have a clear picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- Financial management is very good.
- Leadership and management of the special educational needs department are excellent.
- Good systems are in place to monitor and review the work of departments, however, the consistency and speed with which these are acted upon is still variable.
- Arrangements for induction, performance management and the continuing professional development of teachers are very good.
- The school contributes very well to initial teacher training, but the recruitment and retention of staff continues to pose a significant barrier to improvement.

### **Commentary**

52. The school is well led by the headteacher who is highly committed and has a very clear and realistic vision of what the school seeks to achieve. She is well supported by a senior leadership team who have a wide range of expertise. They provide good leadership and effectively support faculty and subject managers. The quality of planning is thorough with clarity of purpose. Development planning has at its core the promotion of an inclusive and

positive climate for learning to support the raising of student achievement. The governors have a well-informed understanding of the strengths, weaknesses and challenges facing the school and are very supportive of the headteacher and senior leaders. Since the time of the previous inspection the headteacher, senior managers and the governing body have faced significant challenges in recruiting and retaining experienced and qualified staff. They have tackled this challenge in creative ways such as recruiting teachers from overseas, participating successfully in initial teacher training and developing the skills of existing staff. In addition, the headteacher, senior leaders and governors have led the school to a successful bid for specialist mathematics and computing status.

53. The school has moved forward successfully with its plans for improvements to accommodation despite tight budgetary constraints, and since gaining specialist status a year ago, has put significant energy into developing leadership and management roles at all levels. The school benefits considerably from the sharing of expertise and professional development opportunities through its significant involvement with two local school consortia. The school is now poised to improve further the quality of education of its pupils.
54. Management is good overall. The school, although large, functions very well as an orderly community. There is a very clear framework for departmental reviews that clearly sets out responsibilities and the schedule for review within faculties. Middle managers are increasingly involved in the use of performance data to examine the effectiveness of their departments and to take action to improve standards. Senior managers are actively involved in the process. Trends in attainment are monitored and reviews, together with performance data, are acted upon. Pastoral leaders complement the work of subject leaders in supporting and guiding those pupils identified as underachieving. The impact of the cycle of review and the speed with which action can be taken is, however, affected by changes in staffing and levels of management experience across different subject areas.
55. There is good support for provision for pupils with special educational needs from the governing body; they see special educational needs as 'a real strength of the school'. Governors receive very good reports from the co-ordinator and they attend pupil review meetings. There has been a rise in the pupil roll as a consequence of the reputation the school has developed for inclusion and special educational needs. The leadership and management of the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) are excellent and make the learning support base a very effective learning environment. The SENCO has made improvements in documentation, assessment and recording systems, and to the organisation of the learning support base. Liaison between teachers, support tutors and the SENCO is very good. Support tutors report pupils' progress in regularly held departmental meetings as well as informally. Regular meetings are held with link subject teachers to discuss strategies for improvement as well as individual pupil needs. The SENCO led meetings seen during the inspection very effectively and efficiently, encouraging ideas and views and identifying ways to move forward.
56. The school acknowledges that recruitment and retention of qualified staff is a significant barrier to continuing improvement. The school has worked energetically and successfully to recruit and retain teachers to minimise disruption caused by staffing difficulties. There is a strong commitment to continuing professional development for all staff alongside performance management. This is used effectively as a means to further improve the quality of education the school provides. An extensive range of strategies is used to

support staff new to the school. New teachers and those who join the school from overseas value the very good and comprehensive induction programme. This effective support ensures that they make a valuable contribution to the quality of teaching and learning in the school. The school is actively involved in initial teacher training that, as well as bringing some new staff into the school, has the additional benefit of developing the skills and expertise of those teachers who act as mentors.

57. Approaches to and procedures for financial management are very good and ensure that the school effectively spends all the money allocated to it and meets targets despite recent local financial constraints. Governors are regularly informed and fully involved in setting and monitoring the budget while supporting the school in seeking value for money in all its work. The very marginal deficits indicated in the table below reflect the care taken to ensure that pupils benefit from all income.
58. The overall quality of governance is very good. The governing body serves the school very well. Governors are committed to the school's development and there is a well-organised committee structure that ensures that all aspects of the school's life are closely monitored. Members of the governing body bring to it a wide range of professional skills and experiences that they are very glad to use to the benefit of the school. There is non-compliance with statutory requirements in that a daily act of collective worship is not provided for all pupils. The governors are aware of this and the lack of large assembly spaces makes gathering significant numbers of pupils together in this large school difficult. Governors do support the range of Christianity-based activities available at lunch-times and have ensured that religious education provision meets requirements right across the school.

### Sixth form

59. Leadership and management in the sixth form are good. The sixth form is organised efficiently. There are clear lines of responsibility and the school's priorities for development are appropriately based upon the continuing analysis of students' performance. Academic target setting and the monitoring of students' progress are well established and focused upon raising standards. Students' overall progress is carefully tracked and appropriate support is given where necessary. Leadership and management of individual subject areas are good overall, very good in sociology, media studies, art and design and in science. There is good liaison between subject leaders and the head of sixth form, although more could be made of the analysis of subject performances the school purchases. There has been significant progress since the last report in establishing facilities and an atmosphere in the sixth form centre, which enable students to develop independent learning skills and prepare them well for the next stage in education. Inclusion practice means not all students starting Year 12 are as academically able as earlier entrants might once have been, but good teaching and management enables most to achieve well in their work. The sixth form is cost effective.

### *Financial information for the year April [year] to March [year]*

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	£5,808,281	Balance from previous year	-£20,695
Total expenditure	£5,794,156	Balance carried forward to the next	-£6,570

## Work-related learning

Work-related learning was sampled during the inspection.

60. The effectiveness of the school's provision for work-related learning (WRL) is good; it meets statutory requirements.
61. The school's programme for certain aspects of WRL has been carefully planned in accordance with national guidance. The programme starts in Year 7 and in all years relevant work is covered via the school's personal development programme. During the inspection a very good WRL lesson was seen where Year 11 pupils completed an application form and were preparing for job interviews. The pupils' learning in this lesson was very good because of the very well planned teaching offered. The school has a long history of running work experience programmes for pupils in Year 11 and for advanced level students in Year 12. Both programmes have strong features and both offer suitable experiences of the world of work. There is also a good programme of study for a small group of pupils in Years 10 and 11 who are following an alternative curriculum. These pupils are developing useful practical skills through college and other appropriate work-based placements.
62. Although other aspects of the school's WRL programme are in the early stages of development, a clear rationale has been established and teachers responsible manage a good careers education and guidance programme that starts in Year 7. The teaching of careers guidance is good. Some departments have also formed very effective curriculum partnerships that serve to enliven teaching and learning. For example, a very good Year 11 leisure and tourism lesson was seen in which the pupils' learning benefited from a recent visit to Colchester Zoo. Such curriculum initiatives are few in number at present, but the school is keen to develop this aspect of the WRL programme further.
63. WRL is well led, but many developments are recent and have yet to fully impact on standards. There is a commonly understood curriculum policy, for example, but some subject areas have yet to implement it. Assessment systems through the reporting of each pupil's work on their personal development course are in place, but procedures need to be refined to ensure that WRL is adequately reported. In order to do this, a thorough audit of present provision is needed.



## **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 **good**.

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

- Pupils enjoy English and learn well because teachers involve them actively in lessons.
- By Year 11 pupils have made good progress from when they entered school.
- Good management has led to improving overall standards in recent years.
- The work of many pupils shows little regard for good spelling and presentation.
- Lower attaining pupils in mixed ability classes make good progress less often than others.

##### **Commentary**

64. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Standards for pupils in Year 9 have improved from average to above average. In Year 11, above average standards have been maintained.
65. National test results at the end of Year 9 in 2004 are lower than those in 2003, which were above average. The trend over the last three years is in line with the national trend of gradual improvement. Standards in work seen are above average. Test results in 2003 were better than they were in similar schools. Results in 2004 appear less good, and the school gives as the reason for this the fact that staffing difficulties disrupted the learning of pupils in a few classes.
66. GCSE results in 2003 were average compared with those in all schools. The proportion of pupils attaining an A\*-C grade was average in both English and English literature. The proportion of pupils attaining an A\*-G grade was above average in English and average in English literature. When compared with similar schools, GCSE results were slightly better than might be expected. The proportion of pupils attaining A\*-C was above average. The proportion attaining A\*-G was also above average. Boys' results were a little further behind those of girls than nationally. Results in 2004 are better than in 2003 because the proportion of girls in the year was greater. Girls nationally consistently gain higher results than boys. The proportion of pupils attaining the highest grades in 2004 was above recent national averages. GCSE results in recent years have generally been above average.
67. Standards in work seen in Years 7 to 9 are above average. Pupils achieve well. By Year 9 pupils are competent speakers and they read well with good understanding. They make regular use of the resource based learning centre for research and personal reading. Their written work is generally organised and appropriate, but standards of presentation and levels of accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar are too often careless. Pupils

enter the school with broadly average standards in English. Good teaching helps them to reach above average standards by the end of Year 9. This represents good achievement. Boys and girls do equally well in tests against national figures for each gender. Over the last four years test results have improved at the same rate as nationally.

68. Standards in Year 11 are above average. Pupils achieve well in Years 10 and 11. By Year 11 pupils communicate confidently in most situations. They are able to analyse challenging literary and media texts. They write effectively showing good awareness of language. However, standards of presentation and accuracy remain too low for many pupils, including some higher attaining pupils.
69. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress; those in small sets achieve well in all years, those in mixed ability groups do not progress as well because lessons do not always match their particular needs, for example, in choice of materials or tasks or in levels of individual support.
70. Teaching and learning are good across Years 7 to 11. Teachers ensure that pupils work frequently in pairs and small groups so that everyone is actively involved. Pupils enjoy this challenge and learn quickly through their contributions to lessons. In a good lesson on modern poetry, Year 11 pupils in pairs explored aspects of language and layout and then fed back their ideas to the class. Everyone learnt well and readily joined in discussion of the poem's meaning. In another good lesson, pupils in Year 7 compared diary extracts of two young writers. They worked in groups of four to identify differences in content and style and then volunteers assumed the role of one or other diarist, to be questioned by the class. All pupils showed an interest in the moral and social implications of war and effectively developed skills in reading and speaking. In contrast, a lesson for pupils in Year 9 on writing newspaper reports was less successful because tasks lacked appeal so that pupils were insufficiently involved in the lesson to learn well. Teachers usually plan lessons effectively. However, in a lesson for Year 11 pupils an oral question and answer session on a Robert Browning poem lacked the clear objectives necessary for pupils to make good progress. The behaviour of pupils is generally good because they participate fully in lessons.
71. Leadership and management are good. The adverse effects of recent staffing and accommodation difficulties have been minimised. Standards of work have improved steadily since the previous inspection. Programmes of lessons for pupils in each year are being revised to focus even more clearly on what pupils should learn. Work on developing the language and literacy skills of pupils is good, although a clearly structured programme is not yet evident in many lessons. Pupils make widespread use of ICT in researching and presenting their work. Assessment is good. The progress of individual pupils is closely tracked. Marking is consistently detailed and helpful to pupils. Pupils are clearly aware of their progress against national standards and know what they can do to improve further. Opportunities for pupils to extend their learning outside the classroom are good. The excellent resource based learning centre is a valuable stimulus to good learning for pupils in all years.

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

72. Standards in literacy are broadly average in Years 7 to 9 and above average in Years 10 and 11. Support for improving literacy is inconsistent across subjects. In many lessons pupils have good opportunities to develop oral skills. Pupils talk effectively to each other

when working in groups and often speak confidently to the whole class. Although in most subjects the range of reading is quite narrow, many pupils make good use of the resource based learning centre for research and to pursue their own reading interests. Writing for a variety of purposes is evident in English, history, geography and religious education. Writing is often well supported, but marking for accuracy in spelling, grammar and punctuation is not evident across all subjects. As a result, marking does not consistently help pupils to improve their skills in writing.

## **French and German**

Provision in French and German is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers have a very good command of the languages they teach and pupils' listening skills are well developed as a result.
- Pupils' attitudes are positive and behaviour is good.
- Extra-curricular opportunities are good.
- Opportunities for pupils to use the languages themselves and for real purposes are limited; speaking and responding skills are weak.
- The provision for teaching the second language is inadequate and pupils do not achieve as well as they should.
- The systems in place for the development of teaching and learning are not sufficiently structured to spread good practice.

### **Commentary**

73. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Improvement in the last year has been particularly significant; after a severe dip in GCSE results in 2003 due to staffing difficulties standards are now rising and those difficulties have been resolved.
74. GCSE results in 2003 were below average compared with those in all schools. The proportion of pupils attaining an A\*-C grade was low in French and German and very low for boys in French. The proportion of pupils attaining an A\*-G grade was broadly average. However, the proportion of pupils entered for examination was higher in French and much higher in German than is nationally the case.
75. In 2003 there were too many pupils who got very low grades most likely because of staffing difficulties experienced by the department. Boys' results in French were low compared with girls' results probably because of the weaker attitudes towards the subject the school says they had. Results in 2004 are better than in 2003. The trend in results is up because staffing difficulties have been resolved and boys' attitudes towards their learning have improved.
76. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are average and pupils achieve satisfactorily. By Year 9, pupils can describe events simply in the past, present and future and express simple opinions in both languages. However, most cannot do this easily without reference to notes and models. Lower attaining pupils and pupils with special educational needs follow models closely, adapting set phrases to change meaning, and matching sentences to meaning.

77. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are below average overall. There is underachievement due to the adverse effect on pupils' learning of previous staffing difficulties. However, these difficulties have now been resolved and, although overall standards are below what might be expected, pupils are now making satisfactory progress in lessons. By Year 11, pupils write at some length using a range of structures and vocabulary, for example, to describe their part-time jobs or their leisure activities. However, the range of language used is limited and they do not always use it creatively to link their ideas. Listening and reading skills are well developed, but speaking and responding spontaneously are less secure. Pupils are heavily dependent upon written notes and prompts, and this inhibits their ability to respond independently and spontaneously in French and German.
78. Pupils in Years 8 and 9 do not make adequate progress in their second language because they have only one hour per week in the second language. Too much time each lesson has to be spent reminding them of previous learning so that their progress over time is very slow, standards are low and they do not achieve as well as they should. The school recognises this and the provision is being adapted accordingly.
79. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall in all years. Teachers have a very good command of the languages they teach and the language is used effectively to conduct activities; pupils, therefore, benefit from very good role models, and listening skills are well developed as a result. They have good relationships with their teachers and pupils behave well, listen attentively and are concerned to do well. They respond particularly well and make the best progress when they are given the opportunity to work informally in pairs or to use the language either to gather information or participate in games. Pupils lose concentration when they are not directly involved in activities and are reluctant to participate in whole-class oral activities without the chance to practise beforehand.
80. In Year 9, a good lesson enabled pupils to exchange information in German about what they had for breakfast. Key language was presented clearly using visual prompts, and effective questioning enabled them to respond successfully and was followed by opportunities to practise informally. By the end of the lesson they were confident enough to conduct a survey around the class in German. Where teaching is less effective, teacher-led activities dominate, decreasing pupils' opportunities to use the language themselves and, as a result, they are reluctant to participate. Similarly the lesson emphasis is on reading and writing to the detriment of speaking and listening. Lower attaining pupils and pupils with special educational needs find particular difficulty in completing tasks and all pupils rely too heavily on notes so that fluency and pronunciation are adversely affected.
81. In a Year 11 German lesson pupils made very good progress in learning how to describe the weather and grew in confidence in their own ability as proficient linguists. Despite their initial opinions to the contrary they succeeded because the lesson was very well planned with a series of short, achievable steps that enabled them to build confidently on what had gone before.
82. Assessment is satisfactory. Marking is regular and constructive. However, individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs are not always taken sufficiently into account in lesson planning and this sometimes results in these pupils finding tasks too difficult. Similarly, where classes contain a wide range of ability, assessment information is not always used effectively to enable all pupils to succeed at an appropriate level.

83. Leadership and management are both satisfactory. The department has had considerable difficulties with staffing over the past two years, but these have now been resolved and standards are rising again. However, there are some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning and, although systems are in place to monitor and develop teaching and learning, they are not rigorous or structured enough to effectively spread the good and very good practice that exists in the department. Assessment and marking procedures are now in place and used to track pupils' progress. Appropriate action has been taken to raise standards and establish common assessment and marking procedures through the introduction of more suitable course materials. The department makes a valuable contribution to pupils' social, cultural and personal development through its well-established exchanges with France and Germany and the opportunities it gives pupils to take part in national language competitions.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils achieve well in Years 10 and 11 due to good teaching, learning and assessment.
- There is an experienced and well-qualified team of teachers whose particular strengths include planning, the teaching of the most able and those with special educational needs, and the use of reviews at the end of lessons.
- There are exciting developments arising from specialist status including the use of ICT, the development of new courses and support for activities beyond the school day.
- The department is well led and managed; the team is supportive and share high aspirations and a determination to raise standards further, although they need to make better use of data about pupils' performance to help them do this.

## Commentary

84. Improvement is satisfactory overall, but recent improvement is good. In recent years the department has faced considerable staffing difficulties and standards had fallen. There are now clear signs of improvement and a strong well-led team of qualified teachers is in post. Schemes of work have been rewritten, a whole-school numeracy policy is now in place, the department is working towards greater consistency and there is sharing of good practice. There are opportunities for pupils to discuss their work, and teaching and learning strategies are varied.
85. National test results at the end of Year 9 in 2004 are higher than those in 2003, which were above average. Test results in 2003 were poorer than those in similar schools and the school says this is because of difficulties in securing suitably qualified teachers. The trend over the last three years is one of gradual improvement in line with the national trend.
86. GCSE results in 2003 were below average compared with those in all schools. The proportion of pupils attaining an A\*-C grade was low whilst the proportion of pupils attaining an A\*-G grade was above average. When compared with similar schools, GCSE results were poorer than might be expected. The proportion of pupils attaining A\*-C grades was low whilst the proportion gaining A\*-G grades was above average. Girls' results were particularly poor compared with boys' results, which are at least partially explained by the lower proportion of girls in the year. There were fewer able girls than is typical. Results in 2004 appear far better than in 2003, but have yet to be nationally validated. The trend in results over the last three years is up and staffing difficulties have been largely resolved.
87. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are average; pupils achieve satisfactorily. By Year 9, all pupils can simplify simple algebraic equations, manipulate decimal and vulgar fractions, and the most able understand concepts such as moving averages and can sketch graphs of quadratic functions. Standards on entry were average and this standard is maintained. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are above average; pupils achieve well. By Year 11, most pupils can solve simple equations, use appropriate units for measurements, represent data in graphical form and make calculations of speed. The most able pupils are capable of advanced mathematical concepts such as rational and irrational numbers and are capable of factorising quadratic equations by a number of different methods.
88. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because of good enthusiastic teaching. The most able pupils make good progress because they are continually challenged to extend their skills by good, well-qualified teachers. There were no differences observed between the performance of boys or girls during the inspection.
89. Teaching and learning are good overall; satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, good in Years 10 and 11. In Years 7 to 9 teachers generally plan lessons well and follow suggested national strategies. In the best lessons teachers adjust their planning to respond to the needs of pupils. By contrast, in weaker lessons, pupils sometimes spend too long continuing practising a skill they have already. In a good lower attaining Year 9 lesson, pupils started by mentally calculating scores based upon the game of snooker. The teacher encouraged good oral responses as they developed different strategies to improve their speed. In a weaker Year 7 lesson, pupils spent considerable time adding and subtracting positive and negative numbers making very few errors and being given no real challenge.

90. In Years 10 and 11 the pace of work is nearly always demanding, In one Year 10 class high attaining pupils quickly established an understanding of how to simplify complex indices and in Year 11, pupils manipulated surds, and entered a debate upon the use of rational numbers. In a lower attaining Year 10 class pupils were challenged to identify examples for the practical use of measurement before then developing a series of practical tasks to re-enforce their skills. In each case good teaching maintained an effective pace that made sure that all pupils achieved well.
91. Leadership and management are good. Departmental procedures and supporting materials are well developed and peer observations to share good practice are in place. Plans to incorporate the use of ICT within the classroom using interactive whiteboards have been hindered by technical difficulties, nevertheless, progress is being made and the use of the small dedicated ICT room is proving effective. Standards are improving and there is a clear team commitment to raise these further. Good departmental planning is based upon monitoring and evaluation. Books are well marked with appropriate comments to aid pupils and homework completion is tracked. New courses are being developed to support the school's new specialist status.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

92. The National Numeracy Strategy is used very well in mathematics lessons, and other departments have planned for the development of numeracy in their work. In design and technology pupils were seen using mathematical skills to weigh, measure and draw. A good range of numerical skills was also seen in effective use in ICT, for example, calculating and graphing with spreadsheets.

### **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **good**.

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

- Teaching and learning are good in all years.
- Pupils achieve well.
- The leadership and management of the department are very good.
- Relationships are very good and teachers maintain a consistently high standard of discipline in lessons, which enables all pupils to learn effectively.
- The progress of the lowest attaining pupils in Years 7 and 8 is restricted because they receive only two-thirds of the normal quota of science lessons.
- Marking is inconsistent and there are insufficient comments to help pupils improve their future work.

#### **Commentary**

93. Improvement since the last, very good, inspection report has been satisfactory overall, but impeded by staffing difficulties. Above average standards have been maintained. There are now much better facilities for using ICT to enhance learning.
94. National test results at the end of Year 9 in 2004 appear slightly below those in 2003, which were slightly above the national average. Test results in 2003 were below those found in similar schools. Results in 2004 are weaker and this is likely due to staff recruitment and retention difficulties during this cohort's progression through Years 7 to 9. The trend over the last three

years is one of gradual improvement, but in 2004 there was a decrease in the number of pupils reaching higher levels in the tests. The standard of work seen in lessons and in pupils' exercise books is above average and pupils are now achieving well.

95. GCSE results in 2003 were in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils attaining an A\*-C grade was very close to the national average, but the proportion of pupils obtaining at least a grade G was higher than it was in most other schools. In 2004, there was a significant improvement in the GCSE results with two-thirds of pupils achieving at least a grade C. This is well above the national average in 2003 and likely so in 2004, although national results have yet to be validated. Standards of work in Years 10 and 11 are above average. Pupils achieve well and by Year 11 pupils can, for example, explain the differences between genes, chromosomes and DNA, although some have difficulty in distinguishing between electric current and voltage.
96. Pupils with special educational needs are well catered for in Years 10 and 11 with many out-performing their GCSE grade predictions. In Years 7 and 8, however, pupils in the bottom set only have two-thirds of the national average quota of science lessons, making it very difficult for teachers to adequately cover all the work they are required to do. The science education of these pupils is, consequently, diminished.
97. Teaching is consistently good; no unsatisfactory teaching was observed and there were some very good lessons in both key stages. Teachers are caring and insist on a high standard of pupil behaviour in lessons. Their subject knowledge is good and they prepare pupils very thoroughly for external examinations. The department is implementing ideas from the National Key Stage 3 Strategy such as the three-part lesson. A good variety of starter activities are used, such as a true/false quiz, to quickly engage the interest of pupils, but learning objectives are not always explained at the start of the lesson. A very good Year 11 lesson, on how plants take up water and transpire, started briskly with a quick review of previous work and an explanation of the lesson's learning aims. It contained whole-class discussions, teacher demonstrations, some practical work and a short video clip. With such a range of activities the interest of pupils was sustained throughout the lesson and together with clear explanations from the teacher very effective learning took place. Lessons deemed only to be satisfactory lacked variety, resulting in pupils losing interest and becoming bored. In some lessons, where there was a considerable spread of ability, insufficient attention had been paid to ensure that all pupils were offered tasks that matched their individual capabilities.
98. A good assessment system is in place in Years 10 and 11 to monitor the progress of pupils – using the tests provided by the examination board - but a more rigorous system is needed in Years 7 to 9. Well-focused support is offered to those pupils identified as underachieving and the revision programmes provided by staff over the period before Year 9 national tests and GCSE examinations are greatly appreciated by pupils.
99. Leadership and management are both very good even though provision is good overall; the department has been kept running smoothly through several years of staffing problems. The quality of teaching and learning is closely monitored, although marking remains inconsistent in Years 7 to 9. The head of department is scrupulously fair in the way he organises the curriculum and allocates teachers to classes. His hard work and commitment to the ongoing development of the department sets an exemplary standard. The team of staff are very supportive of each other. New improvements are always being considered. A more appropriate GCSE course has been very successfully introduced with a clear improvement in results, and the new Key Stage 3 course already appears to be improving standards.
100. The department makes a good contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and incorporates issues related to citizenship in lessons whenever appropriate, for example, when debating the use of renewable and non-renewable energy



resources. The smooth running of the department is greatly helped by the highly efficient team of experienced and well-qualified technicians ably led by the senior technician.

101. The number of laboratories is barely adequate for the number of science lessons being taught and some lessons take place in a classroom. Most have good facilities, but many are dull and gloomy and do not create the best learning environment.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are above average in Years 7 to 9.
- Good leadership and management have sustained the department over a difficult period.
- Teachers use their specialist knowledge well to support learning.
- Assessment information available to guide and inform pupils on how to improve is underused.
- Pupils, particularly in Years 7 to 9 have positive attitudes that help them learn.
- There are very good resources and guidance for pupils on GCSE courses, but overuse at times discourages pupils from thinking for themselves.
- The very good practice seen in some lessons is not shared sufficiently within the department.

### **Commentary**

102. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. There have been significant changes in the curriculum and a high turnover of staff that have been managed well. The school has achieved mathematics and computing college status.
103. There were no GCSE results in 2003 that enable comparisons to be made with national averages. In 2004 comparisons are not possible because no validated averages are available yet and because whilst some pupils followed a full double award course the great majority took a short course GCSE examination. The proportion of pupils who achieved a C grade or above was 52 per cent on the short course and 42 per cent on the double award full course. Achievement on the full course, particularly that of girls, was unsatisfactory. Limitations in the teaching time allocated to the course contributed to this underachievement.
104. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are above average. All pupils achieve well as a result of well-planned and challenging lessons well matched to their abilities. Current Year 7 pupils have very positive attitudes and are achieving very well. By Year 9, pupils are working on projects that prepare them for their GCSE courses in Year 10 and they are very confident users of the school network and ICT resources. Their skills in the use of presentation software are particularly strong. They have more limited experiences of using ICT to measure and control events, but have a secure understanding of how this can be done.
105. Standards in Year 11 are average. In Year 10 they are above average as a result of the improved pace of learning those pupils received in Year 9. Improved allocation of teaching time means that pupils now build effectively upon their skills from earlier years

and overall achievement is good. They have a very clear understanding of how to develop their coursework as a result of good quality support materials. Pupils with special educational needs in particular benefit from the very structured support materials provided by teachers.

106. Teaching and learning are good in all years. The team of teachers in place, although not all fully qualified, have good specialist knowledge that ensures that skills and knowledge are taught effectively. Planning of what is to be taught is thorough and in Years 7 to 9 in particular ensures that pupils develop a range of skills to high standards. Pupils are encouraged to evaluate and assess their work, but there is scope for teachers to explain the criteria and develop pupils' understanding of how to improve. Teachers support GCSE coursework and help pupils learn through providing an extensive range of study guides and materials. At times, however, teachers over direct pupils and leave insufficient opportunities for higher attainers to extend their thinking beyond the resources provided. In the very best lessons a wide range of methods, questioning and discussion is used very effectively to engage pupils and check understanding. This results in a very good pace of learning, particularly with younger pupils.
107. Leadership and management are both good. The head of department has been in post just over two years. Monitoring and evaluation of the performance of the department have improved. Data is increasingly used to highlight pupils' underachievement and to enable teachers to take action to address it. There have been significant revisions to schemes of work and curriculum time to address the quality of learning and raise standards. The difficulties of recruiting staff have been well managed and an extensive range of support materials is in place on the school network. The excellent support of the computer network manager has enabled the school to put the infrastructure in place to extend support for teaching and learning in line with its specialist school status.

### **ICT across the curriculum**

108. Pupils' capability in using ICT to support their learning is above average overall. Through Years 7 to 9 they are taught the essentials of using a range of software tools including the use of spreadsheets and databases. They are very confident users of the school network and can make very effective use of ICT to develop and present their work. Many subjects are now routinely planning for the use of ICT by pupils to present work and undertake independent research, building upon the very good levels of skill that pupils have. The use of interactive whiteboards to support the teaching of mathematics is developing. In geography and history, many pupils use ICT to present coursework and as part of their research. In business education, Year 11 pupils, some with special educational needs, confidently use their word-processing skills to write up an analysis and report on customer care, following a visit to the local zoo. In some subjects, for example, art and design, regular access to equipment is problematic as demand for computers steadily increases. Pupils enjoy good opportunities to make use of computers in the library resource area and also at lunch-times through computer clubs. For many pupils their skills are also developed through good access to computers at home. The school has put in place a wireless extension to the school network which, when fully operational shortly after the inspection, will further address the issues of access and also provide easy laptop access for teachers.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **Geography**

Provision in geography is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils achieve well in Years 10 and 11 leading to standards that are above average.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good.
- Teaching and learning are good in Years 10 and 11.
- The department is well led and managed.
- Ensuring sound provision for pupils in split classes is using up too much management time.

### **Commentary**

109. Improvement since the last inspection is good. GCSE results have improved and the gap between boys' and girls' results has narrowed. ICT use is now well developed, as are schemes of work and the fieldwork programme. The staffing situation in Years 7 to 9 is still not ideal.
110. GCSE results in 2003 were well above the national average, mainly because of very good performance by a group of boys. The proportion of pupils attaining an A\*-C grade was well above average. The proportion of pupils attaining an A\*-G grade was above average. When compared with similar schools, GCSE results were better than might be expected, and results were above the average of other subjects in the school. Results were not as high in 2004, but a high standard was maintained.
111. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are average. On entry to the school pupils' geographical skills and knowledge are mixed, but generally average and by the end of Year 9 their achievement is satisfactory. By Year 9 the most capable pupils can carry out investigations comparing and contrasting features in different parts of the world. They can present information in a variety of formats and are particularly good at using ICT applications. Lower attaining pupils can collect information, but their analysis and presentation skills are limited and on occasion unfinished work shows limited interest in some issues. The higher attaining pupils write well because literacy is emphasised in most lessons. Numeracy skills are less well developed, with some untidy graph work appearing in many books.
112. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are above average and achievement is good. Recent work to raise boys' attainment has resulted in the gap closing between the learning of boys and girls so that there is now no significant difference. By Year 11, pupils can collect data in the field and make effective analyses of, for instance, land use and beach development. They use ICT well to support their homework and their very positive attitudes mean that lessons move forward at a fast and productive pace.
113. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, but although teachers have individual education plans for the pupils in their groups, not enough thought is given to the use of appropriate learning styles for different pupils in this category and some lessons were seen to be pitched towards the middle of a group rather than providing work appropriate to the needs of all pupils. For example, a group of pupils who would clearly have benefited from the opportunity to draw a route to school on an actual map were asked to describe the route in abstract terms, a task which was beyond many of them and inevitably led to a sense of failure for some.

114. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. They are good in Years 10 and 11, satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. There were no unsatisfactory lessons seen, and one was excellent, where a group of high attaining Year 9 pupils were given a challenging series of activities based on earthquakes, which led to them working together and taking responsibility for organising their own learning. However, the large number of staff teaching in Years 7 to 9, coupled with some classes being split between two teachers, means that pupils in these groups suffer some inconsistency of experience. The standard of teaching and learning was more consistent in Years 10 and 11, where teachers' very good subject expertise, varied and lively delivery, and very good planning of interesting lessons, together with very good pupil attitudes to the subject, ensured good achievement. In one very good Year 10 lesson about demographic change, where pupils were interpreting population pyramids, the teacher kept up constant pressure for the pupils to think for themselves as well as to be aware of the examination requirements of the topic, and, as a result, learning moved forward fast. Assessment is satisfactory; marking is regular and informative and teachers are good at assessing what pupils have learned in class. Also there is a comprehensive system of assessing learning at the end of each unit, although at present this does not always fully reflect National Curriculum criteria.
115. Leadership and management are good. The head of department has not been in post for long and she has already revised the schemes of work and documentation. She is fully aware of the future needs of the department and has made contact with feeder primary schools with a view to rationalising curriculum links. She leads her team well and has a system of delegating key tasks, such as the mentoring of non-specialist geographers teaching in the department. It is her good organisation that minimises the effect of the non-specialist teachers on the learning of the pupils concerned, but this takes extra time and energy. Citizenship has been made an integral and explicit part of the curriculum units and the subject makes a strong contribution to cultural development through its studies of different parts of the world, and to social development through the co-operative nature of much of pupils' work.

## **History**

Provision in history is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards in Years 10 and 11 are above average and pupils' achievement is good.
- Pupils' attitudes to the subject are positive and behaviour in lessons is good.
- In Years 7 to 9 there is much good practice in teaching, learning and assessment, but such practices are not fully adopted by all teachers so teaching and learning in these years is satisfactory overall.
- The history curriculum interests and motivates pupils.

### **Commentary**

116. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.
117. GCSE results in 2003 were above average compared with those in all schools. The proportion of pupils attaining an A\*-C grade was above average. The proportion of pupils attaining an A\*-G grade was above average. Pupils' achievement in these examinations was good. Boys' results were better than those of girls. Results in 2004 represent a slight

decline on 2003; in these examinations, girls' results were better than boys'. In recent years, results have usually been above average.

118. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are average and pupils' achievement is satisfactory from average standards on entry to the school. By Year 9, pupils' knowledge, understanding and their skills of using and evaluating historical sources are as nationally expected. However, the standard of their longer pieces of written work is above average, which is largely a result of good teaching of these skills. There is no consistent difference in achievement by boys and girls. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are above average and pupils' achievement is good. By Year 11, most pupils have a sound knowledge and understanding of the topics they have studied; their skills of using and evaluating historical sources are average. Their longer pieces of structured writing are above average. Most pupils can use and compare historical sources effectively; their skills of evaluating sources for reliability and utility are not so well developed. Pupils with special educational needs and the most able pupils make similar progress to that of other pupils. Again, there are no consistent differences in the achievement of boys and girls.
119. Teachers have high expectations of behaviour and they manage their classes well. Behaviour in history lessons is consistently good. Pupils' attitudes to the subject are positive and history is a popular option at GCSE level.
120. Teaching and learning are good overall, although more consistent in Years 10 and 11 than in the lower years. In Years 10 and 11, teaching and learning are good. Lessons are consistently well planned, with clear objectives. Teachers have a good command of their material and they present it well to interest and motivate pupils. Pupils respond well to the variety of work they are offered. The skills needed for examination success are taught systematically. As a result of all this, achievement in lessons is good. A very good Year 10 lesson on America in the 1920s saw enthusiastic teaching, very good questioning to develop pupils' understanding, effective use of group work and carefully structured tasks. Sometimes there is a need for a greater range of work to meet different needs. In a satisfactory Year 11 lesson on Roosevelt and the New Deal, the teacher had clear aims and managed a potentially difficult group well, but the task needed to be set at different levels of difficulty to match the different abilities of pupils. Nearly all work at this level is marked and assessed thoroughly so that pupils have a clear understanding of their progress and what they need to do in order to improve.
121. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. In these years, as at GCSE level, there are a number of consistent strengths. Some good practice is not consistent across different teachers. For example, lessons invariably have clear objectives, but these are not always explained to pupils. Key words are identified to help pupils develop their historical terminology, but they are not consistently emphasised enough or recorded by pupils. In a satisfactory lesson on the 'Titanic' disaster, Year 9 pupils extracted information about conditions on the ship from a number of sources and recorded it, making satisfactory progress in their source work skills. However, in a very good lesson using the same sources, pupils' achievement was greater; the teacher inspired greater interest and asked very good supplementary questions to develop pupils' thinking, they responded well to working in pairs and showed real enthusiasm for their work. Assessment is satisfactory; the great majority of work is marked regularly and thoroughly so that pupils understand how they can improve their work. However, assessment related to National Curriculum Levels in Years 7 to 9 is only currently being standardised and recent assessments have been too generous.

122. Leadership of the department is good and management is satisfactory. In the short time he has been in post, the head of department has provided a good model of professional practice and a good lead in developing teaching and learning. Much of what he has started has yet to have its full effect. Further monitoring is needed to spread good practice and achieve full consistency across the department's large team of teachers. The history curriculum motivates pupils and helps promote pupils' achievement. There is, unusually, a choice of two very different GCSE courses that meet different needs and interests. Local history is well used to enrich the curriculum. The many opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively make a good contribution to their social development. Citizenship content has been identified in the scheme of work and separate learning objectives for citizenship are a current focus of development.

## **Religious education**

Provision in religious education is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils' achievement is good and improving across the school.
- Teaching is good overall and pupils' attitudes to learning are good.
- Religious education contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and citizenship.
- Marking and assessment are inconsistently applied.
- The school has insufficiently developed links with religious communities other than Christian groupings to create opportunities for pupils to deepen their understanding of world faiths and, consequently, raise standards further.

### **Commentary**

123. Improvement since the last inspection has been good; the school is now fully compliant with statutory requirements.

124. Standards in Year 9 meet the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus and a significant number of pupils exceed expectations. The gap between boys' and girls' achievement is getting narrower. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well. Standards in the GCSE religious studies course, which every pupil now takes, are rising and getting closer to standards in the rest of the school, above average.

125. In Years 7 to 9, pupils gain a good understanding of beliefs, practices and insights of religions, although the relatively weak quality of their written work holds them back. Year 9 pupils appreciate and explain what is unique about them as individuals and what is it that makes one human. In one lesson, some more able pupils mentioned personality, the spirit and soul, thereby, exploring spirituality. In a Year 11 lesson, pupils discussed with each other, qualities of an ideal partner, analysed different points of view and justified their own. They also discussed what is special about a Christian marriage compared with other types of partnerships.

126. The quality of teaching is good overall in all years. Some very good lessons were seen. High expectations of behaviour, coupled with the teachers' good relationships with pupils, are helping pupils to achieve well. Teachers plan their lessons well. Teachers help pupils to learn to respect the feelings and beliefs of each other and to have opportunities for personal development. Pupils' work shows that marking and assessments are not always consistent, particularly in relation to the factual understanding of world religions.
127. Leadership and management are good. The subject is taught mainly by specialists, and the scheme of work is closely linked with the requirements of the agreed syllabus adopted last year. There are detailed lesson plans based on the National Key Stage 3 Strategy, with resources such as books, worksheets and videos to match. Although religious education contributes to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and citizenship, no explicit links are made. Limited use is made of ICT to help teaching and learning.
128. Pupils visit places of religious interest such as local churches and the school maintains a link with the Christian Union and, unusually, there are active groups and clubs in the school. Links with other faith communities are limited.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **Design and technology**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching and learning are inconsistent and unsatisfactory overall.
- There is significant underachievement by boys.
- Leadership is unsatisfactory.
- Pupils achieve well in food and textiles in Years 10 and 11.
- Good procedures exist for assessing pupils' work.
- Overall examination results are well below average.
- Pupils can use a range of ICT skills effectively.

### **Commentary**

129. Improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory. Staffing changes and recruitment difficulties have had adverse effects on provision and continue to cause problems.
130. Teacher assessment at the end of Year 9 in 2004 shows pupils achieving well above average standards. The standard of work seen during the inspection was below average overall, but is variable between material areas; textiles and food work is of a better standard. Both the work seen and teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 show there is a much wider gap than seen nationally between the achievement of girls and boys.
131. Examination results are much lower than at the last inspection when they were above average. GCSE results in 2003 were well below average compared with those in all schools. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A\*-C was very low. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A\*-G was low. Compared with their performance in other subjects pupils achieved less well. Provisional results for 2004, when a smaller number of pupils took the subject, are lower than in 2003. There is a marked difference between the

performance of boys and girls. The performance of girls was above the 2003 subject average and that of boys well below.

132. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are below average and pupils achieve unsatisfactorily. Pupils are able to design and make products using a range of tools and materials. They work well in pairs and groups as seen in a Year 9 group investigating pneumatic systems when pupils worked co-operatively. Pupils are able to use a good range of ICT applications including computer aided design and manufacture and computer numerical control. Pupils' design work, however, shows great variation in quality and quantity. Much of the design work seen was of a low standard. Girls generally produce better work than boys. Variation exists between teaching groups. Standards were highest when pupils understood the purpose of the work and were challenged. Standards were low in a Year 7 group where the majority did not know the name of the material they were using and pupils had to be continually reminded of safe working practices. Pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are sufficient for the needs of the subject.
133. In Years 10 and 11 standards overall are below average. Boys underachieve and girls achieve satisfactorily. This is linked to better teaching in food and textiles, which are taken mainly by girls. Teaching is not as good in resistant materials, systems and control, and graphics where boys predominate. The poor motivation of many boys has an adverse effect on standards. The school acknowledges underachievement of boys and measures have been taken to remedy the situation. The downside of a local and nationally encouraged strategy to boost examination results by starting GCSE courses early is that pupils in this school are not receiving their full National Curriculum entitlement in Years 7 to 9 and do not have a common experience of the subject. A good feature of work is that pupils build on ICT skills learnt earlier. An able Year 11 pupil taking graphic products used software confidently to produce a three-dimensional model of his design. He was able to consider various options by manipulating images. Most pupils use ICT for research and to improve presentation. Pupils who have special educational needs receive adequate support and achieve similarly to other pupils.
134. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory overall and across all years. Lessons seen were mostly satisfactory with small proportions that were better or unsatisfactory. Over time, however, as seen from pupils' work, pupils, particularly boys, show unsatisfactory achievement. In Years 7 to 9 the quality and quantity of pupils' design work seen in folders and books varies with the teacher they have. Not all teachers use the available good assessment procedures and information about each pupil's prior attainment effectively. The quality of marking varies and not all pupils know what they need to do to improve. Pupils tend to opt fairly traditionally within the material areas in Years 10 and 11. For example, in resistant materials, which comprises mostly boys, teaching fails to motivate pupils to design and make innovative products. The lessons are mundane and lack a variety of activities. In textiles, chosen by girls, the teacher presents the work in such a way as to encourage originality and creativity. Pupils are enthusiastic, work hard and achieve well. They design and make attractive products that show flair and quality workmanship, some of which is outstanding.
135. The overall leadership of the department is unsatisfactory. The newly appointed head of faculty has only been in post for a few months. He has not had time to fully monitor and evaluate the work of the department and take effective action. Management is satisfactory; the department runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Several workshops do not provide a good working environment. They are dimly lit, cold in winter, dusty and



cluttered, all of which militates against pupils choosing the subject in Years 10 and 11. Some health and safety concerns were identified to the school and to the department.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

136. Media studies at GCSE level was sampled. One lesson in Year 11 was seen, in which teaching and learning were good. Pupils in the large class were enthusiastic, teaching was stimulating and achievement was patently good.
137. Drama was sampled. One satisfactory lesson was observed in Year 7, in which pupils were only in their third week in the school. Working on a short text, they were beginning to learn to explore plot, suspense and characters, as well as learning something of dramatic conventions. Pupils were interested and eager to learn more.

### **Art and design**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- GCSE results have declined over recent years, but standards of current work show improvement.
- Teaching and learning are good in Years 10 and 11 and pupils achieve well.
- Lessons are mostly well structured and provide a variety of work to pupils.
- Leadership and management are both good and are leading to improving standards of pupils' work.

### **Commentary**

138. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Assessment, curricular planning and pupils' use of sketchbooks for research and preparation have all improved.
139. GCSE results in 2004 are higher than in 2003. The trend in results over the last three years is up because the department is addressing historical reasons for underachievement. GCSE results in 2003 were well below average compared with those in all schools. The proportion of pupils attaining an A\*-C grade was very low. The proportion of pupils attaining an A\*-G grade was average. When compared with similar schools, GCSE results were poorer than might be expected. The proportion of pupils attaining A\*-C grades was particularly low whilst the proportion gaining A\*-G grades was as might be expected. Boys' results were poor compared with girls' results because of less positive attitudes and more absence.
140. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are average; pupils achieve satisfactorily. Pupils enter the school with variable levels of skill; they are average overall. By Year 9, pupils understand the concepts and techniques used in creative art and design. Lessons are well organised, have clear objectives and teachers have high expectations. Occasionally some pupils in Years 8 and 9 do not make sufficient progress. This is because of the poor behaviour of a minority and weak class management. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are above average. By Year 11, achievement for most pupils is good. Pupils can use the formal elements of art effectively. Most pupils use their sketchbooks well to research topics and to prepare pieces to be submitted for examination coursework. Across all years, pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as their peers.

141. Teaching and learning are good overall; satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, good in Years 10 and 11. In a good Year 7 lesson the teacher demonstrated how to draw accurately from observation of natural forms. Pupils learnt how to build up their drawing from a faint outline of the shape by adding shadow, cross-hatching and texture marks. The teacher used a variety of teaching methods including expert advice and imaginative questioning. ICT was used well to help pupils learn in Year 11; a PowerPoint presentation introduced pupils to new approaches to portraiture. However, the lack of computers in the department prevents ICT being used as effectively as it might be otherwise. Assessment is good. Teachers' clear constructive comments on work tell pupils what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve. Examples of high standards of work, displayed in corridors and in art rooms, are used effectively to guide and support pupils' progress. Visits to art galleries extend pupils' learning experiences. Teachers provide extra lessons after school for pupils who want more help to do better.
142. Leadership and management are good. The subject leader is making good progress in halting the decline in GCSE results. The department works together as a strong team. Work plans are developing well and are addressing historical tendencies for boys to underachieve. The robust support that new teachers are receiving enables them to develop the quality of their teaching. The department receives very good technical support and this contributes to raising standards.

## **Music**

Provision in music is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Provision is now improving after a period of considerable decline.
- Although most pupils in Years 8, 9 and 10 are currently making satisfactory progress they have not achieved as well as they should because of unsatisfactory provision when they were younger.
- GCSE results are improving and more pupils are gaining higher grades.
- The quality of teaching and learning is not sufficiently consistent across all classes.

### **Commentary**

143. After the previous inspection, the difficulties of recruiting specialist experienced staff resulted in most pupils who are now in Years 8, 9 and 10 lacking basic practical skills, knowledge and understanding, and losing a serious and hard working attitude to the subject. Outside specialist assistance was brought in to help matters. The school's senior management and the local education authority continue to monitor developments and support the recently appointed curriculum leader. Recent improvement is satisfactory.
144. End of Year 9 teacher assessments in 2003 were well above average in comparison with other schools, and the 2004 assessments were at a similar level. The school now accepts that these are not an accurate evaluation of actual standards. Recent GCSE results have varied from below to above national average, but are now improving. In 2003 they were below average and there were no A\* or A grades. In 2004 more than half the pupils entered gained higher grades.
145. Pupils enter the school with below average standards in music. By Year 9 standards remain below average for most pupils. By Year 11 standards are average, although in

Year 10 at this stage they are below average. Most pupils in Year 11 are moving towards standards that are above average and have the potential to gain even better results than in 2004. Achievement is unsatisfactory by Year 9 and currently in Year 10, as these pupils have suffered the most from fragmented learning and deteriorating attitudes. Year 10 is particularly problematic because the majority of pupils are well behind where they should be and too many demonstrate negative attitudes to the subject. Year 11 are achieving and working well. Pupils with special educational needs achieve at the same level as other pupils because of adaptable tasks and satisfactory support. Higher attaining pupils have satisfactory opportunities to explore more challenging activities.

146. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, but there is insufficient good teaching because of very inexperienced staff. While the new scheme of work and lesson planning are good, the management of pupils' behaviour, lesson time and activities, and the flexibility of teaching and learning methods are not sufficiently well developed. There are not enough opportunities for pupils to evaluate and appraise their own and others' work and most pupils in Years 8 and 9 find difficulty in sustaining productive work on their own, in pairs or groups. Learning in Year 7 is better, but there are inconsistencies across classes in establishing secure subject practice. The best teaching and learning was seen in Year 11, where pupils are benefiting most from sustained and challenging expectations, show enthusiasm, confidence and a positive approach to organising and completing their own work. They are also the only pupils who make good use of the impressive music ICT resources.
147. Leadership and management are both satisfactory. The new head of department is working energetically to implement the subject development plan, which is providing better opportunities for pupils through instrumental lessons and ensembles, public performances and better resources. Her opportunities to monitor the quality and consistency of teaching and learning to support her inexperienced colleagues in lessons are limited by her own teaching commitment. Music makes a satisfactory contribution to the development of pupils' literacy through key words and technical language, and promotes their social skills and cultural and multicultural awareness.

## **Physical education**

Provision in physical education is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Most pupils achieve well by the end of Years 9 and 11 in the compulsory course and by the end of Year 11 GCSE course.
- Good quality teaching and learning result in good progress for all groups of pupils.
- Good leadership and management provide a purposeful focus, ethos and direction for the subject.
- The very good attitudes and behaviour of pupils result in a very positive atmosphere in lessons and extra-curricular activities.
- Very good extra-curricular provision throughout the year extends pupils' learning experiences and personal development.
- There is insufficient use of ICT to support pupils' learning in the compulsory course.

## **Commentary**

148. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. The positive aspects mentioned in the previous report have been maintained. New leadership and management have now started to deal with the aspects identified as areas for development.
149. GCSE results in 2003 were broadly in line with the national average with pupils achieving less well in the subject compared with many others. Approximately one quarter of the year group took the exam. The higher number of boys taking the course does not make it possible to comment on significant differences between the results of boys and of girls. Provisional results in 2004 are much better than in 2003. The trend prior to this year had been one of decline, but results have never been below the national average.
150. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are average; pupils achieve well by the end of Year 9 in relation to their below average capabilities on entry to the school. Pupils make particularly good progress in swimming within their first year in the school. By Year 9, all groups of pupils have acquired a range of individual skills and are able to apply these in a range of activities. Not all, however, are sufficiently competent in the evaluation of their own or others' work. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are average; all groups of pupils achieve well and have continued to build on the skills and techniques learned in Years 7 to 9. Across all years, pupils have developed well their understanding of the principles and procedures for warm up, but on occasion, the quality of their exercises is not good enough.
151. Teaching and learning are good in all years. Learning objectives are made clear at the start of lessons thus pupils know what is expected of them. Teachers have a good command of the activities being taught and have a consistent approach as regards behaviour, discipline and ensuring that pupils work to their best. For example, effective breakdown and demonstration of skills in a Year 10 GCSE badminton lesson ensured that pupils understood what was expected of them. Lessons are well structured, purposeful and provide for progression and challenge. Attitudes and behaviour are very good; pupils clearly respect the ethos within which the subject is taught, which enhances the quality of learning and promotes a very good atmosphere in lessons. Pupils are involved in pair and small group work, but there are sometimes missed chances for pupils to be involved in structured observation of others' work. This would deepen their understanding further and help them modify and develop their own practice. Teachers circulate well and effective use of praise and constructive criticism makes pupils aware of their capabilities and what they need to do to improve. The quality of marking of pupils' GCSE theory work is inconsistent, for example, pupils are not always told what they need to do to improve. In the compulsory lessons, there is insufficient use of ICT to support pupils' learning.
152. Good leadership and management provide a purposeful focus and direction for the subject to raise standards further. The department has recognised that assessment procedures in Years 7 to 9 have not been moderated effectively enough and that assessment levels in planned programmes of work do not always refer clearly to the four strands of work within the National Curriculum.

### ***Comment on general sporting provision in the school***

153. Sixty per cent of pupils have access to two hours of quality physical education provision per week. Very good extra-curricular provision throughout the year, including both recreational and competitive fixtures, extends pupils' learning opportunities and personal development. As a result of the commitment of physical education teachers, senior netball, football and basketball teams have been successful in district competitions. Individuals have attained representative honours at district, county and national levels. The department has recently become involved in the local schools' sports co-ordinator (SSCo) scheme and there are established links with local community sporting organisations that are of benefit to pupils.

### **BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES**

154. One lesson was sampled in both business studies and in leisure and tourism. In business studies standards were above average and the quality of teaching and learning was satisfactory. In leisure and tourism standards were below average, but the pupils achieved very well because of the very good teaching offered.

155. GCSE child development was sampled. Examination results in 2003, when compared with all schools, were well above average for the proportion of pupils achieving grades A\*-C and were below average for the proportion achieving grades A\*-G. Provisional results for 2004 are similar with a very good proportion of pupils achieving high grades. Pupils tend to achieve higher grades in this subject than in their other subjects. Lessons seen were good and examination board requirements are well understood. Teachers make the subject interesting by providing varied learning experiences. Pupils' learning is good because they have the opportunity to study young children brought into school, in playgroups and by taking a cyber baby home for a weekend. Pupils undertake an individual child study as part of their coursework. These are of a high standard and demonstrate that pupils are able to apply theoretical knowledge to a practical situation. Pupils of all abilities have a good attitude to their work and achieve well. Written work is well presented and complete. In the classroom pupils are attentive to the teacher, but are not very forthcoming unless they are questioned directly.

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

156. These subjects, combined within pupils' personal development, were sampled during the inspection. As no lessons could be observed in citizenship, its standards, achievement, teaching and learning are not evaluated. Two lessons in Years 10 and 11 and a Year 7 tutor period were seen in personal health and social education. Teaching and learning were very good in these lessons and all pupils were working at above average standards.

157. Pupils study personal health and social education and citizenship, and prepare for work and further study within the personal development programme. This is taught in dedicated lessons, which are taught by year tutors in Year 7 and by the personal development tutor team in Years 10 and 11. Dedicated lessons are better at ensuring that citizenship requirements are met than others. In Years 8 and 9 personal development occurs within other curriculum subjects, notably humanities and science. The scheme of work clearly indicates how citizenship should be tackled. Where citizenship occurs within the humanities, pupils are less aware of it and teachers are not making sufficient distinction between the aspects and skills of the host subject, for example, history, and those of the citizenship programme it promotes. Currently geography provides the clearest distinction.

158. Curriculum personal development is enhanced further by very good whole-school focus days, in which pupils from all years experience intense activity, for example, in citizenship, health and industry, mainly with visiting specialists from the local community. The citizenship focus day not only made pupils aware of many aspects of being a good citizen, particularly through pupils' interaction in group practical activities, but is also an indicator of the importance that the school gives to the subject. Pupils' evaluations of these activities were very positive. There are many good opportunities through the school's extensive community links and its range of extra curricular activities for pupils to practise and extend what they have learnt in lessons.
159. All pupils participate in the school paper, 'Student Voice', by selecting representatives to express their views and discuss, resolve and act on issues that generally benefit the school. There is also an effective and well-regarded school council. These processes indicate continuing improvements in the school's record of valuing pupils' views and acting on them.
160. Leadership and management are both good. A strong commitment to extend and enrich pupils' personal development, staff expertise, and enthusiasm and appropriate training has resulted in the successful implementation of citizenship and pupils' representation. Co-ordination and monitoring of the curriculum and teaching and learning are better in Years 10 and 11 than elsewhere. A promising start has been made on a citizenship assessment system, which will eventually define standards and how they are measured at the end of Years 9 and 11. The personal development programme has very good resources for learning.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2003.

### *Level 3 GCE AS level courses*

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and Design	10	60.0	80.1	10.0	23.7	16.0	29.9
Biology	10	60.0	65.2	10.0	11.1	17.0	20.6
Business Studies	20	80.0	76.4	5.0	16.3	25.0	26.2
Communication Studies	12	83.3	86.4	16.7	23.8	29.2	32.0
Economics	15	33.3	73.6	0.0	20.1	10.0	26.4
English/English language	16	81.3	82.9	18.8	17.5	27.5	28.7
Design and Technology	11	63.6	74.9	45.5	15.1	29.1	25.3
General Studies	48	47.9	73.9	4.2	17.8	12.7	25.7
History	9	88.9	80.7	0.0	19.5	25.6	28.6
Information Technology	24	54.2	67.0	4.2	10.9	16.3	21.4
Mathematics	16	25.0	61.9	6.3	17.1	8.8	22.1
Other Social Studies	15	60.0	69.7	6.7	16.7	18.7	24.1
Physics	7	28.6	68.6	14.3	14.4	14.3	22.7

Sociology	8	50.0	71.8	12.5	18.4	17.5	25.4
Sports/PE Studies	8	100.0	73.2	25.0	11.4	36.3	23.1
Total	248	60.1	73.9	9.7	17.4	19.0	25.7

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

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and Design	9	100.0	98.6	44.4	50.2	80.0	87.5
Biology	13	92.3	96.4	53.8	39.2	87.7	78.6
Business Studies	16	100.0	98.7	31.3	36.8	75.0	80.1
Business VCE	6	63.6	65.0	0.0	14.6	38.2	60.1
Chemistry	5	100.0	97.6	60.0	49.0	92.0	82.1
Communication Studies	28	100.0	99.4	21.4	37.8	73.6	82.1
Drama	8	100.0	99.5	37.5	40.1	80.0	83.6
English/English Language	25	100.0	99.4	44.0	36.3	87.2	80.9
English Literature	14	100.0	99.5	78.6	46.5	100.0	86.5
Design and Technology	6	100.0	97.8	50.0	35.0	83.3	77.9
General Studies	86	100.0	94.7	22.1	31.0	70.9	73.1
Geography	10	100.0	98.7	70.0	44.5	98.0	84.0
History	17	100.0	99.0	17.6	44.6	63.5	84.6
Information Technology	27	100.0	95.6	14.8	24.6	71.1	69.5
Mathematics	15	100.0	96.7	60.0	55.6	89.3	88.8
Other social studies	18	100.0	97.4	33.3	42.7	70.0	81.8
Physics	13	84.6	96.7	30.8	44.6	70.8	81.7
Sociology	21	100.0	98.2	42.9	44.3	81.0	83.6
Sports/PE Studies	9	100.0	98.0	44.4	30.9	84.4	75.2
Total (includes subjects with <5 entries)	348	98.9	97.7	34.2	42.1	77.1	81.9

**Level 2 vocational qualifications**

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Intermediate GNVQ Business Studies	15	8		1			

**ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

**English**

A lesson in English language and literature was sampled. Teaching was good and students made good progress. Work seen was at above average levels. GCE A-level examination



results for 2003 were above the national average. Those for 2004 appear to be at a similar level.

## **English literature**

Provision in English literature is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good teaching and positive attitudes from students help them to achieve well.
- A-level results in 2003 were well above the national average.
- Good management supports the study of all students very well.
- In a minority of lessons students make less good progress because they are not active participants.

### **Commentary**

161. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. A-level examination results were average at the time of the last inspection. They are now comfortably above the national average.
162. Results in GCE A-level examinations in 2003 were outstanding; the proportion of students attaining grades A or B was very high. GCE results in 2004 have not yet been validated and appear to be lower than in 2003, but still likely to be above average, compared with such results in recent years. Results over the last three years have been consistently above or well above average. Differences in standards, as in the current year, just reflect inherent differences in the ability of the cohort.
163. The standards of work seen are above average. Students achieve well. A-level results show that many students gain higher grades than those suggested by their attainment on entry to the sixth form. By Year 13 students are confident in their knowledge of the texts they study. They research and plan essays carefully so that the lines of argument are persuasive and well supported by textual evidence. Notes are well organised and detailed. Students are very positive in class and work hard outside lessons. They enjoy studying a range of contrasting texts and feel well supported by all teachers from the outset.
164. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers are enthusiastic and conduct lessons at a brisk pace. They usually plan lessons carefully to ensure that activities are varied and that students are fully engaged. In Year 12, a good lesson saw students give short presentations to the class about key Shakespearian characters and then in small groups begin to examine the text of Sheridan's 'The School for Scandal' ready to feedback initial reactions. This was a lively lesson and all students made good progress. In contrast a Year 13 lesson on Alice Walker's 'The Color Purple' was dominated by the class teacher talking so that students were limited to very short interjections. Although their learning was sound they did not engage with the text as directly and so made less good progress. Students respect teachers for their very good knowledge of the subject. Very few students fail to complete either Years 12 or 13. Assessment is very thorough and closely tracks students' progress. Marking is detailed and gives all students clear indications about the standard of their work and shows them how to improve further.

165. Leadership and management are good overall. Good management ensures that students have a very clear overview of examination requirements. They are well informed about the course prior to joining the sixth form so that they make rapid progress early in Year 12. Teachers work well with one another to provide a coherent programme for learning. Students enjoy the additional variety in lessons that arise from having two teachers.

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

166. Standards of literacy in the sixth form are average. Students can meet the language demands in all subjects. They speak competently and work well together in groups. Good focus on language in English literature, media studies and ICT helps students to improve written work. The A-level English courses provide students with valuable support for developing their reading. Very wide use of the excellent resource based learning centre further extends the range of many students' reading. However, in most subjects teachers offer students only limited support for developing literacy.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There is a very high success rate in A-level examinations.
- There is an experienced and well-qualified team of teachers whose various strengths enable the department to offer an extensive range of modules to meet students' needs.
- There are good working relationships between students and teachers.
- The success rate at AS level needs to be improved.
- The work being undertaken to encourage females to study mathematics at A-level needs to be pursued further.

### **Commentary**

167. Improvement since the last inspection is good. There are opportunities for students to discuss their work, and teaching and learning strategies are varied.

168. In 2003 the pass rate at A level at both A to B grades and A to E grades were above average, although the similar measure for AS level was very much below average. Results for 2004 indicate a similar trend despite the previous year's poor AS results. The reason for this is the inclusive nature of the sixth form, which allows relatively weak candidates to take mathematics; good teaching takes time to raise standards. A new AS course, 'Use of Maths', is now available and it is hoped that this and the new specification for AS mathematics will prove more accessible to students with previously lower levels of attainment in mathematics.

169. Standards of work seen are above average. In a Year 13 A-level statistics lesson, students were working confidently in finding the mean and variance of random variables. In a Year 12 lesson, students new to the course were using a variety of methods to solve quadratic equations. Achievement was equally good for females and males, although there were relatively few females studying mathematics at A level.

170. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have a good grasp of their subject and are able to convey this to students in such a way as to increase their confidence even when addressing challenging topics. The relationship between teachers and students is very good. Students are prepared to seek assistance when needed. Tests and homework are regularly marked with

appropriate guidance to help students further improve their work. Some of the work in students' notebooks was not well presented, which could hinder their revision at a later date.

171. Leadership and management are good with the teaching of sixth form spread amongst a number of staff ensuring that expertise is maximised and maintained. There is good communication between teachers who are very supportive of one another, working well as a team. Students' progress is carefully monitored, although better use could be made of some of the data available.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

172. Good use of mathematics was seen in physical education. In business studies, students used statistical methods to draw a line of best fit and calculate mean and median; work was set in a business context and students made good progress. In physics there is some concern that students' standards of mathematics are not sufficient to meet the requirements of the course. Courses in the application of number are made available to all students in the sixth form. This is most successful at Level 2, which supports students on GNVQ courses. The Level 3 course is proving very demanding for a number of students and attendance is not always good. Students also have access to a repeat GCSE course in mathematics at the close of normal school.

## **SCIENCE**

### **Physics**

Provision in physics is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Relatively few students obtain grades A or B at AS and A levels and the proportion of students who continue from AS level to A level is low.
- The time allocation for physics is below the national average.
- Tests and practical work are well assessed.
- Teachers have a very good relationship with their students.
- There is good technical support and good ICT facilities and resources.

### **Commentary**

173. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. There are new schemes of work in place for some of the modules and a much more appropriate A-level specification has been implemented. Resources are better particularly in the amount of ICT equipment used for teaching and learning, and the department now has a comprehensive collection of digital and written reference material for physics.
174. The A-level results in 2003 were in line with national averages and showed an improvement on 2002. In 2004, no students failed to get at least an E grade, but the percentage obtaining at least a grade B significantly dropped. Results at AS level in 2003 were also in line with national averages, but again fell slightly in 2004.
175. Standards of work are generally average and students achieve satisfactorily. Students show a good conceptual understanding of physics principles, such as the effect of electric fields on the movement of charged particles, but in Year 12 many have difficulties dealing with the mathematics associated with their work. The synoptic paper causes difficulties in the A2 assessments. More time spent reviewing past papers and showing students the

natural comparisons and overlaps between topics would improve students' confidence and performance.

176. Teaching is generally satisfactory; no unsatisfactory lessons were seen and a very good Year 13 lesson was observed. This covered the deflection of electrons in a uniform electric field and the teacher very skilfully guided the students through the complicated sequence of steps enabling them to fully understand how the electrons are produced, accelerated and deflected. The teacher showed excellent subject knowledge and was able to anticipate the likely misconceptions of the students and correct them at the outset. Students show a positive attitude to learning, but in some lessons, teachers fail to stress the main concept being taught, leaving the students unclear about exactly what they are learning. There is some inconsistency in the marking of students' day-to-day work. However, unit tests and reports of practical work are conscientiously assessed with good guidance given to students on how they can improve their future work. All students were aware of their 'target minimum grades' and understood how these targets had been derived. The relationship between teachers and students is noticeably good.
177. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Teachers work closely as a team sharing their expertise and ideas. The recently appointed head of department has an infectious enthusiasm for physics and his role as the subject leader. He has already implemented a change of A-level specification and new schemes of work are being developed. Physics technicians provide very good support for teachers, but the laboratory accommodation is inadequate with some AS lessons taking place in a classroom.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

Provision in ICT is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards at A level are above the national average.
- Many students achieve well from a low base at the start of the course.
- Teachers have very good specialist knowledge that they use well to help students learn.
- An extensive range of study guides and materials provide support for independent learning.
- Knowledge and understanding is not always systematically consolidated alongside coursework.

### **Commentary**

178. ICT was not commented on sufficiently in the last report for improvement to be judged.
179. Standards overall in the 2003 A-level examinations were above the national average. Results for female students were well above average whilst those for males were average. This was an improvement on the previous year when results overall were average. Results have fluctuated from year to year and no direct comparisons can be made for 2004 when no females took the examination.
180. Current Year 13 students demonstrated satisfactory achievement in their AS examinations. Coursework results are generally of a good standard, but some students

have particularly weak knowledge and understanding of the theory work, which affected their examination results. In work seen, standards are above average and students are achieving well. This is a result of the good specialist knowledge of teachers. In the best lessons, complex subject matter is explained clearly and knowledge and understanding are regularly checked through questioning and discussion. However, opportunities to ensure that students develop skills such as systematic note taking to consolidate their knowledge are sometimes missed. Students studied GNVQ in Year 11 and many have found the transition to A-level studies difficult. Current Year 12 students have made a satisfactory start to their course, but again there are some students who lack personal study skills that slow their progress with learning.

181. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned within a framework that ensures proper coverage of the examination syllabus. Teachers provide very good study support materials and offer advice and support on how to improve. Marking and assessment could make more use of the examination criteria to inform students of their strengths and weaknesses and what to improve. Female students tend to be more consistent in their note taking and consolidation of key learning than males. Teachers do not always compensate for this and ensure that all students take greater responsibility for their learning.
182. The subject is well led and managed to make good use of the specialist skills and expertise of staff teaching the course. The newly introduced practical course is in the very early stages of development and once resources are all in place will enhance provision in the subject through a work-related pathway for students.

## HUMANITIES

Geography was sampled. One lesson was seen in Year 12. Teaching was very good, providing challenging activities that enabled students to expand their knowledge and develop thinking skills. Standards were average, reflecting the broad range of students in the group. Attitudes were excellent and because the learning was organised so that the stronger students supported the weaker, all achieved very well. A-level results in 2003 were well above the national average, indicating very good achievement by a small group of students.

### History

Provision in history is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and learning lead to good progress by students in lessons.
- Good opportunities are created within the subject for students to develop their key skills.
- The history curriculum is broad and balanced and meets students' needs well.
- There are insufficient books to support students' independent study.

### Commentary

183. The subject was not inspected in any detail at the time of the last inspection so improvement cannot be judged.
184. Standards in the 2003 AS and A-level examinations were well below average. Students' achievement in these examinations was unsatisfactory. There is no clear explanation for these poor results - although insufficient revision by students played a part - and they are out of line with those in the previous and following years. In 2002, results were well above average and students' achievement very good. In 2004, results show a considerable improvement on 2003; students' overall achievement was satisfactory, slightly better at AS than at A level.
185. Standards of work overall are average. Students' achievement overall is satisfactory in relation to their prior attainment, although they are now making good progress in lessons. There is no consistent difference in achievement between males and females. Students' knowledge, understanding and their skills of using and evaluating historical sources are as expected nationally. Students make good progress in developing the skills of writing in analytical form early in their examination courses. Many students, however, find it more difficult to acquire and use the historical terminology appropriate to work at this level, because they do not read widely enough. They research a set topic when required, but do not read sufficient more general historical material in part due to a lack of books.
186. Teaching and learning are both good. Teachers plan their lessons well to ensure that students make good progress in gaining knowledge, understanding and the skills needed for success in examinations. Students are regularly challenged to think for themselves. They benefit from regular practise in examination questions. In a Year 13 lesson on the Cold War, students made good progress in learning to deploy their own knowledge in an examination source work question. Teachers have a good command of their material and they present it well to interest and motivate students. Students respond well to the opportunities presented and they nearly all make a good effort. Assessment is good; teachers assess students' work thoroughly so that they understand clearly their targets, performance and how to improve.
187. There are good opportunities for students to develop the key skills of research, making presentations and working both independently and collaboratively. For example, in a good Year

12 lesson on the French Revolution, students worked effectively in groups to make presentations based on their research findings about the 'Three Estates'. However, students do not have sufficient opportunities for wider reading.

188. The curriculum is a real strength. The units offered for the AS and A2 courses are varied and interesting, providing a broad and balanced experience. The subject has increased greatly in popularity recently. Students have positive attitudes - often very positive - both to the subject and to their teachers.
189. Leadership and management are good. The head of department provides a good role model to students and staff, and good leadership in the development of teaching and learning. Examination performance is evaluated thoroughly. He has been in post for only one year and his effectiveness has not yet been seen in examination results. However, there is clear evidence that standards are rising after the disappointing examination results in 2003.
190. The school's sixth form study area and library resources for ICT are very good and make an important contribution to students' achievement in history. However, the department has insufficient books for students' research, reference and revision, particularly since student numbers have increased. Unless remedied, this shortage is likely to have a negative effect on the teaching of historiography and historical interpretations later in the course.

## **Sociology**

Provision in sociology is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Improving A and AS-level results are evident.
- There is very good achievement by students.
- There are excellent student attitudes.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Curriculum time is being cut and this may adversely affect the quality of the course.

### **Commentary**

191. This subject was not reported on in the last inspection. Recent improvement has been good. There is an improving trend in examination results and larger groups are opting to study the subject.
192. In 2003, AS-level results were above the national average. A-level results were in line with the national average, although girls' results were above average and boys' below. A-level pass rates have been 100 per cent. The trend is one of improvement, continued into 2004. Analysis shows significant value added at AS level in 2004. Considering that none of these students had the opportunity to study sociology at GCSE and, therefore, started the AS course with no basic subject knowledge, this represents very good achievement.
193. Standards of work seen during the inspection are average, with no significant differences between males and females, although there are fewer males overall in the option groups. Students are efficient note takers and Year 12 students have very quickly accumulated a good knowledge of specialist sociological terminology. By Year 13 they can identify, compare and evaluate the contribution of different sociological viewpoints to the topics being studied. Their coursework shows an interesting variety of topics to investigate. They

use ICT well as a basis for research, and also to analyse and present the results of the many surveys they carry out.

194. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers' very good subject knowledge enables them to present the subject with clarity so that even if students struggle with the initial concepts that are presented to them, such as the social function of religion in one lesson, they quickly understand and assimilate the necessary background knowledge. Lessons are very well planned so that no time is wasted. Resources are well used; handouts and checklists serve as useful prompts, but do not dominate the proceedings. Students are encouraged to think for themselves and teachers skilfully develop themes through students' contribution to discussions.
195. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department gives priority to supporting the two other teachers in the department, and also to giving individual support to the students. Students' progress is closely monitored. Because the curriculum time is being reduced and the group sizes are growing, she has already recognised a need to reorganise some of the work of the department in order to ensure that standards do not suffer.
196. Students enjoy their sociology studies and several are thinking of continuing the subject at university. Others see it as relevant to proposed careers in nursing and social work. Last year all students completed the A-Level course and only one of 35 who started dropped out of the AS course.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA**

197. Drama was lightly sampled. One good Year 13 lesson was seen, in which students were exploring part of the text of one of their detailed study texts, 'Hedda Gabler'. Teaching was stimulating, helping students well to portray the emotions and tensions of the scene being studied. Performance skills were well developed and students were serious and mature in their attitude and approach to the subject.
198. One music lesson in Year 12 was seen. Students' standards at this early stage in the course are average and they are making satisfactory progress. Teaching and learning were good.

### **Art and design**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very strong teaching that incorporates a high level of challenge is leading to rising standards.
- Leadership provides a very good role model and this, too, is driving up standards.
- The very good learning in lessons means that students' achievement is very good this term.

### **Commentary**



199. No comparison can be made between present provision and that seen at the previous inspection because the last report contains very few references to art and design in the sixth form.
200. A-level results in 2003 were below average compared with all schools. Records were not available at the time of the inspection to judge these students' achievement. Results at AS level in 2003 were above average and students went on to achieve good results in 2004.
201. During the courses, some students have improved while others have maintained high standards over time. The present AS students had been on an educational visit to the seaside. From using drawings, photographs and artefacts collected during the visit, the standard of work produced during the inspection was very good. This represents good achievement for these students. The A-level students had visited galleries in London. This enabled them to produce interesting work for the contextual study unit. Standards seen were average, which represents good achievement for these students.
202. Teachers show very extensive knowledge of artists and their work. Students are shown how to use artists' work and are challenged to produce ideas from it that are highly individual and imaginative. From these ideas students use their skills with the formal elements of art and design to build up high quality work that satisfies examination assessment objectives very well. The very good quality of teaching leads to the very good achievement of students as it is always focused on individual students' learning needs. Teachers enjoy working with well-motivated students. The quality of assessment is good. It occurs during lessons and expands naturally, through stages, to tutorial interviews that plot attainment and prescribe how students are to improve. The use of ICT as a learning aid is, at present, underdeveloped. The department does not have the computers that are required to lift ICT provision to a useful level. Students' attitudes are very positive at all times. They approach independent learning with enthusiasm. Students use the dedicated art and design studio during their free study time and this improves their achievement.
203. Leadership and management are very good. Leadership provides a very good role model for high standards in teaching. The teaching in the sixth form is shared and liaison between the two teachers is very good. This liaison results in a coherent and cumulative approach to what is taught. It also produces good professional development for the teachers because they continually review their practice. Management of examination entries is handled very efficiently. The very rigorous analysis of examination results focuses on how to improve results in the future. The applications, by many students, to study art and design in higher education are supported very well by the head of department. There has been a massive increase in recruitment on to courses and retention is also very high.

## **Media studies**

Provision in media studies is **good**.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is good overall, sometimes very good, and stimulates students' thinking skills well.
- Leadership and management of the subject are very good.
- The curriculum and lessons are very well planned and assessment is very well used.

- Relationships between teacher and students are excellent.
- Students' written work is sometimes hampered by low literacy skills
- Resources are not as good as they might be; they are just satisfactory.
- Social and cultural understanding is very well encouraged.

## Commentary

204. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Numbers taking the subject at AS and A levels have risen significantly and standards are constantly improving.
205. AS-level results in 2003 were above average compared with those in all schools. Provisional results in 2004 show a significant rise, with males achieving better than females. A-level results were also above average in 2003 and, despite fewer of the highest grades, overall results also improved in 2004. The proportion of students attaining an A-C grade was high. The trend over time is one of consistent improvement, due to good teaching and very good planning and organisation. The retention rate from AS to A level is high.
206. Standards in the current Years 12 and 13 are above average and students achieve well. Males tend to achieve more highly than females, showing much enthusiasm for and interest in the more practical aspects of the subject because of the way in which they are encouraged by good teaching, which gives them confidence in their own abilities. By Year 13, students can explore aspects of the media and their effect in a variety of areas, and they are able to assess and harness the methods used by newspapers, film and television to mould public opinion. About half the students have not studied the subject at GCSE, but still achieve well through the good level of support and help they are given. Sometimes, weak literacy skills hamper achievement in written work.
207. Teaching and learning are good overall and sometimes very good. Above all, the greatest strength in teaching is in the way in which students are stimulated and encouraged to think and make deductions for themselves. This was clearly to be seen in a very good Year 13 lesson on the conventions of the 'western' film. The teacher steadfastly refused to give students notes, but encouraged them very well to make their own notes and to make the jump from one idea to another with thought and enjoyment. The curriculum is very well planned, as are all lessons. Units of work are detailed and ensure that all required skills are covered in depth, so that students really understand what they are learning. Relationships between students and teacher are very good; students copy the very good role model they are offered and work willingly and productively as a result. Teaching is careful and thorough, with the students' learning firmly at the forefront of every lesson. Students are presented with very good examples of literacy, both oral and written, and every opportunity is taken to raise standards in literacy and to enlarge students' vocabulary. ICT is used well in the teaching of the subject, although there is less useful ICT equipment than there might be, especially in the form of interactive whiteboards and projection screens. Assessment is very good, with clear individual targets set for all students, which are constantly reviewed and talked through with students.
208. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department plans very well across the school, monitors and encourages other teachers, checks on the quality of students' work and puts assessment and the tracking of students' achievement to very good use. Leadership is committed, good humoured and thoughtful, showing total dedication to the students and the subject. The subject contributes very well to students' social and cultural development and to citizenship. This was very obvious in a Year 12

lesson in which students were analysing the text and subtext of the film, 'Psycho', looking at social stereotypes and how an audience's reactions to characters can be manipulated.

## **HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL**

### **Physical education**

Provision in physical education is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- GCE AS and A-level results in 2003 were well above the national average.
- Good quality teaching and learning results in good achievement, particularly in Year 13.
- Good leadership and management provide a purposeful focus, ethos and direction for the subject.
- Students have very positive attitudes.

### **Commentary**

209. Physical education in the sixth form was not inspected in depth at the time of the last inspection so improvement cannot be judged.
210. Results in the GCE A-level examination in 2003 were well above the national average, as were AS results. There has been a consistent 100 per cent pass rate over the past three years. Males and females achieved similarly in 2003. Provisional results in GCE A level in 2004 show that the 100 per cent pass rate continued, but the proportion of students attaining higher grade passes dropped.
211. In Year 13, standards of work are above average and students achieve well. Clearly structured lessons and focused teaching have ensured that students have a good grasp of sports physiology. They are also developing very well their knowledge and understanding of the influence of public schools in the 19th century on the development of physical education. The popularity of this examination course has grown; there has been a much increased take up in the present Year 12. It is not possible to comment on the standards of work seen or the achievement of Year 12 students because they have only just started the course.
212. Teaching and learning are good. Lively starter activities consolidate previous learning and crisp end of lesson activities consolidate what has been covered in the lesson. Teachers have a good command of the units of work being taught and are enthusiastic in their approach. Lessons are well planned and structured with pace, progression and challenge. In a sports physiology lesson a variety of activities involved students in individual, pair and small group activities. Students are encouraged to undertake individual research and use the Internet to do so. This enhanced the quality of their preparation for feedback to the rest of the group on the work of Thomas Arnold and the Clarendon Commission in the 19th century. Students appreciate the good quality marking of their work as it informs them as to what they need to do to improve. Students' attitudes to learning are very positive and they comment very favourably on the quality of support and guidance teachers provide for them throughout the course. Homework is consistently set and extends students' learning.
213. Good leadership and management provide a purposeful focus and direction for the subject in order to improve standards even further. There is a strong team ethos and a shared

commitment to improve standards. Analysis of examination results has provided a focus for improvement of delivery of the different units of the AS and A-level courses. However, analysis of results to show the value that is added to students' achievements is not well developed. Other than examination courses, there are few opportunities for the majority of students to take part in formally planned and timetabled physical activities.

## **BUSINESS**

The department offers courses at advanced level in both business studies and economics and an intermediate vocational course in business studies. The focus of the inspection was on advanced level business studies, but two economics lessons were sampled. In these two lessons standards were average, but students achieved well in terms of their prior learning because of the good teaching offered.

### **Business studies**

Provision in business studies is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Recent improvements in the quality of teaching associated with more stable staffing are helping achievement to improve.
- The quality of the students' work benefits from the emphasis that is placed on developing the skills of numerical analysis.
- Learning would benefit from better accommodation and improved access to ICT facilities.
- The forging of partnerships with local firms to enliven the curriculum would further improve learning.

### **Commentary**

214. The department has undergone significant changes since the last inspection including many staff changes. In light of the degree of change it is not possible to comment on the level of improvement since the last report was issued.
215. A-level results in 2003, the last year for which validated data is available, were in line with the national average. Although boys' results were below average, those for girls were similar to the national average. The unvalidated results for 2004 show a small improvement. The 2003 results indicate satisfactory achievement given the students' prior levels of attainment. For present students, it is too early in the academic year to make a secure judgement on standards for Year 12 students, although progress in lessons is good. Standards in Year 13 are, overall, above average, with no marked differences between boys and girls. These students are achieving well in relation to their prior attainment.
216. Teaching and learning are good. The department now has stability in staffing after a long period of time when it was difficult to recruit and retain staff of suitable quality and experience. Students now benefit from a consistent quality in their teaching and this accounts for rising standards and the improvement in achievement. Teachers are knowledgeable and prepare their lessons thoroughly and thoughtfully, and are keen to challenge students' knowledge and understanding and to offer them opportunities to work independently. Students, especially in Year 13, benefit from the focus placed on

developing their numerical skills, and the emphasis placed on the use of key words is helping all students to improve. However, students are not offered enough opportunities to develop their writing skills; too often set work requires short answers. Students should be set more frequent tasks that require longer answers and provide more scope for developing analytical skills. The restricted access to ICT means that opportunities for individual Internet-based research, for example, are restricted. This is an issue that needs to be addressed.

217. Leadership of the department is satisfactory, but its management is good. Now that staffing is more stable, the head of department will be able to spend more time developing long-term strategies for developing and improving the department. Too much time in the recent past has been spent endeavouring to ensure that lessons have been adequately covered and that the students have had suitable materials to aid their learning. These difficulties have been addressed well, but at a cost. For example, the department has few business links and has yet to develop any curriculum partnerships that enliven learning and teaching alike. The quality of accommodation is unsatisfactory. The rooms are too small and do not provide a stimulating business-orientated environment in which students can flourish. Cramped accommodation coupled with limited ICT access restricts learning opportunities because teachers find it difficult to implement imaginative teaching strategies.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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

